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Personality Characteristics of Market Mavens

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ABSTRACT

A number of papers have been published investigating the demographic, motivational and psychological characteristics of the maven, but none has attempted an in-depth investigation of their personality traits. This paper tests the relationships between the characteristics of market mavens with Extraversion-Introversion and four personality orientations or traits that have been developed recently. The findings suggest that it is possible to anchor the construct of market mavens within a broader personality theory. The research found strong relationships between market mavens, physical/sensing personality orientation and extraversion.

EARLY ADOPTERS (INNOVATORS)

In general, all consumers are the targets of marketing communications, although some consumers are more valuable to businesses and industries than others (Feick and Price, 1987; Goldsmith, Flynn, Goldsmith, 2003). An examination of the marketing literature has revealed that three types of consumers are especially valuable to businesses and the marketplace. These are known as reference groups and can be grouped into the early adopters (innovators), opinion leaders and market mavens. Their value to businesses and industries originates from their affinity to share knowledge about the marketplace, products and services.

The first of the reference groups, early adopters (also known as innovators) tend to be associated with usually a bell shape type of normal distribution, which is characterised as product or category specific as opposed to being interested in all product categories across the board (Rogers, 1995). Studies of early adopters/innovators have found that early adopters tend to be better educated, younger ages, upwardly mobile and come from the higher socio-economic status relative to others in the social system, who usually can afford to take the risks and have the money too (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard, 1995). In comparison to other social groups, early adopters are more likely to adopt a new product or service comparatively earlier than other groups of consumers (Clark and Goldsmith, 2005) and are more likely to disregard the risks associated with new products or services (Engel et al., 1995). Numerous studies have shown that early adopters are heavy users of commercial, professional and interpersonal information sources (Goldsmith, Flynn, and Goldsmith, 2003; Fisher and Price, 1992; Mahajan and Muller, 1990). These studies also showed that early adopters tend to be more likely to share information they have gathered about a specific product or service with other members of their local reference groups.

OPINION LEADERS

Like early adopters, opinion leaders are an attractive target for marketers as they have been shown to be effective facilitators for spreading information specific to a product or service (Chan and Misra, 1990; Clark and Goldsmith, 2005; Feick and Price 1987; Goldsmith et al, 2003). There has been a lot of debate as to what are the general characteristics of the opinion leaders (Marshall and Gitosudarmo, 1995). A number of studies have sought to identify differences between opinion leaders and early adopters. These differences include opinion leader's characteristics that relate to levels of sociability, such as gregariousness (extraversion); of outer-directed personality traits (Marshall and Gitosudarmo, 1995);

their degree of innovativeness, positive attitudes to change and demographic characteristics such as youth, higher education and income (Marshall and Gitosudarmo, 1995). Innovativeness is usually tempered by social respectability or need for trustworthiness, which is not always present in the early adopters/innovators. However, opinion leaders, like early adopters, are high information seekers (Clark and Goldsmith, 2005) and use large amounts of commercial, professional and interpersonal sources of information regarding a specific product or category of interest. Opinion leaders regularly share their knowledge with other people. A few studies have shown that opinion leaders may be sought after and consulted about new products or services, by other consumers, because they are usually perceived as more knowledgeable with regards to high involvement purchases (Christiansen and Tsiourtis, 1998).

MARKET MAVENS

The conceptualisation of the third reference group has been credited to the study by Feick and Price (1987). Feick and Price (1987: 85) defined market mavens as "individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of marketing, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for marketplace information".

Feick and Price (1987) demonstrated that although market mavens have similar demographic characteristics as opinion leaders and early adopters/innovators, they differ from the opinion leaders and early adopters/purchasers on the higher levels of general knowledge about the marketplace and product marketing mix (product, prices, distribution, promotions) characteristics. Mavens have been shown to have a broader array of information about different types of products, including durable, non-durables, services and store types (Feick and Price, 1987). This contrasts with the opinion leaders and early adopters who are more knowledgeable and want to share information about a specific range of products within a product category or specific market environment characteristics. Market mavens collect and retain information about a wider range of issues such as product quality, prices, sales, availability, store personnel characteristics and other features that may be relevant to themselves and to other consumers. The media habits of market mavens differ from those of early adopters and opinion leaders. Market mavens are more likely to read retail magazines, direct mail advertisements and discuss retail store image attributes more freely than non-mavens (Higie, Feick and Price, 1987) and to be heavy users of coupons, grocery lists and budgeting tactics (Price and Feick, 1988).

Although demographically similar to opinion leaders and early adopters, market mavens are more likely to be female, marginally lower educated than non-mavens and more likely to come from certain sub cultural groups (Feick and Price, 1987). Market mavens have been shown to be more accurate in their evaluation of service quality than early adopters and opinion leaders (Engelland, Hopkins, and Larson, 2001), but early adopters and opinion leaders are more likely to be influential with a specific market or product category. In contrast, market mavens can be seen to be a source of general or non-specific marketplace information. This trait makes mavens an attractive target market to retailers and other large industries that produce and/or sell a wide range of durable and fmcg products. Market mavens are more likely to

encourage spread of information through word-of-mouth or viral marketing across a wide range of product categories (Clark and Goldsmith, 2005; Goldsmith et al., 2003; Price et al., 1987).

A large number of studies have focused on identifying the general media consumption, communications and demographic characteristics, but little is known about the market maven's motivational and psychological characteristics (Walsh, Gwinner and Swanson, 2004). Knowing that mavens watch more television and read more magazines than non-mavens, without knowing the reasons or motivational and psychological characteristics of the market maven, leaves the question of how to target effectively, build a relationship and communicate in a meaningful way with market mavens relatively unanswered.

MOTIVATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND PREFERENCES OF MARKET MAVENS

A number of studies have endeavoured to identify some of the motivational and psychological characteristics of the market mavens (Clark and Goldsmith, 2005; Engelland et al., 2001; Goldsmith et al., 2003; Walsh et al., 2004). Motives arouse and direct consumer behaviour and therefore market mavens would be targeted more accurately if their motives were better understood (Walsh et al., 2004). Identifying and understanding the motivations behind the actions of the market maven is particularly important to businesses wishing to highlight their product/service attributes and provide relevant information to market mavens. Price and Feick (1987) noted that compared to other groups of consumers, market mavens would be differentially motivated from other groups of innovators and early adopters. Walsh et al (2004) identified some of these unique motivational factors for mavenism. They found that market mavens were motivated to share their information with other consumers for a number of reasons, which include; an obligation to share information; a strong desire to help others; and an intrinsic pleasure in sharing information with others. Clarke and Goldsmith (2005) suggest that market mavens conform to social norms and can be susceptible to normative influences. Therefore cultural and sub cultural or social class norms, values and attitudes are likely to influence and be influenced by market mavens. Clarke and Goldsmith (2005) clarify this result by explaining that although mavens are information leaders, they do have socially normative boundaries, which are used appropriately and skilfully. However, the maven's socially normative behavioural considerations are moderated by the personality trait of high self-esteem and social respect or prestige/status. The literature review has identified no study that attempts to anchor the market maven characteristics within a general personality theory. The ad hoc type of description of the market maven's personality without any reference to their overall personality characteristics without an explanation of what kind of person is a market maven, seems to be a relevant research issue that is very useful for theoretical and model building purposes as well as for marketing practitioners. By expanding our understanding of the broader market maven's personality traits or characteristics, researchers and marketing practitioners would be able to differentiate more clearly market mavens from other groups of innovators/early adopters in terms of their psychographic characteristics and styles of decision making.

PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS AS PREDICTOR VARIABLES OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Albanese (1993) suggests that although all consumers have a personality it is hard to understand how it affects behavioural

decisions. Efforts to utilise personality theory as a single predictor item with consumer behaviour have produced unconvincing results in general (Kassarjian and Sheffet, 1991). However, it is difficult to generalise about the effectiveness of personality in relation to predicting consumer's behaviour and decision making process, because researchers have used a variety of competing theories, definitions, methodologies, and instruments measuring different personality characteristics, in a wider range of appropriate and inappropriate marketing applications (Pervin, 1997; Plummer, 2000). It is very difficult to provide a clear-cut assessment of whether personality as a single or general global construct is a good predictor of behaviour without any other relevant information about the consumers, for example, demographic characteristics, attitudes, motives and values. The degree of construct specificity affects the level of relationships with consumer's behaviour. Personality is considered to be very general construct, attitudes tends to be more of an intermediate level, and specific traits are more closely related with specific context and behavioural aspects of consumer's nature. Therefore, predictive validity of consumer's behaviour varies according to the type of construct (broad, intermediate or specific) and the type of context the trait is hypothesised to be relevant and used for (Nakanishi, 1972; Kassarjian and Sheffet, 1991).

The degree of construct generality is bound to have an effect on the level of predictive power. Gountas and Mavondo (2005) found strong correlations between personality and behaviour using global personality preferences/traits, as well as more specific traits like self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). Integrating personality characteristics (general as well as more specific behavioural context related traits) with motivation, available resources, and external opportunities, (Gountas, 2004; Gountas and Mavondo, 2005) achieved stronger levels of relationships between personality and consumer's behaviour (actual and intended behavior). Personality constructs can be very useful predictors of consumer behaviour if they are developed appropriately for specific consumer behaviour purposes, and if they include other important influences such as social, external factors, demographics, and overall market conditions (Kassarjian and Sheffet, 1991). There is a tremendous range of consumer decisions, varying from high involvement to low/trivial level of importance, and therefore it is appropriate to consider carefully the usage of existing off the shelf personality instruments with all kinds of consumption decisions and behaviour studies.

Kassarjian and Sheffet (1991) suggested that consumer researchers should avoid using ad hoc personality items, especially if they are single personality traits but always endeavour to use well-validated and reliable personality instruments, which have high reliability scores. They suggest that personality instruments should be embedded in a well-developed theory of personality and to consider personality as one of a number of variables moderating or influencing consumer's choices and behaviour.

The literature review identified a number of personality traits and theories being used as predictor or explanatory variables of innovators/early adopters and market mavens, but none has attempted to use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) or any new Jungian personality type of theories (Briggs-Myers and McCaulley, 1989; Jung, 1921/1971). This study uses a new personality theory that has its foundations in the broad Jungian personality typology and takes into consideration the MBTI and other Neo-Jungian ideas. The new personality theory (Gountas, 2003) has been developed over a number of years, has been tested, and retested with representative samples of consumers. The validity and reliability

scores are above the expected standards and therefore the instrument is robust and appropriate for applied consumer research purposes.

THE FOUR PERSONALITY ORIENTATIONS

The new four personality orientations/mega traits attempt to identify distinctive consumer approaches towards processing information and viewing the world from different perspectives. The conceptual foundations of the new theory are a synthesis of the original Jungian (1921/71) and post Jungian personality types postulations (Briggs-Myers, and McCaulley, 1989) based on the four functions or human faculties (thinking, intuitive, feeling and sensing). The new model (Gountas, 2003) departs from the original eight predetermined Jungian personality types which included the four functions, the two additional attitudes or extraversion and introversions and the arbitrary notions of two groups of organising functions that of perceptive and judgement. The new model hypothesises that there are four broad but different approaches/functions regarding consumer's behavior and postulates that each orientation has a different valence and intensity of preferences.

The theoretical model put forward by Zajonc and Markus (1982) of the existence of two distinctive preferences that of cognitive and affective with regards to a wide range of behaviours and actual decision making, has been extended and adapted to form the feeling and thinking orientations of the new personality orientations model. Cacioppo's and Petty's concept that individuals have different Needs for Cognition (Cacioppo and Petty, 1982) has been integrated and adapted to fit in to the overall construct of Thinking/Logical that Jung has put forward too. The Jungian and post or Neo-Jungian function of sensing has been synthesised and adapted with the trait of materialism (Moschis, and Churchill, 1978; Richins, 1987; Richins, and Dawson, 1992) to form the Physical or Somatic/Materialistic orientation. The labels of the four personality orientations in the new model are thinking/logical, imaginative, physical/sensing, and feeling/emotion/action. The core characteristics of each orientation are briefly summarised in order to provide an idea of what are the main differences between the four personality orientations/functions. Each orientation or trait is hypothesised to manifest in all consumers in varying degrees, therefore there is no single one orientation or complete lack of other orientations that exert influence on the consumer's range of preferences and styles of decision-making.

The thinking/logical orientation/function is characterised by a higher level of interest and focus on generating new ideas and understanding the way things or certain phenomenon operate. There is a higher need for cognitive type of processing information; a need to know how and why certain products are more appropriate; and evaluate objectively the differences between products based on accurate factual information and guided by evaluative criteria. The thinking orientation enjoys thinking/ideation, is inclined to form logical connections between ideas, and uses effortful cognitive processing strategies to make sense of any obscure or abstract concepts (Cacioppo and Petty, 1982). Decision-making is likely to be based on the careful cognitive and logical examination of facts and other sources of information related to a product purchase. Consumers with higher scores on the thinking trait rely on principles to guide their reasoning of cause and effect and tend to be impersonal in their relationships (Moss, 1989; Gountas, 2003). Thinking/logical orientation traits are related with a strong interest in creating new knowledge, generating new ideas and constructing new understanding of how the world works (Pervin, 1997; Gountas, 2003). Consumers with an overall higher tendency towards the thinking orientation may show all or some of the characteristics

hypothesised in the thinking/logical construct. Some of these characteristics, construct facets, of the thinking/logical orientation are: interest in analysing information, maintaining objectivity in decision making, using well founded intellectual principles to guide thinking process, value justice and fairness, tend to use critical and deliberate thinking, which can appear emotionless or blunt and less concerned for feelings (Briggs-Myers and McCaulley, 1989; Gountas, 2003).

Consumers/individuals with higher score on the imaginative trait/orientation have a heightened sense of awareness of the unconscious perception (Jung 1921/71; Pervin, 1997). They tend to rely on visual type of learning stimuli, using diagrams and pictures to store information and identify differences between product attributes. They are more likely to interpret and adapt to the word around them using imaginative process of thinking and visualisation techniques to make sense of what and how to do things. Their main sources of information are not logically organised but they are guided by creative and need to understand the non-visible aspects of the world. They are able to use and perceive subconscious images and sensing of what has happened (past events) and what might happen in the future (Jung, 1921/71; Gountas, 2003). Although information is gathered by the five senses, the same as all other personality orientations, at very high speed, not in a particular organised manner, and therefore input tends to be generic, blurred on the details and interested to identify the creative and interesting or unusual qualities of the information material (Moss, 1989). Imaginative consumers tend to prefer unconventional approaches and products, like more abstract and creative types of communication and better at constructing theories and 'hunches' through imaginative processes. The imaginative consumer can visualise patterns and make sense of event with minimal information. They prefer complexity rather simple reality. The facets or sub constructs of the imaginative orientation/trait are a stronger tendency to visualise, to construct and manipulate images, are more inclined to value idealism, reflection, creativity, imagination, tolerance for the unusual and unconventional process of decision making.

The physical/sensing consumers value physical comforts, material possessions and enjoy more the physical world just for its own sake. They experience more pleasure from the physical or material goods and the tangible attributes of products. They rely heavily on the input of their five senses (sight, smell, hear, touch and taste) as well as their instinctive earthy/physical body reactions to tell them what is appropriate for them (Jung, 1921/71; Gountas, 2003). The physical/sensing person is more likely to appreciate the details and real as opposed to the imagined or cognitive interpretations of a situation (Moss, 1989). They tend to focus on the immediate physical experiences and often show an acute ability to see very accurately material characteristics (colour, texture, and three-dimensional aspects). They can understand the material world very well and enjoy transforming and creating new material artefacts. The facets or sub constructs of the physical/sensing orientation/trait are physical realism, acute powers of material observation and understanding, memory for details, practical, down to earth and enjoyment of physical pleasures, achievements and comforts (Briggs-Myers and McCaulley, 1989; Moss, 1989; Gountas, 2003).

The feeling/action orientation/trait is characterised by a higher level of energy drive and achieving the best possible feelings. They tend to prefer experiential input to construct their understanding of the world and who they are as individuals. They focus on the enhancement of self-identity and self-esteem and therefore strive to achieve goals that are socially sanctioned and approved. They evaluate events, products and experiential benefits in subjective terms and whether they are likely to enhance their own sense of

worth, social and self-respect, social acceptance, status and individuality. They enjoy emotional experiences, understand their own emotional states and those of others and are capable of transforming and creating new emotional/feeling states (Briggs-Myers and McCaulley, 1989; Gountas, 2003). Feeling/action oriented consumers tend to evaluate products based on their social symbolism, status and emotional appeal. They are able to evaluate consumption interactions in terms of negative or positive feeling/emotion outcomes based on their own subjective and perceived social evaluation of a service or product (Gountas, 2003; Pervin, 1997). The evaluation process is based on the perceived subjective level of significance or potential to enhance and add status, and feelings of success, importance and power for the individual. Feeling/action orientation consumers rely more and are more interested in the understanding of the personal as well as group values and therefore they are more subjective in their interpretations and construction of reality is more heuristic and based on actual experiential evidence. The feeling/action orientation/trait facets or sub constructs are: higher concern for the human emotional and feeling aspects, experiential sources of information, a need for affiliation, status, social respect and achievement, understanding emotions and able to transform and create new emotions, preference to evaluate products in terms of emotional benefits and social symbolism (Gountas, 2003).

The constructs of extraversion and introversion (E-I) have been considered relevant to include as free standing personality characteristics (Costa, and McCrae, 1992; McCrae and Costa, 1997) in addition to the four general personality constructs in order to be able to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the market maven's characteristics. The E-I construct is composed of the sub constructs or facets of sociability, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement and positive social interactions. They are hypothesised to be relevant personality aspects that may influence decisions and behaviours of market mavens concerning the product category context of food consumption in restaurants.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The specific industry we want to test the relationships between market mavens and the four personality orientations is the restaurant and hospitality industry. The hospitality industry relies heavily on its diners to 'experience' the whole product of the restaurant, including the food, service, atmosphere and the company of others. Market mavens play a critical role in the diner's experience, by providing information and opinions about restaurants; market mavens are able to determine, inadvertently, which restaurants will be patronised by the consumers.

Market mavens are expected to be more knowledgeable about food and restaurant outlets and to produce the highest or stronger positive relationship with the physical/material orientation/trait. All other personality orientations/traits are expected to produce lower (than the physical/material orientation) but positive relationships with market mavens. Eating and dining out in restaurants is a social activity and therefore we expect that second highest correlations with market mavens to be the feeling/action orientation/traits followed by thinking/logical and last the imaginative orientation/trait dominant consumers.

H1: there is a stronger positive relationship between market mavens and physical/material orientation; followed by feeling, thinking and imaginative orientations in order of significance.

The trait of extraversion is expected to influence the strength of the relationships between market mavens and all four personality orientations, but the physical/material orientation is hypothesised to produce the highest regression score followed by feeling, thinking and imaginative orientations.

H2: there is a higher and positive relationship between extraversion and market mavens, and a lower negative correlation between introversion and market mavens.

METHODOLOGY

Exploratory qualitative and quantitative research was conducted to refine the research instrument and the survey method. The questionnaire instrument performed well and researchers decided to use a self-completion survey method within a specific restaurant as the most appropriate venue for the intended sampling method.

Participants. A random sample of dinners throughout the weekdays was selected and two hundred and three (N=203) responses were collected. The demographic characteristics included all ages (18-65+), from all educational and income levels and with an equal proportion of male-female gender participants (male=48.3%, female=51.7%). The findings were factor analysed and then hierarchical regression analysis was carried out to determine the degree of correlations between the hypothesised constructs of market mavens, personality orientations/traits and E-I traits.

Instruments. The researchers used existing scales that are embedded in well developed personality theories, with small adaptations to suit the hospitality environment; five items for market mavens (Feick and Prices, 1987), six items in total for extraversion-introversion (Briggs-Myers and McCaulley, 1989), and an adapted version (twenty four items in total) of the four personality orientations/traits (Gountas, 2003).

INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES

The four personality orientations/traits and the individual traits of Extraversion-Introversion were hypothesised to be the independent variables because they are the overall personality characteristics that influence many other aspects such as market mavenism, attitudes and motives. Market mavenism is hypothesised to be the dependent variable because it is a second order type of personality characteristic.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The reliability analysis produced acceptable Cronbach alpha scores: Market Maven ($\alpha=.88$), Thinking orientation/trait ($\alpha=.72$), Feeling orientation ($\alpha=.71$), Physical/sensing orientation ($\alpha=.64$), Imaginative orientation ($\alpha=.74$), Extraversion ($\alpha=.69$), and Introversion ($\alpha=.69$). Bivariate correlations between the market maven composite construct and a number of demographic variables revealed that there are some interesting and significant relationships at the .01-.05 (2-tailed) level. For example mavens are more likely to frequent restaurants (.286**), if they have achieved a degree level of education (.631**), are aged 26-35 years old (.351*), with an average income of 35-45,000 dollars (.440*), having professional status (.258*), and are equal proportions of males and females (.286**).

The actual regression analysis results (see table 1) suggest that the physical/sensing orientation/trait is the best predictor with the highest score ($r=0.474***$), followed by the thinking trait ($r=0.463***$), feeling trait ($r=.408***$) and imaginative ($r=0.205**$).

TABLE 1
Regression analysis

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
	Beta (standardised coefficients)						
Dependent variable: Market Mavens							
Independent variables:							
1. Thinking orientation/trait	0.463***						0.242*
2. Feeling orientation/trait		0.408***					0.048
3. Physical/Sensing orientation/trait			0.474***				0.307***
4. Imaginative orientation/trait				0.205**			-0.109
5. Extraversion (Sociability)					0.242**		0.125*
6. Introversion						-0.124	-0.148*
7. All Psychological characteristics (1-6)							
<i>r</i>	0.463	0.408	0.474	0.205	0.242	0.124	0.551
<i>r</i> ² (<i>r</i> Square)	0.214	0.166	0.224	0.042	0.059	0.015	0.304
F value	54.771***	40.09***	58.167***	8.859**	12.508***	3.156	14.244***
(***p<.001; **p<.01, and *p<.05)							

Hypothesis 1 is largely supported because all of these regressions are positive and the order of magnitude of relationships is as predicted except one (feeling) is not the second highest correlated orientation as hypothesised.

Hypothesis 2 is also supported because the regression scores between extraversion and mavens is significant, positive and larger ($r=0.242^{***}$) than the introversion trait correlation (-0.124).

When all the independent variables are entered into the regression analysis, the strongest predictor of the maven trait is the physical/sensing orientation/trait followed by the thinking and extraversion (see table 1).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results support the findings by Price and Feick (1988) that market mavens have a higher level of interest and influence on services and store types. The research findings support the hypothesis that mavens are more likely to frequent restaurants. Mavens are likely to be well educated, with average incomes with no significant difference between males or females; they tend to have higher levels of education (college degree level) and are mostly professional people. The most significant predictor item that distinguishes mavens from other market segments is their preference for the physical (food) type of enjoyment. Mavens patronise restaurants for the sheer interest in good food physical comforts rather than for social prestige, status or to escape from everyday life. However, they are sociable and interested in activities that have a social flavour and therefore they tend to be extraverts rather than introverts. Mavens are more likely to evaluate logically which restaurant to patronise and weigh up the different options based on real accurate market facts as opposed to emotional or imaginative considerations. Restaurant outlets need to target and promote their service products and services based on the core benefits (physical pleasure, comfort and luxury type of atmosphere) and provide enough physical evidence to support their promotional communication claims to persuade their prospective customers.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have examined some of the market maven's personality characteristics, namely their four major personality

orientations/traits and extraversion-Introversion. Understanding some of the core personality characteristics of mavens, would enable marketers to identify more clearly the preferences and motives of their most influential consumers. This is an important aspect for academic researchers and marketers because market mavens and early adopters/innovators are usually the key drivers of market demand for new and existing products and services. Consumption patterns change and often they are driven by small groups of consumers (mavens and innovators) who are usually more interested in many product categories and in communicating their knowledge to other consumers.

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