

PERSONALITY TRAITS, UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE AND UNIVERSITY COMMERCIALISATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. Commercialisation plays a vital role in transforming research and innovation into tangible societal and economic impact by enabling university students to commercialise innovative products and services. This conceptual paper proposes a theoretical framework integrating personality traits, individual-level uncertainty avoidance, and commercialisation. Guided by Trait Activation Theory, the framework explains how the expression of entrepreneurial personality traits depends on situational conditions, with uncertainty avoidance acting as a contextual factor that may strengthen or weaken the relationship between personality traits and commercialisation. Using a narrative review approach, the paper addresses the inconsistent findings reported in previous studies and offers a propositional model for future empirical validation. Although the framework has not yet been empirically tested, it provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the interplay between personality traits, uncertainty avoidance, and commercialisation among university students. By integrating Trait Activation Theory with entrepreneurship and commercialisation literature, this study offers a unified perspective on the behavioural mechanisms underlying university commercialisation.

Keywords: *personality traits, uncertainty avoidance, commercialisation, university product*

Introduction

Commercialisation refers to the process of transforming university-generated knowledge and innovations into marketable products and services that generate income (Cho et al., 2019). As universities increasingly contribute to economic and social development, research commercialisation has become essential for translating academic innovations into practical solutions that address both current and future societal challenges. By bridging academic knowledge and industry application, universities serve as key drivers of innovation and sustainable development. Despite this growing emphasis, university innovation does not always progress to successful commercialisation. Many promising innovations fail to reach the market due to various barriers (Suhaimi et al., 2022). Among these, individual personality traits have emerged as important determinants of commercialisation behaviour (Li et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). However, previous findings remain inconclusive. While some studies reported positive relationships between personality traits and commercialisation activities (Pandey et al., 2023; Ahmed et al., 2020a; 2020b; Zhao et al., 2006), others found negative or insignificant relationships (Hsieh et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2010). These

mixed findings suggest that the relationship between personality traits and commercialisation is more complex than previously assumed. Therefore, this study examines how personality traits influence university students' commercialisation activities and whether uncertainty avoidance shapes this relationship at the individual level. Addressing this issue may provide deeper insights into the behavioural and cultural mechanisms underlying student commercialisation activities. This article contributes to a better understanding and practical debate on commercialisation by reviewing past research. It discusses the potential framework to be derived from the existing literature. First, past models of commercialisation were reviewed and the areas to be improved were highlighted. Secondly, a literature review was carried out on the components of personality traits affecting commercialisation. Thirdly, the literature on the potential moderation of uncertainty avoidance was reviewed. This is followed by the proposed conceptual framework and its elaboration. Finally, this paper presents a discussion on a new view of the said relationship as well as its theoretical contributions, limitations, practical implications and future research.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Underpinning model

Trait Activation Theory (TAT) is a useful theory to explain how individual behaviour is influenced by personality traits in different situations. The theory was first presented by Benjamin Schneider (1983) and was later expanded by Tett and Burnett (2003) and says that personality traits are not equally manifested in all situations but are activated by relevant cues in the environment. Although individuals possess relatively stable personality characteristics, the degree to which these traits shape behaviour is contingent upon the surrounding environment offering opportunities or constraints for trait expression (Tett and Burnett, 2003; Schneider, 1983). Thus, behavioural outcomes are a function of both individual personality traits and contextual factors that enable or constrain expression of these traits. Trait Activation Theory has been widely applied in organizational behaviour, leadership, and entrepreneurship research to explain why individuals with similar personality profiles often exhibit different behavioural outcomes when operating under different environmental conditions (Tett et al., 2021; Judge and Zapata, 2015). The present paper provides a strong theoretical basis for explaining the moderating role of uncertainty avoidance in the relationship between personality traits and commercialisation performance via Trait Activation Theory. Academics' personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion and emotional stability) may predispose them to successful commercialisation activities. However, the extent to which these traits lead to commercialisation outcomes depends on the individuals' level of uncertainty avoidance. Academics with lower uncertainty avoidance are generally more at ease with ambiguity, experimentation and innovation, and thus their personality traits can more readily translate into commercialisation activities. By contrast, those scoring higher on uncertainty avoidance may be more risk averse and less likely to engage in uncertain commercialisation processes, thus limiting the behavioural expression of their personality traits. Accordingly, uncertainty avoidance functions as a situational condition that either strengthens or weakens the influence of personality traits on commercialisation performance. Therefore, Trait Activation Theory provides an appropriate theoretical explanation for the proposed

moderating effect and complements the Technology Transfer Model by offering an individual-level explanation of commercialisation behaviour.

Commercialisation

The term commercialisation, derived from the word “commerce”, originates from a Latin word. Merriam-Webster (2025) defines commercialisation as managing a business for a profit motive. Commercialisation is “process oriented”, beginning from the innovation activities until the goods, service or technologies are successfully launched into the market. In this paper, commercialisation is defined as process of transforming academic knowledge, research outputs, or innovations into marketable products or services through activities such as patenting, licensing, spin-off creation, consulting, or venture development (Perkmann et al., 2013). This enables students to turn their academic outputs into real-world solutions with the aim of enhancing economic and social value. Until recently, universities worldwide have devoted much attention on innovation activities. This has led to the establishment of innovation and commercialisation centres to facilitate the transformation of research outputs into marketable products or services. At the same time, in fostering commercialisation activities, universities have integrated entrepreneurship education into their academic curriculum incorporating programmes such as innovation programmes, business incubators and Chief Executive Officers in the faculties (CEO@faculty) (Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia, 2021). These programmes will inculcate the students’ entrepreneurial spirit whilst strengthening the collaboration between academia and industry.

Students’ personality traits and commercialisation

Human personality traits are understood as a unique combination of inherited temperaments, attitudes, and other individual differences in behaviour, thoughts, and emotions (Parks-Leduc et al, 2015). Previous research has highlighted the significant influence of personality on human behaviour (Cao et al., 2022). For instance, individuals who are open to new experiences tend to be creative, well-educated, and independent (John and Srivastava, 1999). In the context of university students, it is suggested that students with specific personality traits are more likely to excel in commercialisation activities. In this paper, student personality traits are categorised into five dimensions, commonly referred to as the Big Five: extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness, and emotional stability. It is widely agreed among scholars that these five dimensions encompass human personality (Karabulut, 2016; John and Srivastava, 1999).

Extraversion

Extraversion is a fundamental personality trait characterised by sociability, assertiveness, high energy levels, and a preference for seeking stimulation and social interactions. Individuals high in extraversion are often described as talkative, enthusiastic, and action-oriented, thriving in dynamic environments and drawing energy from social engagements (John and Srivastava, 1999). Conversely, those low in extraversion, or introverts, tend to be more reserved, introspective, and less inclined towards social stimulation (Watson and Clark, 1997). Recent studies have highlighted the extraverted individuals are more likely to recognise and exploit business

opportunities, demonstrating a proactive approach that is vital for the commercialisation process (Xia et al., 2024). Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is:

H1a: There is a positive relationship between extraversion and commercialisation.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness represents a core personality trait characterised by responsibility, self-discipline, and a strong sense of duty (Turner and Hodis, 2025). Individuals scoring high in conscientiousness exhibit organisation, goal-orientation, and unwavering determination in pursuing their objectives. This multifaceted trait encompasses industriousness, orderliness, and impulse control-dimensions that collectively enhance an individual's capacity to strategically plan, execute tasks diligently, and delay immediate gratification in favour of long-term goal achievement. Individuals exhibiting high conscientiousness and characterised by the aforementioned traits are more likely to pursue commercialisation of their innovations (Zhang et al., 2022). This aligns with the university's mission for commercialisation as it is expected that this personality trait will not only drive goal achievement but also the sustainable growth of new spin-off enterprises. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is:

H1b: There is a positive relationship between conscientiousness and commercialisation.

Openness

The openness aspect of personality traits, is often associated with an individual's tendency to engage with ideas, think abstractly and seek cognitive challenges. Unlike intelligence, which measures raw cognitive ability, openness as a trait reflects a person's disposition toward intellectual curiosity, creativity and problem-solving (Mussel, 2013). In a commercialisation context, personality openness functions as a valuable trait that enhances strategic thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. Individuals high in this trait are more likely to approach complex tasks with curiosity and creativity, generate innovative solutions, and effectively analyse abstract business challenges. Research indicates that personality traits such as openness to new experiences, and conscientiousness positively influence entrepreneurial intentions and behaviours, which are critical in the commercialisation process (Zhu et al., 2021). Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is:

H1c: There is a positive relationship between openness and commercialisation.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness reflects an individual's tendency to be compassionate, cooperative, trusting, and socially considerate in their interactions with others (Zhao and Seibert, 2006). Individuals with a high level of agreeableness are generally empathetic, cooperative, and inclined to maintain harmonious relationships with others. In the entrepreneurial context, high agreeableness can positively contribute to teamwork, networking, and relationship-building, which are important for establishing and sustaining business ventures. However, excessively high agreeableness may reduce assertiveness and willingness to take risks, potentially limiting effectiveness in highly

competitive business environments (Zhao and Seibert, 2006). Research indicates a positive relationship between agreeableness and the commercialisation of university research products. Thus, the hypothesis presented is:

H1d: There is a positive relationship between agreeableness and commercialisation.

Emotional stability

Emotional stability, the inverse of neuroticism from the Big Five Personality Traits, refers to an individual's ability to remain calm, balanced, and resilient in stressful or emotionally charged situations. People high in emotional stability tend to experience fewer negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, or depression, and are generally more composed and confident when facing challenges (John and Srivastava, 1999). Scholars indicate a positive relationship between emotional stability and the commercialisation of university research products (Khan et al., 2022). Emotional stability, characterised by resilience under pressure enable students to navigate the challenges of converting innovative ideas into marketable products. The function of this trait will enhance students' ability to manage challenges and build beneficial relationships with stakeholders, all of which are vital for successful commercialisation. Therefore, this paper formulates the hypothesis as:

H1e: There is a positive relationship between emotional stability and commercialisation.

Moderating role of uncertainty avoidance

Entrepreneurial personality traits are more likely to influence behaviour in cultures that support entrepreneurial activities (Steensma et al., 2000). Originally introduced by Hofstede (2001) as a national cultural dimension, uncertainty avoidance reflects the extent to which individuals feel uncomfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty. Entrepreneurs generally exhibit greater tolerance for uncertainty, which is associated with higher entrepreneurial activity and venture creation (Wennekers et al., 2007). Yoo et al. (2011) extended this concept to the individual level through the Cultural Values Scale (CVSCALE), defining uncertainty avoidance as an individual's preference for structured situations, clear rules, and predictable outcomes. In the context of commercialisation, individuals with lower uncertainty avoidance are more willing to accept ambiguity and risk, thereby strengthening the positive influence of entrepreneurial personality traits on commercialisation activities (Yoo et al., 2011; Zhao and Seibert, 2006). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed: (H2): The relationship between personality traits and commercialisation will be stronger when uncertainty avoidance is low.

Materials and Methods

This conceptual paper adopts a narrative review approach to synthesise and critically analyse the literature on personality traits and university product commercialisation. Unlike a systematic review, the narrative approach enables the integration of theories and empirical findings from entrepreneurship, innovation, and commercialisation to develop theoretical arguments and identify research gaps. Relevant journal articles were

identified, reviewed, and synthesised through thematic analysis to examine the relationship between personality traits and commercialisation. The review highlights inconsistent findings regarding the influence of personality traits on commercialisation. While some studies report positive relationships, others indicate weak, insignificant, or context-dependent effects. To explain these inconsistencies, this paper proposes individual-level uncertainty avoidance, measured using Yoo et al. (2011) CVSCALE, as a moderating variable that may strengthen or weaken the relationship between personality traits and university product commercialisation.

Proposed conceptual framework

Figure 1 depicts the proposed conceptual framework for the commercialisation of academic outputs of the university. The framework aims to examine how personality traits influence the commercialisation of innovations, with uncertainty avoidance acting as a moderating variable. The framework is grounded in the Trait Activation Theory, which explains how individual and cultural factors facilitate or hinder the movement of scientific or technological knowledge from research to market application. The Big Five Personality Traits are used to represent the characteristics that shape individual behaviour and decision-making in the commercialisation process. These traits influence how students approach risks, collaboration, and opportunity exploitation. Meanwhile, uncertainty avoidance describes the extent to which individuals or cultures feel uncomfortable with ambiguity and uncertain outcomes. As a moderator, this variable influences the strength and direction of the relationship between personality traits and commercialisation.

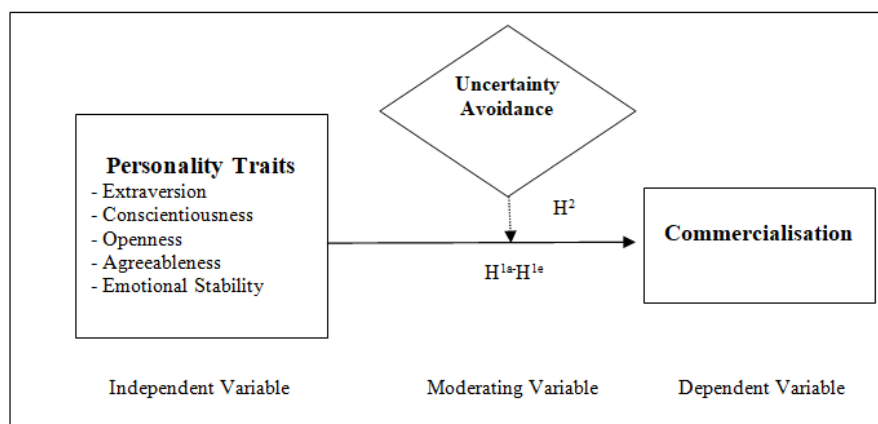


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

Results and Discussion

This paper argues that commercialising university innovations remains a persistent challenge despite the consistent production of high-quality research outputs. While innovation itself represents a significant achievement, successful commercialisation is not guaranteed and is frequently hindered by internal factors, particularly students' personality traits. Prior research examining the link between personality and commercialisation has yielded inconsistent findings, with studies reporting positive, negative, and even non-significant relationships. These inconsistencies highlight the

complex role of internal factors and suggest that cultural dimensions, such as uncertainty avoidance, may moderate the relationship between personality traits and commercialisation outcomes. Understanding these moderating effects is crucial for developing more nuanced models of student entrepreneurial behaviour and designing targeted interventions to enhance commercialisation success.

Paper contributions

This paper holds the important contribution. It offers substantial theoretical contributions to the entrepreneurship literature by integrating two internal variables (e.g., personality traits and uncertainty avoidance). These factors are ingrained in the Trait Activation Theory, which elucidates a holistic framework for understanding how internal elements interact to influence entrepreneurial activities. The framework highlights that commercialisation is not an easy, straightforward outcome of innovation alone but is designed by the dynamic interaction between personality traits and cultural context. In particular, uncertainty avoidance plays a vital role in shaping how personality translates into entrepreneurial behaviour, suggesting that future commercialisation strategies should integrate psychological and cultural perspectives rather than focusing solely on innovation output.

Paper implications

This paper has several important practical implications for educators involved in entrepreneurship education as they must play a critical role in promoting and fostering entrepreneurial mindsets among students through effective entrepreneurial pedagogy. These include integrating experiential learning, problem-based learning and innovation-based assignments into their teaching practices, something that is supported by recent studies in the entrepreneurial education literature which report the development of entrepreneurial competencies through student-centred pedagogical approaches including active learning, reflection and exposure to real-world problem-solving, as opposed to traditional lecture-based instruction (Motta and Galina, 2023). Also, the academics should engage in research commercialisation activities such as patent filing, industry collaboration and perhaps even venture creation. The effectiveness of entrepreneurial educators can be enhanced if they act as role models. Lastly, the government should formulate enabling policies and funding schemes that encourage and help the university - industry linkages while at the same time remove any obstacles that hinder the process of innovation and commercialisation (O'Dwyer et al., 2023). This includes providing tax breaks for university spin-offs, competitive research grants to help early-stage innovation and development, as well as strengthening policies that cover intellectual property protection and technology transfer activities.

Paper limitations

The proposed framework is largely conceptual and remains untested through empirical studies, which restricts its capacity to establish causal links between the variables. Additionally, it is based on a selective review of existing literature, which might not encompass all relevant studies or newly emerging perspectives in the areas of personality traits and commercialisation research. Another notable limitation is its cultural specificity. The inclusion of cultural values, such as uncertainty avoidance, can differ across various national and institutional contexts, which may constrain the

model's applicability beyond comparable cultural settings. Moreover, the framework poses a level-of-analysis concern, as the cultural values construct—originally designed at the national level—has been adapted for application at the individual level in this study, integrating individual-level constructs like cultural values in the process.

Future research agenda

The proposed framework is primarily intended for university students who have undergone entrepreneurship education and are involved in developing and commercialising innovative products or services. This includes activities like innovating new products, developing prototypes, crafting business models, and launching student-driven ventures both within and outside the university environment. Future research should empirically validate the proposed framework using quantitative, preferably longitudinal, studies involving students enrolled in entrepreneurship, innovation, or business-related programmes. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) is recommended to examine the proposed relationships and the moderating effect of uncertainty avoidance. Where appropriate, multi-group or multilevel analyses may be conducted to compare different student groups and institutional contexts.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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