

# 5 INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

“ *Always remember that you're unique. Just like everyone else.*

ALISON BOULTER

## PERSONALISATION

When it comes to persuasion (especially on a larger scale), one of the key problems businesses face is the sheer size and heterogeneity of their target audience. If your customers have a wide variety of needs, goals and preferences, it can make a one-size-fits-all approach pretty tricky,<sup>1, 2</sup> which is why so many companies personalise their marketing materials by addressing their customers by name, or serving content relevant to past behaviours.<sup>3</sup>

Although behaviourally targeted ads often have a positive effect on purchase intention, there can be a hidden cost to this approach, particularly when it comes to more invasive practices. This cost is called *psychological reactance*, and it refers to the aversive emotional state we experience in response to perceived threats to our freedom and autonomy.<sup>4, 5</sup>

It's this phenomenon that kicks in when we receive an ill-judged advert from a brand we don't know, don't trust or have never bought from. I recently experienced it first hand when I went to watch a tv programme online, and a pre-roll advert for Mr Burberry came on. An image flashed onto the screen accompanied by a message which read, 'Your personalised advert will begin in 5 seconds'. Without any warning, or option to skip it, the video started playing, revealing a dark screen and the text 'Monogrammed for N'. It then proceeded to show me a young couple in the throes of passion, the woman having clearly been seduced by a few wafts of the 'New fragrance for men' that her hairless lover had generously doused himself with. The final scene closed with an image of said fragrance, displaying a poorly judged 'NN' at its base (the signature I use to sign off personal emails). Not only did this seem extraordinarily presumptuous, but because I have never, not once, interacted with this brand, it also felt like an unwarranted invasion of my privacy.

Suffice it to say that if I didn't care much for Burberry in the first place, I certainly won't be buying from them now.

As unappealing as this experience was, it provides a classic illustration of reactance in response to a 'creepiness factor' – the feeling that your every move, both public and private, is being watched, tracked, followed, analysed and capitalised on<sup>6</sup> by ill-advised marketers trying to boost their bottom line. The frustrating thing is that personalisation doesn't have to be this way. If you can provide a good reason (such as a transparent value exchange) for consensually acquiring your customers' information *once they already know and like you*, then you can quite comfortably use a personalised approach to help foster a more intimate bond. The takeaway point here is not to jump the gun.

When deployed intelligently, personalised adverts, services and recommendations can actively enhance customers' positive emotions, which can lead them to spend more money, more often.<sup>7</sup> It's therefore useful to look at some of the basic things you can do to personalise your communications. For instance, if you're sending information via email, app or by text, test which medium drives the most return on investment. While marketing ROI may be different from one business to the next, for meaningful results, you should look at a multi-touch attribution model that takes into account every stage of the customer's journey to purchase.

You can also optimise for the best time and frequency at which to deliver your content, so as to ensure the greatest open- and click-through rates (most email marketing providers and app analytics tools can help you split test this). All of these hacks will give you greater insight into the schedules and preferences of your customers, but if you want to take a more psychological approach to personalisation, we need to dive into the quirky and fascinating world of individual differences, starting with gender.

## GENDER

Despite increasing internet penetration rates, men still have greater access to the internet than women in many nations,<sup>8</sup> a disparity which also translates into different usage patterns. From seeking health advice to shopping, gender is often one of the most accurate predictors of our online behaviours. Although various studies have found that women are more likely than men to seek out health information online<sup>9,10</sup> (other factors such as socioeconomic status also influence this<sup>11</sup>), when it comes to ecommerce, British and American men now spend both more time *and* money than women,<sup>12,13</sup> which says a lot when you consider the additional 'gender tax', the inflated prices for comparable products (e.g. women's



shampoo being more expensive than men's), that women have to pay whether online or instore.<sup>14</sup>

Since the internet's inception, our online behaviours have increasingly come to reflect historical social, cultural and economic trends, including many of the inequalities apparent in everyday life.<sup>15,16,17</sup> For instance, some research shows that people with lower education and income levels also tend to watch more TV and read fewer books, a behaviour mirrored online by greater time spent gaming and interacting on social platforms, versus reading articles and social comment.<sup>18</sup>

An increasingly hot topic, privacy, also yields gendered responses. In general, women typically express greater concern about third-party access to personal information, protecting their privacy more proactively now than they would have a decade ago.<sup>19</sup> Within certain demographics, they are also more likely to post modest photos,<sup>20</sup> provide inaccurate personal information<sup>21</sup> and blog anonymously<sup>22</sup> – a behaviour likely exacerbated by the various misogynistic threats many women have had to endure over the past few years (Gamergate being one of the most memorable). It may come as no surprise then, that men are more likely to share their phone number<sup>23</sup> and address<sup>24</sup> with companies and on social platforms, whereas women are more likely to actually read the site's privacy policies and change their settings accordingly.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the fact that women express a greater concern for their online privacy, they are still as likely to join a social network, and once they do, participate more actively,<sup>26</sup> opening their profiles to a larger number of friends<sup>27</sup> than their male counterparts. This may relate to the finding that women appear to have more of an interdependent construct of self (more focused on one's relationships with others), whereas men's self-construct seems to be more independent (more focused on the self, excluding the influence of others).<sup>28,29,30</sup> Although gender differences can and do exist, it is important to understand that you're much more likely to find a greater differences *between individuals of the same gender* (for instance between one woman and the next) than between genders (between men and women in general).<sup>31</sup>

As research goes, the magnitude of gender differences varies dramatically across cultures and tends to be most pronounced in European and American cohorts.<sup>32</sup> However, since most of these studies don't make explicit comparisons of gender differences within different occupational and generational groups,<sup>33</sup> it makes the findings tricky to generalise.

If you look at some of the younger generations coming through, you'll discover other behavioural differences falling along gendered lines. In 2015, Pew Research Centre found that while 57 per cent of teens reported making friends online, 78 per cent of girls did so through social media, compared to only 52 per cent of boys.

What's more, only a fraction of girls (13 per cent) made friends through online gaming, versus a whopping 57 per cent of their male peers.<sup>34</sup> While games seem to play a critical role in the development and maintenance of boys' friendships, girls are more likely to resort to texting, and they're also more likely to unfriend, unfollow and block former friends when things go wrong.<sup>35</sup> What's curious is that in virtual community games, such as Second Life, people still seem to conform to traditional gender roles, with more women engaging in meeting people and shopping, and men owning property and building things.<sup>36</sup>

In terms of why we use the internet, there is evidence to suggest that men go online for a wider variety of reasons than women, with gaming, betting and entertainment (including pornography) topping the list. Women on the other hand are more likely to go online to communicate, make travel reservations and interact on social media. Men tend to be the heaviest users of video and music, both listening to and downloading more media than women. They also go online to research products in greater numbers, and are more likely to use newsgroups.<sup>37</sup>

## PERSONALITY

It's not just our gender that can shape what we do online. In the last few years, a growing body of research has found that many of our behaviours – including social media interactions, emotional responses to adverts and susceptibility to persuasion techniques – can be profoundly influenced by personality.

If you've ever taken a personality test, you may have already guessed that some are more reliable than others. Despite the weed-like prevalence of popular (yet unscientific) assessments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI),<sup>38</sup> if you're serious about gaining meaningful, evidence-based insights, the test you use should have a track record for being reliable, valid, independent and comprehensive. This means that it must produce consistent results over different times, contexts and cohorts, and it must also provide comprehensive information on the categories it is sampling. Sadly, many tests upon which businesses base significant financial and structural decisions fail abysmally on all four of these crucial standards.

Although no method is perfect, the *Big Five* is one of the most established and widely used personality tests within the behavioural sciences. Tracing back to the research of D. W. Fiske,<sup>39</sup> it was expanded upon and codified by Costa and McCrae,<sup>40</sup> and originally included 4,500 traits. These were later reduced to 35, and further analysed until they could be classified under five main categories, hence the name. These are: *openness*, *conscientiousness*, *extraversion*,



*agreeableness* and *emotional stability*. Some researchers have since classified an additional sixth trait, *honesty-humility*, and have proposed an evolved HEXACO model of personality.<sup>41</sup>

Tests such as the Big Five are useful because they enable us to predict a person's emotional, behavioural and cognitive patterns,<sup>42</sup> as well as important aspects of their lives such as psychological health, political leanings, career choices and the quality of their relationships.<sup>43</sup> From a business perspective, understanding your customers' psychographics (their personalities, attitudes and values) can give you a significant advantage over basic demographic and persona-based approaches.

With the technological advances that have been made across various research methods in recent years, we've reached the stage at which a computer's assessment of your personality (based on your digital footprint) can yield more accurate and valid results than many of the judgements made by your friends, family or even your spouse.<sup>44</sup> We've crossed a threshold and entered a world in which our personalities can be predicted automatically, without the need for other humans to interpret the data for us. Coupled with the fact that consumers are increasingly expecting a personalised experience, this goes a long way to explaining why so many businesses are turning to personality-based profiling to design and serve up more relevant, engaging and trait-based content.

What's interesting is that your personality not only influences the language you use and respond to, it can also shape many of the behaviours you express online. For instance, when going online to shop, people with higher levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness will tend to take a more utilitarian, direct and central route through a website, whereas those with higher levels of emotional stability, openness and extraversion will often take a more experiential, hedonic (and thus peripheral) path.<sup>45</sup> As a business, if you can understand your customers' behaviours, mirror their linguistic preferences and adapt your message to match their traits, you will be much more successful in attracting, engaging and converting them.

In the following pages, we'll look at each of the Big Five personality traits in turn. We'll explore what they are, the key characteristics that define them, and how you can frame your message to psychologically optimise your content accordingly. You'll then be able to use this information to design trait-specific tests to help you assess and segment your audience.

For instance, you could run a Google AdWords campaign testing three variants of a display advert, one using words for openness, the second for extraversion and the third for emotional stability, making sure that each landing page uses language consistent with its advert. You'll be able to see how each condition

performs in terms of impressions, click-through rates and on-page conversions, which should give you an indication of the most prevalent personality traits of your audience, and the kinds of messages most likely to engage them. You can also run this kind of test using promoted tweets, newsletter headlines, Facebook adverts and video headlines on YouTube. At the end of this chapter, you'll find a list of tools you can use for larger-scale testing.

When running these experiments, it's worth noting that the Big Five traits are inter-correlated, so you may find that your audience segments into two higher-order factors: *plasticity* (comprising extraversion and openness) and *stability* (comprising emotional stability, agreeableness and conscientiousness).<sup>46, 47</sup> Plasticity refers to our tendency towards exploring and engaging flexibly with novelty, both in our behaviour and cognition,<sup>48</sup> and it relates to dopamine, a neurochemical associated with exploration, risk-taking and reward-seeking (known as approach behaviours). The second meta-trait, stability, concerns our need for maintaining a stable physical and psychological condition in order to achieve our goals, and it relates to the serotonin system which is associated with satiety and restraint.

If your customers are high in plasticity, they will tend to be more sociable and are likely to occupy positions of leadership, displaying finely honed social skills and expressivity.<sup>49</sup> They will usually be non-conformist<sup>50</sup> and are more likely to engage in sexual behaviours,<sup>51</sup> typically observing and regulating the impression they make on others in order to cultivate their status (this is known as acquisitive self-monitoring<sup>52, 53</sup>). Whether on- or offline, they will generally do this by being assertive, self-enhancing and by helping others, which is useful to know if you're designing a message, campaign or competition specifically targeting this group.

In contrast, customers high in stability will have a tendency towards maintaining the status quo in order to avoid emotional, social and motivational disruption.<sup>54</sup> As a trait, stability appears to reflect our ability to inhibit or regulate negative emotions, aggression and distraction,<sup>55</sup> and high-scorers are generally more conformist and self-controlled than their low-scoring peers. Curiously, people high in stability are often 'morning people',<sup>56</sup> and they also tend to be more responsive to others (sometimes with anxious attention) so as to avoid social rejection (known as protective self-monitoring).

## Openness

Do you have a high degree of intellectual curiosity, creativity and a preference for novelty? If the answer is yes, you probably score high for *openness*. Open people enjoy variety and actively seek out (and examine) new knowledge and experiences. They tend to be imaginative, insightful and adventurous, and some research shows that openness is the trait least susceptible to persuasion strategies.<sup>57</sup>



Typically flexible, independent and emotionally self-aware,<sup>58</sup> open people are usually good at monitoring their feelings and are often broad-minded, original and intelligent.

In comparison, people with low scores are more closed to experience, tending towards traditional, conventional outlooks, and preferring familiar routines to new experiences. They may struggle with abstract thinking and be more susceptible to fundamentalist religious beliefs,<sup>59</sup> expressing a narrower range of interests, and an inclination towards more authoritarian, conservative (and sometimes ethnocentric and prejudiced) views.<sup>60, 61</sup> What's fascinating is that if you want to boost your levels of openness, psilocybin (the psychoactive compound in magic mushrooms) has been found to increase this trait even 14 months after use.<sup>62</sup>

## MAKE THIS WORK FOR YOU

### High openness

- **Characteristics** Characterised by their creativity, curiosity, imagination and insight, open people tend to be original, unconventional, and with wide ranging interests. High scorers are more susceptible to fantasies, aesthetics and feelings, and are interested in novel actions, ideas and values. They typically prefer new, intense, diverse and complex experiences.
- **Online behaviours** Open people tend to change their profile picture more frequently on Facebook,<sup>63</sup> they are more likely to enjoy online shopping,<sup>64</sup> blogging,<sup>65</sup> entertainment,<sup>66</sup> and visit sites for arts and animation. They tend to like business marketing, business services, arts and photography, and have many likes, statuses and groups (i.e. interests) on Facebook,<sup>67</sup> often posting about intellectual topics.<sup>68</sup>
- **Frame your message** People who score highly for this trait enjoy creativity and intellectual stimulation, so use words such as innovation, intelligence, sophistication, imagination and creative.<sup>69</sup> Typically more intellectual, this group tends to use more articles (the) and fewer pronouns (I, it), and generally avoids the first person singular and plural (I, we), and second person (you). Open people are also more abstract, referring to things in the real world less, so avoid appeals to leisure, family and the home, as well as space and time. Where possible try not to use

negations (such as 'don't') and use prepositions such as 'on' and 'after', being thoughtful of the link between objects. In general, you can afford to be more unemotional in your message, and should avoid appealing to perceptual and biological processes.<sup>70</sup> You can frame your message around greater risk-taking,<sup>71</sup> appealing to people's cognition by using language which is 'thoughtful' and examining the relationship between different things (e.g. causation, discrepancy).<sup>72</sup> Open people tend to embrace uncertainty<sup>73</sup> and respond positively to art and aesthetics,<sup>74</sup> so use implicit rather than explicit messages, drawing on curiosity, mystery or puzzles so that the reader has to think about the meaning.<sup>75</sup>

- **Persuasion principles** You can use reciprocity,<sup>76</sup> social pressure (for instance, stating that others will find out if they violated a social norm), focus on hopes/gains rather than duties/losses,<sup>77</sup> and highlight instrumental benefits (what they will get out of a particular action).<sup>78</sup>

## Low openness

- **Characteristics** Practical, sensible, and straightforward, people low in openness tend to be down-to-earth, concrete thinkers and conservative, conventional and traditional in their outlook.<sup>79</sup> Often inflexible, they prefer to keep things simple,<sup>80</sup> focusing on the details and getting things done rather than diving deep into abstract thought.
- **Online behaviours** People who score low for openness are more likely to share information online about their favourite entertainment content<sup>81</sup> and visit sites for reference and education, television, sports and children's shopping.<sup>82</sup> Intriguingly, they're also more likely to be an editor of Wikipedia.<sup>83</sup>
- **Frame your message** Since low-scorers prefer not to read at all,<sup>84</sup> find a way to communicate more visually through images, memes and videos. You can make use of numbers, frame your message around the past and present tense, and use more pronouns (I, it), first person singular and plural (I, we), and second person (you). Contrary to their more open peers, this group will respond better to words about space and time, as well as concrete messages about things in the real world. Negations (such as 'don't') tend to be effective, as this group is literally less open, and emotional, positive appeals that focus on social processes,



particularly family, will also work well. People who score low for openness are also more interested in leisure and home, respond well to assent (such as 'yes'), tend to be more perceptual, biological<sup>85</sup> and less cognitive.<sup>86</sup> Where possible, avoid uncertainty,<sup>87</sup> make the conclusion of your message explicit, and don't force the reader to think too hard.<sup>88</sup>

- **Persuasion principles** You can use authority,<sup>89</sup> regret messages (for example, 'You will suffer if X behaviour causes you pain'), reciprocity,<sup>90</sup> and incentive messages (such as, 'You will get a gift card if you do X').<sup>91</sup> Your message should focus on duties and losses rather than hopes and gains.<sup>92</sup>

## Conscientiousness

Are you organised, dependable, self-disciplined and dutiful? Do you prefer to plan and aim for achievement? If so, chances are you're high in *conscientiousness*. Conscientious people tend to think, feel and behave in a fairly consistent way, they are generally tenacious, dependable, organised, cautious (as opposed to careless) and decisive.<sup>93</sup> People high in conscientiousness are also better at delaying gratification, and have a propensity to follow norms and rules.<sup>94</sup>

In fact, this trait is one of the most reliable predictors of positive life outcomes, in everything from job performance<sup>95</sup> and long-term career success,<sup>96</sup> to marital stability,<sup>97</sup> longevity,<sup>98</sup> healthy lifestyle behaviours<sup>99</sup> and even eating habits.<sup>100</sup> People who score low for this trait are generally less responsible, act more condescendingly, are less able to hold back hurtful comments, and are less responsive to their partners.<sup>101, 102, 103</sup>

## MAKE THIS WORK FOR YOU

### High conscientiousness

- **Characteristics** Conscientious people tend to be competent, methodical, disciplined and dutiful, displaying good impulse control and a preference for order and structure. Motivated to achieve their goals, high scorers are deliberate, considered, industrious, reliable and decisive.

- **Online behaviours** People who score high in conscientiousness tend to go online for school or work,<sup>104</sup> to write reviews<sup>105</sup> and to visit sites for education, dictionaries, electronics and children's shopping.<sup>106</sup> Intriguingly, they're also more likely to quit Facebook.<sup>107</sup>
- **Frame your message** Conscientious people value efficiency, goal pursuit, achievement and order,<sup>108</sup> so create content around these motivations and avoid framing your message as a risk.<sup>109</sup> Messages that use guilt (the affective core of conscientiousness)<sup>110</sup> and embarrassment are typically quite motivating for high scorers,<sup>111</sup> as are appeals to their helpful nature and sense of duty.<sup>112</sup> Your language should be formal and 'proper' (so no swearing), use articles (such as 'the'), and focus less on humans. Framing messages in terms of time can be useful, and you should avoid talking about causations or discrepancies. Try not to communicate in either a very tentative or a dogmatically certain way, as it's best to avoid these extremities with this group.<sup>113</sup>
- **Persuasion principles** Commitment and consistency<sup>114</sup> work well, as does reciprocity.<sup>115</sup>

## Low conscientiousness

- **Characteristics** People with low scores tend to be disorganised, messy, creative, unambitious, forgetful and often late. Unlikely to follow rules, they prefer chaos over order, they don't adhere to traditions, and they're seldom conservative. Other characteristics include carelessness, irresponsibility, disorderliness, frivolousness,<sup>116</sup> and impulsivity.<sup>117</sup>
- **Online behaviours** People who score low for conscientiousness tend to use Facebook more,<sup>118</sup> and exhibit a higher frequency of browsing pages including their own,<sup>119</sup> with many likes and groups.<sup>120</sup> They use the platform for acceptance-seeking behaviours (such as posting to feel included or to make others feel closer to themselves), connection and caring behaviours (showing care and support to others) and attention-seeking (which includes showing off).<sup>121</sup> More broadly, low scorers often display problematic internet use,<sup>122</sup> such as pathological gambling,<sup>123</sup> procrastination<sup>124</sup> and cyberloafing<sup>125</sup> and they are more likely to be an editor of Wikipedia.<sup>126</sup> These individuals tend to visit sites for mental health, music, animation and literature,<sup>127</sup> and do not like to reveal their true selves, preferring instead to present an idealised persona.<sup>128</sup>



- **Frame your message** To reach low-scorers, you can use swearing, agreeing, negation and negative emotions, especially anger and sadness. Focusing on the human element of your message can also be effective, and you can even include content around death. Anything that seems socially exclusive will also engage this group,<sup>129</sup> as will framing your message as a risk.<sup>130</sup>
- **Persuasion principles** Loss aversion,<sup>131</sup> reciprocity<sup>132</sup> and framing benefits in the present rather than the future<sup>133</sup> all work well here.

## Extraversion v. Introversion

Are you energetic, positive, assertive and sociable? Do you tend to seek stimulation in the company of others? If you answered yes, you probably score highly for *extraversion* and are likely to be gregarious, talkative and ambitious.<sup>134</sup> Typically more expressive and adept at decoding non-verbal information than their introverted peers,<sup>135</sup> high scorers may make friends easily, but they also have a tendency to be dominant.<sup>136</sup>

Although people high in extraversion may generally be happier<sup>137</sup> and have a greater number of sexual partners, they're also more likely to die sooner and land themselves in hospital due to accident or illness.<sup>138</sup> It may come as no surprise then, that your level of extraversion can reliably predict things like your alcohol consumption, popularity and the variety in your dating life.<sup>139</sup> At the other end of the scale are *introverts*, who are typically more reserved, shy and inward-focused, with a tendency to get easily absorbed in tasks. People who are introverted tend to be thoughtful and good at rationalising, but may also have a propensity for overthinking things.

## MAKE THIS WORK FOR YOU

### High extraversion

- **Characteristics** Extroverts are gregarious, assertive, warm, positive, and active. As well as being outgoing and optimistic, high scorers love excitement, and are often sensation- and thrill-seeking.

- **Online behaviours** As you might expect, extroverts talk more about social events,<sup>140</sup> and are typically more motivated to create user generated content, vent negative feelings and be self-enhancing.<sup>141</sup> Classic cyberloafers,<sup>142</sup> they will often visit sites about education, environmental science and music. High scorers love to socialise and talk about themselves, their family and friends,<sup>143</sup> and share information about their favourite entertainment content.<sup>144</sup> They use Facebook primarily for communication (writing on other people's walls and commenting on posts), emotional disclosure (such as posting about 'drama' and venting frustrations), and presenting their true selves.<sup>145</sup> They tend to exhibit higher Facebook use and have more friends, showing a greater propensity for viewing their own page, adding photos of other people, and changing their profile picture more frequently.<sup>146</sup>
- **Frame your message** To engage extroverts, use shorter, less formal language and exclamation marks,<sup>147</sup> and include words such as strong, outgoing, active, exciting, attention, amazing, party.<sup>148</sup> High scorers tend to use a lot of first person plurals (we, ours) and second person (you, yours), often talking about family, friends, the body, and sex or sexuality.<sup>149</sup> Their language is usually disinhibited, social and inclusive, and your message should be straightforward, certain and simple, using positive emotional content. Extroverts tend to be more sensual and prefer greater stimulation (including louder radio messages),<sup>150</sup> and are motivated by excitement, rewards and social attention.<sup>151</sup>
- **Persuasion principles** Reciprocity,<sup>152</sup> social comparison,<sup>153</sup> scarcity,<sup>154</sup> liking, social proof<sup>155</sup> and future discounting such as 'buy now, pay later' (extroverts value things more in the present)<sup>156</sup> all tend to work well for this group.

## High introversion

- **Characteristics** People who are introverted tend to be more reserved, quiet, shy and silent.<sup>157</sup> Prone to fantasies with the ability to get absorbed in tasks, they are typically thoughtful and may become easily tired or worn-out. Having fewer friends, introverts often prefer to be alone.
- **Online behaviours** High scorers tend to enjoy introspective, computer-based activities such as Photoshop and programming, often talking online about fantasy hobbies such as anime, and watching television



series.<sup>158</sup> Interested in self-exploration,<sup>159</sup> introverts visit sites for movies, literature, comics and children's shopping,<sup>160</sup> and can be at greater risk of pathological gambling.<sup>161</sup>

- **Frame your message** Introverts are more likely to use text-based emoticons (such as O.O,>.<, q;.:\_3,>\_<.^.^, etc.), use longer, more formal language (they're slightly more likely to use articles, adverbs and prepositions) and express negative emotions such as anger and anxiety.<sup>162</sup> Framing your message numerically can be persuasive for this group, and since introverts are usually more inhibited, thoughtful, tentative and quiet, it can help to reflect this in your communications. Your message should talk about causation (go into depth about the reasons behind your communication), and also focus on work and achievement.<sup>163</sup>
- **Persuasion principles** Social pressure<sup>164</sup> and reciprocity<sup>165</sup> tend to work well here.

## Agreeableness

Do you have the tendency to be compassionate and cooperative, rather than challenging, suspicious or antagonistic towards others? If so, you may score highly for *agreeableness*. This trait describes how pleasant, likeable and harmonious we are in relation to other people, and high scorers are typically described as considerate, warm and kind. Although highly agreeable people are usually popular and well liked, this is often because they project positivity onto others and have a tendency to make excuses for other people's shortcomings.<sup>166</sup> Because they are emotionally responsive, high scorers are more open to influence by strong, persuasive arguments than their low-scoring peers,<sup>167</sup> and some research shows that this trait is the most susceptible to persuasion strategies.<sup>168</sup>

When faced with conflict, agreeable people usually take a more constructive approach, often transforming competitive situations into cooperative ones. They're typically more empathetic, find it easier to see other people's perspectives, and are more likely to help a wider range of people, whether a friend or a stranger.<sup>169</sup> When they experience difficult emotions or frustrating interactions, neuroscientific research shows that high scorers will automatically engage in emotion regulation<sup>170</sup> (one study even found this difference in young kids responding to a 'disappointing gift').<sup>171</sup>

## MAKE THIS WORK FOR YOU

### High agreeableness

- **Characteristics** High scorers are altruistic, cooperative and trusting. They communicate in a straightforward and honest way, and are generally modest, humble, sympathetic, appreciative and affectionate.
- **Online behaviours** Individuals who score high in agreeableness tend to be avid users of Facebook, with a greater frequency of browsing pages in general, both others' and their own.<sup>172</sup> They generally present their true self and use the site to communicate, connect with, care for and support others, as well as seeking acceptance for who they are.<sup>173</sup> In terms of the websites they frequent, agreeable people tend to seek out sites for education, diseases and business logistics.<sup>174</sup>
- **Frame your message** To engage people in this group, your message should emphasise connection with family and community, as well as communal goals and interpersonal harmony.<sup>175</sup> Your language can be more inclusive (we, our), friendly, and positive in emotional content, focusing on what people see and feel. You can also mirror high scorers' tendency to use numbers and write in the past tense, and include content around the body and sex (though to a lesser extent than you would with extroverts). Content that touches on leisure and home life will also be well received,<sup>176</sup> and ideally you should avoid framing your message around risk.<sup>177</sup>
- **Persuasion principles** Reciprocity,<sup>178</sup> social comparison<sup>179</sup> and deterrence messages (such as stating that a behaviour is associated with criminal punishment) can work well here, as can morality messages ('X behaviour is the right thing to do') and regret messages, ('You will suffer if X behaviour causes you pain').<sup>180</sup> Agreeable people are also more sensitive to social validation and liking,<sup>181</sup> as well as loss aversion.<sup>182</sup>

### Low agreeableness

- **Characteristics** Low scorers are typically selfish, competitive, individualistic and ruthless, and can be thoughtless, rude, harsh, and disagreeable. Likely to be a rebel, a person who is low in agreeableness can be unfriendly, cold, hard-headed,<sup>183</sup> aggressive and antagonistic, as well as untrusting, sardonic, cynical and uncaring.

- **Online behaviours** People who score low in agreeableness are more likely to develop problematic multiplayer online gaming,<sup>184</sup> use Facebook for attention seeking<sup>185</sup> and visit sites for kids and teens, society, mental health, physics and pets.<sup>186</sup> They're also partial to a bit of online shopping,<sup>187</sup> and are more likely to be an editor of Wikipedia.<sup>188</sup>
- **Frame your message** Low scorers are more likely to swear, express negative emotions (especially anger) and talk about death than their high-scoring peers,<sup>189</sup> and you can mirror this in the tone of your content. Talking about causation, money,<sup>190</sup> and framing your message as a risk<sup>191</sup> can also work well for this group.
- **Persuasion principles** Reciprocity.<sup>192</sup>

## Emotional stability

Originally labelled neuroticism (the inverse of its new name), the trait of *emotional stability* refers to how well or poorly we respond to environmental stressors. People who score highly in this trait are less reactive to stress, and are usually even-tempered, calm and less likely to feel tense. They tend to be more emotionally stable and resilient, and are better able to cope with failures, setbacks and difficulties.

Low scorers, on the other hand, can be more pessimistic, insecure, self-conscious and vulnerable. They tend to experience greater levels of anxiety, depression and hostility, are more likely to act impulsively, and find it harder to deal with aversive events than their high-scoring peers.<sup>193</sup>

## MAKE THIS WORK FOR YOU

### High emotional stability

- **Characteristics** Emotionally stable people are generally cool and collected, and not easily phased or perturbed. Stable, calm, unemotional and content,<sup>194</sup> high scorers tend to be relaxed and self-confident.<sup>195</sup>
- **Online behaviours** People high in emotional stability often talk about social plans and sports,<sup>196</sup> visit websites on photography, maths, marketing and business logistics,<sup>197</sup> and enjoy online shopping.<sup>198</sup>



- **Frame your message** This group tends to talk a lot about the second person (you, yours), their friends and the space around them, displaying a general sense of confidence.<sup>199</sup>
- **Persuasion principles** As with the other traits, reciprocity<sup>200</sup> works well here, and fear-based appeals are generally more effective than non-fear based ones.<sup>201</sup>

## Low emotional stability

- **Characteristics** People who score low for emotional stability can be anxious, depressed, hostile, tense and moody, with a propensity for acting impulsively. They may feel self-conscious, vulnerable, and unable to accommodate aversive events, and can be irrational, dysphoric and easily overwhelmed.
- **Online behaviours** Low scorers are more likely to go online to write reviews,<sup>202</sup> blog,<sup>203</sup> watch pornography<sup>204</sup> and cyberloaf,<sup>205</sup> as well as share information about their favourite entertainment content.<sup>206</sup> They often turn to the internet for a sense of belonging,<sup>207</sup> and use Facebook not only to communicate with others and look at people's profiles, but also to express themselves emotionally (which often means venting)<sup>208</sup> and to present their ideal or false self.<sup>209</sup> They are more susceptible to pathological gambling<sup>210</sup> and will visit sites for pets, scouting, sports and physics.<sup>211</sup>
- **Frame your message** Low scorers are generally more sensitive to threats and uncertainty, so any messages framed around safety and security will be more engaging.<sup>212</sup> This group also responds better to content that relates to them personally, and phrases such as 'don't do this' and 'never do that' will be more persuasive. Discrepancies will also grab their attention, so avoid making any mistakes unless you are using this strategy deliberately. Low scorers tend to focus more on themselves (I, me, mine) than others (you, yours), and are prone to swearing and using negations (such as 'no') more often.<sup>213</sup> Although they typically express a full range of negative emotions online (such as anxiety, anger and sadness), low scorers can be tentative and inhibited, so it's best to avoid fear appeals.<sup>214</sup> Instead, focus on social exclusivity, physical feelings, causation and certainty.<sup>215</sup>

- **Persuasion principles** Reciprocity,<sup>216</sup> social comparison,<sup>217</sup> scarcity,<sup>218</sup> authority and social proof<sup>219</sup> can work well, as can anchoring, due to this group's high external locus of control.<sup>220</sup>

## USEFUL TOOLS

If you want to segment your audience according to their personality traits, there are several academia-grade tools you can use for the job. I have included a list of resources here, however it's worth noting that the links may be subject to change.

To take the Big Five test yourself, visit: [outofservice.com/bigfive](http://outofservice.com/bigfive). If you're interested in personality in general, there's a fascinating range of tests you can explore at Cambridge University's website, [discovermyprofile.com](http://discovermyprofile.com).

For commercial use, I recommend Cambridge University's personalisation engine, [appliedmagicsauce.com](http://appliedmagicsauce.com), a white-label product that predicts psychological traits from the digital footprint of Facebook users. You can also try [Hogan-x.com](http://Hogan-x.com), which works in a similar way by drawing on user activity across a wide variety of social media profiles. For computerised text analysis, you can try [liwc.wpengine.com](http://liwc.wpengine.com), a research tool that analyses text for its emotional and motivational content, as well as personality traits.