



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS AND CONSUMER SUSCEPTIBILITY TO INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE AMONG YOUNG ADULTS: A CORRELATION AND REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Tarika Goel

Department of Psychology (Shift II), Women's Christian College, Chennai

ABSTRACT

Social influence is pervasive in individuals' lives, shaping routine behaviors through interactions with society (Bhukya & Paul, 2023). This influence extends to consumer behavior, notably among young adults.

The study explores the connection between personality traits and social influence on consumer behavior in this demographic. With 84 participants aged 18-25, findings indicate a significant correlation between Openness to experience and susceptibility to informational social influence. Additionally, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are significantly linked to normative social influence susceptibility. These insights fill gaps in consumer behavior literature, aiding marketers in tailored strategies. Moreover, addressing personality-driven susceptibility to social influence in education empowers young adults to make informed choices, emphasizing critical thinking and decision-making skills. The study underscores the intricate relationship between personality, social influence, and consumer behavior, offering valuable implications for marketers and educators.

KEYWORDS : *Social influence, Consumption behaviour, Personality*

INTRODUCTION

The late teens to early twenties signify a pivotal phase marked by challenges and experiences, crucial for identity formation. Interactions with peers, mentors, and family play a pivotal role as young adults navigate social groups, seeking acceptance. This quest for identity intensifies as late adolescents enter university and embark on careers, often leading to conformity with group opinions and behaviors.

This period also witnesses the development of belief systems and worldviews influenced by the surrounding beliefs and values. Educational and career decisions are frequently guided by advice from family or professionals, emphasizing the impact of external counsel. Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook expose young adults to diverse ideas, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors, all united by a common thread—social influence.

Social influence encompasses normative influence, driven by a desire for social acceptance, and informational influence, rooted in the pursuit of correctness. The social environment significantly shapes consumer behaviors, prompting individuals to adjust beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors based on others' knowledge and opinions (Baron & Branscombe, 2012).

Young adults, driven by a desire to belong and limited life experience, are particularly susceptible to social influences. They may unconsciously adopt others' consumption choices, beliefs, and behaviors, conforming to societal consumption norms. Social media platforms amplify this influence by bombarding young adults with consumer-related content, often delivered through advertisements and influencers. Those following influencers may consider them credible sources, accepting recommendations without scrutiny, and the sheer number of followers endorsing these influencers contributes to widespread conformity.

Therefore, social influence plays a significant role in shaping the consumption choices of young adults, influenced by various factors, including personality.

Personality, defined as a person's unique and relatively stable behavior patterns, is a pivotal force shaping various aspects of an individual's life. Personality traits represent stable behavior patterns persisting over time, with profound consequences across different life domains (Coon & Mitterer, 2007).

The Big-Five model introduces five universal dimensions—extroversion, agreeableness,

conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience—each corresponding to different aspects of behavior. Extroverted individuals are outgoing, agreeable individuals are friendly and nurturing, conscientious individuals are disciplined and responsible, neurotic individuals experience negative emotions, and those open to experience are intelligent and open to new ideas (Coon & Mitterer, 2007).

Different personality traits respond uniquely to various forms of social influence, leading to either a tendency to conform or resist such influence. For instance, extroverted individuals might succumb more to peer pressure, while agreeable individuals could be more influenced by others' opinions.

Previous research emphasizes the significant role of individual personality in purchasing behavior and the links between the Big-Five personality traits and various aspects of social influence.

Given the integral roles of personality and social influence in young adults' lives, their independence or interconnection, especially concerning consumption behavior, remains unclear. This study seeks to explore the relationship between personality traits and social influence among young adults in the context of consumer behavior.

In conclusion, the consumption behavior of young adults is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by social influence and personality traits. This study endeavors to bridge the gap in understanding the relationship between the Big-Five personality traits and susceptibility to social influence in consumer behavior among young adults. By illuminating this interaction, the study aims to provide valuable insights for marketers and academics, aiding in a better understanding and navigation of the intricate realm of consumer behavior.

Problem and Hypothesis

Research Question

1. Is there a relationship between the Big Five personality traits and consumers' susceptibility to interpersonal influence among young adults?

Objective

1. To determine the relationship between the big-five personality traits and consumers' susceptibility to interpersonal influence among young adults.

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the big-five personality traits and consumers' susceptibility to

interpersonal influence among young adults.

Method of Investigation

Research design

Ex-post facto research design

Independent variable

Big-five personality traits

Dependent variable

Consumers' susceptibility to interpersonal influence

Sample

The study involves a sample group of 84 participants in the age group of 18-25 years. Purposive sampling was adopted to identify young adults in the specified age group.

Inclusion criteria

- Indian young adults aged 18-25 years
- Young adults with proficiency in the English language
- Young adults engaged in consumption-related activities

Exclusion criteria

- Young adults with mental disorders
- Young adults with physical disabilities
- Young adults residing in countries other than India
- Young adults of rural areas.

Operational definition

Big-five personality traits:

The Big Five—Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness to Experience—are a set of five broad, bipolar trait dimensions that constitute the most widely used model of personality structure (McCrae & Costa, 1991).

Consumers' susceptibility to interpersonal influence: Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence, a variable trait, varies among individuals and relates to other personal traits. It involves seeking approval and conforming to expectations in product choices and learning from others (McGuire 1968).

Table 1

Table 1 represents the tools used and the respective variable they measure

Tool	Variable
Ten-Item Personality Inventory	Big-five personality traits
Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence	Consumers' Susceptibility to interpersonal influence

Description of the tool used

Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) (Samuel D. Gosling, Peter J. Rentfrow, and William B. Swann Jr, 2003)

The TIPI assesses Big Five personality dimensions with ten items, two per dimension. Rated on a 7-point scale, items 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 are reverse-scored. The average of each dimension's two items, including the reverse-scored one, forms the total score for that trait. (Gosling et al., 2003).

Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) (William O. Bearden, Richard G. Netemeyer, and Jesse E. Teel, 1989)

The CSII, a multidimensional scale, gauges individual susceptibility to interpersonal influence in consumer choices. It comprises informational and normative components, rated on a seven-point scale. Higher scores signify greater susceptibility. Reliable and valid across student and nonstudent samples, with alpha estimates of 0.82 and 0.88 for informational and normative factors. Demonstrates convergent and discriminant validity in correlations with other constructs. (Bearden et al., 1989).

Procedure of data collection

Purposive sampling was adopted and a questionnaire was administered to the sample group through a Google Form. Ethical considerations were taken into account.

Statistical analysis

SPSS was used to analyse data collected for the present study. Shapiro Wilk test for normality was employed.

Descriptive statistics

1. Mean
2. Standard deviation

Inferential statistics

1. Pearson Correlation
2. Linear Regression

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2

Table 2 Represents Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the study variables

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Informational social influence	84	18.40	5.802	—	.32	.05	.1	-.09	.07	.24*
2. Normative social influence	84	21.73	9.055	.32	—	.06	-.33*	-.22*	.17	-.24*
3. Extroversion	84	4.084	1.638	.05	.06	—	-.05	.22*	.00	.19
4. Agreeableness	84	4.988	1.100	.1	-.33	-.05	—	.22*	-.21	.04
5. Conscientiousness	84	4.661	1.254	-.09	-.22*	.23*	.22*	—	-.32	.30
6. Neuroticism	84	3.982	1.425	.07	.17	.00	-.21	-.32	—	-.15
7. Openness to experience	84	5.167	1.677	.24*	-.24*	.19	.04	.30	-.15	—

*p < 0.05, significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed.

Table 3

Table 3 Represents the Regression Coefficients of Openness to Experience and Informational Social Influence

Variable	B	SE	β	p
Constant	12.16*	2.82		0.00
Openness to experience	1.21*	0.53	.24	.026
R2	0.06			

*p < 0.05, significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed.

Table 3 indicates how openness to experience influences young adults' susceptibility to informational social influence. The R² value of 0.06 indicates that the predictor variable explains 6% variance with F (1, 82) = 5.16, p < 0.05, highlighting a positive relationship between openness to experience and informational social influence in consumption behaviour.

Table 4

Table 4 Represents the Regression Coefficients of Agreeableness and Normative Social Influence

Variable	B	SE	β	p
Constant	35.42*	4.38		0.00
Agreeableness	-2.74*	.86	-.33	.002
R2	.11			

*p < 0.05, significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed.

Table 4 displays how agreeableness influences young adults'

susceptibility to normative social influence. With an R^2 value of 0.11, the predictor variable explains 11% variance $F(1, 82) = 10.26, p < 0.05$, indicating a negative association between agreeableness and normative social influence in consumption behavior.

Table 5

Table 5 Represents the Regression Coefficients of Conscientiousness and Normative Social Influence

Variable	B	SE	β	p
Constant	28.95*	3.76		0.00
Conscientiousness	-1.55*	.78	-.22	.05
R2	.046			

* $p < 0.05$, significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed

Table 5 reveals how conscientiousness affects young adults' susceptibility to normative social influence. With an R^2 value of 0.046, the predictor variable explains 4.6% variance $F(1, 82) = 3.96, p < 0.05$, indicating a negative correlation between conscientiousness and normative social influence in consumption behavior.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study suggest that there is no significant relationship between extroversion and consumer susceptibility to informational social influence among young adults. Although extroverts are often around people and in social situations, a lack of significant informational influence in terms of consumer behaviour could mean that the confidence in self associated with extroversion translates to consumption behaviour as well, wherein extroverts are confident about the choices they make and do not feel the need to be seek the opinions of others. Moreover, because extroverts spend a significant amount of time in social situations, it is likely that they are aware of what is right and wrong in terms of consumption behaviour, making informational influence inconsequential.

The results show that there is no significant relationship between agreeableness and consumer susceptibility to informational social influence among young adults. The straightforwardness of agreeable individuals could also reduce reliance on informational social influence as they choose to be honest not only to others but also to their own values which guide what they believe is right and wrong.

A lack of a significant relationship between conscientiousness and consumer susceptibility to informational social influence among young adults is perhaps because conscientious individuals are thoroughly organized and have a penchant for details. This could translate to consumer behaviour as conscientious individuals gather information and contemplate options based on their own analysis and investigation. Conscientious individuals are therefore more likely to rely on their own research to determine what is correct and appropriate and not seek external opinions or information.

The findings suggest that there is no significant relationship between neuroticism and consumer susceptibility to informational social influence among young adults. Neuroticism is typically not defined as a social trait and includes less social contact (Segel-Karpas, & Lachman, 2018) thereby making neurotic individuals less likely to be exposed to the opinions and choices of others. Therefore, these individuals may not be aware of what is right or wrong, make no effort to learn it and they are absorbed by their anxieties, irritability, sadness and moodiness.

The results reveal a lack of significant relationship between extroversion and consumer susceptibility to normative social influence among young adults. This suggests that despite

being characterised by a high need to be around people and in social groups, the trait of extroversion might not be prepotent in determining consumption choices as consumer behaviour is affected not only by social influence but by other factors as well such as one's values, past experiences, likes, dislikes, marketing strategies and interest among others. These factors might take precedence over the desire to be liked, which is not reflected in consumption behaviour.

The findings suggest that no significant relationship exists between neuroticism and susceptibility to normative social influence among young adults. Neurotic individuals tend to be apathetic (Bjornsen et al., 2007), leading to an unconcern about others as well as an uninterest in whether others like them or not, thereby reducing normative influence. This might translate to consumption behaviour as well.

There is a lack of significant relationship between openness to experience and consumer susceptibility to normative social influence among young adults. The trait of openness to experience is characterised by exploration and attraction to novelty. These characteristics might make it less likely that open individuals are swayed by the influence of others as they would be more willing to explore ideas and try new things instead of following the ideas of others. The sensation seeking aspect of openness might therefore take precedence over wanting to be liked.

Findings reveal a significant relationship between openness to experience and consumer susceptibility to informational social influence. From table 3, significant relationship between consumer susceptibility to informational social influence and openness to experience results show that although the results are significant, the relationship is weak, with openness to experience explaining only 6% variance in consumer susceptibility to informational social influence. This could mean that while open individuals might mostly prefer to explore ideas and different avenues in consumer behaviour, they might also be open to the opinions of others when they are creative, unconventional and unique.

There is a significant negative relationship between agreeableness and consumer susceptibility to normative social influence, with agreeableness explaining 11% variance in consumer susceptibility to normative social influence. A negative relationship implies that an agreeable consumer is less likely to be susceptible to normative social influence. Agreeable individuals may consider harmony to be valuable but they also possess personal choices, tastes and inclinations. Their tendency towards harmony may exist mostly in social situations and where there is possible conflict but consumer preferences are a personal choice, guided by individual likes and dislikes.

There is a slight significant negative relationship between conscientiousness and consumer susceptibility to normative social influence, with conscientiousness explaining 4.6% variance in consumer susceptibility to normative social influence. The results indicate that conscientious consumers are less likely to be susceptible to normative social influence, that is, the desire to be liked by others. Conscientious individuals are disciplined, which may translate to consumer behaviour in terms of brand loyalty. Conscientious consumers might stick to their preferred brands and might not be influenced by their desire to be liked by others and therefore they might not purchase products and/or services according to the likes of others and would be more inclined towards brands they trust and are loyal to.

Social influence is quite powerful and has the ability to determine our actions, including those related to consumption. This consumption behaviour is a complex one

which is influenced by a combination of a variety of factors. Personality traits are powerful factors that determine almost every aspect of our life and our major decisions and choices. However, a lack of significant relationship between most traits and consumer susceptibility to social influence indicates a complex interplay of numerous factors as even the significant relationships found are only minimal.

CONCLUSION

Openness to experience correlates significantly with informational social influence susceptibility. Agreeableness is significantly related to normative social influence susceptibility, as is conscientiousness among young adults.

Implications

This study addresses and extends gaps in consumer behaviour and social influence literature, focusing on personality traits. Significant relationships between traits and susceptibility to influence have implications for marketers to tailor strategies. In education, awareness and skill development can empower young adults to navigate social influence, fostering critical thinking and decision-making abilities.

Limitations

The questionnaire's self-reporting may elicit socially desirable responses. The sample lacks diversity in gender, economic backgrounds, and education, neglecting individual differences' influence.

Future directions

Future research on social influence and consumer behavior can explore gender, age, socioeconomic status, and culture. Cross-national studies can reveal variations in universal traits influenced by cultural nuances, offering insights into global patterns of social influence and consumer behavior.

REFERENCES

1. Baron, R.A., & Branscombe, N. R. (2012). *Social Psychology* (13th ed.). Pearson.
2. Bhukya, R., & Paul, J. (2023). Social Influence Research in consumer behavior: What we learned and what we need to learn? – a hybrid systematic literature review. *Journal of Business Research*, 162, 113870. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113870>
3. Coon, D., & Mitterer, J. O. (2007). *Introduction to Psychology: Gateways to Mind and Behavior* (11th ed.). Thomson Wadsworth.