

**A PATH ANALYTIC STUDY OF THE EFFECT OF BIG FIVE
PERSONALITY TRAITS ON ASSERTIVENESS, BEING MEDIATED
BY SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL ANXIETY, AMONG
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF MYANMAR INSTITUTE OF
THEOLOGY**

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Abstract: The present study investigated the direct and indirect effect of big five personality traits on assertive communication among undergraduate students in the Myanmar Institute of Theology (Liberal Arts Program) mediated by self-esteem and social anxiety. This quantitative research employed path analysis using survey questionnaires with 156 undergraduate students aged 21-29. The path analysis results indicated that students with high scores in extraversion and neuroticism traits had both direct and indirect effects on their level of assertiveness, mediated by self-esteem. Social anxiety could not predict this study's assertiveness, although it has a direct negative association with extraversion.

Keywords: Big Five Personality Traits; Assertiveness; Self-Esteem; Social Anxiety

Introduction

Personality is relatively permanent, determining one's reaction to events or life experiences. It is basically the instrument by which people can identify another individual and perform a response accordingly. Personality is what a person experiences within themselves and shows it to others to the outside world. The main features of personality are relatively stable; nevertheless, humans evolve and demonstrate new and impressive behaviors based on their experiences and skills. This naturally leads to adaptation and success

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(Bagherian et al., 2016). One of the most common conceptualizations of personality is the Big Five personality traits proposed by McCrae and Costa (1992). They defined personality traits as “dimensions of individual differences in tendencies to show consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions” (McCrae & Costa, 1990, p.29). In their position, personality could be categorized among five significant aspects: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. According to De Young (2014), the research has been conducted to investigate how traits of the Big-Five influence social relationships. The Big-Five has also been related to interpersonal behaviors during initial encounters (Berry & Hansen, 2000). Being skilled in interpersonal communication brings innumerable benefits across a range of social spheres, including the enjoyment of high-quality personal relationships, rich educational experiences, career advancements, successful participation in the complex communicative environments of the 21st century (Burlinson, 2007; Morreale & Pearson, 2008). So, the main goal of this current research is to investigate the effect of the big five personality traits on assertiveness which is one of the communication competencies for social relationships. According to the research demonstrated by Erdle et al. (2009), self-esteem is distinctively and firmly rooted in the basic dimensions of the big five personality traits.

Socially anxious individuals are also more likely to remember negative interpersonal reactions and underestimate their interpersonal skills, such as being assertive in social situations (Lee, 2012). Socially anxious people tend to believe that others criticize and evaluate them negatively (Teachman & Allen, 2007). Socially anxious individuals have some difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings openly due to avoiding social situations marked by concerns pertaining to social rejection and embarrassment, including features of being shy, fearful, and withdrawn in new situations (Abedzadeha, M., & Mahdian, M., 2014). Myanmar Institute of Theology is a leading seminary in Myanmar, offering quality theological education since its establishment in 1927. MIT started a liberal arts program called Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies in 2000. The objective of MIT is to equip its students with higher education theology and secular so that students will be able to actively and effectively participate in the ministry and serve their society. In Myanmar, few kinds of research have been conducted concerning the effect of the big five personality traits on assertiveness mediated by self-esteem and social anxiety. Patterns of behavior such as obedience to the authorities, hierarchical family structure, the need for self-control in situations of physical and emotional stress, and conforming to social and traditional norms are apparently in direct contradiction to assertive behavior as defined in Western society (Galassi and Galassi, 1977). Myanmar society is strongly hierarchical. Elders are viewed

as an essential source of wisdom for younger generations, and young people are expected to listen and obey and not to offer opinions to them (BCP,2005). Therefore, most people in our country have social communication, which is less confrontational, and they rarely express themselves assertively in their daily social interaction. For this reason, research related to the effect of the big five personality traits on assertiveness was conducted among undergraduate students in MIT (Liberal Arts Program) to know how students' different personality traits affect students' assertiveness in their daily social interaction and how the enhancement of self-esteem can help the students to be assertive while students' assertiveness can be diminished by having social anxiety.

Purpose of the Study

1. To investigate the direct or indirect effects of Big Five personality traits, being mediated by self-esteem and social anxiety on the assertiveness of undergraduate students from Myanmar Institute of Theology

Literature Review

The five-factor model of personality, from which the Big Five personality traits come, has been thoroughly researched by psychologists and researchers in organizational behavior in the last two decades. This model is one of the most prominent models in contemporary psychology that describes the most important features of personality. These five dimensions can narrow down the broadest understanding of personality and show specific personality characteristics. In almost any measure of personality, the big five traits have been used to analyze trait adjectives in many languages. These data strongly suggest that personality trait structure is universal. The big five personality dimensions can be divided into five factors: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism through the process of cross-cultural replication, empirical validation across many methods and instruments, and it becomes the five-factor model, which is a basic discovery of personality psychology (Zaidi et al., 2013).

Extraversion

This trait can be conceptualized as a multidimensional higher-order trait that includes interpersonal/social and positive emotional aspects (Spinhoven et al., 2014). It is a trait characterized by high energy, enthusiasm, and assertiveness. Individuals with extraversion are determined as gregarious, talkative, and cheerful (Seidman, 2013). It is characterized by a tendency to be self-confident, dominant, active, and excitement-seeking (Arnold et al., 2006).

Agreeableness

The agreeableness person tends to have negotiation skills that help solve conflicts (Graziano & Tobin, 2002; Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2011). Agreeable individuals like harmonious social interaction and cooperative family life. They are also highly prosocial and empathic and enjoy helping others in need (Caprara et al., 2010).

Conscientiousness

The hard work, punctuality, and reliable behavior exhibited by conscientious individuals result in a host of life outcomes such as a higher grade point average (Conrad, 2006; Nofle & Robins, 2007; Poropat, 2009), greater job satisfaction, greater job security, and more positive and committed social relationships (Langford, 2003).

Neuroticism

Among the traits that classify this dimension are fearfulness, irritability, low self-esteem, social anxiety, poor inhibition of impulses, and helplessness (Costa et al., 1987).

Openness to Experience

Individuals with a high level of openness are explorers. They are change agents who tend to be open to considering new approaches, whereas individuals with a low level of transparency are more conventional and prefer familiar things (Bramante A., 2015).

Assertiveness

Vagos and Pereira (2010) stated that assertive and non-assertive responses are partially influenced by a cognitive filter controlling how individuals interpret social cues. These cognitive interpretations of social situations are guided by core beliefs developed from childhood experiences with attachment figures and influence how we view ourselves, others, and their relationships. Individuals with positive core beliefs about the self (e.g., “I possess as many skills as most people”), others (e.g., “I may go against the will of others, without having them reject or mistreat me for it”), and relationships (e.g., “In my relationships with others I don’t let them dominate me and also don’t try to dominate them”) may find it easier to assert themselves than individuals with negative core beliefs.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is characterized as the value people place on themselves (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohls, 2003). From this concept, high or low self-esteem is distinguished. High self-esteem is defined as a highly

favorable global evaluation of the self, and low self-esteem is defined as an unfavorable evaluation of the self (Bramante, 2015). The role of self-esteem in the psychological and personality literature is substantial (Ramsdal, 2008).

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is defined as the fear of being evaluated by others, accompanied by negative beliefs about outcomes, such as humiliation or embarrassment (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The potential negative outcomes of social situations include others' negative judgments and the negative impact on one's reputation. Triggers of social anxiety are based on the prospect or reality of social situations, which are different from other elicitors of anxiety such as heights, enclosed spaces, blood, animals, etc. Although not identical, shyness, embarrassment, shame, and social anxiety are often used interchangeably (Lee, 2012). Individuals who have social anxiety show higher self-focused attention than others. In addition, these individuals commonly have negative cognition such as fear of negative evaluation, self-consciousness, self-deprecating thoughts, and self-blaming attributions for social difficulties (Lee, 2012).

Assertiveness and Big Five Personality Traits

Bouchard, Lalonde, and Gagnon (1988) investigated the correlations between assertiveness and personality factors in undergraduate students, which showed a significant positive correlation between overall assertiveness and extraversion. Additionally, the study revealed that high scores on the positive assertion response class were related to high scores on the agreeableness and openness to experience personality factors. According to De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, Konings, & Schouten (2013), openness to experience has been associated with a "questioningness" communication style., initiating conversation sequences (Cuperman & Ickes, 2009), positive assertion (Bouchard et al., 1988), and general assertiveness (Kirst, 2011). Therefore, it is expected that openness would account for some variations in assertiveness scores. High conscientious people are organized, reliable, ambitious, energetic, and strong-willed (Janatian, 2015). Conscientiousness is the highest predictor of assertiveness. In the study conducted at Alborz University, Iran, there is a significant positive relationship between extroversion and conscientiousness with assertiveness. There is an inverse relationship between neuroticism and assertiveness, but there is no relationship between openness and agreeableness with assertiveness. The research also showed that neuroticism could be the predictor of assertiveness. Higher rates of anxiety and emotional instability in individuals with neuroticism traits (Hosseini, 2014) cannot have a good assertiveness in life, so neuroticism is the lowest predictor of assertiveness.

Self-Esteem and Big Five Personality Traits

Ramsdal's (2008) study of 128 Norwegian college students sought to delineate between self-liking and self-competency as aspects of self-esteem and their relationship to the big five traits. The researcher determined that both facets of self-esteem demonstrated significant correlations with each of the five traits; however, the correlations differed for these dimensions with self-competence revealing a higher correlation with openness and extraversion, and self-liking showing a higher correlation with agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism. Ramsdal (2008) interpreted these results as support for the two-dimensional concept of self-esteem and suggested that based on the corresponding big five personality traits, self-liking might be considered the "communal" aspect of self-esteem, whereas self-competence represented the "agentic" aspect of self-esteem (Ramsdal, 2008, p. 338). These findings clearly indicated a significant relationship between personality traits and self-esteem.

Big Five Personality Traits and Social Anxiety

Certain personality traits have been shown to be vulnerability factors for high social anxiety (Levinson, Kaplan, & Rodebaugh, 2014). It is well established that there is a positive relationship between social anxiety and neuroticism and a negative relationship between social anxiety and extraversion (e.g., Bienvenu, Brown, et al., 2001; Kotov, Watson, Robles, & Shmidt, 2007). However, research on the relationship between social anxiety and the remaining big five personality traits—agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience has been mixed (e.g., Bienvenu Brown et al., 2001: Norton, Cox, Hewitt, & Mcleod, 1997), Glinski and Page (2010) found that individuals with social anxiety disorder participating in a treatment study reported low levels of conscientiousness. Still, average levels of openness and agreeableness compared to Revised NEO Personality Inventory norms.

Assertiveness and Self-Esteem

There is a positive relationship among assertiveness, self-confidence, and self-esteem. The level of assertiveness and self-confidence affect each other (Ozsaker M.,2013). Karagözoğlu et al. (2008) concluded that nursing students who had the highest SE also had the highest levels of assertiveness. The power component of differentiated self-esteem was found to have a high correlation with global self-esteem and with assertiveness than with other components (Johnson, 1993) and has established a positive correlation between SE and assertiveness.

Assertiveness and Social Anxiety

Kirst (2011) reported a study that Lefevre and West conducted shows a significant positive correlation between assertiveness and level of self-esteem in undergraduate students. Assertive individuals are likely to have greater success in social situations than non-assertive individuals and feel more confident about themselves. Conversely, individuals with low self-esteem may be inhibited in expressing their opinions, rights, wishes, and attitudes.

Conceptual Framework

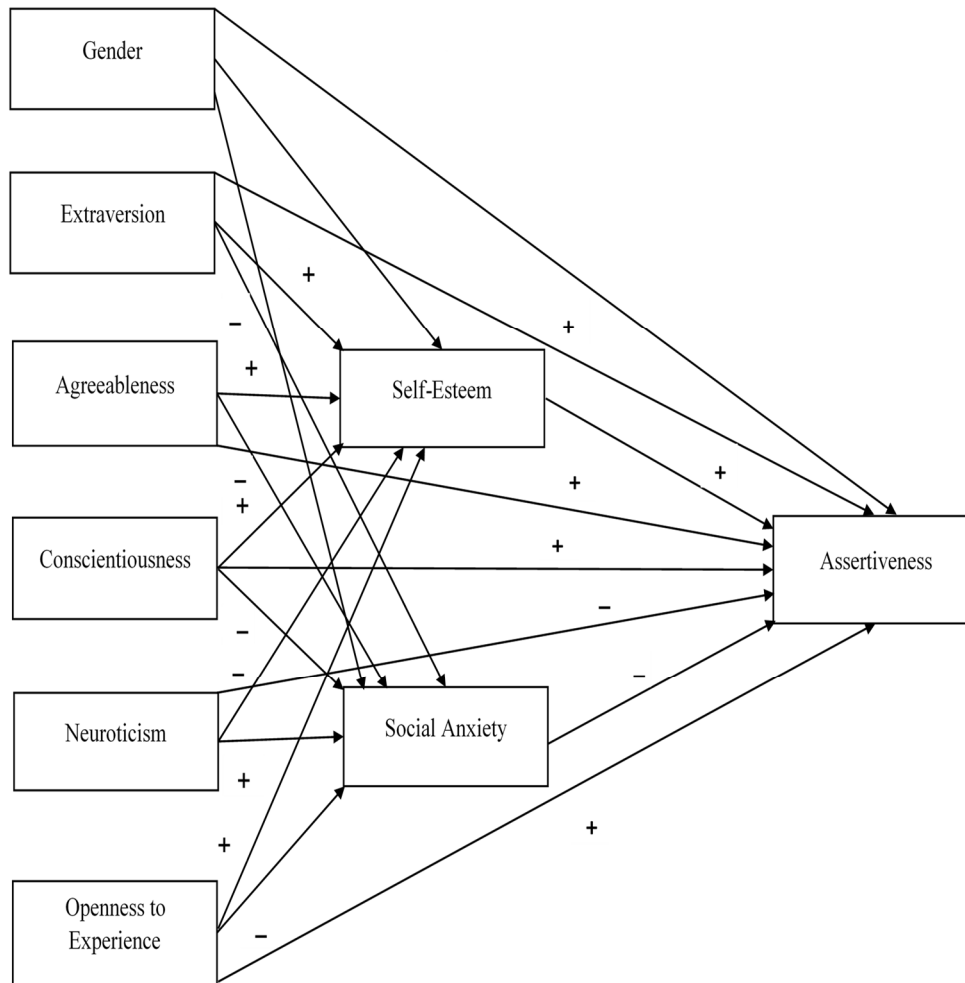


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the relationship between internet addiction and academic performance.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with descriptive and inferential statistical tools to analyze the posited path model. It utilized a correlation research design via path analysis to explore the direct and indirect sequential relationships hypothesized among the key variables. Personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience), self-esteem and social anxiety, and assertiveness among undergraduate students in Myanmar Institute of Theology (Liberal Arts Program). This quantitative study was based on the responses of participants to the study's survey questionnaire.

Participants

The required sample size was determined by using the statistical program G*Power 3.1.9.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). The program was set with the α error probability level at 0.05, power at 0.95, and effect size at 0.15 for a total of 8 predictor variables. The required minimum sample size was determined to be 107. In order to enhance the reliability and external validity of the obtained findings, the decision was made to use a sample size of 156.

Research Instruments

This current study employed a self-administered survey questionnaire as the primary tool for collecting data. The questionnaire consisted of five sections in order to tap into the study's key variables. They are (1) Demographic Information, (2) International Personality Item Pool (IPIP), (3) The College Self-Expression Scale (CSES), (4) The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and (5) The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNES). Detailed information on each part of the survey questionnaire is presented below.

Demographic Information

This section contains items written to tap the respondents' demographic characteristics of gender, age, and year of study. With the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, personal information that is not related to the study and would directly identify respondents will not be included in the questionnaire.

The 50-item IPIP (International Personality Item Pool) representation of Costa and McCrae's (1992) revised NEO Personality Inventory (Goldberg, 1999): This 50-item self-report questionnaire is designed to assess constructs similar to the "Big Five" personality factors of the NEO PI-R, which include Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience,

Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The questionnaire is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The domain of Neuroticism indicates whether the respondent is prone to be emotionally stable or emotionally distressed. The domain of Extraversion measures the extent to which respondents are full of energy and thrill-seeking or sober and reserved. The Openness to Experience domain illustrates whether the respondent is traditional and pragmatic or inquisitive and liberal. The domain of Agreeableness assesses whether the respondent is sympathetic and trusting or competitive and conceited. The domain of Conscientiousness determines whether the respondent tends to be more organized and meticulous or easy-going and careless (Costa & McCrae, 2008). Cronbach's alphas are acceptable for Neuroticism (.86), Extraversion (.86), Openness (.82), Agreeableness (.77), and Conscientiousness (.81) (Goldberg, 1999).

The College Self-Expression Scale

(CSES; Galassi et al., 1974) is a 50-item self-report measure that assesses three dimensions of assertiveness (positive, negative and self-denial) in college students. Positive assertions include expressions of positive feelings such as approval, love, agreement, admiration, and affection. Negative assertiveness consists of expressing negative emotions, including irritation, disagreement, justified anger, and discontent. Self-denial consists of exaggerated concern for the feelings of others, excessive apologizing, and undue interpersonal anxiety. Items measure respondents' level of assertiveness in various interpersonal contexts and are rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (*almost always*) to 4 (*never or rarely*). Respondents indicate how they generally express themselves towards different individuals, including members of the opposite sex, authority figures, family members, and strangers. The scale contains 21 positively phrased items and 29 negatively phrased items. Items are scored in the direction of assertiveness. Thus high total scores indicate a generalized assertive response pattern, and low total scores indicate a generalized non-assertive response pattern. Strong construct validity and concurrent validity for the scale have been reported. The test-retest reliability coefficients for the entire measure based on a 2-week interval with two samples ranged from 0.89 to 0.90 (Galassi et al., 1974).

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

(SES; Rosenberg, 1989) is a 10-item self-report measure that uses a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) to assess one's self-esteem. Total scores range from 0 to 40, with 40 representing the maximum score possible. High scores indicate high self-esteem, whereas low scores indicate low self-esteem. Cronbach's alpha for various samples ranges

between .77-.88 and test-retest correlations between .82-.88 (Rosenberg, 1989).

The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale

(FNES-B; Leary, 1983) is a 12-item self-report measure that uses a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*) to assess people's fear of being evaluated unfavorably. The reason to use this scale is to figure out students' anxiousness in front of their classmates during their presentation or class performance. The scale correlates highly ($r = .96$) with the original Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Watson & Friend, 1969). Cronbach's alpha for various undergraduate samples ranged between .90-.91, and the 4-week test-retest reliability was 0.75 (Leary, 1983; Miller, 1995).

Data Collection and Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed at the Myanmar Institute of Theology (Liberal Arts Program). Twenty questionnaires were distributed to ten third-year students and ten final-year students of the Liberal Arts Program (MIT). This would be a pretest of the survey questionnaire in order to check for any difficulties the participants might have with regard to the comprehension of the questionnaire directions, items statements, and length of time to take the test to ensure that fatigue will not be a factor. Following the pretest and any corrections that needed to be made, 78 questionnaires were given to third-year and another 78 questionnaires to fourth-year Myanmar students, who agreed to participate in the research voluntarily. After collecting the completed questionnaires, the researcher individually inspected each completed questionnaire to check for possible errors of commission and omission. Only valid questionnaires were used for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Independent sample t-tests were conducted to examine the differences in assertiveness, self-esteem, and social anxiety by gender, and multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between the predictor variables and assertiveness.

Results

The participants included 56 male and 100 female students who were third year and final year students from Myanmar Institute of Theology (Liberal Arts Program). The results from Section 1 (Personal Information) of the questionnaire indicated that in terms of gender, 64.1% ($n=100$) were female and 35.9% ($n=56$) were male. In terms of age, 37.8% ($n= 59$) of the participants aged 21-23 years, 32.7% ($n=51$) aged 27-29 years and 29.5%

(n=46) of the participants aged 24-26 years. For the year of study, 50% (n=78) of the participants were third-year students, and another 50% (n=78) of the participants were final-year students.

Table 1. *Demographics of participants (N = 156)*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
- Male	56	35.9
- Female	100	64.1
Age		
-21-23 years	59	37.8
-24-26 years	46	29.5
-27-29 years	51	32.7
Year of Study		
-Third year	78	50
-Finale year	78	50

The computed Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the scales employed in this study were adequate, and they ranged between .89 to .97. Consequently, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of these scales imply that (1) the reliability results for the IPIP that measures big five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience) were considered to be acceptable and excellent (Cronbach's alpha were .95, .90, .94, .96 and .96 respectively), (2) the reliability results for the RSES that measures self-esteem was considered to be good (Cronbach's alpha was .89), (3) the reliability results for the FNES_B was considered to be good (Cronbach's alpha was .919), and (4) the reliability results for the CSES was considered to be excellent (Cronbach's alpha was .97).

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the eight computed factors of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience, self-esteem, social anxiety, assertiveness and gender.

Table 2. *Means and Standard Deviations for the nine computed factors*

	Mean	SD	Median
Extraversion	3.17	1.09	3.15
Agreeableness	3.09	1.03	3.2
Conscientiousness	3.19	0.99	3
Neuroticism	2.45	1.12	2.75
Openness to Experience	2.41	0.67	2.85
Self-Esteem	3.08	0.68	2.7
Social Anxiety	2.62	0.92	2.79

	Mean	SD	Median
Assertiveness	2.47	1.13	2.20
Gender	1.64	0.48	1.50

As can be seen from Table 2, the factors of extraversion, conscientiousness, self-esteem, and assertiveness, and gender were rated above the mid-point on their respective scales, whereas the factors of agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and social anxiety were rated below the mid-point on its scale. Thus, overall, the participants rated extraversion, conscientiousness, self-esteem, and assertiveness as high and, in contrast, rated their agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and social anxiety as low.

Table 3. *Regression Analysis of Assertiveness from gender, Big five personality traits, self-esteem, and social anxiety*

	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.474	.636		.745	.457
Gender	.157	.122	.077	1.295	.198
Extraversion	.290	.100	.323	2.894	.004
Agreeableness	.015	.058	.015	.252	.802
Conscientiousness	.078	.057	.078	1.352	.178
Neuroticism	-.159	.069	-.181	-2.297	.023
Openness to experience	.127	.052	.147	2.441	.016
Self-esteem	.302	.150	.208	2.015	.046
Social anxiety	-.122	.079	-.115	-1.545	.124

Dependent Variable: Assertiveness

Among the big five personality traits, the results showed that the students who have high scores in extraversion and openness to experience have a direct positive influence on assertiveness. Thus, the higher the students who have extroverted traits and openness to experience trait express themselves assertively in social situations ($\beta=.323$, $t=2.894$, $p\leq.05$) and ($\beta=.147$, $t=2.441$, $p\leq.05$) respectively. Students with high scores in conscientiousness and agreeableness showed no significant direct influence on their assertive behavior ($p\geq.05$). Neuroticism has a direct negative effect on assertiveness, such that the higher the students' scores in neuroticism traits, the lower their assertiveness level in their social interaction ($\beta=-.181$, $t=-2.297$, $p\leq.05$).

Table 4. *Regression Analysis of Self-esteem from gender, Big five personality traits*

	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.839	.276		6.668	.000
Gender	-.044	.064	-.031	-.692	.490
Extraversion	.459	.038	.742	12.104	.000
Agreeableness	.010	.032	.015	.315	.753
Conscientiousness	.014	.032	.021	.443	.658
Neuroticism	-.076	.038	-.124	-2.009	.046
Openness to experience	-.014	.029	-.024	-.494	.622

Dependent Variable: Self-Esteem

The results also showed that extraversion has an indirect positive effect on the assertiveness of undergraduate students in Myanmar Institute of Theology (Liberal Arts Program) being mediated by self-esteem such that the more students with extraversion reported having high self-esteem, the higher their assertiveness in their social interaction ($\beta=.742$, $t=12.104$, $p\leq.05$). Neuroticism has an indirect negative influence on the assertiveness of undergraduate students in Myanmar Institute of Theology (Liberal Arts Program) being mediated by self-esteem such that the more students with neuroticism reported having low self-esteem, the lower their assertiveness in their social interaction ($\beta=-.124$, $t=-2.009$, $p\leq.05$).

There is no significant indirect relationship between three personality traits, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and assertiveness being mediated by self-esteem among undergraduate students of Myanmar Institute of Theology (Liberal Arts Program).

Table 5. *Regression Analysis of Social anxiety from gender, Big five personality traits*

	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.103	.522		5.948	.000
Gender	.450	.121	.234	3.706	.000
Extraversion	-.446	.072	-.530	-6.217	.000
Agreeableness	-.058	.061	-.064	-.949	.344
Conscientiousness	.047	.060	.050	.781	.436
Neuroticism	.102	.071	.124	1.438	.152
Openness to experience	-.012	.054	-.015	-.226	.821

Dependent Variable: Social Anxiety

Big five personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience have no significant indirect relationship with assertiveness being mediated by social anxiety. However, extraversion was negatively associated with social anxiety ($\beta = -.530$, $t = -6.217$, $p \leq .05$).

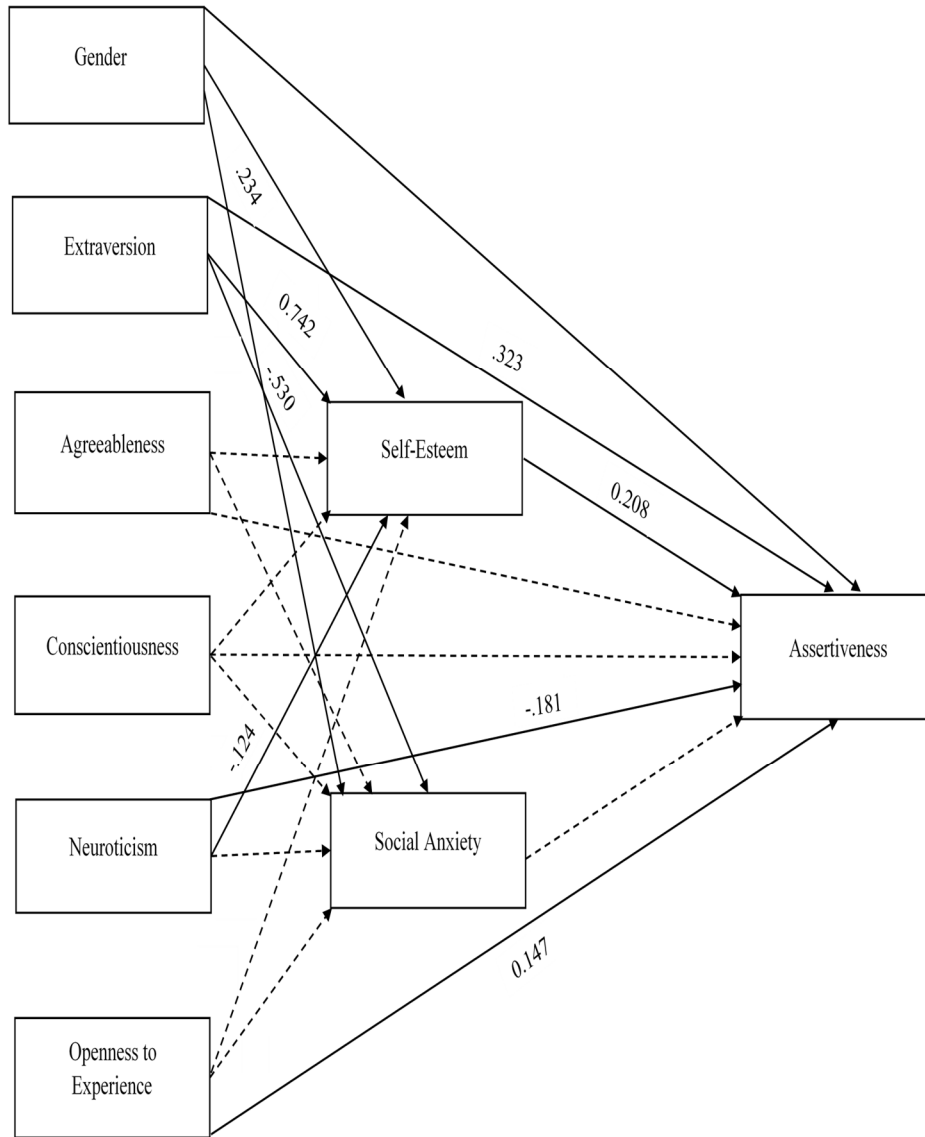


Figure 2: Path model of the influences of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience on assertiveness, being mediated by self-esteem and social anxiety

Discussion

The Direct Effect of Big Five on Assertiveness

Extraversion had a significant direct positive effect on assertiveness. Thus, it can be inferred that the higher the level of extraversion, the higher are the levels of assertiveness. This finding suggests that extraversion may play an essential role in boosting assertive behavior among the undergraduate students of the LAP program in their daily social interaction. This comes as no surprise since extraversion is associated with many positive facets such as being gregarious, boldness, assertiveness, approach tendencies, positive emotionality, and status motivation (Lukaszewski, A. W. 2020). There is a significant positive direct relationship between openness to experience and assertiveness, such that the higher the levels of openness to experience, the higher the levels of assertiveness. This finding is also not contrary to those obtained from a past study which demonstrated there is a significant positive relationship between openness to experience and assertiveness as people with higher scores in openness are curious both in this world and their inner world and have a rich experience in life (Bagheiran, 2016). There is also a significant negative direct relationship between neuroticism and assertiveness. The higher the levels of neuroticism, the lower levels of assertiveness as neurotic individuals are insecure in dealing with their relationships (Caspi et al., 2005). Insecurity in social interaction can prevent individuals from behaving assertively. So, they will tend to express themselves aggressively as neuroticism is associated with low emotional intelligence (Lee & Hankin, 2009). According to this study, students with high scores in agreeableness also have no significant relationship with assertiveness, as past research showed no significant correlation between agreeableness and assertiveness. However, one of the outcomes contradicted that of the past research where conscientiousness was found to have no significant direct relationship on assertiveness. Some personality scales have indicated that dependability or responsibility are important facets of conscientiousness reflecting such behaviors as service to others and commitment to community projects. (McCrae and Costa, 1998; Dunn, Mount & Barrick, 1995). As responsibility and virtue are the lower-level facets of agreeableness, Roberts, Chernyshenko, Stark, and Goldberg (2005) explained that conscientious people show less assertive behavior in their social interaction. However, this contention might be potentially different from other targeted populations.

Indirect Effect of Big Five on Assertiveness Mediated by Self-Esteem

According to the results of this research, students with extrovert traits show assertive behavior as they have confidence in their social interaction as it is characterized by a tendency to be self-confident, dominant, active, and excitement seeking (Bakker et al., 2006). In contrast, students with

neuroticism tend to show difficulty in their assertive behavior as they have low self-esteem at the same time insecure in their relationship. Most neurotic students can be aggressive in social interaction (Lee & Hankin, 2009). There is no significant indirect relationship between agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and assertiveness mediated by self-esteem. According to Shrivastava, U., and Mishra, V. (2015), an individual with healthy self-esteem can stand strong for his opinions and take a step back to other more deserving individuals without feeling inferior to or threatened by them. For agreeable and openness to experience individuals, enhancing self-esteem is necessary to improve assertive communication as self-esteem is positively weakly associated with agreeableness and openness to experience (Furr & Funder, 1998; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Finch, 1997). Individuals with conscientiousness traits have self-discipline, and they are very industrious people with suitable preparation for their daily activities. Although self-esteem is moderately associated with conscientiousness (Jackson & Gerard, 1996; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997), conscientious individuals have difficulty being assertive, according to the current finding of this research.

Indirect Effect of Big Five on Assertiveness Mediated by Social Anxiety

There is no significant indirect relationship between the big five personality traits and assertiveness being mediated by social anxiety. However, higher scores on extraversion among the respondents were associated with lower levels of social anxiety. According to the current study research, the assertiveness of individuals with different personality traits is not based on having social anxiety. This contradicted the past study, which described certain personality traits as vulnerability factors for high social anxiety (Levinson, Kaplan, & Rodebaugh, 2014).

Limitation

The nature of the sample limits the external validity of the study's findings. The sample is relatively small and consisted of 156 undergraduate students from the third year to final year in the Myanmar Institute of Theology (Liberal Arts Program) aged between 21 and 29 years. Also, the sample was obtained via convenience sampling. Given the small sample size and the non-randomness of the sampling technique, the study results cannot be generalized to the wider population of undergraduate students in Myanmar. All information collected was through self-report measures. According to Anastasi (1992), self-report measures are biased responses. Participants were requested to respond to all questions in the research instrument. Some participants were likely to give a socially attractive response, which is not easy to control. As the veracity of responses could not be validated in the survey,

this meant that this researcher had to accept the response at face value and assume that the participants replied to the questions honestly.

Recommendations

A comparative study is suggested to be done with other undergraduate students from other universities in the Myanmar Institute of Theology. As assertive behavior is assumed to be mostly seen in individualist cultures, Myanmar is one of the countries that embraced the culture of collectivism. Thus, there is a potential difference in the aspect of assertiveness shown among the respondents and those studied in Western countries. This current study was carried out among undergraduate university students in the Myanmar Institute of Theology. As such, future research can be done among junior and senior secondary school students. It would also be a good idea to contrast students' assertiveness at the pre-university and university levels to determine how their personality factors increase or decrease their assertiveness. This can help the teachers to work on the problematic areas and boost their students' self-esteem in their social interaction.

Conclusions

In summary, the enhancement of self-esteem will be necessary for the students to be able to communicate assertively, which is mentioned by Shrivastava and Mishra (2015). This research gives the teachers of MIT some ideas, strategies, and approaches relating to enhancing students' self-esteem in their daily social as there is no indirect effect of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience on assertiveness being mediated by self-esteem in this research. According to the finding of this research, there is no significant mediating effect of social anxiety between the big five personality traits and assertiveness. However, there is a significant negative association between extraversion and social anxiety. This research showed the students and teachers the importance of having an awareness of social anxiety, which restrict assertive communication, and teachers from the Myanmar Institute of Theology can support the students who have social anxiety with some effective strategies such as conducting mini-seminars or special talks programs relating to social anxiety disorder to be able to overcome their social anxiety for their academic achievement or their effective social interaction.

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