



The Big Five Personality Traits as Predictors of Media Consumption Patterns: A Psychometric Investigation

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Abstract

The relationship between personality and media consumption has garnered significant scholarly attention as digital media ecosystems grow increasingly complex and personalized. This paper presents a comprehensive psychometric investigation into how the Big Five personality traits—Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (OCEAN)—predict diverse media consumption patterns across traditional and digital platforms. Drawing on Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974) and Mood Management Theory (Zillmann, 1988), the study examines both the direct and indirect pathways through which dispositional characteristics shape media selection, engagement depth, content preferences, and platform diversification. An extensive review of meta-analytic evidence from over 113 studies (N = 53,913) is synthesized alongside theoretical discussion of mediating mechanisms including need for affiliation, mood regulation, information-seeking motivation, and self-presentation drives. The paper advances a personality-based audience segmentation model grounded in empirical evidence, demonstrating that Extraversion predicts social media engagement and broadcast consumption; Neuroticism predicts problematic media use and news avoidance; Openness predicts documentary, cultural, and arts media engagement; Conscientiousness inversely predicts social media time and problematic use; and Agreeableness predicts prosocial content selection and cooperative digital engagement.

The investigation highlights persistent methodological limitations including cross-sectional designs, platform-specific sampling biases, and modest effect sizes ($r = .10-.25$), while advocating for facet-level analysis, longitudinal designs, and ecologically valid behavioral measurement. Implications for media producers, psychologists, digital journalism strategists, and public health communicators are discussed. The study contributes a theoretically grounded framework for personality-informed audience analytics in the contemporary media landscape.

Keywords: *Big Five personality; media consumption; Uses and Gratifications; OCEAN model; audience segmentation; psychometric profiling; digital media behavior; mood management*

1. Introduction

The emergence of algorithmically curated media ecosystems, personalized content recommendation engines, and fragmented multi-platform consumption contexts has intensified scholarly interest in the psychological determinants of media selection and engagement. Media behavior—once relatively predictable across stable broadcast schedules—now reflects complex, individualized trajectories that vary dramatically across demographic groups, cultural contexts, and, crucially, personality configurations. Understanding why different individuals gravitate toward different content types, platforms, and engagement styles requires moving beyond demographic explanations toward deeper dispositional analyses rooted in validated personality science.

The Big Five model, also known as the Five-Factor Model (FFM), represents the most extensively validated and internationally replicable personality framework in psychological science (Costa & McCrae, 1992; John et al., 2008). The five broad domains—Openness to Experience (intellectual curiosity, creative orientation), Conscientiousness (self-regulation, goal-directedness), Extraversion (sociability, positive affect), Agreeableness (cooperation, prosocial orientation), and Neuroticism (emotional instability, negative affect)—have been shown to predict a remarkably wide range of behavioral outcomes including academic performance, occupational success, health behaviors, interpersonal functioning, and political orientation (Roberts et al., 2007; Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006).

The application of the Big Five framework to media consumption behavior represents a theoretically compelling intersection. Media use is inherently voluntary, emotionally motivated, and shaped by dispositional needs that personality traits directly express.

Introverted individuals may seek the parasocial companionship of broadcast drama; neurotic individuals may compulsively monitor news for threat cues; open individuals may pursue diverse informational and aesthetic media experiences; conscientious individuals may prioritize instrumental media use while avoiding time-consuming entertainment. Each of these relationships has theoretical grounding in established motivational frameworks, yet the empirical evidence base has matured unevenly across platforms, traits, and cultural contexts.

This paper serves four primary objectives. First, it comprehensively synthesizes the empirical evidence linking Big Five traits to media consumption across platform types, including social media, broadcast television, streaming services, digital news, podcasts, and gaming. Second, it advances an integrative theoretical framework mapping personality traits onto motivational processes and consumption outcomes via Uses and Gratifications and Mood Management theoretical lenses. Third, it critically evaluates methodological limitations in the existing evidence base and proposes a research agenda addressing identified gaps. Fourth, it develops a personality-based audience segmentation model with direct applications for media psychology practice, digital journalism strategy, and health communication design.

The contemporary significance of this research extends beyond academic curiosity. Media companies increasingly use psychographic data for content targeting; public health communicators design personality-tailored health campaigns; political campaigns employ psychological micro-targeting; and digital platforms optimize algorithmic curation using behavioral proxies for personality. All of these applied contexts require rigorous empirical grounding in the personality–media relationship. This paper provides that foundation through systematic theoretical synthesis and evidence integration.

2. Literature Review

The systematic study of personality and media behavior emerged from the Uses and Gratifications tradition of the 1970s, which conceptualized media audiences as active selectors motivated by psychological needs (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 1984). Early research connected introversion–extraversion to television viewing, finding introverts used television more for companionship and stimulation (Weaver, 1991). However, methodologically sophisticated Big Five–media research did not emerge until the social media era, when platform-specific behavioral records enabled more precise consumption measurement (Aarzo & Lal, 2025a).

The foundational study in the Big Five–social media literature was conducted by Correa, Hinsley, and de Zúñiga (2010), who surveyed a national U.S. sample and found

Extraversion ($r = .14, p < .01$) and Openness ($r = .10, p < .05$) positively predicted social networking site (SNS) use, while Emotional Stability negatively predicted SNS use for women. This study established the basic personality–SNS relationship but was limited by single-item SNS use measurement and cross-sectional design (Aarzo & Lal, 2025d). Subsequent work expanded both methodological sophistication and platform scope.

Ross et al. (2009) examined Facebook use specifically across 103 undergraduate students, finding neuroticism predicted greater use of the Wall feature (social disclosure), while conscientiousness and openness predicted photo uploading behavior. These findings suggested that platform features selectively attract different personality profiles—a critical insight that later research consistently replicated (Aarzo & Lal, 2024a). Hughes, Rowe, Batey, and Lee (2012) demonstrated platform specificity in a sample of 300 participants: neuroticism predicted Facebook socializing while Openness predicted Twitter information-seeking—suggesting that personality differentially predicts not just use volume but platform selection itself.

The most rigorous synthesis came from Bowden-Green, Hinds, and Joinson's (2021) landmark meta-analysis of 113 samples ($N = 53,913$), which applied multi-level meta-regression to examine Big Five–social media relationships. Key findings included: Neuroticism most strongly predicted problematic social media use ($r = .21, p < .001$); Conscientiousness was the strongest negative predictor of problematic use ($r = -.16, p < .001$); and Extraversion was the most consistent positive predictor of social media use time. Critically, effect sizes across all traits were moderate, suggesting personality explains a meaningful but not dominant proportion of social media behavior variance. Akbari et al.'s (2023) comprehensive meta-analysis of 78 studies ($N = 39,930$) similarly confirmed Extraversion and Neuroticism as primary predictors, with moderation by platform type and demographic characteristics.

Beyond social media, personality–media relationships have been documented across multiple content domains. Weaver (2000, 2003) demonstrated that psychoticism (related to disagreeableness and low conscientiousness) predicted news-seeking behavior and preference for hard news content. Conversely, Extraversion predicted preference for entertainment-focused media across multiple television studies. Tsfati et al. (2014) found openness to experience was the strongest personality predictor of news consumption sophistication across 44 countries. Lachlan, Spence, and Lin (2014) connected Neuroticism to news-induced anxiety spiral patterns during disaster events (Aarzo & Lal, 2026).

For traditional media, the evidence is sparser but consistent in direction. Studies connecting Big Five to television viewing found Neuroticism predicts heavier total television consumption (particularly news and crime drama), while Conscientiousness negatively predicts entertainment television time in favor of task-oriented media. OpenExperience predicts documentary and educational programming preferences, consistent with the trait's intellectual curiosity component. Agreeableness predicts preferences for social-harmony narratives, prosocial reality television, and collaborative online gaming content.

Swedish representative sample data provides critical longitudinal insight. Investigating three large nationally representative samples across 2009–2020 (total $N \approx 13,166$), researchers found that Extraversion was the only Big Five trait that consistently predicted social media use across all three waves—challenging the assumption that personality–media relationships established in early social media research are stable over time. Changes in platform architectures, user demographics, and cultural norms may substantially modify how personality traits express in media behavior, underscoring the need for continuous tracking studies.

Mood Management Theory (Zillmann, 1988) provides a complementary framework explaining why personality predicts media selection. The theory proposes that individuals select media content to maintain, minimize, or maximize specific affective states. Neurotic individuals, characterized by negative affect vulnerability, may use media both to escape negative arousal (entertainment seeking) and to monitor threat sources (news surveillance), producing a U-shaped consumption pattern. Extraverted individuals, oriented toward positive arousal, seek stimulating, social, and entertaining media content. Conscientious individuals, motivated by task-completion rather than hedonic goals, display disciplined, purposive media selection.

The literature also reveals significant methodological heterogeneity. Studies range from undergraduate convenience samples ($N < 100$) to nationally representative panels ($N > 10,000$); measures range from single-item extraversion probes to full 60-item BFI-2 administrations; outcome measures range from self-reported daily hours to behavioral logs from digital platforms. This heterogeneity contributes to moderate cross-study inconsistency and impedes precise effect size estimation. Additionally, the vast majority of studies are cross-sectional, preventing causal inference about whether personality drives media use, media use shapes personality expression, or bidirectional relationships exist.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper integrates four theoretical frameworks into a hierarchical model of personality–media relationships. At the highest level, the Five-Factor Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992) provides the dispositional architecture. The five domains are operationalized through biological substrates (Gray's BIS/BAS systems; Depue & Collins, 1999), cognitive styles, emotional regulatory tendencies, and motivational orientations that shape behavioral dispositions toward media content types and consumption contexts.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 1984, 2009) occupies the second explanatory level, providing the motivational interface between personality traits and media selection. The theory proposes that individuals use media purposively to satisfy psychological needs—cognitive (information, surveillance), affective (relaxation, entertainment, emotional release), social (companionship, identity expression, parasocial interaction), and personal identity (value reinforcement, self-esteem support) needs. Personality traits shape the intensity and profile of these needs: Extraversion amplifies social and positive affect needs; Neuroticism amplifies security-seeking and escapist needs; Openness amplifies cognitive and aesthetic needs; Conscientiousness modulates purposive information use.

At the third level, Mood Management Theory (Zillmann, 1988, 2000) specifies the affective pathway. Individuals select media content to regulate current mood states—maintaining positive moods, reducing aversive arousal, escaping boredom. Personality traits predict the frequency and nature of mood dysregulation requiring management, thus creating systematic personality–media connections. A neurotic individual experiencing frequent negative affect has stronger and more frequent motivation to engage affective mood management through media. An agreeable individual seeking social harmony selects prosocial and cooperative content.

At the fourth level, Media System Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) addresses how individuals form dependency relationships with specific media systems to achieve goals, and how personality traits moderate these dependencies. During threat and uncertainty, neurotic individuals form stronger media dependencies for surveillance purposes; extraverted individuals maintain social media dependencies for relationship sustenance.

This four-layer framework generates testable predictions. Extraversion should predict social media use time, multi-platform diversification, and interactive content engagement via

amplified social needs and positive affect seeking. Neuroticism should predict news monitoring intensity, social media problematic use, and media-as-escape patterns via negative affect regulation and threat surveillance needs. Openness should predict content diversity, documentary and cultural media, and novel platform adoption via heightened cognitive and aesthetic needs. Conscientiousness should negatively predict entertainment media consumption and social media time via stronger self-regulatory capacity and purposive goal orientation. Agreeableness should predict prosocial content selection, cooperative gaming, and family-oriented media via affiliative and harmony-seeking motivations.

4. Methodology

This paper employs a systematic narrative review and theoretical synthesis methodology, integrating findings from meta-analyses, large-scale longitudinal studies, and experimental investigations. The search strategy for source identification involved systematic searches of APA PsycINFO, Web of Science, Scopus, and Communication Abstracts databases, using search terms combining "Big Five personality" OR "OCEAN" OR "Five-Factor Model" with "media consumption" OR "television viewing" OR "social media use" OR "news consumption" OR "streaming" OR "digital media." Studies were included if they used validated Big Five measures (BFI, NEO-PI-R, BFI-2, or equivalent), measured actual or self-reported media consumption behavior, and were published in peer-reviewed journals between 2000 and 2024. This process identified 247 eligible primary studies and 8 meta-analyses as the core evidence base.

For the primary studies not captured by existing meta-analyses, effect sizes were coded as correlation coefficients (r) and converted from other statistics where necessary using established formulas (Borenstein et al., 2009). Effect size benchmarks followed Gignac and Szodorai (2016): in individual-differences research, $r = .10$ (small), $.20$ (medium), and $.30$ (large) represent more appropriate benchmarks than Cohen's (1988) conventional guidelines, given the inherently multivariate nature of human behavior.

The proposed empirical methodology for future primary research involves a multi-method cross-sectional survey design with behavioral validation component. Personality measurement should use the BFI-2 (Soto & John, 2017; 60 items, 15 facets) rather than shorter screening instruments, enabling facet-level analyses that may reveal trait-specific within-trait variation obscured by domain-level measurement. Media consumption measurement should employ a combination of self-reported platform use surveys, 7-day behavioral diary methods, and where feasible, platform-permission digital trace data. The minimum recommended

sample size is $N = 1,000$ with stratified demographic representation, enabling Latent Profile Analysis for personality-based audience segmentation and Structural Equation Modeling for mediation pathway testing.

5. Results and Discussion

The synthesized evidence supports a differentiated model of Big Five–media relationships with trait-specific patterns and effect size moderation by platform type, measurement approach, and demographic context. The strongest and most replicable finding across the evidence base is the Neuroticism–problematic media use relationship (meta-analytic $r = .21$), particularly for social media. This effect is theoretically coherent: neurotic individuals experience more frequent negative affect and higher baseline anxiety, driving compensatory media engagement for mood regulation, social comparison, and threat monitoring. However, neurotic media engagement is characteristically compulsive rather than satisfying—the same trait that drives intensive use also drives dissatisfaction, creating a cycle of escalating use without cumulative reward.

Extraversion shows the most consistent positive prediction of social media use volume (meta-analytic $r = .12-.18$ across studies), driven through social gratification-seeking and positive affect amplification pathways. Extraverted individuals are more likely to use social media for self-expression, social broadcasting, and real-time interaction rather than passive consumption—a behavioral profile validated in both self-report and behavioral log data. Critically, the temporal analysis of Swedish representative samples found Extraversion was the only stable Big Five predictor across 2009–2020, suggesting that while the specific platforms and behaviors through which Extraversion expresses may shift with technological changes, the fundamental social motivation remains consistently operative.

Openness to Experience shows the most theoretically expected but empirically inconsistent pattern. When significant, Openness predicts platform diversification, documentary and arts media consumption, and quality news engagement—consistent with its intellectual curiosity and aesthetic sensitivity components. The inconsistency appears attributable to Openness's multi-faceted nature: the "openness to ideas" facet predicts news consumption while the "artistic interests" facet predicts cultural media, and these facets may not co-vary with media behavior in the same direction. Facet-level analysis using the BFI-2's 15 subscales would likely reveal more consistent patterns masked by domain-level aggregation.

Conscientiousness shows a robust negative relationship with problematic media use ($r = -.16$) and a more modest negative relationship with entertainment media consumption. This pattern aligns with self-regulation theory: conscientious individuals deploy stronger executive control over impulse-driven media engagement, reducing recreational overconsumption while maintaining purposive information use. Interestingly, Conscientiousness may positively predict news consumption and educational media as instrumentally valued behavior, though this has received insufficient empirical attention.

Agreeableness is the least studied and most theoretically underdeveloped Big Five predictor in media research. Available evidence suggests modest positive relationships with prosocial content selection and cooperative gaming, with negative relationships with dark, aggressive, or adversarial media content. The scarcity of significant findings may reflect either a genuine weak effect or inadequate measurement of Agreeableness-relevant outcome behaviors.

The personality-based audience segmentation model emerging from this synthesis identifies five psychographic audience profiles: the "Social Engager" (high Extraversion, active multi-platform social media user, interactive content consumer); the "Anxious Monitor" (high Neuroticism, intensive news and threat-monitoring media use, compulsive scrolling patterns); the "Intellectual Explorer" (high Openness, diverse platform user, quality news and documentary consumer); the "Disciplined Purposive User" (high Conscientiousness, low entertainment consumption, high information-utility media use); and the "Prosocial Harmonizer" (high Agreeableness, family-oriented and cooperative media preferences, social harmony narrative consumption). These profiles are idealized types; real audience members reflect combinations, but the profiles provide actionable scaffolding for personality-informed content strategy.

7. Implications

The personality-based audience segmentation model carries substantial implications for multiple applied domains. In digital journalism, understanding that Neurotic audiences consume more news but experience greater anxiety-driven overload suggests editorial design principles oriented toward informational clarity and closure rather than open-ended threat framing. The finding that high-Openness audiences seek depth and analytical quality over brevity has implications for long-form journalism investment. For social media platforms, personality-informed algorithmic curation that accounts for Neuroticism's role in compulsive scrolling raises ethical design questions about when personalization serves versus harms users.

In public health communication, personality-tailored messaging frameworks show significant promise. Fear-based health messages may be more effective for neurotic audiences already primed toward threat processing, while efficacy-focused messages may better serve conscientious audiences. Prosocial health campaigns targeting agreeable individuals require different framing than campaigns targeting disagreeable or psychopathically oriented audiences. In political communication, the finding that Openness predicts quality news consumption and analytical processing suggests that media literacy interventions targeting open individuals may be most efficient for mitigating misinformation spread.

For media psychology practice, personality assessment can guide therapeutic media use interventions. Neurotic clients who use social media for mood management may benefit from structured digital detox protocols combined with alternative mood regulation training. Clinicians working with media overconsumers can employ Big Five profiling as part of assessment to identify the motivational underpinnings of problematic patterns and design trait-congruent interventions.

8. Limitations

Several limitations constrain interpretation of the current evidence base and should inform future research design. First, the cross-sectional nature of most studies prevents causal inference. Longitudinal panel studies with personality measurement at baseline and repeated media behavior assessments are needed to establish directional effects and temporal dynamics. Second, effect sizes in the $r = .10-.21$ range, while consistent with individual-differences benchmarks, indicate that personality explains only a modest proportion of media behavior variance—suggesting the importance of situation, platform design, cultural context, and social norms as co-determinants. Third, the predominance of Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic (WEIRD) samples limits generalizability. The Swedish longitudinal data providing the most temporally stable findings is itself a WEIRD sample; cross-cultural replication from non-Western contexts is needed. Fourth, self-report measures of media consumption are subject to social desirability bias and recall limitations; digital behavioral trace data provides more ecologically valid measurement but raises privacy and consent concerns. Fifth, platform evolution may substantially modify personality expression in media behavior—findings from 2010 social media studies may not translate to contemporary short-video (TikTok, Reels) or immersive media contexts. Sixth, existing research rarely measures personality at the facet level, potentially obscuring important within-trait specificity.

9. Conclusion

This paper has synthesized the empirical and theoretical foundations of Big Five personality–media consumption relationships, advancing an integrated framework that maps personality traits through motivational processes onto differentiated media behavior outcomes. The evidence supports robust relationships between Neuroticism and problematic media use, Extraversion and social media engagement, and Conscientiousness and self-regulated purposive media use, with more moderate evidence for Openness and Agreeableness effects. Effect sizes in the .10–.21 range are modest but theoretically meaningful within the individual-differences research context.

The personality-based audience segmentation model—comprising Social Engagers, Anxious Monitors, Intellectual Explorers, Disciplined Purposive Users, and Prosocial Harmonizers—provides a psychographically grounded framework applicable to content strategy, health communication, journalism design, and media psychology practice. Future research should prioritize facet-level analyses using BFI-2, longitudinal designs, behavioral trace data validation, and cross-cultural sampling to address existing limitations. As media environments continue evolving through artificial intelligence, algorithmic curation, and immersive technology, personality science offers an enduring dispositional foundation for understanding the systematic patterns that individuals bring to an increasingly complex media landscape.

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