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Suggestibility Among the Indian Youth – A Validation Study of Multidimensional Iowa Suggestibility Scale

Abstract

Suggestibility is one of the personality traits. The ability to accept signals from oneself, another person, or any type of media without feeling obligated to do so, including messages concerning physiological feelings, is referred to as suggestibility. It varies from compliance in that it requires the internalisation of a message rather than just a behavioural change. The study aims to validate the Multidimensional Iowa suggestibility Scale (MISS) developed by Dr Roman Kotov on Indian youth for future use and application. The study's hypothesis is that the scale will be highly reliable and valid for the Indian population. The original scale established by Dr Roman Kotov consisted of 95 items to be responded to by choosing the appropriate option from five given, which was given to an Indian sample of 510 individuals. The scale includes five suggestibility subscales and two companion scales. To check the validity, inter-scale correlation and reliability was performed. The results have been positive, with high correlations among the subscales, which suggests further future use. MISS, consisting of five subscales of suggestibility and a Short Suggestibility Scale, has been validated and can be used on the Indian population.

Keywords: *suggestibility, validation, MISS, personality*

Introduction

Suggestibility is a psychological attribute in which people are more likely to trust and act on messages without examining evidence that contradicts them. Those with high suggestibility are quick to accept information, while those with low suggestibility consider it critically and question its accuracy. People are said to be suggestible if they act on or accept recommendations from others. Our suggestibility varies, with elements such as self-esteem, age, background, and assertiveness, all contributing to our susceptibility.

Suggestibility is seen in many situations, particularly among children, who are more inclined than adults to absorb new information without question. The recounting of a fight or disagreement at a children's school is one example of suggestibility. Witnesses to the brawl may believe it was not serious at first. They may alter their memory and unwittingly skew it after hearing someone define the conflict using words that present it as a violent affair. The behaviour of numerous people yawning after seeing one person yawn is known as contagious yawning. Susceptibility is demonstrated by yawning, which occurs when the actions of others impact us without being aware of it. (2)

Because recommendations may alter our memory based on erroneous information, suggestibility can lead to poor decisions. This erroneous information subsequently affects how we recall experiences and make decisions in comparable situations. A dentist appointment, for example, may be remembered as unpleasant but bearable. Assume someone else describes how dreadful they thought our dentist experience was. We may alter how we recall our dental experience due to this talk and then postpone a crucial appointment due to this distorted memory.

Suggestibility can refer to more than merely recalling stories incorrectly. Witness testimony is a good example of the impending effect of suggestibility. Because of the initial interview procedure, people's memories of events can be skewed when they offer their initial comments. During the interview, attorneys or police officers may offer suggestions that confuse and distort the witness' recall. This tendency has been well-documented and observed, posing a serious and dangerous threat to legal decision-making. (1) Though academics are still trying to figure out why some people are more suggestible than others, an academic study has found that many factors influence our suggestibility. People who have strong or passionate emotions are more susceptible to suggestion. Furthermore, our age has been used to determine our susceptibility. According to research, our suggestibility declines as we age. (3) According to psy-

chologists, people with low self-esteem and assertiveness are more suggestible. Furthermore, researchers have concluded that our personality and upbringing influence our levels of suggestibility. Children trained to be sceptical are typically less suggestible than their less sceptical peers. (4) Variability in suggestibility has also been linked to variances in attentional performance, according to researchers. Researchers define our aptitude to filter unconnected information and inhibit prepotent responses as attentional functioning. Overall, various behavioural and social factors influence an individual's proclivity to receive signals from others and adjust their beliefs in response to those suggestions. (5)

Suggestibility has a big influence on how we remember things and make judgments in the future. Everyone is affected by suggestibility, and awareness of it can help us spot instances of it. Once we are aware, we can take the required steps to avoid suggestibility in our cognitive processes. The impact of suggestibility on witness evidence, particularly in the case of juvenile witnesses, has been extensively researched. Due to the nature of forensic cross-examining methods, children are especially prone to suggestibility. According to previous research, children might speak emotionally and seem honest about events that had never happened. In addition, eyewitness experts in another study concluded that children's testimony was less accurate than that of adults. These biases frequently jeopardise the interview process, resulting in interviewers suggesting ideas or details to youngsters. Before conducting interviews, researchers looked at children's language, concept of mind, and emotional attachment, then used their results to construct a line of questioning that tested different theories.

People are glad when they achieve a goal or avoid an unpleasant situation. When sensations of happiness are produced, they serve as a signal that everything is well and that no acute catastrophe necessitates the diversion of cognition (Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Researchers discovered that when individuals are pleased, they prefer to retrieve knowledge and solve issues efficiently and innovatively.

Social media is becoming a crucial part of the process of suggesting. The advertisements about the products and the appealing tone boost the urge to engage in buying behaviour among individuals. Individuals tend to accept and internalise the content on social media if it is high on suggestibility as a trait. The quality of the suggestion helps in deciding whether to compel or not.

Studies have also shown a negative correlation between intelligence and suggestibility. People scoring low on intelligence tests tend to be high on suggestibility as a trait. These people also have poor memory recall (Gudjonsson, 1983). People more cooperative and acquiescent are more susceptible to suggestion, and acquiescence and agreeableness have been linked to suggestibility (Eisen et al., 2003; Gudjonsson, 2003). Additionally, it has been discovered that suggestibility posi-

tively correlates with social desirability, whereas assertiveness adversely correlates with suggestibility (Gudjonsson, 2003). Research shows that suggestibility is more common in those with poor self-esteem and insecure attachment patterns (Alexander et al., 2002; Howie & Dowd, 1996; Nurmoja & Bachmann, 2008).

Method

Participants and Procedure

The study sample consisted of 510 people of both genders: males and females. There were 254 males (49.80%) and 256 females (50.20%). The average mean age of males was 20.54, and that of females was 20.40. All the participants were assessed using the Multidimensional Iowa Suggestibility Scale (MISS), and psychometric properties were found. Participants were asked to fill out hard copies of the scale before informed consent was obtained. Participants were asked to be more than 18 years of age and Indian nationality.

Cronbach alpha was performed for reliability, and correlation values were found as the procedure followed in the original scale development.

Measure

Multidimensional Iowa Suggestibility Scale (MISS): The MISS developed by Dr Roman Kotov consist of 95 items. The items are spread along five suggestibility subscales and two companion scales. It also gives out a Short Suggestibility Scale (SSS) consisting of 21 items. The five subscales are Consumer Suggestibility (11 items), Persuadability (14 items), Physiological Suggestibility (12 items), Physiological Reactivity (13 items) and Peer Conformity (14 items); the two companion scales are Mental Control (15 items) and Unpersuadability (16 items). Separately, the SSS could also be penned down consisting of 21 items. The response pattern is a 5-point Likert scale ranging 1 as “Not at all”, 2 as “A little”, 3 as “Somewhat”, 4 as “Quite a bit”, and 5 as “A lot”.

Statistical Analysis

The licensed version of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used for descriptive statistics and correlation. The correlation values were found among the subscales. Cronbach alpha was performed to test the reliability. A t-test was applied to compare the mean difference among the genders.

Results and Discussion

The study aimed to validate the Multidimensional Iowa Suggestibility Scale (MISS) on the Indian population. The study included 254 males (49.80%) and 256 females (50.20%). The psychometric properties were found to be significant. The internal consistency reliability was found to be 0.89 of the full scale. In his original study, Kotov (2004) found the reliability to be 0.92, which is close. The inter-scale reliability of the original scale and the present study is as follows.

Table 1. Inter-scale correlation

Subscale	Original scale values	Present study values
TOT	.92	.89
SSS	.86	.90
COS	.83	.77
PER	.79	.74
SC	.83	.73
PHR	.79	.64
PC	.82	.74

Note: N = 510. TOT = sum of the 5 suggestibility subscales, SSS = short suggestibility scale, COS= consumer suggestibility, PER = persuasibility, SC = sensation contagion, PHR = physiological reactivity, PC = peer conformity.

Gender difference:

In addition to the study's objective, differences among the genders were found, so a t-test was applied. The average mean difference between males and females shows that females score higher on suggestibility than males. The mean age for males was 20.54 (N = 254), and that for females (N = 256) were 20.40. The mean average of males found was 176.76 (SD = 29.95), and for females it was 177.29 (SD = 26.73).

Table 2. Gender differences among the subscales

Scale	No. of item	Total (n = 510)		Males (n = 254)		Females (n = 256)		Cronbach α
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
CS	11	27.27	7.11	27.68	6.82	26.87	7.37	.76

		Total (n = 510)		Males (n = 254)		Females (n = 256)		
PER	14	41.33	7.68	41.48	7.90	41.17	7.47	.74
PS	12	27.17	7.51	27.10	8.04	27.23	6.96	.73
PHR	13	43.42	8.51	42.35	8.10	44.48	8.78	.64
PC	14	50.15	8.02	44.24	8.10	43.75	7.09	.74
SSS	21	54.38	11.53	54.46	11.81	54.30	11.28	.90

Note: α values are significant at 0.001 level

The present study aimed to validate the MISS on the Indian population, and the results show moderately high reliability compared with the original scale by Kotov (2004). The t-test shows the minimal mean difference between the two genders. Considering the subscales, males seem to score a little higher than females on Consumer Suggestibility (CS), Persuadability (PER) and Peer Conformity (PC). Females score higher on the other subscales like Physiological Reactivity (PHR) and Physiological Suggestibility (PS). The Short Suggestibility Scale (SSS) shows a higher mean for males than females.

The suggestibility scale thus yields a moderately high reliability, making it convenient to be administered to Indian youth aged 18 to 25 years. Strong or powerful emotions make people more susceptible to suggestion. Age has also been used to determine our susceptibility to suggestion. According to research, suggestibility often declines with age. (3)

Limitations

The participants of the study were from non-clinical backgrounds. Hence, the results might differ with different populations. Age was limited to only 18-25 years; various groups could be compared in future studies to establish the norms. Suggestibility can further be studied using emotions in an experimental design. The fact that the criteria measures were self-reported, which would have caused common method variation and so muddled the results, is another issue. Future studies should use various techniques (such as observer rating and behaviour coding) to investigate the validity of the MISS because validation is an ongoing and never-ending process.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Multidimensional Iowa Suggestibility Scale is a reliable tool for assessing Indian youth. It is sensitive to detect the suggestibility among the individual. Future research can utilise the validated scale for the collected data and other variables and populations.

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