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Life Choice Matters: A Study on Decision Making Process among Young Adults

Lulu Farshana M

Decision-making is a higher-order mental process that involves the selection of the most appropriate alternative from several alternatives through identification, information collection, evaluation, and choice. Most human decisions have to be made under time pressure, especially in the workplace. Moreover, life choices always depend on individual characteristics like personality and internal psychological factors like interest, and attitudes in the decision situation. In the present study, we examine the influence of personality traits and perceived social support on the decision-making style of young adults. The sample size (N=300) in the present study is equally distributed (Male=150, Female =150) based on the gendered aspect for comparing the difference in the decision-making process. The presented study is employed based on the primary data collected from university-level students, and quantitative analysis is done to understand the relationship between the variables. The study is novel by the nature of investigating the decision-making process concerning personality traits and perceived social supports among young adults.

Keywords: Decision making, life choices, personality traits, perceived social support

Decision making process is a complex set of mental operations that an individual adopt to reach and choose the best among from the multiple alternatives. Generally it includes identifying the alternatives,

searching for information about the alternatives, evaluating each of the alternatives by the possible outcomes and making judgements about the consequences. Various branches of psychology mostly social and cognitive perspectives have playing major role in the development of the study of decision making process. The applicability of the findings are significant, because of the facts of decision making are cross cutting (Eisenfuhr, 2011). Theories considering the decision making is mainly based on two categories such as normative theories and descriptive theories of cognition (Over, 2004). The aim of normative theories is to covey how people should act when making decisions. Normative theories, in usual, talk through the principles of comparative evaluation and choice among multiple alternatives. Theories falls in this category were consist of formal logic, probability theory etc. While Descriptive theories, on the other hand, are interested in how people make decisions (rational or irrational) in practical life. Empirical experiments served as the foundation for these theories. In recent years, descriptive theories have shown excel than normative theories in dominance. The distinction between normative and descriptive theory was found to be more fragmented.

Normative theories of decision-making focuses on the top-down methods of prescribing guidelines for how individuals should make decisions. Based on mathematical studies, human beings calculate the logical or rational aspect of the choices that will lead to enable the most apt choice (e.g., Byrnes, 2013; Gardener & Selten, 2001; Shahsavarani & Abadi, 2015; Hickson & Khemka, 2014). In order to make beneficial to maximize the expected utility of outcomes, normative rules are presented (Hickson & Khemka, 2014). These rules serve as rational standards to be compared with human actual behaviours. According to Johnson & Busemeyer (2010), decision-making is reduced to the process of solving a problem with an eye toward maximizing the expected utility among the probability distributions of the outcomes of various actions. The transitivity, cancellation, dominance, and invariance axioms of the normative approach are shared with the Expected Utility Theory (Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944). From a theoretical standpoint, decision-making entails with transitivity, cancellation, dominance, and invariance are

shared. A list of potential actions serves as the basis for decision-making in this theoretical perspective (Fischhof, 2010).

Studies on psychology and economics giving evidence to agree the eminence of two basic human motivations, such as the desire to decrease uncertainty and increase the benefits (Bentham, 1970). These days' human beings also showing emotional interest on the rational choice (Cabanac, 1992). The prior studies provides the a significant space for the heuristics strategy (Kahneman & Tversky,1974) showing that it is the most used cognitive style of decision making (Galotti,1989).

Most literature on people's decision making concerns decision by experts (Klein, 2017; Fortin-Guichard et al., 2020), in which important decisions are made by a group of decision makers who seek consensus (Palomares et al., 2012) or decisions made in simulations and within non-ecological contexts such as the laboratory (Hepler & Feltz, 2012; Koehler et al., 2015) in which participants receive a series of self-contained, hypothetical decision scenarios, often gambling or games, and are asked to choose from a set of options (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974, 1981) excluding activities central to life choices such as clarifying goals, gathering information, weighting the relative importance of multiple criteria and without a real impact (Galotti & Umscheid, 2019; Galotti, 2017; Wiswall & Zafar, 2015). Life choices are influenced by numerous factors, such as context, social interaction (Sanfey, 2007), and individual differences (Galotti, 2005; Levin et al., 2002;) and can have effects and repercussions on the entire life ahead.

In particularly, this study inspect the "love"/affective "and the "work" career aspects, these ought not to fulfil the complete portrayal of human life. It could be sustained that significant decisions taken in these two life aspects are common to the life of adult. In base of prior research lights the arguments. Hazan and Shaver (1990) implemented multiple studies where participants were surveyed about "love and work" in their lives to assess the main hypothesis that the two areas were functionally similar to attachment and exploration in early childhood, and to analyse their complimentary influences and effects on well-being. Also the affective factors play a pervasive and predictable role in decision making and satisfaction. A latest review

showed (Lerner et al., 2015) that emotions are the dominant driver factor of most meaningful decisions in life (Loewenstein et al., 2001; Ekman & Yamey, 2004; Oatley et al., 2006) leading the individual to focus on information congruent with the emotion, and consequently to a biased interpretation of the stimulus or the event producing a distortion in risk perception and, consequently, suboptimal decisions (Finucane et al., 2000) all life choices are influenced by the context and relationships with others, as the choices are made within a society and for this reason, they can influence both one's own and others' lives. Some theories argue that the way we approach relationships is influenced by how we build relationships during the first few years of life (Hamarta, 2004). According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973, 1982) individuals themselves develop internal behaviour patterns related to the relationships they have experienced with a reference figures during infancy, childhood and adulthood. According to Bowlby (1973), an individual's initial attachment is established from the beginning of his development through the relationship with his primary caregiver, and this provides a cognitive framework to understand social surrounding and relationships.

The goal of the current study is to comprehend the cognitive processes involved in crucial life decisions that the participants themselves have identified. Participants will be asked to think back on important decisions they have made in their lives, specifically two categories: sentimental (such as "Should I get married?" or "Should I break up with my partner?") and professional (such as "Should I move abroad for Work?" or "Should I accept that job offer?").It should be noted that although a decision-process analysis (Abbey & Valsiner, 2005; Fossa et al., 2016) of life decisions is likely hard to complete (i.e., a step-by-step analysis of micro-components of decisions would involve gathering data on the life-relevant decision the moment/period they are taken, and with highly complex instruments). Hypothesised that Hp1: While making career decisions, people will typically rely more on rational thoughts and deliberative system, whereas when making emotional decisions, they will typically rely more on their emotional and intuitive system.

Method

The present study is a quantitative analysis of decision making process. The methodology is adopted from a study conduct in Italy in 2022 (Savioni et al,2022). The total of 300 young Indian adults were included in the present study. 150 male participants and 150 female participants were chosen as per the convenient sampling process. Participants are from an age group of 18 to 30 years old. The majority of them are university level students. All the participants consented to participate voluntarily and did not receive incentives for their participation.

Sample distribution

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	150	50	50	50
	2	150	50	50	50
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	100

Procedure & Materials used

Data were directly collected from the participants, firstly the researcher given the overall idea of the aim and purpose of the study. Secondly the description of the procedures of the study were presented in front of student by providing set of standardised questionnaires.

After having provided socio-demographic information, the subjects were asked to think about their own life (autobiographical memory) and particularly to choose one determined significant option of choice portraying to life events/ professional aspects and one to the sentimental area. Specifically, subjects given were by an imaginary event to think about *"an event or a specific experience of your life in which you had to make an important decision. In particular, think of an event experienced in your life regarding the affective sphere (e.g., Should I get married? Now or later? / e.g., Should I study or work? Should I move for work?)*

Big five Personality questionnaire the big five personality scale is developed by Costa & McCrae in 1992. The scale is a standardised personality questionnaire to assess the personality of

individuals. This scale is having a total of 44 items and 5 dimensions, scored by five subscales**.** Namely Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness. The scale is five-point Likert scale (1= strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= neutral 4=disagree 5= strongly disagree) having positive and reverse scoring. Reliability coefficient is 0.88 and validity of the scale is 0.7.

*Making decision in everyday life scale (*Mincemoyer, Perkins and Munaya ,2001) : the scale is developed in Indian condition which used to measure the decision making ability of individuals in their daily lives. The test retest coefficient was found 0.7 for this study.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988): MSPSS is a self-report questionnaire that explores the perceived social support. The scale is consist of 12 items on a 7-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The instrument used to measures support from family, friends, and significant others. The scale showed a high reliability equal to 0.8 the reliability was equal to 0.9.

Data analysis

Data analysis is done by using SPSS-25 version, there are different statistical analysis were done particularly for understanding the effects of dependent and independent variables in the study. A *t*-test analysis was done to measure the This analysis is widely used to compare groups' means for particular variables like the mean scores of gender difference, personality types and decision making(Kim, 2015).Data allows us to compare the characteristics of the participants' decisional processes. Regression was also used to find out the differences on the basis of variations in the social supports perceived by the individuals and personality traits.

Result and discussion

The study exploring the dependency between personality trait influences, social support influences in the daily decision making process. Participants were asked to respond on the basis of their own decisional processes when confronting one specific relevant choice pertaining to the important and unimportant decisions. Table 1. Shows

the decretive statistics of the present study showing the mean scores and standard deviations of the decision making, social support and personality.

Table 1. shows the descriptive statistics of decision making, social support and personality

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
DM TOTAL	300	35.0	72.0	52.48	10.49
SS TOTAL	300	30.00	70.00	51.68	9.99
P TOTAL	300	35.0	68.0	50.28	8.97
Valid N	300				

The subjects were provided by the options of rational and emotional in the rating scales and asked by to choose options based on the personal and professional decisions of daily life.

Table 2. Shows the difference in scores of decision making between male and female

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Male	150	53.40	8.34	3.14	0.0004	Significant
Female	150	65.22	11.01			

The mean and standard deviations of decision making among male and female young adults were discussed in the table 2. The female participants (M=65.22, SD=11.01) achieved slightly higher mean score than male (M=53.40, SD=8.34) the mean difference was also statistically significant (t- score =3.14) were p value is less than 0.05, so the null hypothesis were rejected.

Table 3. Shows the model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.568ᵃ	.323	.309	6.22848
a. Predictors: (Constant), P TOTAL, P TOTAL CONS, P TOTAL AGRE, P TOTAL EXTRA, P TOTAL OPEN, PTOTAL ES, SS TOTAL				

Table 4. Shows the regression values

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5414.971	6	902.495	23.264	.000[b]
	Residual	11366.615	293	38.794		
	Total	16781.587	299			
a. Dependent Variable: DM TOTAL						
b. Predictors: (Constant), P TOTAL, P TOTAL CONS, P TOTAL AGRE, P TOTAL EXTRA, P TOTAL OPEN, P TOTAL ES, SS TOTAL						

Table 5. Shows the coefficients of regression with respect to the personality traits

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	12.013	3.254		3.692	.000
	PTOTALEXTRA	-2.026	1.311	-.402	-1.545	.123
	PTOTALCONS	-1.836	1.294	-.355	-1.418	.157
	PTOTALAGRE	-1.502	1.288	-.277	-1.165	.245
	PTOTALES	-1.886	1.291	-.406	-1.461	.145
	PTOTALOPEN	-1.941	1.297	-.381	-1.497	.136
	PTOTAL	2.921	1.280	1.531	2.282	.023
	SSTOTAL	2.613	1.234	1.412	2.013	.010
a. Dependent Variable: DMTOTAL						

Through the analysis of the table 3,4& 5 shows that decision making process have a significant influence with the personality traits and social support. The analysis of personality characteristics impacting the life experiences and recalled life choices in the different life areas showed a difference only regarding pleasantness. Decisions in the work area remembered as more pleasant than sentimental decisions. On the one side, it's possible that life choices in the sentimental area

involve a wider variety of emotions and they underwent more dramatic elaboration and emotion regulation efforts. An alternative interpretation may regard a memory bias that leads subjects to remember extreme results sooner and more frequent. We can therefore assume that career choices involve a higher level of risk for one's own future than sentimental ones, because they may potentially lead to outcomes more difficult to change at a later time (e.g., moving abroad); this characteristic leads to be remembered more pleasantly, because the decision process involved more risk, and the participants are today happier to have overcome such obstacles. Individual characteristics as well as the recourse to rational vs. intuitive cognitive processes proved to play a role in the final satisfaction about the outcome of the choice. Despite explained variances being slightly higher regression analyses provided some interesting information.

Conclusion

Decision making is widely explored by different disciplines, while studies are often focused on abstract concepts and ignoring out its study in the "natural" contexts of life choices. This study can contribute to this field. Findings of the study shows that the decision-making process changes in relation to various variables, both personal (e.g., personality characteristics) and external (e.g. social support). The idea provided by this study can be a crucial point for future research on decision making in life choices. In fact, there are several aspects that can be investigated and that can be open future insights about the personal social contributions to the cognitive processing. Life-relevant decision making, needs more active proceeding which involved by the previous experiences and personal characteristics. The study employed by standardised questionnaire methods which is widely accepted and allow us to easily interpretation and reorganization of lifer relevant and daily life choices.

Future research can inspect further the reasonableness of such a methodology to which is similar to their research aims. Another limitation is found the questionnaires were not developed in the Indian context. This could drive some participants to alter their responses and there is a chance to misinterpretation of the questions. They will put themselves in a positive aspect of experience cognitive dissonance,

so we cannot rule out that demand characteristics partially influenced subjects responses. Future research may employ questions formulated in the Indian context for the better validation. And future research can also focus on a higher sample size and a balanced demographic details for the better results.

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Lulu Farshana M

Research Scholar

Department of Humanities and Social Science,

MANIT Bhopal,

India,

Pin: 462003

Ph: +91 8075221693

Email: lulufarshanam@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-1053-1422