

# A Study on the Relationship Between Narrative Engagement and Sensation Behaviour Among Young Adults

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## Abstract

The present study explored the association between narrative engagement and sensation seeking behaviour among young adults utilizing a quantitative, cross sectional, correlational research design. In this study two scales are used, the narrative engageability scale (Rick W. Busselle and Helena Bilandzic (2009) and the sensation seeking scale (Zukerman et al 1964) a portion of it was later taken and developed into a scale by the American Psychological Association (APA) were administered to 299 young adults (age range 18-30) in Tamil Nadu, India. The descriptive statistics indicated that on average respondents reported a level of narrative engageability of 57.67 (SD = 16.284) and a level of sensation seeking behaviour of 5.43 (SD = 2.070). There was a slight but positive correlation between narrative engagement and sensation seeking behaviour ( $r = .128, p = 0.27$ ). The alternate hypothesis is accepted, thereby indicating the influence of thrill and risk seeking behaviour by narrative immersive experience. Limitations include regional focus and exclusion of older adults/uneducated participants. Future research could include diverse population and other psychosocial factors such as social conformity.

**Keywords:** Narrative engagement, sensation seeking behaviour, young adults.

## 1. Introduction

Narrative engagement refers to a disarmingly compelling psychological condition in which people seem completely immersed in the story, forgetting the existence of the real world and indeed forming strong affective and cognitive ties to characters and events. It is a subjective feeling of being lost in the story, attention, emotion and imagination combine to form a strong mental image according to Busselle. It is a multidimensional process and involves the creation of mental models, in which, people construct and revise their meaning of the story, and narrative understanding which incorporates the understanding of events and motivation of characters. Attention focus enables the listeners to become completely engaged with the story, thus having minimal distraction and emotional engagement causes them to identify with characters and feel their emotions. These aspects combined create the sense of narrative presence, of being there in the story, and can sometimes seem like a flow-like trance in which time is lost and the self awareness minimized. A significant consequence of narrative engagement is its persuasive effect because highly involved people will be less prone to actively oppose hidden messages embedded in a narrative and

stories can affect beliefs and attitudes in a subtle way. It is also an important factor of emotional regulation in that it can deepen emotion and offer a safe zone to process emotion, catharsis and allowing automatic and conscious emotional reactions that allow resilience and development. Sensation seeking is closely related to sensation seeking, a personality characteristic characterized by Marvin Zuckerman as the wish to have new, complicated, and intense experiences, including the risk-taking. This characteristic involves thrill seeking, curiosity of new experience, social disinhibition and boredom intolerance. The high sensation seekers would like high speed emotionally tense storylines because they demand more stimulation. Narrative engagement fulfills this desire through providing an active experience but without the dangers of the real world.

These variables are also linked through emotion regulation, where the high sensation seekers (who have more intense emotions and poorer control) rely on the narratives to deal with the tension within and attain the balance. With the modern digital world, especially the more interactive features of virtual reality and interactive storytelling, this connection has become more prominent, especially with the younger generations. Although these activities may decrease the risky behavior by offering harmless alternatives to excitement, overexposure to extremely stimulating or discontinuous information may cause mental exhaustion, shortened attention span, stress, and addiction to extreme excitement, commonly referred to as brain rot. It can have a detrimental impact on well-being, behavior, sleep, and relationships, and ordinary interactions in the interactions appear to be less enriching. But in the case of meaningful content, narrative involvement along with sensation seeking can increase empathy, emotional intelligence and prosocial action. Finally, it is a matter of balance, and rational interaction makes the storytelling an instrument of emotional and cognitive and social learning.

### **Definition of Narrative Engagement**

Larkey and Hecht (2010) argue that narrative engagement is essentially a “process of developing a sense of self through narratives, about making sense of experience, and about expressing these identities and interpretation through social interaction”

### **Definition of Sensation seeking behaviour**

Zuckerman has explained Sensation Seeking Behaviour as a personality trait defined as the need for varied, novel, and complex sensations and experiences and the willingness to take Physical, legal, social and financial risks for the sake of such experiences

## **2. Review of literature**

**YoungJu Shin (2020).** Narrative involvement and interpersonal communication involving substance use on adolescent substance use behaviours; this research investigated the role played by entertainment-education (E-E) and social circles in drug resistance. It involved 225 8<sup>th</sup> -grade students in rural Pennsylvania who were using the keepin' it REAL curriculum. It was found that there was a significant and positive correlation between the identification with main characters and refusal self-efficacy which subsequently resulted in a reduction in the 30-day substance use ( $p < 0.05$ ). Conversely, the interest and realism levels failed to literally predict self-confidence ( $p > 0.05$ ). Teens of greater refusal self-efficacy were less exposed to substance activity particularly in situations that were accompanied by regular and comfortable drug talk with parents or friends ( $p < 0.001$ ). Since the identification with prosocial role models by a student affects their level of confidence as well as interpersonal support impacts the behavioural results, the promotion of the narrative immersion along with the free family dialogue seems

to be the essential prerequisite to the effective prevention in the context of social cognitive and primary socialization theories.

**Bilandzic et al. (2019)** created a 12-item multidimensional measure based on four different datasets of size of  $N = 339$ ,  $N = 514$ ,  $N = 121$ , and  $N = 151$ . The researchers used exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to establish four important dimensions, including propensity to presence, emotional engageability, propensity to suspense/curiosity, and the easiness of accepting unrealism. The scale had good psychometric characteristics and it was found to have good model fit and reliability with varied data sets. Moreover, the study was able to demonstrate convergent validity as it revealed that narrative engageability was positively associated with the current Transportability Scale and associated attributes, such as need for affect, empathy, and sympathy. Lastly, the researchers also established the predictive validity of the scale by showing how successfully it correlated with state-level narrative engagement and moderated the influence of the stories on story-consistent beliefs.

**Erickson, Dal Cin, and Byl (2019)** examines the effect of the movement toward the consumption of traditional episodic television to a more modern phenomenon of binge viewing on services such as Netflix and Hulu on the reactions of the audience, namely in terms of narrative transportation and parasocial relations. Based on the existing theories of media effects, the literature claims that binge watching is watching three or more episodes one after another (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014) and that there are various reasons people engage in binge viewing, namely, hedonic pleasure, relaxation, and social utility (Pittman and Sheehan, 2015). The authors rely on the Transportation Theory (Green and Brock, 2000) to indicate that the absence of breaks and the abundance of content that characterizes bingeing helps a viewer to get away into a story. Moreover, the paper investigates the concepts of Parasocial Relationships (PSR) (Horton and Wohl, 1956), where the writers argue that due to a binge format, the speed of disclosure of characters and the diminishing of uncertainty enables individuals to have stronger one-sided relationships with the media personalities. These theories were proved to be effective by the results of the experiment, as it was observed that binge watching has a strong influence on the state transportation and the strength of parasocial relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) in comparison with episodic viewing. Most importantly, the study discovered that such heightened ties are long-lasting and not short-lived as observed even a week post viewing ( $p < 0.05$ ). In determining that format of viewing enhances engagements, the study concludes that binge watching can essentially enhance the magnitude of media effects on beliefs and behaviors of audiences since engagement is a familiar predictor of media effects.

**(Spicer et al., 2022)** examined the gateway hypothesis on 1,102 UK adults and concluded that 19.87% of the participants themselves reported a causal relationship between the purchasing of loot boxes and gambling. By applying Pearson product-moment correlations( $r$ ), as well as the Kendall tau of spending and harm, to examine the relationship between spending and harm, it was identified that significant positive relations exist between loot box spend and problem gambling severity ( $r = 0.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and problem video gaming ( $r = 0.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Besides, the researchers conducted Chi-Squared tests ( $\chi^2$ ) and Wilcoxon tests to compare the groups and found that those who reported gateway effect had much higher scores of Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) (Mean = 6.46) compared to those who did not (Mean = 2.31), and Bayesian analysis revealed overwhelming support of such differences ( $BF > 100$ ). A content analysis supports the results with references to sensation-seeking and normalization, which means that, despite the inability of loot boxes to affect all gamers, it is related to measurable psychological risks and augmented expenditure propensities ( $p < .05$ ) in a vulnerable minority segment.

(Howell et al., 2025) investigated the effect of narrative engagement on science communication through a randomized assignment of a representative sample of 781 U.S. adults to view one of four short documentary science movies. Applying ordinary least squares (OLS) regression and Pearson product-moment correlations ( $r$ ), the researchers discovered that the predictability of narrative engagement, which includes the two concepts of narrative transportation and character identification was a predictable and significant one in a variety of positive outcomes, such as increased factual knowledge recall (e.g.,  $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < .001$  in one movie) and increased perceived knowledge (with coefficients ranging between  $\beta = .54$  and  $\beta = .58$ ,  $p < .001$  in all movies). Additionally, both the findings revealed strong positive correlation, with narrative engagement and interest in learning more (between  $\beta = .74$  and  $\beta = .79$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and significant correlations with identification with science (up to  $\beta = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and perceived value of science (up to  $\beta = .58$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The results indicated that film storytelling could be useful in learning science and emotional appeal among the various demographics and without distortion of fact.

### 3. Research methodology

#### Research question

The study was attempted with the motive to find the relationship between Narrative engagement and Sensation seeking among young adults, basically to understand how they are influenced by media and narration.

#### Objectives

- To evaluate the level of Narrative Engagement among young adults using the Narrative Engageability Scale (NES).
- To assess the level of Sensation Seeking Behaviour tendency among young adults using the Sensation Seeking Behaviour Scale.
- To understand the relationship between Narrative Engagement and Sensation Behaviour among young adults

#### Hypotheses.

H1. There is a significant relationship between Narrative engagement and sensation seeking behaviour among young adults.

#### Research Design

The current study followed a quantitative correlational research design to identify the relationship of the Narrative Engagement and Sensation-seeking Behaviour in young adult. Data was collected from the participants using a cross-sectional research design at one point in time

#### Sample

The study will have a sample of 299 young adults, comprising students from various institutions along with employed young adults who like books movies and web series. The study participants will be sampled through the snowball sampling and convenient method.

### TOOLS USED

#### 1. Sensation-Seeking Scale

The Sensation-Seeking Scale (SSS) is a psychological measure of the propensity of an individual to pursue novel, complex and intense experiences and to be willing to take risks to obtain such stimulation, as postulated on the arousal theory, which was created by Marvin Zuckerman (1978; revised 1994). The used version of the current study is a modification and adaptation of the existing materials on the same subject

published by the American Psychological Association (TOPSS unit lesson plan, 2010) where the respondent answers 13 forced-choice questions (A or B) about their preferences or behavior. The full scale has been shown to be psychometrically acceptable to good, both in terms of Cronbachs alpha (0.70-0.86) and test-retest (0.80), although the adapted version with 13 items will have relatively lower internal consistency, and the scale has strong construct and criterion validity, as evidenced by the relationships it has with personality traits and risk-taking behavior.

## 2. Narrative Engageability Scale

The Narrative Engageability Scale (NES) was created by Helena Bilandzic, Freya Sukalla, Cornelia Schnell, Matthias R. Hastall, and Rick W. Busselle (2019) as a 12-item self-report scale that is multidimensional and aims at assessing the trait propensity of an individual to be engaged with narratives. The scale was created with the help of multiple studies carried out by exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. The scale has good reliability with Cronbach alpha of about 0.83 to 0.90 as the overall scale and 0.63 to 0.87 as sub scale in the various samples. The scale has strong construct and convergent validity in terms of validity.

### Inclusion Criteria

- Young adults who are aged between 18 to 30
- Young adults who enjoy books, series and movies.
- Willingness to participate and provide informed consent

### Exclusion Criteria

- Young adults with marked psychiatric or neurological disorders.
- Young adults who do not seem to enjoy movies, books, or web series.
- Young adults who do not give consent to participate in this study.

### Statistical Analysis

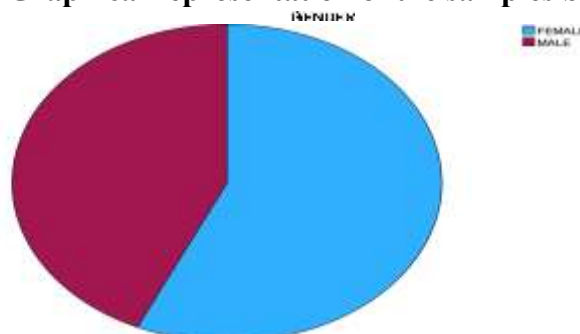
The data collected was evaluated utilizing the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). A covariance analysis was done using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to provide both strength and direction (i.e., positive and negative) for each variable's relationship with one another.

## 4. RESULT

This chapter discusses the interpretation of the data analysis collected for the study, which focuses on examining and understand the relationship between narrative engagement and sensation seeking behaviour among young adults. The results of the collected data is presented using the analysis of descriptive statistics, Pearson-Product moment correlation and graphical representations.

### 4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF THE POPULATION

Figure 4.1 Graphical representation of the samples based on gender



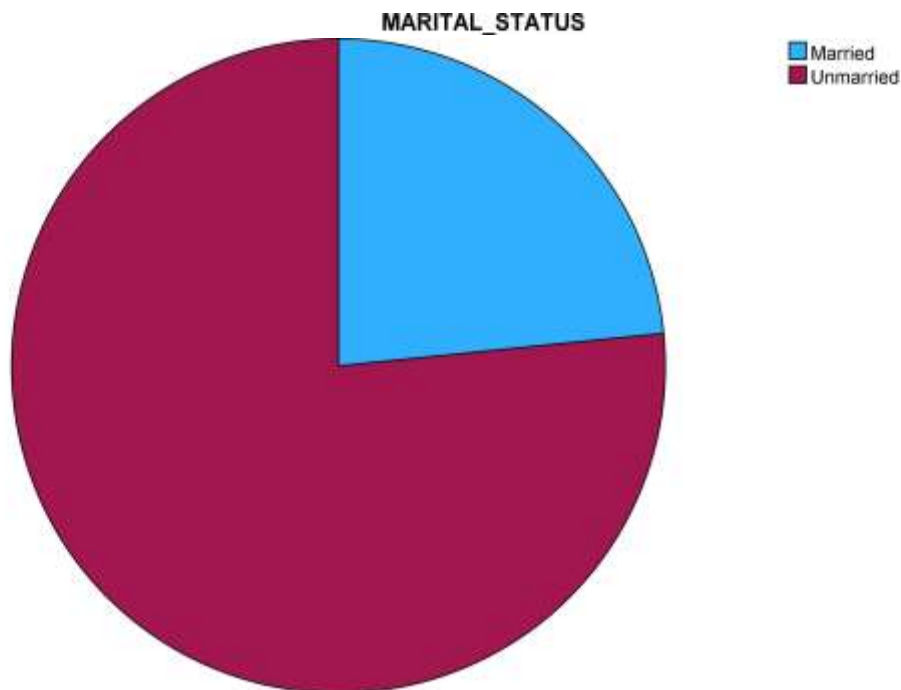
**Table 4.1.1 Gender of the participants**

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	129	43.1
Female	170	56.9

Participants Gender Distribution (Fig. 4.1 and Tab. 4.1.1) Most of the sample consists of female participants (56.9%), followed by male participants (43.1%). Such a distribution highlights a disparity, leaning towards females having committed more to the narrative of the particular study.

**Figure 4.2**

*Pictorial representation of the sample based on marital status*

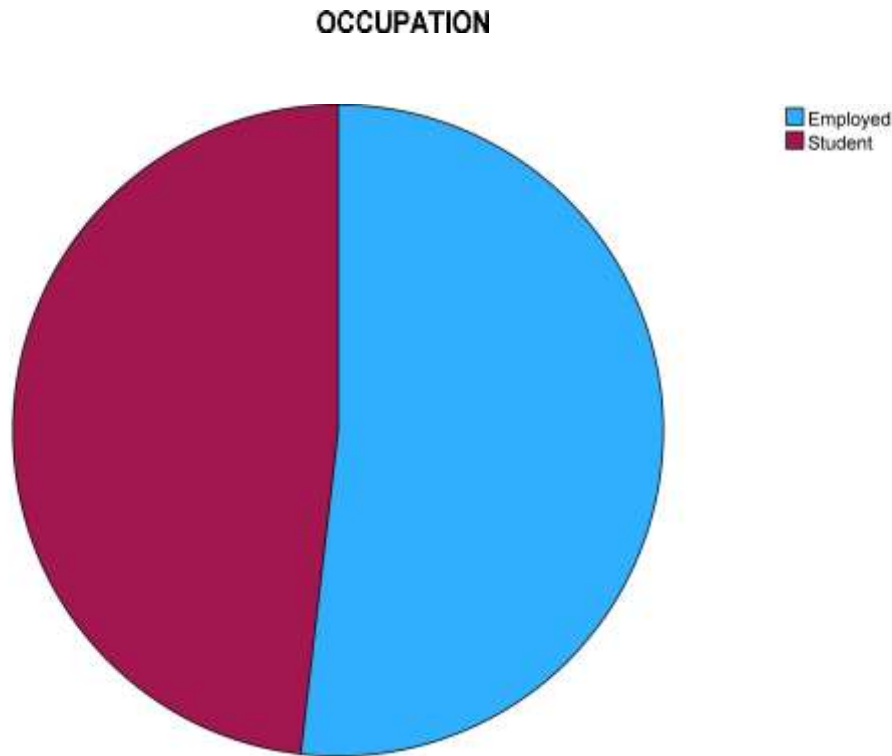


**Table 4.1.2 Marital status of the participants**

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	70	23.4
Unmarried	229	76.6

The figure 4.2 and the table 4.1.2 depicts that marital status of the samples. The majority (76.6%) of the participants are unmarried. Only a quarter (23.4%) of people are married. The majority of the sample is unmarried suggesting that young people who are not married tend to be focused on sensation-seeking behaviours influenced by narrative engagement. Since the population included only young adults between 18 and 30, likely that married people are also involved in sensation-seeking behaviour.

**Figure 4.3**  
*Pictorial representation of occupation of the participants.*



**Table 4.1.3 Occupation of the participants**

Occupation	Frequency	percentage
Student	144	48.2
Employed	155	51.8

The figure 4.3 and the table 4.1.3 depicts the occupation of the participants. It is observed that the data are almost equal, with only a slight difference. The highest is employed participants (51.8%) and the student participants (48.2%). This data reveals that regardless of the occupation status of the young adults, they tend to enjoy immersive stories, narration and risk taking behaviour. This can be evidently argued due to presence of excessive usage of social media and influence through it.

#### 4.2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

**Table 4.2.1**

**Indicates the descriptive statistics, the mean value and standard deviation of Narrative engageability and Sensation seeking behaviour**

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Narrative Engagement	57.67	16.284	299
Sensation seeking behaviour	5.43	2.070	299

Table 4.2.1 shows the descriptive statistics of the data. Narrative Engagement Scale has mean value of 57.67 and standard deviation of 16.284 with sample of 299. Sensation Seeking behaviour has mean value of 5.43 and standard deviation of 2.070 with sample of 299.

**TABLE 4.2.2**

Correlational analysis showing the positive relationship between Narrative Engagement and Sensation Seeking Behaviour among young adults.

		NARRATIVE ENGAGEMENT	SENSATION SEEKING
NARRATIVE ENGAGEMENT	Pearson Correlation	1	.128*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.027
	N	299	299
SENSATION SEEKING	Pearson Correlation	.128*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.027	
	N	299	299

**\*Correlation is significant at the 0.5 level (2-tailed).**

The relationship between Narrative engagement and Sensation seeking behaviour in young adults was studied by using Pearson correlation to analyse the correlation. The results indicated that there is a weak but significant relationship between narrative engagement and sensation seeking behaviour ( $r = .128$ ,  $p = 0.27$ ) meaning that an increased level of narrative engagement creates an increased level of sensation seeking behaviour among young adults. That implies that individuals who are more engaged in any activities of narration may as well have exciting, dangerous actions.

Hypotheses testing

H1 – There is a significant relationship between narrative engagement and sensation seeking among young adults is accepted.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The current research paper was intended to investigate the correlation between narrative engagement and sensation-seeking behaviour in young adults.

Narrative engagement is the extent to which a person gets emotionally, imaginatively and cognitively engaged with a story. It may consist of immersion, emotional identification with the character, attention, and transportation to the fictional world.

Sensation-seeking behaviour is a personality trait that has been defined by seeking risky, novel, intense and stimulating experience even when the potential of the experience can be immensely risky; they like doing it.

The fact that the relationship is positive means that sensation seekers might be attracted more by the immersive and emotionally provoking stories. Narratives can be vicarious, which includes adventure, thrill, emotional intensity, and the new activities that can be desirable to those with a high level of sensation seeking. The low yet meaningful correlation indicates that sensation seeking is one of the factors of narrative involvement, though not the sole one. This relationship could be mediated or moderated by other psychological variables.

The sensation seekers generally need a greater degree of stimulation in order to have an optimal level of arousal. Such psychological need can be satisfied with the help of immersive narratives that can be considered a safe but stimulating form. In such a way, sensation-seekers can be more inclined towards getting deeply absorbed in narrative content.

Nevertheless, the rather low strength of the correlation indicates that the storytelling activity depends on several factors other than sensation seeking. Empathy, imagination, emotional intelligence, cognitive absorption, preference of a genre, and situational context are some of the variables that might play an important role in immersion in the narrative.

The result indicates that the effects of personality traits in media engagement patterns are real, although the narrative immersion is a complex psychological process. Sensation seeking helps to cause engagement tendencies, but not single-handedly.

## 6. Summary

The current research was performed in order to investigate how narrative engagement and sensation seeking behaviour are correlated in young adults. Under the study, quantitative research design was used, and a total sample of 299 respondents was used to obtain the data.

The participants were divided in a gender proportion that showed that there were 170 (56.9%) females and 129 (43.1%) males thus the female respondents were slightly more represented in the study. In the regard of occupational status, there were 144 students and 145 employed people, which is almost equal representation of both groups. Although they were in various stages of life, the outcome was of significance, possibly since all the participants are of the same age group. Occupational status especially applies in this research as students might be more exposed to narrative media (books, movies, web series, social networks, and digital campaigns) but employed people might create a narrative depending on the amount of free time.

Regarding marital status, 229 and 70 participants were unmarried and married respectively. Sensation seeking behaviour and narrative engagement may be affected by marital status. Single participants, can be more exploratory and also offered the freedom to the society to be open to new experiences. Likewise narrative engagement can be altered due to the alteration in the roles and responsibilities of the life of the individual where the case is different in both categories.

The relationship between narratives engagement and the sensation seeking behaviour was analysed using Pearson product moment correlation. The correlation analysis showed that the variables were positively related to each other ( $r = .128$ ,  $p = .027$ ,  $N = 299$ ). The relationship between the values is statistically significant since the p-value received is not as large as the level of significance ( $p < .05$ ).

The relationship is however, weak as shown by the small correlation coefficient. This indicates that the participants that received greater amounts of narrative engagement would have a slightly greater sensation-seeking tendency. Alternative hypothesis is accepted.

## CONCLUSION

On the basis of the research results, it can be determined that positive relationship that is statistically significant between narrative engagement and sensation seeking is present among young adults. Even though the size of the correlation was moderate, the statistical significance of the relationship indicates that there is a meaningful correlation between narrative engagement and sensation seeking behaviour among the young adults.

These findings essentially suggest that immersive reading of narratives can be associated with the tendency of a person to newness, stimulation, and experience intensity. Reading immersively the stories can be a psychologically safe way through which sensation seeking tendencies are cognitive and affective articulated.

The results are put into perspective by the demographic. The large number of unmarried young adults, the representation of both sexes, almost even ratio of students and working professionals, gives the population a diversity but developmentally relevant sample. The identity seeking, exploration, novelty seeking, media engagement is the phase that defines the young adulthood and essentially supports the results of the research.

In general, the results argue in favor of the fact that psychological involvement in narrations is related even in the less significant way, to sensation seeking oriented behaviour inclinations, thus making significant contribution in psychology.

## 7. Limitations

- The research focused on one region alone, meaning results might not apply everywhere. Given the wide range of population of the Indian sub-continent only one region is taken
- Information were collected from Tamil Nadu, limiting wider conclusions.
- Similar research could be done for other population and different ethnic group including some other psychological variables.
- The participants above 30 years were not included for the study.

## 8. Recommendations

- Future work can involve participants from various areas, increasing both size and ethnicity and diversity.
- Further study can include other related psychological variables such as empathy, social conformity.
- The study can be expanded in terms of sample size including middle aged people, teenagers.

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