

# Self-Monitoring as a Moderating Variable in Consumer Behavior

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Most consumer research uses either a dispositional or a situational conceptual orientation for all types of behavior. This article explores the value of using a moderating variable to identify which individuals are primarily influenced by either dispositional or situational variables.

Traditional consumer research has frequently employed a "dispositional" or "actor trait" approach, and often the results have been disappointing (Kassarjian 1971). Only one published study has explicitly considered the influence of personality on consumer decision-making in the context of specific situations (Brody and Cunningham 1968). In their research, Brody and Cunningham reported that personality variables were very useful in discriminating brand choice in situations where risk of making a wrong choice was high. More recently, an explicit situational orientation has begun to develop in consumer research (Belk 1974, 1975) based on the assumption that the situation may have more impact on behavior than would dispositional or internal actor characteristics.

Given these two disparate orientations, some attempt at conceptual resolution is in order. Rather than approach this question as an "either disposition or situation" debate, Bem (1972) suggested that it would be more fruitful to search for moderating variables that may determine in which areas of behavior the actor demonstrates trait-like cross-situational and inter-response mode consistency, and in which areas behavior would reflect situational differences.

## Self-Monitoring

Among the many variables that moderate the relative influence of traits and/or situations, self-monitoring may be an important one (Snyder 1974; Snyder and Monson 1975). The high self-monitoring individual is one who is particularly sensitive to the expression and

self-presentation of others, and uses social cues as behavioral guidelines (Snyder 1974). One might hypothesize that the behavior of low self-monitoring individuals will be associated with dispositional variables such as personality traits, while the behavior of high self-monitors will relate more closely to situational cues. Consideration of self-monitoring as a moderating variable may provide a missing conceptual link, as we attempt to identify individuals whose behavior is more likely to be self-initiated, rather than triggered by cues in the environment.

This exploratory investigation was undertaken to determine if personality is a more meaningful predictor of certain aspects of consumption when self-monitoring is included as a moderating variable. In traditional consumer research, all respondents are included in the analysis as equivalent. If high and low self-monitoring subjects are not equivalent, high and low self-monitoring groups must be examined separately to ensure that potentially significant personality relationships in the low self-monitoring group are not masked by data from high self-monitors whose behavior is determined by situational cues.

## METHOD

Since the research was exploratory, data were collected from juniors and seniors enrolled predominantly in night courses in the School of Business Administration at a major university. The total data set represented two separate samples. There were 154 respondents in the first sample, 141 of whom provided complete sets of responses. The second sample was collected to increase the total sample size, facilitating cross-validation. Of 86 respondents in the second sample, 83 represented useable responses. Hence, the useable sample size totaled 224 respondents.

Private brand proneness was selected as the dependent measure, partly because a previous attempt to

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TABLE 1  
TEST OF EQUALITY OF REGRESSIONS ACROSS SELF-MONITORING VARIABLE (ANALYSIS SAMPLE)

Private brand proneness	Source of residual error	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	F statistic	Significance level
Nonsocial products	Between group	7.1394	4	2.996	0.05
	Within group	67.3251	113		
	Total	74.4645			
Social products	Between group	8.7571	4	4.057	0.01
	Within group	60.9720	113		
	Total	69.7301			

relate personality and private brand attitude (Myers 1967) had demonstrated very little relationship. In addition, this variable afforded the opportunity to focus on a general aspect of consumption behavior across a number of different product categories.

To ensure that the products were relevant for a student population, a pretest was conducted among 40 respondents, which asked for purchase frequency of 28 product types, and respondents' perception of whether the products were "social" or "nonsocial" in purchasing influence or use. As self-monitoring measures the extent to which respondents are attentive to social cues, it was hypothesized that the respondents' private brand proneness may be influenced by whether or not the product is more socially visible.

Based on the pretest, four social products were selected: cologne/perfume, mouthwash, complexion aids, and alcoholic beverages. Vitamin capsules, pocket calculators, coffee, and candy bars were selected as products in the nonsocial category. To measure private brand proneness, respondents were asked to indicate for each product the strength of their preference for private versus national brands on a five-point bi-polar continuum ranging from "strongly prefer private brand" to "strongly prefer national brand." The instructions to each respondent indicated that private brand names were associated with the retailer, whereas national brands are branded by the manufacturer. Private brand proneness indices were created by summing scores for both the four social products and the four nonsocial products.<sup>1</sup>

Personality was measured using the California Psychological Inventory (CPI). This instrument consists of 480 items and requires approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. As in most other personality research, the entire inventory of 18 personality variables was employed in the data collection and analysis.

A 25-item true-false scale developed by Snyder (1974) was used to measure self-monitoring (see Appendix). In extensive validation, the instrument has demonstrated considerable internal consistency, stability over time, and discriminant validity (Snyder 1974).

The respondents were divided into high and low self-

monitoring groups using a median split scoring suggested by Snyder (1974). Low self-monitors were the 102 respondents scoring below the median; high self-monitors were the 101 respondents above the median.

To analyze the data, the 18 personality variables were regressed separately against private brand proneness for nonsocial and for social products, using a step-wise procedure. The tolerance level for the step-wise regression was set at  $F = 2.30$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ . The sample was then divided into a high self-monitoring group and a low self-monitoring group to generate separate regression solutions for each group using only the independent variables that entered the step-wise solution.

A cross-validation procedure was employed to examine the internal stability of the model. As the intent was not to validate the relationships across the populations over time, the two samples were combined into a larger sample, which was then randomly split into an analysis sample and a validation sample. Approximately 60 percent of the data was selected for the analysis sample to achieve a more satisfactory item-to-respondent ratio in the step-wise regression analysis that included all 18 personality variables. The remaining 40 percent of the data was utilized to validate the relationships using the four-variable step-wise solution.

## RESULTS

If the relationship between personality and private brand proneness is mediated by self-monitoring, the regression relationship between private brand proneness and the personality variables should vary between the high and low self-monitoring groups. This proposition was tested with a Chow test of the equality between two linear regressions (Chow 1960).

Table 1 presents the results of the Chow procedure for the analysis sample. As anticipated, significant differences in the regression coefficients appeared across the self-monitoring variable for both social and nonsocial products. Thus, it was not feasible to represent the results with a pooled regression model.

Table 2 presents the results of the separate regression analyses estimated among the high and low self-monitoring groups in the analysis sample. The Table includes the standardized regression coefficients and the coefficient of correlation for both the high self-monitor equation and the low self-monitor equation

<sup>1</sup> Private brand proneness index scores ranged from "strongly private brand prone" (4) to "strongly national brand prone" (20) for both social and nonsocial products.

TABLE 2  
BETA COEFFICIENTS FROM REGRESSION ANALYSIS (ANALYSIS SAMPLE)

Nonsocial products			Social products		
Variable	Low self-monitors	High self-monitors	Variable	Low self-monitors	High self-monitors
Tolerance	.2763	.0363	Dominance	.3597	.2002
Responsibility	.1644	.0286	Intellectual efficiency	.6246	.0204
Socialization	.4784	.2887	Socialization	.1581	.3816
Achievement via independence	.4435	.2880	Achievement via independence	.4816	.1292
<i>R</i>	.716 <sup>a</sup>	.392 <sup>a</sup>		.801 <sup>b</sup>	.421 <sup>b</sup>
<i>F</i> ratio	14.96	2.48		25.48	2.91

<sup>a</sup> Nonsocial products *R* for low self-monitor group significantly higher than *R* for high self-monitor group,  $z = 2.59, p \leq 0.01$ .

<sup>b</sup> Social product *R* for low self-monitor group significantly higher than *R* for high self-monitor group  $z = 3.43, p \leq 0.001$ .

for social and nonsocial products. The 0.716 correlation in the low self-monitoring group was significantly higher than the 0.392 correlation in the high self-monitoring group ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) for nonsocial products. In the social products analysis, 0.677 for low self-monitors was significantly higher than 0.421 among high self-monitors ( $p \leq 0.001$ ). While both low self-monitor correlations were significant ( $p \leq 0.001$ ), only the social products correlation coefficient was significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) among high self-monitors.

To cross-validate these results, the four-variable regression solutions for both social and nonsocial products were applied to the validation sample that was held out of the initial analysis. Table 3 reports the results of the Chow procedure for the validation sample. Again, both for social and nonsocial products the regression coefficients were significantly different across the self-monitoring variables. Hence, using the same regression model, self-monitoring appears to moderate the relationship between personality and private brand proneness.

The results of the separate regression analyses performed on the high and low self-monitoring groups in the validation sample are presented in Table 4. As in the analysis sample, the 0.651 for the low self-monitoring group was significantly higher than the 0.333 in the high self-monitoring group for nonsocial products ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). Similarly, the 0.751 for the low self-monitoring group was significantly higher than 0.358 for the high self-monitoring group for social products ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). In addition, the correlation coefficients in the low self-

monitoring group were significant for both social and nonsocial products ( $p \leq 0.001$ ), whereas the correlation coefficients for the high self-monitoring group were not significant, in either case. Hence, the findings in the validation sample tend to support the results of the original analysis.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study demonstrate that personality variables may be a factor for future consumer research, and that more consideration should be given to the potential role of moderating variables.

In both the analysis and validation samples the pooled regression model was insufficient to represent the relationship between private brand proneness and personality. When self-monitoring was used as a moderating variable, however, the regression relationship among the low self-monitoring group was highly significant and clearly outperformed the relationship among high self-monitors. This finding suggests that while among low self-monitors personality influences behavior, among the high self-monitoring group situational factors would more likely be related to consumption. In addition, the data indicated that, among the low self-monitoring group, the relationship between personality and private brand proneness was significant for both social and nonsocial products.

Traditionally, consumer research has focused on either the person/actor, the situation, or the interaction of the person and the situation. One interpretation

TABLE 3  
TEST OF EQUALITY OF REGRESSIONS ACROSS SELF-MONITORING VARIABLE (VALIDATION SAMPLE)

Private brand proneness	Source of residual error	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	<i>F</i> statistic	Significance level
Nonsocial products	Between group	4.1997	4	2.517	0.05
	Within group	30.8716	74		
	Total	35.0713			
Social products	Between group	13.0096	4	5.640	0.001
	Within group	42.6698	74		
	Total	55.6794			

TABLE 4  
BETA COEFFICIENTS FROM REGRESSION ANALYSIS (VALIDATION SAMPLE)

Nonsocial products			Social products		
Variable	Low self-monitors	High self-monitors	Variable	Low self-monitors	High self-monitors
Tolerance	0.4426	0.1473	Dominance	0.1397	0.0643
Responsibility	0.0849	0.3603	Intellectual efficiency	0.5865	0.2449
Socialization	0.1448	0.1056	Socialization	0.3137	0.2111
Achievement via independence	0.7072	0.1056	Achievement via independence	0.6402	0.3535
<i>R</i>	0.651 <sup>a</sup>	0.333 <sup>a</sup>		0.751 <sup>b</sup>	0.358 <sup>b</sup>
<i>F</i> ratio	6.42	1.16		11.29	1.36

<sup>a</sup> Nonsocial products *R* for low self-monitor group significantly higher than *R* for high self-monitor group,  $z = 1.89$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

<sup>b</sup> Social products *R* for low self-monitor group significantly higher than *R* for high self-monitor group,  $z = 2.62$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

of the present findings is that persons differ in the extent to which situational or dispositional factors influence their behavior. Self-monitoring is suggested here as a variable that identifies those individuals for whom situational or dispositional variables have primary influence. While this conceptualization must be explored in future research, it could be complemented by parallel research strategies examining when situationally anchored moderating variables become important in understanding and explaining consumer behavior.

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## APPENDIX

### Self-Monitoring Scale Items and Scoring Key\*

1. I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people. (F)
2. My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes, and beliefs. (F)
3. At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like. (F)
4. I can only argue for ideas which I already believe. (F)
5. I can make impromptu speeches even on topics about which I have almost no information. (T)
6. I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain people. (T)
7. When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for cues. (T)
8. I would probably make a good actor. (T)
9. I rarely need the advice of my friends to choose movies, books, or music. (F)
10. I sometimes appear to others to be experiencing deeper emotions than I actually am. (T)
11. I laugh more when I watch a comedy with others than when alone. (T)
12. In a group of people I am rarely the center of attention. (F)
13. In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons. (T)
14. I am not particularly good at making other people like me. (F)

\* Items keyed in the direction of high self-monitoring. T = true, F = false.

15. Even if I am not enjoying myself, I often pretend to be having a good time. (T)
16. I'm not always the person I appear to be. (T)
17. I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone else or win their favor. (F)
18. I have considered being an entertainer. (T)
19. In order to get along and be liked, I tend to be what people expect me to be rather than anything else. (T)
20. I have never been good at games like charades or improvisational acting. (F)
21. I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations. (F)
22. At a party I let others keep the jokes and stories going. (F)
23. I feel a bit awkward in company and do not show up quite as well as I should. (F)
24. I can look anyone in the eye and tell a lie with a straight face (if for a right end). (T)
25. I may deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them. (T)

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