# CONNECTIONS OF REAL AND VIRTUAL SOCIAL STATUS OF INSTAGRAM USERS

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## Abstract

Today, the transition of everyday communications to virtual space not only gives its participants endless opportunities for constructing their own self-presentations, but also constantly sets them the task of adequately "reading" the self-presentations of other users. Thus, we can talk about the formation of a person's virtual social status, which can be defined as a combination of self-representative characteristics of a network communication subject and formed on their basis the social-perceptive consensus of other users.

The hypothesis of the study: the virtual social status of the user, based on an assessment by external "experts" of his network self-presentation, is associated with the personal characteristics of users.

Attribution parameters which were used to analyze the user's virtual social status were: the quantity and quality of social connections, experience with other cultures, physical and mental health, education and socio-psychological status in various groups. Personal features of users were assessed by questionnaires the "Big Five" and the "Dark Triad", as well as the level of self-monitoring. During the study, 72 respondents rated 50 profiles of unfamiliar Instagram users who pre-filled personality questionnaires using a specially designed questionnaire.

The results indicate that the attribution of the user by an outside observer of his profile is associated with neuroticism, Machiavellianism, narcissism and high self-monitoring. The found interrelationships are generally consistent with the results of studies of the personal determinants of social status in real interaction.

It can be said that real and virtual social status represent a single phenomenon, presented in a different social context.

*Keywords:* Self-presentations, social status, personal characteristics.

## 1. Introduction

The social status of a person, being initially a sociological concept, today is one of the basic for the social sciences as a whole. However, despite the almost century-old tradition of use, it includes more and more meaningfully heterogeneous parameters (Folomeeva, Fedotova 2018). In socio-psychological optics, social status is understood as the unity of the objectively distinguishing characteristics of a person, defining his position in the social community and the result of his subjective assessment by other members of the group. The central issue in this case is the search for the ratio of objective and subjective parameters of social status, as well as mechanisms that implement this ratio. The erosion of objectivity inevitably complicates attributive schemes, strengthening the role of prototypical and narrative components in them (Folomeeva, Fedotova 2018; Anderson et al. 2015; Hays et al. 2015).

The transition of an increasing number of everyday communications to virtual space, on the one hand, gives its participants almost endless possibilities for constructing their own self-presentations and, on the other hand, constantly challenges them to adequately "read" the self-presentations of other users. In other words, we can talk about the formation of a person's virtual social status. The latter, by analogy with the real one, can be defined as a combination of the self-presenting characteristics of the subject of network communication and the social-perceptive consensus of other users formed on their basis. And if a sufficient number of studies have already been devoted to the features of self-construction in network interaction (Belinskaya, Gavrichenko 2018; Astrid et al. 2006; Seidman 2013 et al.; Palmer, Tackett, 2018), there are not too much empirical studies of the processes of social attribution in the virtual space (Gosling 2011; Anderson et al 2015).

## 2. Problem

In this regard, a whole number of research questions arise, namely: how do the real and virtual social status of a person compare? How much can our virtual self-presentations affect the way we are perceived and evaluated in real interaction? How much personal characteristics of a user can be "read" through his network self-presentations.

### 2.1. Research hypothesis

The general hypothesis of the empirical study was the assumption that the virtual social status of the user, based on an assessment by external "experts" of his network self-presentation, is associated with the personal characteristics of users.

### 2.2. Procedure and research methods

At the first stage of the study, 65 respondents, active users of the social network Instagram, agreed to provide links to their profiles. They filled out a short socio-demographic questionnaire, as well as 3 standardized methods: 1) a brief questionnaire of the Big Five, (Kornilova, Chumakova 2016); 2) the questionnaire "The Dark Triad", (Kornilova et al. 2015); 3) the questionnaire on the ability to manage self-presentation in communication, (Amyaga 1998).

The aim of the second stage of the study was to evaluate the profiles provided at the first stage by "experts". The respondents of this stage filled in the author's questionnaire aimed at assessing the perceived social status of the user. All questions were rated on a scale of 1 to 7; each of the expert evaluated three profiles of people unfamiliar to him, guided by rating the photos that were presented in profiles the information about the number of publications, the number of subscribers and subscriptions. All personal information (name, surname, links to profiles on various social networks and personal sites) was hidden.

## 3. Results and discussion

After obtaining "expert" assessments of virtual social status, the degree of their consistency was determined, for which the Kendell concordance coefficient (W; $p \leq 0.05$) was used. For profiles that have agreed expert evaluations, values were calculated by five selected parameters of social status corresponding to five blocks of questions developed by the questionnaire. Correlation analysis was carried out using the Spearman and Pearson criteria.

A connection was found between neuroticism and high virtual social status, expressed in the parameters of social connections and the socio-psychological status of a person in a group. It seems that in the conditions of virtual communication, this data can be a strategy to cope with the discomfort and anxiety associated with low control of social interaction, the reasons for which are the features of the virtual environment. At the same time, within the framework of virtual interaction in the Instagram social network, people with a high level of neuroticism can have advantages in maintaining and enhancing their virtual social status associated with their increased attention to the image of their self-image, perceived and evaluated by other participants.

A relationship has been revealed between the expressed level of user self-monitoring and attribution to him of high indicators of virtual social status. This relationship was based on such parameter as the quantity and quality of social connections. This data is consistent with the general patterns of perception and assessment of social status.

The results, indicating the absence of correlation dependencies between openness to experience and parameters of virtual social status, show that popular and mastered by many users social networks lower the social advantage of people with a high level of openness to experience, associated with creativity, a high diversity of interests and desire to risk. For people with a low level of openness to experience, social networks are familiar and, therefore, safe platforms for interaction.

The discovered positive relationship between users' Machiavellianism and some parameters of their virtual social status can be explained as follows. Any virtual social network is characterized by a much lower structure of the social hierarchy than in the real communication space, which allows users with high Machiavellian indicators to successfully apply specific self-presentation tactics for the purpose of social self-promotion.

The result obtained in our study about the connection between a high level of user narcissism and attribution of a high virtual social status shows that this relationship is strengthened in the social network Instagram because of the great ability to satisfy narcissistic users their need for attention and a positive assessment of others, as well as because of their increased sensitivity to social status

## 4. Conclusion

Attribution of the user by an outside observer of his profile of certain parameters of social status (virtual social status) is associated with such personal characteristics of the user as neuroticism, Machiavellianism, narcissism and self-monitoring. The found interconnections are consistent with the results of studies devoted to the investigations of personality determinants of social status in the space of real interaction, as well as studies of virtual self-presentation on the Facebook network. This fact indicates the dominant role of these personality traits in attributing a particular social position, regardless of forms of interaction. The revealed similarities confirm the point of view that real and virtual social status is a single phenomenon with universal motivational grounds. It is presented in a different social context: within the framework of a virtual and transitive space, which are united by at least two of their characteristics - variability and multiplicity (Belinskaya, Martsinkovskaya 2018). Moreover, the features of the environment within which social status is considered determine the features of its external presentation, as well as change the nature of the connection with personal characteristics, increasing or decreasing the effectiveness of various behavioral strategies associated with them.

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