

Edina MOLNÁR
University of Debrecen, Hungary

THE ROLE OF THE HIGH EMOTIONAL AROUSAL LEVEL IN PURCHASING DECISIONS CAUSED BY ADVERTISEMENTS

Original
Research

Keywords

Empathy;
Anxiety;
Personality;
Purchasing Decision;
Emotional Arousal;

JEL Classification

D83

Abstract

The ability to empathize is essential to everyday life, and one cannot interpret simple movements without empathy. It is essential in healing, teaching, and even modern societies rely on it for commercials or films. For individuals who consider advertising important, does the seemingly high arousal of personal distress or empathic anxiety appear to be the effect of the situation, or can it be considered a stable personality trait that usually represents a response in situations requiring empathy? Is there a difference in the above categories between individuals who, according to their own admission, tend to buy through advertising and those who do not feel the effectiveness of advertising in their purchasing decisions? To answer these questions, the applied research tools are valid psychological tests, the methods are correlational and T-test measurements. The results: in the comparison of the two groups, those who consider advertisement important are more polite, control their emotions less and want to satisfy social expectations less.

INTRODUCTION

One of the factors influencing purchasing decisions is the personality of the customer. There are models present, which describe and analyse customer decisions as communicational process (Pólya, 2019; Máté, 2011; Héder-Rima & Dajnoki, 2020), but also other which put family on the forefront (Horváthné, Bálint, Kulcsár & Oravecz, 2012), or operationalized research which takes one aspect of personality into account (Agárdi, 2019; Korpás & Szabó, 2019; Kun & Ujhelyi, 2018; Szakács, 2016; Szentesi, 2007). However, little is said about customer personality, or it is interpreted one-sidedly in general, with little attention payed to the deeper psychological analysis of the personality.

In marketing research the examination of empathy appears in two areas. One of these is personal selling, where the effect of the empathic attitude of the ones acquiring service or merchandise, and the providers on the sales process is being examined (Bahadur, Khan, Ali & Usman, 2019; Delpechitre, Rutherford & Comer, 2019; Umasuthan, Park & Ryu, 2017; Zerbini, Vergura & Luceri, 2019).

The other area is the area of the charity ads which build upon empathy at its foundation (Bartsch & Kloss, 2019; Keskin, Akgün, Ayar & Etlioglu, 2017; Weiss & Cohen, 2019).

According to Kohut (1985), with the help of empathy the other person conveys and impressions a person, which is similar to the unintentional, intuitive nature of face recognition. The empathic tuning and the face recognition roots from the mother-child relationship have similar nature and both of them start to develop in this relationship.

The ability of empathy is vital for the everyday life: according to Kohut, one couldn't interpret even the basic movements without empathy and its intrapsychic counterpart, the introspection. It is indispensable in healing, teaching, even the modern societies play upon this when presenting an advertisement or movie.

The social conditions of the 19th-20th centuries call forth the alienation of individuals. Everything is being automated and sped up, so there is less time and energy to spare for human relations. In the everyday rush, it is the empathy which can connect people and through connecting relations can provide safety (Davis, 2018).

The investigation shown in this paper was inspired by Kohut's realization, that empathy is an indispensable condition in everyday life, which advertising takes advantage of. The investigation is based upon three additives: first, empathic arousal (Pervin, 1982) and the statement that the higher arousal will result in a higher degree of aid (Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley & Birch, 1981); second, linking to this, Hebb's known diagram (Hebb, 1975) about the correlation between arousal levels and the effectiveness of behaviour governing

stimuli: the increase of the arousal level above the optimal will cause an emotional disturbance; third, Davis's results in personal distress correlation (Davis, 1983).

Does the emotional instability of everyday life situations go hand in hand with the personal distress (the heightened arousal created by the experience of another human's suffering) of individuals, who consider the advertisement as an important shopping factor on themselves? In other words: in the case of the individuals who consider ads important, is it the high arousal which seems to be the effect of the situation that is creating the personal distress or the appearance of empathic anxiety, or can it be considered a stable personality trait, which would mean a generally occurring response in situations that require empathy? Secondly, is there a difference in the above two categories between the individuals who – according to their own claim – generally make purchases as a result of advertisements and those who do not feel the effectiveness of the advertisement's impact on their shopping decision.

METHOD

Test individuals

In the first stage of the research there was filled a questionnaire by 1864 adults. According to the test results, the individuals were divided into two groups, the first group professed that they do not feel ads as a decisive factor during their shopping decisions, while the other marked it as an influencing factor. In one of earlier publications (Molnár, 2020), there were presented the process and results of the examination of this last group. The number of elements of this group was 965. This publication will present the results of the first group (those who disregarded the advertisements) and also the comparison of the two groups. The number of elements of this group is 899 individuals.

Tools

In order to measure empathy and anxiety the investigation utilized Davis' IRI scale (Davis, 1983). The test individuals had to decide about 28 questions, how much it applies to them and indicate this on a five degree scale (0 = doesn't apply, 4 = applies much). The questionnaire contains both direct and converse statements. The score given for the statements equals the numbers given by the individual. The subscales must be summarised separately. Each subscale contains seven statements, so 0 to 28 points can be given.

The personality was measured by the Big Five personality test (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni & Perugini, 1993). The questionnaire contained 132 items, and answers were required on an agreement

scale of five, the scoring was the same as previously. The five personality factors were divided into subscales of two by the authors, and they also added a scale measuring desirability, which shows the test person's tendency, to distort his or her own self-concept because of the desire to be approved by others. Each scale consists of 12 items.

Procedure

The test individuals filled both questionnaires on the same occasion, first the Big Five, then the IRI. There are instructions on both the questionnaires, and the tested person fills the answer sheets alone.

RESULTS

The average results and standard deviation of the first group – the one that disregards advertisement – are readable in Table 1.

The IRI questionnaire's subscales were correlated by the Big Fives' subscales. The correlations turned out to be the following between IRI and the divided Big Five subscales (in Table 2).

The correlations between the IRI subscales and the five personality dimensions and also the Social Desirability are in Table 3.

As a next step, T-tests were made on two groups' results (the one that's disregards ads and the one that considers it an important factor). Most of the t values did not show significant difference between the corresponding subscales, except three; these are readable in Table 4. The average result of those who consider ads important is significantly higher on the Gallantry and on the Emotional Control subscales than the first group's. On the Social Desirability subscale, the average of the ones who disregard ads is higher.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be seen from the table of those who disregard advertisement that there is a significant positive correlation between Neuroticism – and within it the lack of Emotional Control – and the Empathic Concern, furthermore the Personal Distress. So this means that in situations that require empathy, the use of altruistic or egoistic empathy depends on – and comes with – how high the observing person's neuroticism is, so in general, in emotional situations how much he/she gives into his/her emotions without controlling them. Those individuals who experience high levels of discomfort or empathic resonance are often characterised as “emotional” or people who live a heightened emotional or impetuous life by their environment. On the other hand, those who are unable to feel anxiety or have low levels of

personal distress are prone to high levels of emotional control. There wasn't any significant result in the contracted Neuroticism dimension, only tendentious relation and only with the Empathic Concern.

The correlation is significantly positive between Cooperation and Perspective Taking and tendentious between Gallantry and Empathic Concern. Individuals who are polite and friendly experience high levels of altruistic empathy in empathic situations.

Energy – and within it Dynamism – correlates negatively with Personal Distress. This result confirms one of the conclusions of Davis' investigation, namely the one which states that Personal Distress and Introversion are positively correlated.

Summarised: inside the Neuroticism personality dimension the Emotional Control correlates with Empathic Concern and Personal Distress, but Impulse Control shows no relation. According to this, Neuroticism comes tendentiously with the formers.

The result of present inquiry adds to Davis' results and to the question about the effectiveness of advertisement. In the group who disregarded advertisements uncertainty, timidity, vulnerability, but also emotional discontrol marks the individuals who, at the sight of others suffering, will feel discomfort or have high levels of altruistic empathy. In an empathic situation, heightened arousal will result in a sufficient or an overly excessive level of anxiety. The former will lead to altruistic, the latter to egoistic empathy. However, this is not a momentary state. Rather these people are generally prone to extreme emotional reactions. In the comparison of the two groups, those who consider advertisement important are more polite, control their emotions less and want to satisfy social expectations less. These demonstrable differences, as well as the tendentious relations indicated earlier, call for additional studies in this field. But even this result shows that investigating the usefulness of advertisement in shopping decision making requires a more sophisticated approach to personality with the exploration of more subfields, like empathy, anxiety or other personality characteristics.

Acknowledgements

The publication of this study was supported by the EU-funded Hungarian grant EFOP-3.6.3.-VEKOP-16-2017-00007, for the project entitled “From Talent to Young Researchers” – Supporting the Career-developing Activities of Researchers in Higher Education.

REFERENCES

- [1] Agárdi, I. (2019). A tapintás iránti preferencia mediáló hatása a fogyasztó neme, a termék típusa és a csatornaválasztás kapcsolatában [The mediating effect of tactile preference on consumer gender, product type, and channel choice]. *Vezetéstudomány - Budapest Management Review*, 50(1), 70-79. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14267/VEZTUD.2019.01.07>
- [2] Bahadur, W., Khan, A., Ali, A. & Usman, M. (2019). Investigating the Effect of Employee Empathy on Service Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Trust in and Satisfaction with a Service Employee. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332667.2019.1688598>
- [3] Bartsch, A. & Kloss, A. (2019). Personalized charity advertising: Can personalized prosocial messages promote empathy, attitude change, and helping intentions toward stigmatized social groups? *International Journal of Advertising*. 345-363. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2018.1482098>
- [4] Batson, D. C., Duncan, B. D., Ackerman, P., Buckley, T. & Birch, K. (1981). Is Empathic Emotion a Source of Altruistic Motivation? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 40, 290-302.
- [5] Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Borgogni, L. & Perugini, M. (1993). The Big Five Questionnaire: A new questionnaire to access the five factor model. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 15, 281-288.
- [6] Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44, 113-126.
- [7] Davis, M. H. (2018). *Empathy: A social psychological approach*. Routledge, New York DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429493898>
- [8] Delpechitre, D., Rutherford, B. N. & Comer, L. B. (2019). The importance of customer's perception of salesperson's empathy in selling. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 34(2), 374-388. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-03-2017-0073>
- [9] Hebb, D. O. (1975). Science and the world of imagination. *Canadian Psychological Review/Psychologie canadienne*, 16(1), 4-11.
- [10] Héder-Rima, M. & Dajnoki, K. (2020). Kultúrám a márkám – A munkáltatói márkaépítés és a szervezeti kultúra kapcsolata [My culture is my brand - The relationship between employer branding and organizational culture]. *Marketing & menedzsment*, 2020(2)
- [11] Horváthné Kökény A., Bálint Á., Kulcsár P. & Oravecz G. (2012). A háztartások pénzügyi döntései: gondoskodjunk a jövőnkéről [Household financial decisions: taking care of our future]. *Szolnoki Tudományos Közlemények*, 16, 20-27.
- [12] Keskin, H., Akgün, A., Ayar, H. & Etliloglu, T. (2017). Persuasive messages and emotional responses in social media marketing. *Journal of Management, Marketing and Logistics*, 4, 202-208. DOI: [10.17261/Pressacademia.2017.481](https://doi.org/10.17261/Pressacademia.2017.481)
- [13] Kohut, H. (1985). *Self Psychology and the Humanities*. Ed. by Charles B. Strozier. W. W. Norton & Co., New York & London
- [14] Korpás, Z. & Szabó, B. (2019). Az online reklámok közvetlen hatásának vizsgálata a vásárlási döntésekre [Investigate the direct impact of online advertising on purchasing decisions]. *Marketing & Menedzsment*, 53(2), 31-44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15170/MM.2019.53.02.03>
- [15] Kun, A. I. & Ujhelyi, M. (2018). Cultural fit and academic performance of higher education students. *Vezetéstudomány* 49(11), 12-23.
- [16] Máté, Z. (2011). A magyarországi kis- és középvállalkozások marketingszervezetének kialakulása, léte, funkciói [The development, existence and functions of the marketing organization of small and medium-sized enterprises in Hungary]. *Marketing & menedzsment*, 45(1), 38-43.
- [17] Molnár, E. (2020). The role of empathy, anxiety and personality in purchasing decisions caused by advertising, submitted and accepted to *Annals of the University of Oradea Economic Science*
- [18] Pervin, L. A. (1982). The stasis and flow of behavior: Toward a theory of goals. *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 1-53.
- [19] Pólya, É. (2019). Born to consume? Some aspects of consumer socialization. *Economica (Szolnok)*, 10(2), 99-104.
- [20] Szakács, A. (2016). A pénzügyi tudatosság fontossága napjainkban [The importance of financial awareness today]. In: Árpási, Z., Bodnár, G., & Gurzó, I. (Eds.) *A magyar gazdaság és társadalom a 21. század globalizálódó világában I. kötet. "30 éves a békéscsabai felsőoktatás" jubileumi konferencia* [The Hungarian Economy and Society in the Globalizing World of the 21st Century Volume 1. "30 years of higher education in Békéscsaba" anniversary conference]. Békéscsaba, SZIE Gazdasági, Agrár- és Egészségtudományi Kar. 198-203.
- [21] Szentesi I. (2007). A Pilgrim-féle modell alkalmazása a fogyasztói magatartás-kutatásban [Application of the Pilgrim model in consumer behavior research]. *Szolnoki*

- Tudományos Közlemények, 11(Különszám), 1-25.*
- [22] Umasuthan, H., Park, O. & Ryu, J. (2017). Influence of empathy on hotel guests' emotional service experience. *Journal of Services Marketing, 31(6)*, 618-635.
- [23] Weiss, J. K. & Cohen, E. L. (2019). Clicking for change: the role of empathy and negative affect on engagement with a charitable social media campaign. *Behaviour & Information Technology, 38(12)*, 1185-1193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2019.1578827>
- [24] Zerbini, C., Vergura, D. & Luceri, B. (2019). How fair-trade claims and emotional empathy affect the consumer's propensity to buy fair chocolate? *British Food Journal, 121(7)*, 1605-1613.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1
Averages and deviation of the group that disregards advertisement

		Averages	Deviation
IRI	Fantasy Scale	18.6	5.49
	Perspective Taking	16.87	5.19
	Empathic Concern	17.53	3.58
	Personal Distress	13.6	5.58
Big Five	Dynamism	38.8	8.05
	Dominance	37.53	5.89
Dynamism + Dominance	Energy (Extroversion)	76.33	12.17
Cooperation + Gallantry	Cooperation	43.47	6.16
	Gallantry	36.8	5.39
	Agreeableness	80.27	7.27
Accuracy + Endurance	Accuracy	35.47	7.34
	Endurance	42.6	6.5
	Conscientiousness	78.1	11.32
Emotional + Impulse Control	Emotional Control	34.67	6.43
	Impulse Control	39	8.94
	Neuroticism	73.67	14.42
Openness for Culture + Experiences	Openness to Culture	40.33	8.58
	Openness to Experiences	39	6.85
	Openness	79.33	11.69
Social Desirability	Social Desirability	41.13	3.6

Own source, own editing

Table 2:
Correlations between Big Five and IRI subscales

	Fantasy Scale	Perspective Taking	Empathic Concern	Personal Distress
Dynamism	0.313504	0.064259	0.145186	-0.63849 *
Dominance	0.3297	0.021167	0.1074	-0.21044
Cooperation	-0.16516	0.696021 **	-0.2191	-0.29339
Gallantry	-0.05122	0.210819	0.457327 +	0.149258
Accuracy	-0.15469	0.415931	0.2697	0.210821
Endurance	0.243483	0.216194	0.153948	0.198171
Emotional Control	0.17199	-0.24512	0.5165 *	0.517565 *
Impulse Control	0.404562	-0.14913	0.405647	0.324992
Openness to Culture	0.066727	-0.32898	0.344528	0.202906
Openness to Experiences	0.188249	0.401777	0.06407	-0.37975

(+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01)

Own source, own editing

Table 3
The correlation between the 5 personality traits and IRI subscales

	Fantasy Scale	Perspective Taking	Empathic Concern	Personal Distress
Energy	0.366868	0.052733	0.147979	-0.52402 *
Agreeableness	-0.17785	0.745764 **	0.153091	-0.138
Conscientiousness	0.039544	0.393647	0.263152	0.250386
Neuroticism	0.32765	-0.20184	0.482003 +	0.432453
Openness	0.159217	-0.00627	0.290462	-0.07339
Social Desirability	0.393062	0.230021	-0.37662	-0.413

(+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$)

Own source, own editing

Table 4
T-test's significant results

	Average of those who consider ads important	Average of those who disregard ads	t value
Gallantry	40.40	36.80	2.0396
Emotional Control	44.15	34.66	2.9416
Social Desirability	38.20	41.13	-2.06468

Own source, own editing