

## COMMUNICATION STYLES OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND CYBERBULLYING

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**Abstract:** *The research was conducted to examine communication styles on social networks and the prevalence of cyberbullying among the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The survey included 250 respondents, of both sexes, from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Respondents answered individually via an online questionnaire. The results showed that social networks are widely used in Bosnia and Herzegovina; as many as 94.8% of respondents use Facebook, 82.3% use Instagram, and 32.9% use Tik Tok. All three communication styles (aggressive, passive, and assertive) are also present when communicating online on social networks. Assertive and passive ways of communicating are more common than aggressive ones. At least a third of the respondents included in this research were exposed to cyberbullying. Along with the numerous advantages of communication via social networks, it has its disadvantages. The existence of victims of violent communication on social networks is a non-negligible fact. There is an obvious necessity to detect and remediate this relatively new social problem, and also the need to provide adequate social and counseling services for the protection of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina against violent online communication.*

**Keywords:** *communication styles, social networks, cyberbullying, speech and language counseling*

## INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the basic segments of human life and plays a vital role (Kumari & Gangwar, 2018). Humans portray themselves verbally through words as well as nonverbal through body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and actions. It is critical to reach an understanding between these two modes of communication. When there is a conflict between verbal and nonverbal messages, studies suggest that humans tend to believe the latter (nonverbal) (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010). During a lifetime every person adopts some model/style of communication. It is possible to single out at least three styles of communication: passive, aggressive, and assertive. There are also combinations of basic styles, and as the most common it is possible to point out passive-aggressive ones (Bocar, 2017).

*Passive communication* can be described as accepting circumstances or other people's acts without questioning them. Communicating passively is perceived by some people as evidence of shyness and low self-esteem, but also as weakness or vulnerability (Maloney & Moore, 2020).

*Aggressive communication* is defined as asserting one's own interests and desires without regard for others (Pereira, Ferreira, Veiga Simão, Paulino, Oliveira & Mora-Merchán, 2021). When words are used to offend or intimidate others in online communication we are talking about verbal aggressiveness. Verbal aggressiveness is one of the basic manifestations presented in cyberbullying (Pereira et al, 2021). An aggressive way of communicating results in negative feelings, the inability to admit one's own mistakes, and the inability to progress, as well as the avoidance or rejection of the aggressive speaker by his interlocutors (Zajec, 2018).

*Assertive communication* represents the ability to talk and engage in a way that recognizes and protects the rights and opinions of others while simultaneously standing up for your own freedoms, interests,

and personal limits. Assertive communication skills enable open debate in which a variety of viewpoints, needs, and options are respectfully heard and evaluated in order to reach a win-win solution to specific challenges (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010).

The importance of the style that a person uses is also reflected in the daily practice of various types of therapists, including speech therapists, educators, and rehabilitators, psychologists, social workers, medical and health personnel, etc. The communication style that a person uses can be one of the facilitating, but also aggravating factors if that person or a family member close to him needs to be provided with a certain rehabilitation help or service (Klein, 2005; Flasher & Fogle, 2004).

Nowadays information and communication technologies (ICT) are increasingly being used instead of face-to-face communication. Digital media offer many opportunities to assess and examine new aspects of social interaction (Montepare, 2014). Social media interactions encourage self-expression by allowing users to create and share their own material (Dwivedi et al, 2021). It is unfortunate that this self-expression occasionally takes aggressive forms or offers violence as the new normal. Common bullying behaviors include insults and threats, sexting and outing, attacks on intelligence and physical beauty, and physical attacks (Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015).

## **METHODS**

### **A sample of respondents**

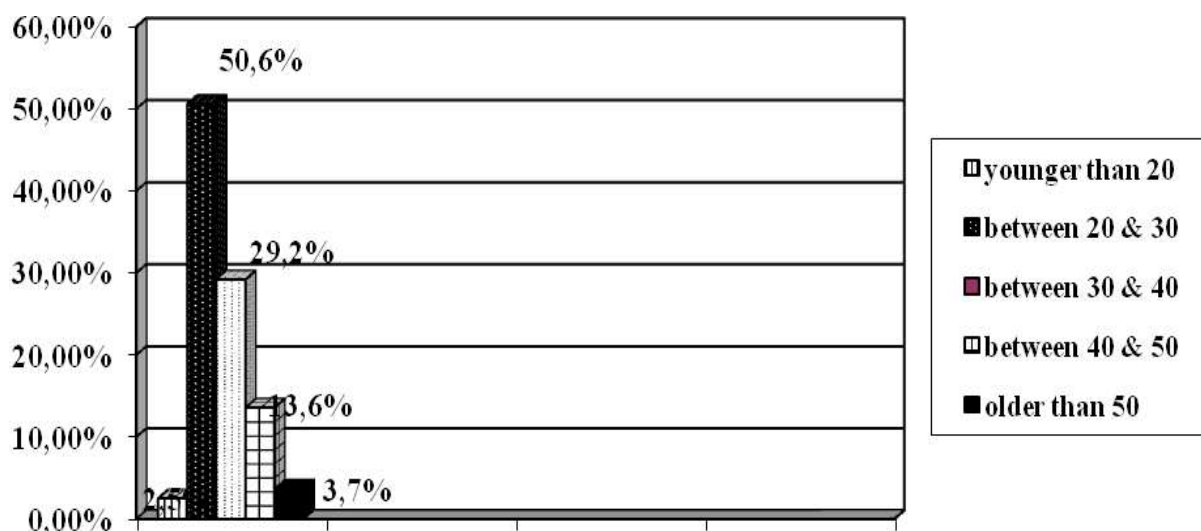
The research was conducted on a sample of 250 respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Respondents were chosen by random selection. Respondents of both genders, different levels of education, and from different age groups are represented in the sample.

### **Instruments and procedures**

For the purpose of data collection, an online Questionnaire was conducted, which was created based on the questionnaires used for similar topics. Respondents were informed that participation was anonymous and completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The survey questionnaire in the first part contained related variables on demographic characteristics, including gender, age, and level of education. The second part of the Questionnaire consisted of 20 statements related to the style of communication on social networks. The first five statements in the survey questionnaire referred to an aggressive form of communication, statements from six to 10 refer to a combination of aggressive and passive communication styles, the next five statements are an example of passive communication, and the last five statements were an example of an assertive form of communication. Each statement was followed by five answers, which expressed the degree of agreement or disagreement (very often, often, periodically, rarely, never).

## **RESULTS**

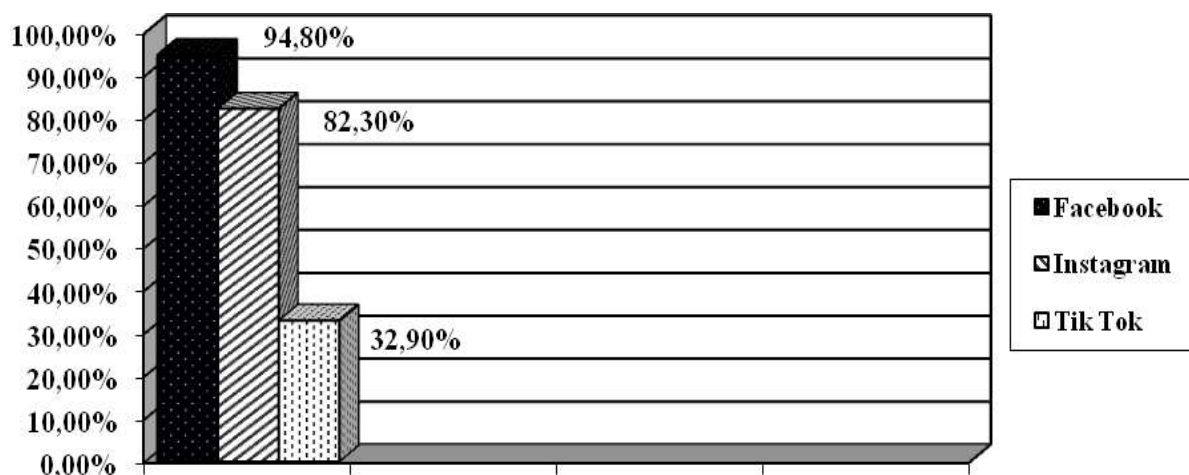
A sample consists of 83.1% female respondents and 16.9% of male respondents.



**Figure 1.** Age distribution of respondents in the total sample

The majority of respondents were between the ages of 20 and 30 (see Figure 1). The above results may indicate an age group that is possibly more interested in participating in this kind of online research, but also to be a coincidence due to the probability that the online questionnaire spread more easily among peers.

47.7% of the respondents in the sample were university-educated, 25.5% of them had a secondary (high school) education, 10.3% of the respondents had the status of a student, 13.2% of the respondents had a master's degree, and 2.5% of the respondents had completed doctoral studies. Only a few respondents were only at the elementary school level (0.8%).



**Figure 2.** Representation of different social networks

In the respondents' answers to the questions about the social network they use, Facebook stood out, which is in the clear lead, followed by Instagram, while Tik Tok is currently the least-used social network in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Figure 2). Not a single respondent declared that they do not use any of the offered social networks.

Violation of privacy via social networks in the form of profile hacking was experienced by 22.2% of respondents. A third of the respondents (33.3%) experienced that someone insulted them in communication via the Internet, or more precisely that someone sent them malicious comments on social networks. Again, almost a third of respondents (32.1%) experienced someone spreading lies or

gossip about them via social networks. 11.5% of respondents confirmed that at some point they had a fake profile on one of the social networks in order to "communicate more freely". Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents' answers to questions about communication style on social networks. By reviewing the presented results, it is possible to notice that all three dominant styles of communication; aggressive, passive, and assertive, as well as a combination of aggressive and passive forms, are also represented when communicating online on social networks. Assertive and passive styles of communication are more common compared to aggressive styles.

**Table 1.** Distribution of answers to statements about communication style on social networks

Statement	Distribution N (%)				
	very often	often	periodically	rarely	never
1.1. I tend to interrupt people	5 (2,03)	16 (6,49)	84 (34,10)	101 (41)	40 (16,24)
2.I use "You" statements (You need, You have to, You should...)	10 (4,06)	22 (8,93)	68 (27,60)	103 (41,82)	43 (17,45)
3.I am dominant in most communication situations	11 (4,46)	40 (16,24)	112 (45,47)	61 (24,76)	22 (8,93)
4.I react immediately when someone annoys me	36 (14,61)	60 (24,36)	81 (32,88)	51 (20,70)	18 (7,30)
5.I can be aggressive when defending my position	15 (6,09)	55 (22,33)	75 (30,27)	65 (26,39)	36 (14,62)
5.I'd rather keep my anger/anger to myself than confront the person about an issue	21 (8,4)	71 (28,4)	82 (32,8)	58 (23,2)	18 (7,2)
7.I often use sarcasm and irony	41 (16,73)	51 (20,80)	67 (27,34)	52 (21,22)	34 (13,87)
3.I choose pleasant words when trying to offend someone	40 (16,12)	84 (33,85)	74 (30,19)	29 (11,68)	21 (8,46)
3.I often feel alienated/like a stranger among other people	24 (9,74)	41 (16,24)	74 (30,85)	63 (25,57)	44 (17,86)
3.I often use emoticons that don't correspond to my real feelings (e.g. smileys when I'm angry)	26 (10,60)	33 (13,46)	55 (22,44)	59 (24,07)	72 (29,37)
1.I never speak confidently about myself	32 (13,05)	31 (12,64)	76 (31,0)	58 (23,66)	48 (19,58)
2.I tend to allow others to violate my rights	11 (4,48)	31 (12,64)	58 (23,66)	66 (26,93)	73 (32,23)
3.It's hard for people to understand me	22 (9,04)	33 (13,56)	75 (30,82)	68 (27,95)	45 (18,49)
4.I am afraid to express my opinion and feelings	16 (6,53)	42 (17,14)	60 (24,48)	63 (25,70)	64 (26,11)
5.I often feel anxious when communicating	17 (6,98)	30 (12,33)	61 (25,07)	60 (24,66)	75 (30,82)
5.I use "I" statements	18 (7,25)	52 (20,95)	88 (35,46)	69 (27,80)	21 (8,46)
7.I feel confident when I communicate	42 (17,17)	80 (32,72)	78 (31,90)	38 (15,54)	6 (2,45)
3.I am confident	62 (25,36)	79 (32,32)	66 (26,99)	28 (11,45)	9 (3,68)
3.I stand up for my rights	81 (33,13)	86 (35,17)	52 (21,26)	21 (8,59)	4 (1,60)
I speak clearly, honestly and directly	116 (47,32)	93 (37,94)	29 (11,83)	7 (2,85)	0 (0,0)

For the purpose of analyzing the differences in the intensity of agreement/disagreement according to statements related to a certain communication style, the average results were calculated. Table 2 shows the average values on the Scale of agreement/disagreement with statements. By reviewing the presented results, it is possible to notice that the respondents on average show rare and periodic agreement with statements related to aggressive and passive communication style, in contrast to statements related to assertive communication style, for which they show periodic and frequent agreement on average (\*).

**Table 2.** Descriptive indicators of average results on the Scale of agreement with statements

Statement	Average values (%)
1. I tend to interrupt people	2,36
2. I use "You" statements (You need, You have to, You should...)	2,40
3. I am dominant in most communication situations	2,82
4. I react immediately when someone annoys me	3,18
5. I can be aggressive when defending my position	2,78
5. I'd rather keep my anger/anger to myself than confront the person about an issue	3,076
7. I often use sarcasm and irony	3,040
3. I choose pleasant words when trying to offend someone	3,375
9. I often feel alienated/like a stranger among other people	2,74
0. I often use emoticons that don't correspond to my real feelings (e.g. smileys when I'm angry)	2,51
1. I never speak confidently about myself	2,76
2. I tend to allow others to violate my rights	2,33
3. It's hard for people to understand me	2,66
4. I am afraid to express my opinion and feelings	2,52
5. I often feel anxious when communicating	2,39
5. I use "I" statements	2,90*
7. I feel confident when I communicate	3,46*
3. I am confident	3,64*
9. I stand up for my rights	3,89*
0. I speak clearly, honestly, and directly	4,29*

The existence of a statistically significant difference between communication styles was found using a one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Results of testing the differences between communication styles

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.519	3	1.173	8.966	<b>.001</b>
Within Groups	2.093	16	.131		
Total	5.612	19			

The results of posthoc testing (Tukey test) showed the existence of statistically significant differences between the following communication styles; aggressive and assertive communication styles, between combinations of passive-aggressive and assertive communication styles, and between passive and assertive communication styles (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Results of post-hoc testing of the differences between communication styles

Communication styles		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
AO	PAO	-.240200	.228756	.723
	PO	.176000	.228756	.867
	ASO	-.928000*	.228756	.005
PAO	AO	.240200	.228756	.723
	PO	.416200	.228756	.301
	ASO	-.687800*	.228756	.038
PO	AO	-.176000	.228756	.867
	PAO	-.416200	.228756	.301
	ASO	-1.104000*	.228756	.001
ASO	AO	.928000*	.228756	.005
	PAO	.687800*	.228756	.038
	PO	1.104000*	.228756	.001

\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Legend: AO – aggressive style of communication; PAO – combination of passive and aggressive style of communication; PO – passive style of communication; ASO – assertive style of communication

It would be interesting to compare whether people use the same style of communication when communicating online and in face-to-face communication or whether there are differences, as well as whether citizens feel freer to communicate - online or live, which can be a guideline for some subsequent research.

## DISCUSSION

The probability of respondents participating in “in-person” interviews increases with age. The willingness to participate in app-based surveys via smartphones or computers starts to drop around the age of 50 ( Mulder & de Bruijne, 2019). According to Smith (2009), women are often more likely to respond to surveys. Communication and social interaction have been proven to improve the quality of life. Along with the development of the Internet and the progress of social networks, communication patterns have also changed, and online communication is taking up more and more space (Jung, Ozkaya & LaRose, 2014). The obtained results in our study support the fact that social networks, including Facebook, attract millions of people around the world since they provide the opportunity to communicate with a large number of people from the comfort of home (Stieger, 2019). Willson et al. (2012) state that such a pronounced use of social networks is evidence of the human natural desire to create connections and communicate. Social networking has become a common form of communication, and it is now practically impossible to find someone who does not use one. Social networks have a significant impact on daily life and society at general (Vardi, 2019).

The term "cyberbullying" is used more frequently and denotes various forms of aggressive behavior via social networks, i.e. on the Internet. Cyberbullying is already considered to be one of the causal factors of emerging psychological symptoms, or physical symptoms with unclear or unknown causes, as well as poorer academic performance (Ferrara, Ianniello, Villani & Corsello, 2018). It is extremely important to understand that cyberbullying comes in many forms; verbal harassment, insults or threats, spreading rumors, impersonation, and various frauds (Pieschl, Porsch, Kahl & Klockenbusch, 2013). Because of the potential for anonymity and the simplicity with which so many people can join in the harassment of victims, cyber violence is particularly dangerous (Sterner & Felmler, 2017). No one is adequately protected from abuse/bullying via the Internet, so we are daily witnesses that children and

young people are exposed to this problem, as well as, adults (Zhu, Huang, Evans & Zhang, 2021). There is a danger that the virtual world could become a place where individuals will go with the intention of engaging in inappropriate behavior or engaging in online crimes, such as cyberbullying (Garett, Lord & Young, 2016).

It seems that verbal aggressiveness (as a form of cyberbullying) - apropos the tendency to attack the interlocutor - is increasing on social networks. Verbal aggressiveness consists of various mockery and attacks on character, ability, and appearance, as well as teasing, curses, and threats (Bekiari, Deliligka & Koustelios, 2017).

As a result of an aggressive communication style, persons may experience less emotional well-being and regard cyberbullying as fair. Additionally, whether teens think this kind of behavior is fair or unfair may influence their intent to engage in cyberbullying (Pereira et al, 2021). The assertive communication approach demands a careful balancing act between one's desires and those of other people. The cornerstones of this communication style are an open mindset toward oneself and others, as well as listening to others' points of view and showing respect for them (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010). Assertive communication enables better and active, two-way communication, and more respect, and facilitates the development of healthier relationships (Perse, Naljic & Tibljas, 2011). There is an obvious need to monitor and control communication styles, especially of children and young people, with the aim of encouraging quality communication skills and ensuring better communication in the future (Pânișoară, Sandu, Pânișoară & Duță, 2015).

## **CONCLUSION**

The Internet and communication via social networks have their advantages, but unfortunately also disadvantages that need to be talked about more. The existence of victims of violent communication on social networks is a non-negligible fact. The Internet should not be (become or remain) a place where undesirable forms of communication or bullying go unpunished. Speech and language pathologists as communication professionals in close cooperation with sociologists and psychologists should be involved in the detection of pathological forms of communication as well in rehabilitation, i.e. counseling of victims of violent communication and cyberbullying. In order to detect and remedy this relatively new social problem, it is necessary to provide adequate social services, in addition to the already existing public services for the legal protection of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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## **KOMUNIKACIJSKI STILOVI NA DRUŠTVENIM MREŽAMA I VIRTUALNO ZLOSTAVLJANJE**

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**Sažetak:** Istraživanje je provedeno kako bi se ispitali komunikacijski stilovi na društvenim mrežama i raširenost virtuelnog zlostavljanja među građanima Bosne i Hercegovine. Istraživanjem je obuhvaćeno 250 ispitanika, oba spola, s područja Bosne i Hercegovine. Ispitanici su pojedinačno odgovarali na pitanja putem online upitanika. Rezultati su pokazali da su društvene mreže u širokoj upotrebi i u Bosni i Hercegovini; čak 94,8% ispitanika koristi Facebook, Instagram koristi 82,3% ispitanika, a 32,9% ispitanika koristi Tik Tok. Sva tri stila komuniciranja (agresivni, pasivni i asertivni) prisutna su i prilikom online komuniciranja na društvenim mrežama. Asertivni i pasivni stil komuniciranja su češći u odnosu na agresivni stil. Nekom od vidova virtuelnog zlostavljanja izložena je bila najmanje trećina ispitanika obuhvaćena ovim istraživanjem. Uz brojne prednosti, komunikacija preko društvenih mreža ima nažalost i svoje mane. Postojanje žrtava nasilnog komuniciranja na društvenim mrežama je nezanemariva činjenica. Očigledna je potreba detektiranja i saniranja ovog relativno novog društvenog problema, ali i nužnost pružanja adekvatnih socijalnih i savjetodavnih usluga za zaštitu građana Bosne i Hercegovine od online nasilnog komuniciranja.

**Ključne riječi:** komunikacijski stilovi, društvene mreže, virtuelno zlostavljanje, logopedsko savjetovanje