

## **To Investigate the Impact of Big Five Personality Traits on Customer Advocacy Behavior**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – *The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of Big-5 personality traits on customer advocacy behavior.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *A model was developed to assess the impact of the personality traits including conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience and neuroticism on customer advocacy behavior. The model was tested on 142 customers of a telecommunication company. Survey research method was used in this research and questionnaire was the tool used for collecting data.*

**Findings** – *The findings suggest that customers who have stronger levels of openness to experience are indeed more willing to contribute as advocates. The customers with higher levels of conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism do not have positive and negative effect on customer advocacy behavior.*

**Research limitations/implications** – *The model was tested for the customers of only one telecommunication organization so the results cannot be generalized over the customers of other telecommunication organizations. Furthermore, the data is collected from only telecommunication industry's customers so the results/findings of this research cannot be applied to other industrial sectors.*

***Practical implications*** – *The study considers the customers potential that how they can be further engaged to serve as advocates and thus improve the firm's marketing performance.*

***Originality/value*** – *Much of the previous work has been based on analyzing different factors that affect the customer advocacy behavior, this study advances on analyzing the role of customer's personality traits on customer's advocacy behavior.*

**Keywords** – Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness to experience, Neuroticism, Customer advocacy behavior.

## **Introduction**

In various disciplines the concept of advocacy has been used widely, which means 'to recommend' or 'to be in favor of', while in legislation this term of advocacy is used as 'the person who speaks on behalf of the other person' (OED 1998). While in terms of marketing the term advocacy means a person truly representing the interests of the customers (Urban, 2005).

Uma (2005) said that the researcher Urban (2005) said that to be the advocate of customers is a new foundation laid on the firm's belief of providing absolute and unprejudiced information related to the interests of the customer, keeping in mind the products which suits the customers (keeping fair struggle with their competition), design of the product, and creating affiliation which results into an allegiance in their relationship. On the contrary, 'advocate for your customer and they'll advocate for you'.

Immense literature is available on the advocacy behavior of customers still there is lack of understanding about the personality traits and their relationship with advocacy behavior of customers. The

aim of this paper is the manipulation of the personality traits upon the customer advocacy behavior. In particular this paper targets the sundry personality traits of the varied people which affect the customer advocacy behavior.

One of the indispensable questions that arise in the studies of personality is that the individual differences are portrayed by which personality traits. Hierarchical models have been employed by many researchers in the last few decades in order to mount the answer for this question. One of the models among these is the Big Five (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1981; McCrea and Costa, 1999), which consists of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism, which can educate and foresee various individual differences over an array of settings, including intellectual and substantial fitness, job contentment, and work performance (e.g. Barrick and Mount, 1991; Judge, Heller, and Mount, 2002) as well as customer advocacy behavior. Extensively accredited model of character portrayal is Big Five Model (John, Ntouyas, Soto, 2008).

Personality traits not only fluctuate among persons but these differences also demonstrate longitudinal divergence that is they revolutionize with the change in time (Small, Hertzog, Hultsch, and Dixon, 2003).

One of the crucial elements of personality associated with psychosomatic progression is willingness (openness) intellect (Colin G. De Young, Racheal G. Grazioplene a, Jordan B. Peterson, 2010).

Extraversion is referred to as socialization (Furr, 2009). Extraversion (associated with optimistic concern and activation) and Neuroticism (is associated to pessimistic sentimental concentration)

are well thought-out to be instinctively determined (Mac Donald, 1995; Pothbart and Derryberry, 1981; Yik and Russell, 2001).

Agreeableness and conscientiousness is associated with the effortful command, a super-ordinate dogmatic structure (Jensen Campbell *et. al*, 2002). One of the significant concepts in this scaffold is that each sphere represents units of character. For example the Big Five dimensions (i.e neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness).

One of the emerging view points in the realm of marketing is that customers should be taken as valued property (Blattbug and Dieghton, 1996; Bolton *et. al*, 2004; Peppers and Rogers, 2004).

Supplementary expansion in modern customer relationship management literature by keeping the view that the firm can enhance customers worth's duration by developing and increasing interaction with their customers.

This study tends to search out the business customers' eagerness to acquire a part as advocates in marketing. The scheme of customer advocacy gained extreme gratitude but still there is palpable interval of research scrutinizing the advocacy behavior of customers. In an endeavor to swathe this gap, the researcher will study the advocacy position of customers in competition with the personality traits of customers. Study objective is to inspect the relationship between the personality traits of customer and their eagerness to serve as advocates. This study commences with the establishment of hypothesized model using Big Five personality traits to cram the relation with the advocacy behavior of customers. The described model was tested on the customers of telecommunication company i.e. Ufone in the H-8 sector of Islamabad because many universities

are situated in this sector as well as the HEC head office is also located in this sector. Survey research method was used as a tool for data collection. After this, findings are discussed. Furthermore the paper is concluded by offering managerial implications and major limitations of this research are discussed.

### **Literature Review**

The meaning of the word ‘advocacy’ is not the technique of a company which it uses for speaking to its customers rather it’s a harmony among the company and the customers of the company that if the company is concerned about the pleasure of its customers than it will be reflected back in the form of customers conviction, more procurement and increment in the fidelity of the customers. It’s a kind of conformity among the company and its customers for the reciprocated remuneration. Company realizes the demands and necessities of its customers and in return the customers start to speak for buying the products of the company and in assembling the design of the product in an approved manner. One of the vital benefit is that customer starts telling others about the company and its products. Advocacy is a new technique for augmenting the relationship between customers and the company (Urban, 2005).

The initiative of the customer advocacy has gained a lot of acknowledgment but still remarkable research is required. For this purpose the personality traits of customers has been studied in connection with the advocacy behavior of the customers in this research.

In this study, it is intended to investigate the relationship between the personality traits of the customers and their inclination towards serving as promoters. This research is proposed to consider

the advocacy of customer as an individual's proclivity to curve up his/her know-how about some of the products or service (Chelminski, & Coutler, 2011).

Studies of the past suggest that the communal conduct is often influenced by helping others or with the will to have an increment on wellbeing of the communal society (Batson, 1991; Simon, 1993). The interties of the individuals towards the welfare of a society provide the foundation for an individual's scruples which shows the compassionate sentiment with the needs of others (Aronfreed, 1968, 1970). In the actions regarding market, research shows that many people hold them accountable to assist others (Chelminski, & Coulter, 2011).

This research is aimed at exploring the aptitude of individuals to share any information and knowledge about product/service (Chelminski and Coulter, 2011) in association with the personality traits. The idea that insists on helping others and moving forward to the social wellbeing is the fundamental motion of social behavior, which can also be observed from previous literature (Batson, 1991; Simon, 1993). This enthusiasm is entrenched in one's conscience showing one's approach towards ethical tasks (Aronfreed, 1968, 1970). Some of the customers hold them responsible for assisting others (Chelminski, & Coulter, 2011). For example the centre of attention for many of the researchers before is on the leaders with rational liberality, who are always willing to share their familiarity with others (Childers, 1986).

The proposal of customer advocacy is intimately linked with different qualities of individuals, same as the concept of opinion leadership, competent assisting behavior, and market mavnism

(Chelminski, & Coulter, 2011) and there is the idea to produce optimistic marketing place know-how by providing functional knowledge to customers (Chelminski, & Coulter, 2011).

Here customer advocacy deals differently as it impairs the customer to counteract any pessimism in market place, such as providing lower than normal products, and services that has obnoxious status because of the lower intensity of performance (Chelminski, & Coulter, 2011).

A question which usually comes across the personality research is that how many elementary and changeable features of personality are needed for the description of the character of an individual (Linden, Nijenhuis and Bakker, 2010). In order to embark upon this question, the researchers used different top down models (Linden, Nijenhuis and Bakker, 2010). One such structures or sculpt is Big Five (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1981; McCrae and Costa, 1999), which encompasses Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism.

These dimensions and features of personality can elucidate variety of personality traits over different grades and settings, psychological and substantial stability, job contentment, performance and customer advocacy (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Judge, Heller and Mount, 2002).

Big Five model of personality traits comprising of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness has came forward as highly adequate and pragmatic model summarizing major character diversities (John, Noumann, & Soto, 2008).

It is alleged that very few studies have examined the impact of personality traits on the advocacy behavior of customers. In this study the main focus will be the examination of different dimensions of personality and the impact of each of them on the advocacy behavior of customers.

Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are linked to the exerted control (Campbell *et. al*, 2002). Agreeableness refers to an individual's sympathy towards other individual's sentiments and requirements (Serbet, Miller, Pryor, Reidy, and Zeichner, 2010). So keeping customer advocacy as dependent variable and that of the personality trait as independent variable, in this study the first proposed hypothesis is as follows:

*H 1: Agreeableness has a positive effect on customer advocacy behavior.*

Extraversion (related to optimistic affect and activation) and Neuroticism (associated to pessimistic affective strength) are considered to be instinctively resolved (Mac Donald, 1995; Rothbart, and Derryberry, 1981; Yik, and Russell, 2001).

Since the literature suggests that 'extraversion' is related to positive effect and activation, thus on the basis of this second hypothesis has been established that extraversion people show more readiness to serve as advocates to customers.

*H 2: Extraverted people are more ready to serve as customer advocates.*

Up to some degrees, conscientiousness approximates kinds of optimistic and pessimistic sentiments (McCrea and Costa, 1991, Watson, 2000). It is a measure of an individual's capability for being thankful for, allowing for penalty before taking some activity, unswerving on times of dullness and aggravation also including unsocial and violent behavior (Miller and Lynam, 2001). By reviewing literature it is identified that people with higher levels of conscientiousness operate more positively rather than negatively. So the third hypothesis is:

*H 3: Conscientiousness has appositive effect on customer advocacy behavior.*

Customer advocacy is well thought out to be extra role behavior. Customer advocacy is broadening the way for customers out of the perspective of marketing (Leo, Berett, and Dreman). 'Extra-role behavior is defined as distinctive behavior of frontline employees which is beyond their formal role' (Beltencourt, & Brown, 1997). For further the investigating the concept of customer advocacy, extra role behavior is mandatory.

Assisting out of the way is an element of this universal construct (King, George, & Hebl, 2005). While investigating the personality traits, researchers noted that at least four out of the five personality traits are in connection with sentimental filter of individuals, identified in terms of balance between positive and negative sentimental status (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999).

Extraversion and neuroticism are the results of optimistic and pessimistic experiences (Clark, & Watson, 1999). Studies suggest that Neuroticism tends more towards the pessimistic rather than optimistic behavior. So it is argued that individuals with higher levels

of neuroticism influence the advocacy behavior of customers negatively. So the fourth hypothesis comes out to be.

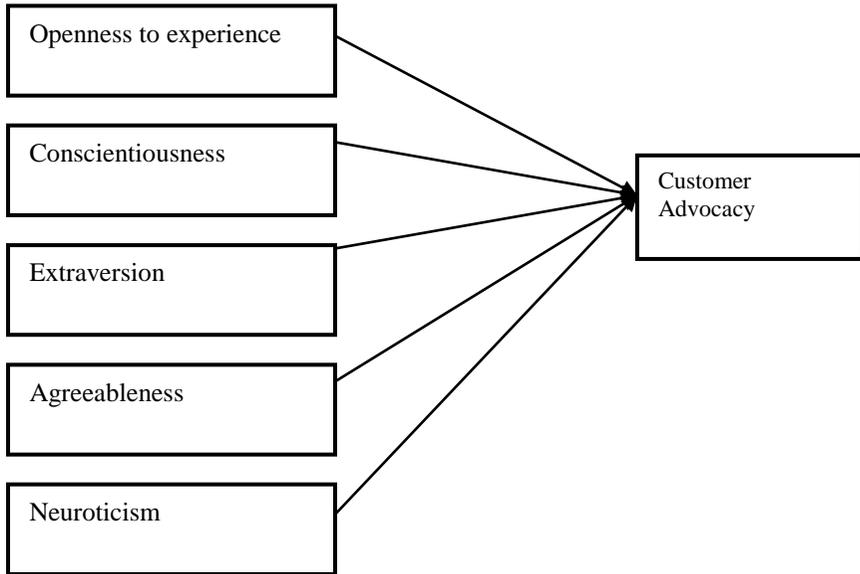
*H4: Neuroticism has a negative effect on the customer advocacy behavior.*

Openness and conscientiousness also to some degrees approximates types of positive and negative sentimental (Mc Crea, & Costa, 2000). Basic dimension that is closely associated with the mental process is readiness/ openness/ intellect (De Young, Grazioplene, & Peterson, 2010). Readiness to discover is instinctive but has minor application on balance between pessimistic and optimistic sentimental (Mc Crea, & Costa, 1991). It is observed that the individuals with higher levels of openness have a positive manipulation on advocacy behavior of customers. The fifth hypothesis thus comes out to be.

*H5: Openness to experience has a positive effect on customer advocacy behavior.*

This study is aimed at investigating the customer advocacy in association with personality traits. For which the study is commenced with big five personality traits model in order to study its association with customer advocacy behavior. The model was then tested for a telecommunication company's customers using survey as a tool for research methodology. Key findings are then discussed and the hypotheses are tested using Ordinary Least Square Regression (OLS) and then the study is concluded with the implications important for managers and then limitations are identified.

### Proposed Research Model:



### Methodology

This study considers six variables that have not been discussed directly in a relationship by previous researchers specifically in Pakistan, which includes the five dimensions of personality i.e. Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience and Neuroticism along with the Customer Advocacy Behavior.

### Research Design

**Type of Investigation:** This study was carried out to identify the impact of personality traits on the advocacy behavior of customers; hence it's a co-relational study.

**Study Setting:** As it's a co-relational study so it was conducted in a non-contrived setting invariably and done in organizations called as field study.

***Unit of Analysis:*** Individual customers were mostly focused for the collection of data regarding this study; hence the units of analysis are customers. Data was gathered from each customer and each customer's response was treated as individual data source.

***Time Horizon:*** Data was gathered just once, over a period of days in order to answer the research questions. Such study is called as cross-sectional studies.

### **Population and sample**

The population of this study is comprised of 304 customers of Pakistan from telecommunication sector. Unit of analysis of this study were customers from all levels of telecommunication industry.

### ***Sampling***

Asper Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Formula for Sample Determination was used for determining the sample. Five hypotheses were developed and were tested with a sample of 142 customers from one Telecommunication Company of Pakistan. Customers from all the levels of the telecommunication sector were included in the study.

### ***Sampling procedure***

Non probability convenient sampling techniques were used and data was collected by conducting a cross sectional survey.

### ***Sampling techniques***

Sampling technique used for this research was convenience sampling in which questionnaire was used as a research instrument. 128 questionnaires were completely filled and returned and 14 were lost during the process or wrongly filled out of 142 questionnaires. In the sample of 128 customers 56 were males and 72 were females. Response rate was 90.14% as 142 questionnaires were distributed and 128 were received during the study. Total 51 items were added in the

questionnaire first question was related to demographic variable including gender. Next questions 1-7 were related to customer advocacy behavior, questions 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, and 36 were related to extraversion, questions 2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27, 32, 37, and 42 were about agreeableness, questions 3, 8, 13, 13, 23, 28, 33, 38, and 43 were related to conscientiousness, questions 4, 9, 14, 19, 24, 29, 34, and 39 were related to neuroticism, and questions 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 35, 40, 41, and 44 inquired about the customer's tendency to openness.

### **Characteristics of sample**

Demographic variables have effect on customer advocacy behavior, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. For this reason as control variable in testing the hypothesis, gender was used.

### **Measures / Scales**

For the measurement of data Likert's five point scale was used ranging from 1 as strongly disagree, 2 as disagree, 3 as neutral, 4 as agree till 5 as strongly agree.

***Customer Advocacy Behavior:*** 7-item scale has been taken from Liu, D., Harris, J., and Payne, A. "I take the initiative to act as a 'promoter' of this service provider?" The response rate ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

***Extraversion:*** 8-item scale has been adapted from John and Srivastava, (1999). "I see myself as someone who is talkative?" The respondents were asked to rate each statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

***Agreeableness:*** 9-item scale has been adapted from John and Srivastava, (1999). "I see myself as someone who has a forgiving

nature?” The respondents were asked to rate each statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

***Conscientiousness:*** 9-item scale has been adapted from John and Srivastava, (1999). “I see myself as someone who works hard until the task is finished?” The respondents were asked to rate each statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

***Neuroticism:*** 8-item scale has been adapted from John and Srivastava, (1999). “I see myself as someone who is emotionally stable, not easily upset?” The respondents were asked to rate each statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

***Openness to experience:*** 10-item scale has been adapted from John and Srivastava, (1999). “I see myself as someone who is original, comes up with new ideas?” The respondents were asked to rate each statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Sample of 128 responses were taken and introduced into SPSS software. It's computer operator statistical software. Following domains were analyzed in this software:

- Reliability
- Means
- Standard deviation
- Correlation
- Regression

### **Results**

Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations among studied variables. A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the

customer advocacy behavior and the big five personality traits. It was found that there was a positive correlation between the trait “extraversion” and customer advocacy behavior ( $r = 0.185$ ,  $n = 128$ ,  $p = 0.036$ ). Increase in the tendency towards extraverted personality was correlated with increase in the advocacy behavior of customers. A scatter plot summarizes the results (Table 1). It was also found that there was a positive correlation between the trait “openness to experience” and customer advocacy behavior ( $r = 0.280$ ,  $n = 128$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Increase in the tendency of “openness to experience” was correlated with increase in the advocacy behavior of customers. The results also show that there are no correlations between the variables “agreeableness and customer advocacy behavior”, “conscientiousness and customer advocacy behavior”, and “neuroticism and customer advocacy behavior”.

**Table 1: Descriptive and Intercorrelations**

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations									
Variables	Mean	S.D	Gender	AG	EXT	CO	NU	OP	CAB
Gender	.562	.498	--						
AG	3.526	.676	-.062	(0.744)					
EXT	3.124	.617	-.155	.105	(0.626)				
CO	3.298	.581	-.078	.392**	.217*	(0.632)			
NU	3.016	.637	.196*	-.353**	-.352**	-.408**	(0.654)		
OP	3.379	.554	.058	.235**	.366**	.234**	-.202*	(0.637)	
CAB	3.312	.777	-.124	-.014	.185*	.115	-.109	.280**	(0.806)

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 2: Regression Analysis**

Customer Advocacy Behavior				
Model	Beta	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	Δ R <sup>2</sup>
AG	-.126	.199		
EXT	.073	.456		
CO	.069	.487	.100	.100
NU	-.047	.643		
OP	.257	.008		

Dependent Variable: CAB

Table 2 reports the regression results of the variables. On the basis of the regression results H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>3</sub>, and H<sub>4</sub> are not accepted i.e. “Agreeableness has a positive effect on customer advocacy

behavior”, “Extraverted people are more ready to serve as customer advocates”, “Conscientiousness has a positive effect on customer advocacy behavior”, “Neuroticism has a negative effect on customer advocacy behavior” respectively. Although the results of the regression analysis are in favor of H<sub>5</sub> i.e. “Openness to experience has a positive effect on customer advocacy behavior”, thus H<sub>5</sub> is not rejected.

### **Discussion**

Not long ago it was widely believed that variance in psychological traits was solely environmentally determined or socially constructed. Times have changed, and as Rutter (2002) has argued “any dispassionate reading of the evidence leads to the inescapable conclusion that genetic factors play a substantial role in the origins of individual differences with respect to all psychological traits, both normal and abnormal (p. 2).” All individuals are not same; every individual is blessed with some innate abilities which make them different from one another. These abilities are the basis of individual differences and personality traits thus making one individual’s personality different from others.

One of the noteworthy personality traits is ability to take up new things known as openness. Openness to some extent estimates types of positive and negative emotions (McCrae & Costa, 1991; Watson, 2000). Basic dimension of personality related to psychological processes are readiness/openness/intellect (DeYoung, Grazioplene, & Peterson, 2010). Readiness to explore is an innate capability but has lesser application on balance between positive and negative emotions (McCrae & Costa, 1991). The advocacy behavior of customer is considered as extra role behavior, their agreeableness

which is somewhat related to the positive word of mouth may be referred to as socialization. Researches supports current research hypothesis that people who tend to be more open to experience are more ready to share their experience with others rather than the ones who tends to be less open to experience. The statistical results show that coefficients of openness has positive sign which means the frequency of advocacy behavior of customer increases by 0.257 units whenever there is one unit increase in the openness to experience of the customer. Their significant relation can be confirmed through the significance value i.e. 0.008 ( $p < 0.01$ ) and also by t-value i.e. 2.708 ( $t\text{-value} > 2$ ).

A Researcher points out that individuals with higher level of openness have a positive influence on customer advocacy behavior. Openness to experience is an intellectual ability of maintaining customer relationships. Studies have reported a positive relationship between Openness to experience and customer advocacy behavior as openness allows going out of the way (Ackerman & Heggstad, 1997; Gignac, Stough, & Loukomitis, 2004). So our results as well as theory supports our hypothesis that the more open to the experience an individual will be the more will be the chances to serve as customer advocates.

The only demographic variable “gender” was not working as a control variable. The proposed hypothesis as H1, H2, H3 H4 about personality traits; agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism yield insignificant results. Main reason behind the hypothesis rejection is that customers in Pakistani context are not interested in building association with products. In realistic customer scenarios, customers rarely show excitability, sociability,

talkativeness, assertiveness and high amounts of emotional expressiveness rather emotional instability toward a particular brand. Most of the time customer's conscience while using a particular product is need oriented instead of goal oriented in order to build trustworthy communication strategies.

The genetic variance of neuroticism and extraversion has been shown to mediate the occurrence of undesirable life events (Saudino, Pederson, Lichtenstein, McClearn, & Plomin, 1997) which may, in turn, contribute to prolonged negative behavior in individuals.

Customer advocacy behavior involves an interaction between a person's (customer's) underlying personality traits and situational variables. The situation that a customer finds himself or herself in plays a major role in how the person reacts. Under the given conditions of current research customer advocacy behavior proved to be invalid because customer fail to show/exhibit required expressions. Personality is a complex as a whole and each individual show these complex personality traits on varying degrees. Likewise customer advocacy behavior is a result of such complex personality associations.

### **Conclusion**

Impact of personality on customer advocacy behavior is an exploratory research. Research aims to explore and explain customer advocacy behavior in the context of big five personality traits. Statistically and methodologically, the use of the Big Five taxonomy is useful. There have been hundreds of existing studies utilizing the Big Five, the current study may be among the first to utilize accepted personality traits in customer advocacy behaviors. Five personality traits were taken as variables out of which only two i.e. openness and

extraversion are positively correlated with customer advocacy of behavior. Regression analysis reveals some degree of association between Openness to experience in personality and that of the advocacy behavior of customers. Personality traits are individual differences; therefore we cannot fix one particular behavioral extreme as criteria of customer advocacy behavior as well as personality. In flexible situation customer advocacy behavior is measured on varying degrees between two polar extremes of personality traits in order to achieve signification of results. It is now time to identify specific individuals (personality types) and specific interventions (change and personality programs) aimed at those (customers) considered “at risk” for not attending to their behaviors.

### **Limitations, Implications and Recommendations for Future Studies**

This study has a number of limitations. First limitation is that there were more women than men in our sample. Second, in this study only Big five traits were considered as the predictors of customer’s advocacy behavior, other factors including environmental factors, cultural factors etc. were not included. This study was a cross sectional study which makes the results of this study non-generalizable over the longitudinal study.

The most noteworthy limitation would be the sample size and use of a relatively young and homogeneous sample of convenience. Generalization of current findings should be cautiously made to other demographic. The current study is also limited by the sole use of self-reported personality. Also the study was conducted only in the

telecommunication sector due to which it cannot be generalized over the other sectors.

Much of the previous work has been based on analyzing different factors that affect the customer advocacy behavior, this study advances on analyzing the impact of customer's personality traits on customer's advocacy behavior and considers the customers potential that how they can be further engaged to serve as advocates and thus improve the firm's marketing performance.

Additional research should be encouraged into more diverse sectors as this study only covers the customers of telecommunication sector. An important direction for future research is also to examine these associations in age groups across the lifespan. Future work must also validate the scales used in the research on more diverse and large sample size.

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