

# Examining The Role Of Personality In Selective Exposure To Information

Katelyn Kebodeaux & Dr. Christopher L. Thomas

The University of Texas at Tyler

## Background

Past research has demonstrated that individuals often struggle to process information in an objective manner (Thomas et al., 2018).

Specifically, some decision-makers demonstrate a tendency to seek out information that reinforces one's pre-existing beliefs – a phenomenon known as selective exposure (Hart et al., 2009). However, some decision-makers demonstrate a tendency to search for information that opposes one's pre-existing beliefs – a phenomenon known as the uncongeniality bias (Taber & Lodge, 2006).

Numerous examinations have highlighted that biased information processing undermines effective decision making (Hart et al., 2009). Therefore, our study sought to establish a connection between personality traits and information search tendencies in an attempt to identify characteristics of those most at-risk to engage in biased information processing.

## Method

Undergraduate students (N = 345, 68% Female, 62% Caucasian) completed the following:

### Attitude Position:

- 7–point semantic differential scales assessing students' opinions toward allowing “abortion on demand” ( $\alpha = .98$ )

### Personality

- A 10-point scale assessing levels of Openness to Experience ( $\alpha = .39$ ), Conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .37$ ), Extraversion ( $\alpha = .63$ ), Agreeableness ( $\alpha = .35$ ), and Neuroticism ( $\alpha = .56$ ; Rammstedt & John, 2007).

### Selective Exposure Paradigm:

- Four vignettes describing articles supporting and opposing “abortion on demand”. Participants indicated if they would like to read each article in more detail (yes/no; adapted from Thomas et al., 2018).

## Results

### Information Search Preferences

We determined information search preferences by calculating the difference between the number of attitude consistent and attitude inconsistent article vignettes chosen to be read in more detail. The difference scores are interpreted such that positive values indicate a preference for attitude consistent information, zero indicates no preference for attitude (in)consistent information, and negative values indicate a preference for attitude inconsistent information.

| Information Search Classification | N   | %    |
|-----------------------------------|-----|------|
| Selective Exposure                | 128 | 39.5 |
| Unbiased Search                   | 66  | 20.4 |
| Uncongeniality Bias               | 130 | 40.1 |

### Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis

A multinomial logistic regression analysis was conducted predicting information search classification (congeniality bias, uncongeniality bias, & unbiased information search) from openness to experience, neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness. Results indicated that extraversion and openness to experience were significantly related to information search classification.

### Summary of Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis

| Predictor              | Unbiased Search Vs. | B    | OR   | p   |
|------------------------|---------------------|------|------|-----|
| Openness to Experience | UCB                 | -.06 | 1.12 | .71 |
|                        | SE                  | -.35 | .70  | .03 |
| Conscientiousness      | UCB                 | -.09 | .91  | .67 |
|                        | SE                  | -.08 | .92  | .69 |
| Extraversion           | UCB                 | .39  | 1.47 | .01 |
|                        | SE                  | .11  | 1.12 | .45 |
| Agreeableness          | UCB                 | .23  | 1.30 | .12 |
|                        | SE                  | .15  | 1.16 | .36 |
| Neuroticism            | UCB                 | -.02 | .98  | .90 |
|                        | SE                  | -.09 | .91  | .58 |

Note.  $R^2 = .05$  (Cox & Snell),  $.06$  (Nagkerke),  $.02$  (McFadden). Model  $\chi^2(10) = 19.05, p = .04$

## Conclusion

Our study found that individuals who score high on Extraversion are more likely to display an uncongeniality bias, and seek out information that contradicts their own beliefs. Additionally, participants who score low on Openness to Experience are more likely to demonstrate selective exposure, and seek out information congruent with their own beliefs.

Limitations: The Big Five Inventory – Short Form (Rammstedt & John, 2007) was found to be an unreliable measure of personality. This suggests that sources of error (i.e. external influences such as mood, environmental setting, & distraction) may have influenced participants responses to the personality questionnaire, as well as the results of our study.

## References

- Hart, W., Albarracin, D., Eagly, A. H., Brechan, I., Lindberg, M. J., & Merrill, L. (2009). Feeling validated versus being correct: A meta-analysis of selective exposure to information. *Psychological Bulletin, 135*, 555-588.
- Rammstedt, B., & John, O. P. (2007). Measuring personality in one minute or less: A 10-item short version of the Big Five Inventory in English and German. *Journal of Research in Personality, 41*, 203 – 212.
- Taber, C. S., & Lodge, M. (2006). Motivated skepticism in the evaluation of political beliefs. *American Journal of Political Science, 50*, 755 – 769.
- Thomas, C. L., Bourdeau, A. M., & Tagler, M. J. (2019). Interhemispheric communication and the preference for attitude consistent information. *Laterality: Asymmetries of Body, Brain and Cognition, 24*, 342 - 354

## Contact

Katelyn Kebodeaux  
School of Education  
The University of Texas at Tyler  
Email:kkebodeaux@uttyler.edu