

# THE MORPHOLOGY OF AN INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE MEASURE

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## ABSTRACT

The present study examines the morphology of an interpersonal influence manifestation scale that has been cited in consumer behavior textbooks and in several major studies (e.g., Bearden and Etzel 1982; Childers and Rao 1992) of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. The results indicate that further refinement of the dimensions is needed to improve the scale's validity as a measure of an individual's susceptibility to interpersonal influence in decision making.

Interpersonal influence can potentially impact a consumer's information processing, norms, values, aspirations, and consequently, purchase behavior. Interpersonal influence appears to affect social and cognitive motives (Lascu, Bearden, and Rose 1995) and thus is a multidimensional construct.

The primary purpose of this study was to empirically examine the factor structure and internal consistency of a 14-item interpersonal scale (Park and Lessig 1977) using a procedure adapted from Churchill (1979): (1) specify the domain of the construct, (2) generate a sample of items, (3) collect the data, and (4) purify the measure by using factor analysis and coefficient alpha.

The interpersonal scale examined in this research defined the domain of the interpersonal influence construct to include three types of influence: (1) informational, (2) utilitarian, and (3) value-expressive. An informational influence is accepted if it is perceived to emanate from persons possessing product related knowledge. No norms are imposed on the individual. The utilitarian dimension is a type of normative function. If an individual's actions are expected to be visible or known to others, s/he may be expected to comply with the preferences or expectations of significant other who are perceived as mediators of rewards or punishments. A person's need for psychological association with a group is reflected in the

value-expressive construct. A person may be influenced because of a liking of the group. It is similar to the comparative reference group function.

Ideally, a three factor structure should emerge from the empirical testing of the 14-item scale. This occurred for one-half of the products studied. Instability occurred primarily in the four-item utilitarian subscale. An assessment of the internal consistency of the three subscales was performed to further investigate the dimensionality of the scale's domain. If a series of items display internal consistency, it is likely that they all relate to the same construct. An examination of coefficient alpha offered additional evidence of inconsistency within the utilitarian subscale.

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