

Relationship between personality of owner-managers and performance of internet cafes in Free State, South Africa



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Background: Although small businesses, including internet cafes, contribute to the country's economy, the majority of internet cafes fail to survive for more than 2 years after their first year of operation.

Aim: The main aim of this article was to promote the growth and survival of small businesses in the telecommunication industry through profiling owner-managers and the business performance of internet cafés in the Free State province, South Africa.

Setting: The study focuses on the relationship between the personality of owner-managers and the performance of internet cafés.

Methods: This study draws on a quantitative approach in line with the positivist paradigm, with a participation of 88 owner-managers who completed the questionnaires.

Results: The findings of the study showed that conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience traits are positively related to the performance of internet cafes.

Conclusion: Despite most studies investigating the relationship between the performance of internet cafes and the personality traits of owner-managers, this study concludes that there is a relationship between the two variables. This informs institutions that provide funding for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to encourage people with conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience personality traits to pursue businesses in the technology industry.

Keywords: personality; business performance; telecommunication industry; internet cafes; owner-managers.

Introduction

This study investigated the relationship between the personality of owner-managers and the performance of internet cafes in Free State province, South Africa. Internet cafes fall under the telecommunication service industry, which is one of the fastest growing industries, that is driven by growth in mobile telephony and broadband connectivity (Beschoner 2019). This industry consists of big companies, such as Vodacom, Telkom and MTN, and small businesses, such as internet cafes. Internet cafes, just as any other small businesses in South Africa, contribute to the country's economy. However, despite this contribution, Eva financial solutions (2019) found out that the majority of these businesses fail to survive for more than 2 years after their first year of operation because of stiff competition within the telecommunication sector.

Several factors lead to the performance and, therefore, the failure of many small businesses. These include low skill levels of managers (Hashim, Raza & Minai 2018) and the personality of owner-managers (Ng & Kee 2018). Personality is defined by Costa, McCrae and Löckenhoff (2019) as a person's character that describes consistent patterns of feelings, cognition and behaviour. It is famously described by using the five-factor model (FFM) of personality (Widiger & Crego 2019) which divides personality into neuroticism, extraversion, openness and conscientiousness. Ncube and Chimucheka (2019) found that the personality of the small, micro and medium enterprise (SMME) owner is one of the critical factors that affect SMMEs' ability to overcome barriers to survival and the achievement of sustainable growth. Additionally, Sari, William and Tina (2018) believed that owners with high levels of extraversion, openness and conscientiousness to experience are likely to have prosperous small businesses. Therefore, the link between personality and business performance cannot be over emphasised and ignored in understanding small business performance.

It is evident from the above that personality influences business performance. However, the challenge is that previous studies on personality traits (Hikkerova, Ilouga & Sahut 2016; Woo et al. 2016) focused more on how the construct is related to outcomes such as career success, occupation choice, leadership style and large business performance. There are no known studies that have investigated how personality is linked to the performance of internet cafes, especially in the Free State province in South Africa. Accordingly, the concentration of previous studies on personality and performance in other sectors (Dollimore & Page 2016) at the expense of the telecommunication sector provides an opportunity for further investigation of personality and performance in this sector.

The choice of the telecommuting sector, especially internet cafes, is given impetus by reports that with the advent of fourth industrial revolution (4IR revolution), the production of sophisticated handy technology tools, the proliferation of other role players in providing internet services, plus the most recent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, internet cafes are slowly losing business and face imminent closures in large numbers in the next few years (Xaba, Fang & Mthembu 2021). The need for alternative strategies to remain in business, therefore, becomes imperative. Current studies on internet cafes in Africa have concentrated on their evolution (LeBlanc & Shrum 2017) and structural and demographic variables (Rambe & Mokgosi 2016) such as age of the owner and government policies, respectively, to explain how these small businesses can maximise performance and remain competitive. What is void of these studies is failure to consider the psychological aspects of the owner-managers. Actually, to date, there is dearth of empirical evidence linking the owner-managers' personality and business performance of the internet cafes in South Africa.

Problem statement

The South African economy needs small businesses as they are part of the driving forces of the economy. However, just like small businesses in other sectors, small businesses in the telecommunication sector, such as the internet cafes, are facing competition from other role players with the advent of the 4IR. These small businesses are also facing challenges with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in lockdowns and prevented people from visiting internet cafes. Previous studies in and outside South Africa attest that small businesses (internet cafes included) fail within 2 years of inception because of lack of access to finances (Nikolaou et al. 2016) and, in some cases, proper management competencies (Gumel 2017). Researchers (Neneh 2019; Papa et al. 2018) have shown that personality can play an important role in mitigating small businesses' failure. Nonetheless, there is no known study that has been conducted within the South African context to establish the link between personality and business performance, particularly among the internet cafes.

The rest of this article is structured as follows: firstly, a brief review of related personality and business performance literatures is presented; secondly, research methodology, empirical results and discussions are provided; and finally, the conclusions of this article are provided.

Theory of the study

The study draws on strategic leadership, which focuses on the executives who have overall responsibility for an organisation – their characteristics, what they do, how they do it and, particularly, how they affect organisational outcomes (Cannella et al. 2009). Thus, this study was guided by the Strategic Leadership Theory (Finkelstein, Hambrick & Cannella 1996). The theory is guided by the idea that social science explains human actions through finding its prior determinants. It is also an antecedent of the Upper Echelon Theory by Hambrick and Mason (1984), which states that outcomes of a business are, to some extent, predicted by the background of managerial characteristics of the top level management team. In addition, the strategic leadership theory is situated within Child's (1972) strategic choice concept (Finkelstein et al. 1996), which suggests that top management is responsible for shaping, designing, comparing and choosing the best idea for solving an organisation's problems.

Objective

The study's objective is to establish the nature of the relationship between the personality of the owner-managers and the performance of internet cafes in the Free State province, South Africa.

Literature review

Personality and personality traits

Personality is defined by Akbar et al. (2020) as temperament and behavioural patterns that a person is born with. Handoko, Nugroho and Sembel (2021) also defined it as expressions of a person's mental preferences. Both definitions show that personality is a person's expression, approach or attitude towards things that happen. These definitions also indicate that personality is related to patterns of how people think and the way they feel and behave, which remain the same during their lifetime and differentiate them from others.

The first researchers to describe personality in 1936 were Allport and Odbert (1936). They identified set of words which described personality characteristics in the English language. This identification was followed by the emergence of 16 personality traits that were derived by using factor analysis and other related statistical procedures that were established by Cattell in 1946.

Consequent to the emergence of 16 personality traits, controversy on how personality develops started; some researchers believe it is inborn, while others believe it is something people learn. For example, Thomas, Chess and

Birch (1970) found that personality is inborn. This is supported by researchers such as Akbar et al. (2020) who are of the belief that personality is a foundation of temperaments and temperaments are inborn. Similarly, Trevarthen (2016) also believed that personality can be spotted as early as on infants because it is inborn. The belief that personality is inborn is emphasised in a study by Maung (2021) who also believed that personality can be spotted as early as after birth because people are born with their personalities. Be that as it may, different researchers such as Satpathy (2021) have different views regarding the origin of personality. The main controversy is between whether personality is inborn or whether personality is developed through the influence of factors such as the environment (Hernandez Duran et al. 2021). This is indicated through studies conducted by researchers such as Eysenck (1952) who found that personality is a person's character that develops and is influenced by the environment.

Granted that personality can either be inborn or influenced by the environment, it is evident that personality is a complex variable that needs more investigation in order to be understood better. To try and put more clarity on the concept, many approaches to personality including but not limited to psycho dynamic, behaviourist/learning, cultural, trait and the big five personality approaches were explored by researchers such as Boundles (2016).

The big five personality traits approach divides people's behaviour into the following segments: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness (Babajide 2015). Each of these is described in the following section, and reference is made on how they relate to the study

Neuroticism

Neuroticism is a personality trait that generally describes a person who is moody (Naik & Yadav 2017). It relates to a person who lacks emotional stability and has a certain degree of negative emotions (irritability and being commonly sad).

These types of people always want the reassurance that everything is well as they constantly worry that something could go wrong. Within the business context, one would argue that neurotic owner-managers may have a negative impact on business performance. Their irritable nature, lack of emotional stability and the above-mentioned negative characters may make it difficult to manage employees and the business as a whole.

Neurotics, however, also have positive characters such as being highly cautious which may make them good managers in business (Brooker 2020). This is supported by Cilliers and Strydom (2016) who advocated that being a cautious entrepreneur reduces the risk of failing and increases chances of succeeding in business. Consistent with previous author, Avanzi et al. (2020) hold the view that neurotics can be hard

workers even without expecting to be rewarded. Avanzi and colleagues further stated that neuroticism can be an asset if worries are channelled into an individual's work.

Conversely, there is also a premise that supports that, because a person with this personality trait easily falls into depression, they would, therefore, as a business owner-manager, not do well (Adegbuyi et al. 2018). Adegbuyi and colleagues further argued that neurotics prefer stress-free jobs because they are prone to stress. The controversy on whether neurotics are good entrepreneurs or help business performance seems to be on-going and inconclusive as evidenced above. What this study is contributing to the debate is a shift away from conceptualising firm performance in its totality, by identifying some of its influences such as establishing whether personality of owner-managers affects business performance in the telecommunications sector.

Extraversion

Extraversion is a dimension of the big five personality traits that describe a person who is intensely social (Tov, Nai & Lee 2016). It relates to people who are talkative and have a high amount of emotional expressiveness (Jensen 2016). These types of people are referred to as extroverts.

According to van den Berg et al. (2016), extraversion is a trait characterised by the tendency to experience positive emotions such as being active, energetic, talkative and enjoying social interactions. To further clarify, extroverts are observed to get their energy from interacting with others. They are classified as those with the ability to create an energetic atmosphere (Hwang, Han & Hyun 2018). In line with this, Baluku, Kikooma and Kibanja (2016) found that individuals with this personality trait are more likely to have successful small businesses. This is because being talkative, outgoing and sociable works in their advantage as they can use it to promote their businesses.

Considering the above, one can suggest that such individuals would make good owner-managers of internet cafes as they would be able to market their businesses through social links while out socialising with either business associates or consumers. Additionally, extroverts are generally known to be risk takers. Correspondingly, this is seen by Baluku et al. (2016) to be advantageous for small businesses as they hold the view that risk takers have the ability to drive and have successful small businesses. Risk taking has also been found to be an advantage in the technology industry. This is according to Mukarram, Ajmal and Saeed (2018) who found that this industry constantly has developments and therefore requires a person with a will to take a risk and make bold decisions.

The advantages of being sociable and taking risks as outlined above may create an impression that extroverts may manage to have successful businesses. This study investigates if this is likely to be accurate for internet cafes in the study context.

Openness to experience

Openness to experience is a dimension of the big five personality trait that describes a person who likes to learn new things. It is characterised by a person who has a broad range of interests and enjoys new experiences (Schwaba et al. 2018).

People with this personality trait are artistic (in areas such as music, art and poetry), highly curious, imaginative and insightful (Escolas, Ray & Escolas 2016). Examples of people with this character are those who generally try new things, intelligent and imaginative (Khan, Ahmed and Abid 2016). Because of their interest in new and different things, it can be speculated that such people would attempt opening businesses.

Correspondingly, openness to experience has been found to be advantageous in small business because people with this trait are highly creative and innovative (Franco & Prata 2019). As noted on the first chapter, because of a high rate of failure of small businesses, they need highly innovative owner-managers in order to succeed. With this in mind, openness to experience can be perceived to be beneficial for small business in the technology industry too. With the intention of testing feasibility of this idea, the relationship between openness to experience and performance of internet cafes in the proposed study context is being investigated.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness is a dimension of the big five personality traits that describes a person who is commonly friendly. It relates to people who are compassionate, kind and affectionate (Crowe, Lynam & Miller 2018). It is used to describe a person who is likeable, pleasant, considerate, warm and harmonious (Tang & Lam 2017). Furthermore, Li et al. (2016) found that agreeableness is characterised by people who are good-natured, trustful, and cooperative.

As per the term 'agreeableness', an example of this personality trait would be people who are generally willing to agree with others. In the business world, people with this personality trait often have a determination to start new businesses (Leonelli, Ceci & Masciarelli 2016). They are, however, unable to provide frank feedback to their subordinated and, therefore, tend to be ineffective managers (Xia Liu, Li & Xu 2021).

Agreeableness would therefore not be favourable in small businesses in the technology industry because in this industry, new technological ways of doing business need to be thought about seriously in terms of how they would benefit the business, before adopting them. This is critical for small business in the sector, considering that they generally operate on small budgets, and therefore, decisions made need not be costly to the business.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is also a dimension of the big five personal traits, and it describes a person who is very careful. Their traits include being organised, methodical and thorough (Roberts, Hill & Davis 2017). These types of people are very mindful of details, and they have goal-directed behaviours (Bieleke, Keller & Gollwitzer 2021). Arora and Rangnekar (2016) discovered that this personality trait reveals itself in three faces: orderliness (planful and organised), dependability (responsible and careful) and achievement orientation (hardworking and persistent).

People with this personality trait have the desire to succeed and are therefore long-term planners and have a good technical expertise. Arora and Rangnekar (2016) defined conscientiousness as a person's tendency to make plans, being organised and effective in goal setting. Research indicates that conscientiousness constantly leads to general success because people with this trait work hard in the face of challenges and can control their impulses (Setia 2018). With that said, one can conclude that conscientiousness would be an ideal personality trait for small business including those in technology industry. This is verified by Setia (2018) who found that despite challenges faced by small businesses, conscientiousness entrepreneurs are successful in starting, maintaining and expanding businesses.

Internet cafes and performance

The performance of small business, specifically internet cafes, is affected by internal factors such as attitudes of staff members which affect customer service (Syahnur & Basalamah 2019) and the speed of their server (Harris 2016).

At the same time, the performance of an internet cafe can also be influenced by numerous additional external factors including the location of the business (Montero & Balacuit 2018) and better rates offered by bigger organisations (Abdullah et al. 2018). Assessing the number of customers, financial targets, increase in net profit, increase in number of employees, increase in business units and the increase in number of diversification of services offered can be used as tools of evaluating the performance of small internet businesses against the mentioned influenced (Wibowo, Udasmoro & Noviani 2020).

The mentioned influences of the performance of internet cafes seem to be applicable across small businesses including those in the technology industry in order to increase their competition. According to Rambe and Mokhosi (2016), competition has an influence on the performance of internet cafes in the South African context.

Personality and performance measures

The performance of business has been found to be influenced by a number of factors. In addition to the factors that have been identified above, Watson et al. (2020) acknowledged personality. Research by Asbari et al. (2021) advocated that

a person's personality (their energy, the effort they put in and how hard they generally work) is bound to influence the results of whatever they work on. Consequently, Michael, Saban and Abdurahman (2016) suggested that personality is the main stimuli for business initiation, business drive, business performance and its success.

With that being said, it is important to note that businesses have challenges such as competition, technology and finances; they therefore require to be owned and managed by certain characters in order for them to succeed. In accordance with this, one may assume that certain personalities may start businesses and, therefore, make a success of them. Correspondingly, Baluku et al. (2016) found that some personalities can make businesses successful. Consequently, it can be assumed that only certain personalities can start and therefore maintain successful internet cafes.

Although the above may be true, Baluku et al. (2016) differed from this assumption and further explained that although some personalities rate high in starting businesses, they do not make successful businesses. Therefore, there are personalities that do not have a positive relationship with successful entrepreneurship even though they have a positive relationship with the initiation thereof. At the same time, there are personality traits that have a positive relationship with starting and maintaining successful businesses. Correspondingly, some personality traits do not have a relationship with either starting up or maintaining a successful business.

To demonstrate, Leonelli et al. (2016) found that agreeableness personality trait has a relationship with starting up businesses, while people with neuroticism personality have no interest in starting new businesses. Additionally Farradinna and Fadhli (2018) identified openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness to have a relationship with entrepreneurship, while neuroticism does not. Moudry and Thaichon (2020) concurred with these findings and added that extraversion, agreeableness and openness to experience are personalities that make successful businesses. This is because people with personality traits such as extraversion and openness to experience are viewed to be risk takers and can therefore endure through challenges faced by businesses (Franzer et al. 2020).

As can be seen, there seem to be a positive relationship between extraversion and business success. This is emphasised by Hwang et al. (2018) who also share the same view. Conversely, extraversion has been found not only to have a positive relationship with big organisations' success but also have the same impact for small businesses. To demonstrate, authors such as Ayoade et al. (2018) advocate that small business entrepreneurs with extraversion personality trait can build successful businesses.

Equal to extraversion, research by Franco and Prata (2019) indicated that openness to experience also has a positive

relationship with business performance. As previously mentioned, people with openness to experience personality trait have been found to have the drive to initiate businesses (Laguna & Purc 2016). In addition to this, Sarwoko and Nurfarida (2021) suggested that openness to experience is good for business because it is associated with innovativeness and creativity.

Furthermore, Runst and Thoma (2020) proposed that innovativeness is good for small businesses too and thus suggested that similar to big organisations, openness to experience has a positive relationship with small businesses too. Among the big five personality traits, it is evident that both extraversion and openness to experience are good for both big and small businesses.

Observing the above, one, however, wonders if conscientiousness could have the same effect on business performance. According to Awwad and Al-Aseer (2021), conscientiousness is indeed good for both big and small businesses. Based on this, it would be reasonable to assume that the three personality traits (conscientiousness, extraversion and openness to experience) are positively related with small business performance just as with big businesses' performance. This is re-affirmed by Baluku et al. (2016) who hold the view that conscientiousness, extraversion and openness to experience personality traits have a relation to small business success and the relationship is positive as these traits lead to successful small businesses.

Moreover, researchers including Mhlanga (2019) share the same view as above. They justify this view by indicating that individuals with conscientiousness, extraversion and openness traits are very sociable and therefore have good networking skills; they are also very driven and competent; and they are generally very creative. Correspondingly, one may well believe that these characters are, therefore, beneficial for both big businesses and small businesses which include internet cafes.

In addition to the three mentioned personality traits, there is also neuroticism and agreeableness. Although the other three personality traits seem to have a positive relationship with business performance, these two seem not to. Neuroticism is commonly associated with being anxious and pessimistic (Bech et al. 2016), and agreeableness with being warm and kind (Crowe et al. 2018). In addition to other researchers mentioned earlier in this chapter, Gridwchai et al. (2020) advocated that being warm and kind does not correlate well with business performance. This study will investigate if the relationship between business performance in the study context and neuroticism and agreeableness is also negative. In addition to this, the study investigates whether there is a positive relationship between openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness and business performance in the Free State province.

The studies cited above on the relationship between traits such as conscientiousness, extraversion and openness to

experience and business performance were, however, done in tourism and other sectors but not in technology.

In contrast, the focus of this study is in the technology sector. Within this sector, Rambe and Mokgosi (2016) believed that small internet cafe businesses are important for the economy of South Africa because of reasons such as job creation. Studies that examined the success of technology industries indicate that their success is influenced by innovation (Pan et al. 2018), software process improvement (Wu et al. 2017) and personality of owner-managers (Kerr et al. 2017).

Although evidence that personality influences the success of technology industries is available, there is lack of literature on the relationship between personalities of owner-managers of small businesses in technology-orientated sector and the performance of their businesses, especially in the South African context.

In this study, specific big five personality traits and their relation with small business performance in this industry (especially internet cafes) is, therefore, explored.

Method

The objective of this study was to establish the relationship between the personality of the owner-manager, and the performance of internet cafes in the Free State province. The said relationship was more likely to be demonstrated through statistics. Accordingly, the study adopted the quantitative approach in line with the positivist paradigm. Hypotheses were generated, and a statistical analysis was performed to explain the predicted relationships between the investigated variables, which are personality and business performance.

Population and sampling

This study's population was 110 owner-managers of all registered and paying tax internet cafes in the Free State province. The major towns in which these internet cafes are allocated are Bloemfontein, Theunissen, Brandfort, Welkom, Qwaqwa, Bethlehem, Senekal, Botshabelo, Kroonstad and Sasolburg. Using the sample size calculator, with 95% confidence level and the population of 110, the determined sample size was 86. Accordingly, 110 questionnaires were distributed; however, only 88 were returned. This represented 80% response rate which has an appropriate confidence level.

Data collection procedure

The study's data were collected through the use of questionnaires. The questionnaires, which were self-administered, had items measured on a Likert type scale ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree'. (Chen et al. 2020). The questionnaire was administered by the researcher among owner-managers of internet cafes in the Free State province. Numerical data were statistically analysed in order to explain the hypothesised relationship.

Data were cleaned and captured using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21. Both descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions, averages and percentages, and inferential statistics, such as logistics regression, were used to analyse data. This data collection process took a period of 6 months, with only 88 questionnaires returned, out of the 110 distributed – this represented an 80% response rate.

Instrument

The study used self-administered questionnaires as a measuring instrument.

Validity and reliability

A Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test the reliability of the variables in this study. In order to ensure validity of the study, the following measures were taken:

- *Content validity* – The researcher made use of experts such as psychologists and experts in human resources to check if all content in all areas of the questionnaire related to the aimed purpose of the study.
- *Construct validity* – In this study, the construct validity was assured through an extensive literature review. The review assisted in the process of defining and explaining the key concepts under investigation, which was also done in line with Furr and Heuckeroth (2019) suggestions for insuring construct validity.
- *Face validity* – The researcher ensured this by giving the questionnaire to a few fellow students to determine the appropriateness of the font size, language, clarity of instructions, how long it takes to complete the questionnaire, availability of adequate workspace for participants to complete and whether questions were not ambiguous. The responses provided were positive in that they affirmed the face validity of the questionnaire.

Ethical considerations

The following ethical standards were adhered to throughout the study: Firstly, all participants were informed about the study being undertaken. Accordingly, participants were informed about the purpose of the study in order to ensure that they make an informed decision on whether to participate or not. Secondly, the researcher clarified to participants that their participation was anonymous. Thus, participants were not requested to complete any detail that could identify them. Lastly, the researcher highlighted the issue of confidentiality to each and every participant by explaining that the information provided was not going to be disclosed to any external parties and would solely be used for academic purposes. The researcher further assured that only information agreed to be disclosed was included in the final study. In addition, the researcher assured the participants that access to the questionnaires was limited to the data analyst, the supervisor and the researcher only. The masters project was approved by the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee (FRIC) at the Central University of Technology, Free State (FMSEC05/18).

Findings

The descriptive statistical results for the sample are demonstrated in Table 1. The response rates are demonstrated on Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, there was a fair balance in representation by both male respondents (53.4%) and female respondents (46.6%). Only 9.1% of the respondents were below 24 years of age with the other age groups above 24 years. Most of the respondents had less than 5 years of operating as owner–manager of an internet cafe as only 38.6% had more than 5 years' experience. The majority of the respondents also had education to the certificate level (46.6%) with 35.2% being holders of diplomas. Most of the respondents has been operating their internet businesses for up to 4 years with those with 2 years of operating having the highest frequency of 30 (34.1%). There is a fair distribution across the other periods of operation.

As far as the construct of openness to experience is concerned, while most respondents indicated that they are thoughtful and imaginative (84.1%) and are open to new ideas (94.3%), most lack a sense of arts as only 29.5% indicated that they liked poetry and only 30.7% like art.

The items of this construct had low percentages of those agreeing or strongly agreeing meaning that the trait of neuroticism was not a dominant trait in the sample. Although this may be the case, as can be seen, 'Q16: I doubt things easily' scored the highest. This may be attributed to the popular belief that neurotics are generally sceptical. To explain, Maciantowicz and Zajenkowski (2018) hold the view that there is a strong correlation between neuroticism and narcissism. Maciantowicz and his colleague further explained that narcissism is a disorder that makes a person very doubtful, and therefore, neurotics are highly sceptical people, and in this study, this means that the owners–managers of internet cafes in the Free State are generally people who doubt things easily.

The construct of conscientiousness had high percentages of respondents who were agreeing or strongly agreeing. As far as paying attention to details is concerned, 95.5% were positive with all the other items having at least 73% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This later turned out to be a very strong driver of business performance as the sections that follow will show. Table 4 indicates that most owner–managers paid attention to details.

The construct of agreeableness had moderate percentages of respondents who were agreeing or strongly agreeing. A fairly high 78.4% of the sample indicated that they do not avoid contacts with others with 62.5% saying that they make friends easily and 72.7% feeling comfortable around people. The lower percentages were on items that relate to talking and drawing attention to oneself.

The construct of introversion is one of the two negative traits covered in this study, and as with neuroticism, it also garnered low percentages on its items. This means that it is not a dominant trait in the sample, hence in the population studied. The only item that had a high percentage-agreeing is the fact that some had small group of close friends (70.5%).

The construct of business performance indicated that, generally, the respondents were happy with the performance of their businesses as indicated by the percentages of who were happy with matters around customers, that is, 79.5% had good to excellent customer growth, 84.1% had increase in customer compliments, 96.6% were able to solve customer complaints on time, 85.2% had fast servers and 79.5% had increases in sales. Moderate percentages also indicated that they had profit before tax (62.5%) and profit after tax (53.4%). In general, business performance was not bad. With these results, one can assume that good business performance may be attributed to the fact that a business like internet cafe relies on customers, and every effort is put in place to ensure loyalty of patronage.

Discussion

The research objective of the study was to determine whether there is a relationship between personality and business performance. The results in statistical analysis, indicated on Table 1 to Table 4, show that there is a relationship between the personality of owner–managers and the performance of internet cafes in the Free State province. This is demonstrated through findings of a strong positive correlation between personality traits such as conscientiousness, openness to experience and agreeableness and business performance, while business performance was found to be significantly and negatively correlated with neuroticism.

TABLE 1: Sample statistics of the respondents.

Demographic variable	Frequency	Percentage
Q1: Gender		
Male	47	53.4
Female	41	46.6
Q2: Age (years)		
Below 24	8	9.1
25–30	24	27.3
31–39	33	37.5
40+	23	26.1
Q3: How long have you been owner–manager of an internet cafe? (years)		
< 2	24	27.3
2–5	30	34.1
5+	34	38.6
Q4: Highest level of formal educational qualifications you have completed		
Certificate	41	46.6
Diploma	31	35.2
Bachelor's degree	12	13.6
Master's degree	4	4.5
Q5: How long has your internet been operating? (years)		
1	16	18.2
2	30	34.1
3	22	25.0
4	20	22.7

TABLE 2: Descriptive statistics for the construct of openness to experience.

Openness to experience	Disagree or strongly disagree		Neutral		Agree or strongly agree		Mean	Standard deviation	Latent factor coefficient
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%			
Q6: I like poetry	33	37.5	29	33.0	26	29.5	2.90	1.33	0.902
Q7: I have a brilliant imagination	2	2.3	12	13.6	74	84.1	4.35	0.80	0.817
Q8: I enjoy hearing new ideas	3	3.4	2	2.3	83	94.3	4.59	0.75	0.817
Q9: I look for a deeper meaning in things	22	25.0	11	12.5	55	62.5	3.52	1.42	0.795
Q10: I like art	35	39.8	26	29.5	27	30.7	2.85	1.40	0.748

Note: Cronbach's alpha = 0.620.

TABLE 3: Descriptive statistics for the construct of neuroticism.

Neuroticism	Disagree or strongly disagree		Neutral		Agree or strongly agree		Mean	Standard deviation	Latent factor coefficient	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%				
Q11: I am not relaxed most of the time	44	50.0	24	27.3	20	22.7	2.58	1.33	0.521	
Q12: I do not like myself	81	92.0	4	4.5	3	3.4	1.42	0.83	0.425	
Q13: I panic easily	47	53.4	25	28.4	16	18.2	2.35	1.18	0.675	
Q14: I do not easily get irritated	36	40.9	24	27.3	28	31.8	2.83	1.20	0.442	
Q15: I have frequent mood swings	58	65.9	20	22.7	10	11.4	2.15	1.15	0.483	
Q16: I doubt things easily	26	29.5	29	33.0	33	37.5	3.11	1.18	0.446	
Q17: I do not remain calm under pressure	70	79.5	15	17.0	3	3.4	1.80	0.85	0.488	
Cronbach's alpha								0.499		

TABLE 4: Descriptive statistics for the construct of conscientiousness.

Conscientiousness	Disagree or strongly disagree		Neutral		Agree or strongly agree		Mean	Standard deviation	Latent factor coefficient
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%			
Q18: I pay attention to details	1	1.1	3	3.4	84	95.5	4.49	0.63	0.431
Q19: I make plans and stick to them	4	4.5	15	17.0	69	78.4	4.15	0.86	0.834
Q20: I finish what I start	0	0.0	15	17.0	73	83.0	4.35	0.76	0.855
Q21: I complete tasks successfully	0	0.0	15	17.0	73	83.0	4.27	0.74	0.788
Q22: I do not tend to waste time	12	13.6	11	12.5	65	73.9	3.94	1.14	0.658

Note: Cronbach's alpha = 0.756.

TABLE 5: Descriptive statistics for the construct of agreeableness.

Agreeableness	Disagree or strongly disagree		Neutral		Agree or strongly agree		Mean	Standard deviation	Latent factor coefficient
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%			
Q23: I do not avoid contacts with others	7	8.0	12	13.6	69	78.4	4.13	1.00	0.558
Q24: I make friends easily	12	13.6	21	23.9	55	62.5	3.84	1.18	0.572
Q25: I talk a lot	15	17.0	29	33.0	44	50.0	3.53	1.25	0.673
Q26: I talk to a lot of people at a party	20	22.7	26	29.5	42	47.7	3.36	1.24	0.812
Q27: I Do not like to draw attention to myself	29	33.0	23	26.1	36	40.9	3.08	1.36	-
Q28: I feel comfortable around people	2	2.3	22	25.0	64	72.7	4.02	0.82	0.666

Note: Cronbach's alpha (without Q27) = 0.703.

TABLE 6: Descriptive statistics for the construct of introversion.

Introversion	Disagree or strongly disagree		Neutral		Agree or strongly agree		Mean	Standard deviation	Latent factor coefficient
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%			
Q29: I have a small group of close friends	15	17.0	11	12.5	62	70.5	3.75	1.21	0.634
Q30: Being around too many people drains my energy	43	48.9	23	26.1	22	25.0	2.65	1.17	0.570
Q31: People find it difficult to get to know me	50	56.8	17	19.3	21	23.9	2.53	1.30	0.761
Q32: I prefer to do things alone	34	38.6	22	25.0	32	36.4	3.07	1.36	0.763
Q33: I enjoy having time to myself	15	17.0	21	23.9	52	59.1	3.64	1.22	0.825

Note: Cronbach's alpha = 0.759.

To clarify the above, the results show that agreeableness (mean = 3.78) and openness to experience (mean = 3.64) are not significantly different ($t = 1.246$, $df = 174$, $p = 0.214$), while all other pairwise comparisons of the other traits are significantly different at the 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$). To some extent, research shows similar behaviour in people with agreeableness and openness to experience. For example, a study by van Scheppingen et al. (2019)

found that people with agreeableness and openness to experience personality traits have similar interaction styles. In addition, Israr and Saleem (2018) found that there is a positive correlation between agreeableness, openness to experience and the intention to become an entrepreneur. Moreover, Dimitriadis et al. (2017) found that these traits trigger creativity in the entrepreneurial context. It is, therefore, not surprising that data collected

TABLE 7: Descriptive statistics for the construct of business performance.

Business performance	Poor		Fair		Good or excellent		Mean	Standard deviation	Latent factor coefficient
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%			
Q45: Customer growth	2	2.3	16	18.2	70	79.5	3.11	0.78	0.863
Q46: Profit before tax	3	3.4	30	34.1	55	62.5	2.77	0.78	0.854
Q47: Profit after tax	4	4.5	37	42.0	47	53.4	2.63	0.78	0.811
Q48: Increase in customer compliments	4	4.5	10	11.4	74	84.1	3.17	0.81	0.585
Q49: Solving customer complaints on time	0	0.0	3	3.4	85	96.6	3.52	0.57	0.451
Q50: The speed of our server	1	1.1	12	13.6	75	85.2	3.30	0.75	0.471
Q51: Increase in sales of (e. g. data, faxing, photocopying)	3	3.4	15	17.0	70	79.5	3.15	0.82	0.718

Note: Cronbach's alpha = 0.816.

from respondents showed no significant difference in the study's context as well.

Additionally, a correlation and regression analysis was used in order to evaluate the effects of the personality traits of owner-managers on the performance of internet cafes. The results show that business performance is significantly and negatively correlated with neuroticism ($\text{corr} = -2.67$, $p = 0.012$) and with conscientiousness ($\text{corr} = 0.539$, $p < 0.001$) and agreeableness ($\text{corr} = 0.219$, $p = 0.041$). Here, conscientiousness has the highest effect size ($\text{corr} = 0.539$), while openness to experience and introversion do not have a significant impact on business performance ($p > 0.05$). The significant negative correlation between neuroticism and business performance in the study's context is not surprising. This may be attributed to a finding by Harb and Alhayajneh (2019) that neurotics do not find technology to be useful. Accordingly, neurotics would not have much interest in pursuing a business in a technology sector. Nevertheless, conscientiousness and agreeableness, as reflected in this study's findings, have been found to influence business performance in a positive way (Wang & Chen 2020). In addition, studies show that people who score high on agreeableness and conscientiousness influence business performance positively in areas such as marketing (Caliskan 2019).

Implications for further research

The purpose of this study was to investigate a relationship between the personality of owner-managers and the performance of internet cafés. However, the study was only done on internet cafés in the Free State province. Future studies could investigate the relationship between personality and small business performance in other small businesses and not only internet cafes in the Free State province but other provinces as well. Future studies could also use the pragmatic research approach in order for respondents to provide more insightful, detailed and meaningful responses, especially on performance of business. Lastly, future studies could also focus on large organisations as the constructs under investigation could manifest themselves more in such businesses.

Recommendations

This article seeks to promote the growth and survival of small businesses in the telecommunication industry

through profiling owner-manager personalities and business performance of internet cafes in the Free State province, South Africa. Based on the findings, it is recommended that people with conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience be encouraged to pursue businesses in the technology industry. The results indicated a positive relationship between owner-managers of internet cafes and the three stated traits, especially conscientiousness as it is a dominant trait. Thus, funders of entrepreneurs in the internet cafes business should profile the potential owner-managers to ensure that the entrepreneurs possess these traits.

Conclusion

The existing literature focusing on the study was reviewed in order to theorise the proposed relationships based on previous studies. It was also meant to contextualise the study in a particular chosen theory and provide a justification thereof. The literature review outlined different aspects of personality, and different ways of measuring business performance were reviewed. The review led to the establishment of the relationship between personality and business performance in general. The review also indicated that, in general, there is dearth of empirical evidence on the relationship between all two variables, especially in the study's context.

Although there was not enough literature on the relationship between personality and business performance, it is reasonable to conclude that, for the purpose of this study, there is a relationship between the stated variables. This is because the reviewed literature revealed that conscientiousness emerged in literature as an ideal personality trait for small businesses including those in the technology industry. Therefore, it was noted that there could be a relationship between conscientiousness and the performance of the internet cafes. On the contrary, literature also proved that there are personality traits that lead to negative relationships. For example, agreeableness was found not to be favourable to the performance of businesses in the technology industry and the conclusion was that it would not have an effect on business performance.

In addition to the above stated conclusions, the results of the study revealed that the most dominant personality traits of owner-managers of internet cafes were the positive traits, namely, conscientiousness, agreeableness

and openness to experience. The most dominant trait was conscientiousness, which was found to be significantly positively correlated with business performance together with agreeableness. However, openness to experience and introversion did not have a significant impact on business performance. It can therefore be concluded that conscientiousness influences business performance.

Moreover, this research examined two objectives using quantitative analysis techniques. Each of the objective is presented below with a summary of findings and conclusions related to it.

Objective one: To determine the dominant personality traits of owner–managers of internet cafes in the Free State province

Results show that the most dominant personality traits of owner–manager of internet cafes were the positive traits, namely, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience. The most dominant trait was conscientiousness with a mean of 4.24 and a standard deviation of 0.6.

Conscientiousness was the trait with the highest minimum score among the respondents (min = 2.80). As can be seen, most owner–managers have the same personality traits, which could mean that it takes a certain kind of people to own or manage an internet cafe. Therefore, it can be concluded that the three personality traits are dominant among the owner–managers of internet cafes in the Free State province.

Objective two: To determine the extent to which dominant personality traits of owner–manager correlate or predict with the performance of internet cafes in the Free State province

The results show that business performance is significantly and negatively correlated with neuroticism (corr = -2.67, $p = 0.012$), significantly positively correlated with conscientiousness (corr = 0.539, $p < 0.001$) and agreeableness (corr = 0.219, $p = 0.041$), with conscientiousness having the highest effect size (corr = 0.539). However, openness to experience and introversion did not have a significant impact on business performance ($p > 0.05$). It can be concluded that conscientiousness influences business performance.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

N.T. was responsible for the conceptualisation and writing of literature review. C.C. assisted with the methodology and construction of the questionnaire.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, N.T., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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