Social Change and Personality Development in a Nigerian Sample

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Abstract

This study explored the relationship of social change and personality development in a sample of Nigerian students. Social change was taken to mean people's perceptions of the trends of social events while personality development was the manifestations of the Big Five Personality traits which are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience. It was hypothesized that personality traits will not significantly be a predictor of social trends. Social change was measured using the index of social trends developed by the researchers while personality development was measured using the Big Five Inventory. Results of the multiple regression analysis showed that social change or trends was predicted by the personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience but social trend was not predicted by neuroticism. Within the framework of social cognitive theory and social Darwinism, the relevance of the findings to human development and social policy formulation were highlighted.

Keywords: Social change, Personality development, Nigeria

1. Introduction

The enormous social and technological changes which characterized the end of the twentieth century and a greater part of the twenty first century (Williams, 2004) have created an urgency to address issues pertaining to young persons beyond the usual concerns of discipline and education (Uzoka, 2006) in Nigeria. This is because beneath the constant activity of daily events and the cycling routine of a life time lays an enduring social change. Change is bound to occur in all the strata of the social system because dynamism is applicable to all existential realities. So, there is a massive political, economic and geographic change occurring on a global scale coupled with accelerated scientific and technical breakthrough as well as an unprecedented level of competitiveness. A Dictionary of the Social Sciences defines social change as the significant alteration of social structures (that is, patterns of action and interaction) including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms, values, cultural products and symbols. It occurs in communities, families, nations and in all social institutions.

There is not only a universality of change as a social phenomenon but also the Nigerian society has gone through and continues to undergo some major changes since at least over half a century ago or more. Examples are changes in gender roles, increasing feminism and near gender equality, ethnic consciousness; an expansion, shrinking and near disappearance of the middle class, declining confidence in public officials, value disorientation and globalization. A new wave of individualism seems to be sweeping through the Nigerian society -a trend that is deplored by some and favoured by others. These developments create demands for higher levels of education and training than were required of previous generations.

Furthermore, studies on the structure of the self-concept of young people (e.g., Snow & Philips, 1982; Zurcher, 1972) tend to support Turner's (1976) argument that people have turned away from defining themselves in terms of broad roles, social norms and social values, and turned towards their inner feelings. Igbo and Anugwom (2002) had also stated that in the notion of consistency and persistence of change is the fact that the social system of a society is made up of all ideal patterns of behaviour within a society. The relationship between social change and

the social system can then be better appreciated when we know that all social systems consists of norms or conducts of behaviour, status, roles, positions, orientation goals and values.

On personality development, Reiss (1965) maintains that it refers to how the parts of a personality grow and change through life which originates primarily at the social systems level. In the same vein, values and behaviour arise from several sources and are promoted by institutional backing. Paradoxically, changes in the social systems are often initiated by dissenters acting on values modeled largely from individuals who are opposed to prevailing social practices (Bandura, 1973; Keniston, 1988; Rosenhan, 1970). So, in this study, social change is specifically conceived as those trends in life patterns of people at a time in the society. Personality development is also adopted in this research to mean the traits or relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that distinguish individuals from one another which evolves through the lifespan.

In spite of the challenges inherent in mapping out personality structure across the life span, researchers have made substantial progress in elaborating taxonomies of individual differences in adult personality development. Based on seminal studies of self-reported personality traits (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1978; McCrae, 1982; McCrae & Costa, 1984), a sophisticated model of personality structure and functioning which accurately reflects not only how people say they behave but also their real behaviours across different situations have been articulated. This is the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality which is also called the Big Five Model or the Five Factor Theory.

The Five Factor Model of personality development as postulated by Costa and McCrae (1992) as well as McCrae and Costa (1999) has been widely accepted as a useful framework for the exploration of personality traits. These traits are as follows: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience, and Neuroticism. Neuroticism as personality taxonomy usually includes a trait that encompasses the tendency to experience the world as distressing or threatening. Neuroticism includes both anxious (or fearful) distress and irritable distress (Rothbart & Bates, 1998; Shkiner & Caspi, 2003). Extraversion is the introvert/extrovert trait in people. This is a tendency in human beings to be friendly, sociable, fun-loving and concerned about others (extrovert) or to focus attention on our selves, shy, reserved and quiet (introvert) (Lahey, 2001).

Tupes and Christal (1961) as well as Warren Norman (1963) have described openness to experience as culture. It is a tendency to seek stimuli and explore new environments or issues actively. Agreeableness is a variety of traits that foster congenial relationships with others (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997). Agreeable individuals are co-operative, considerate, empathic, generous, polite and kind. The two poles of it are prosocial tendencies and antagonism. Conscientiousness is the capacity for cognitive and behavioural control. High conscientiousness has been variously seen as willingness to follow authority and conform to group norms (Hoga & Ones, 1997) or a positive engagement with task-related endeavours (Ashton & Lee, 2001).

Since personality is a dynamic human attribute that changes over the lifespan and is shaped by experience (Roberts, Walton & Viechtbaver, 2006), longitudinal and cross-sectional studies (e.g., Vaillant, 1991; Field & Millsap; Schaie & Wills, 1991) have shown that personality traits continue to change in adulthood. A meta-analysis of 92 studies covering the life course (Roberts, Walton & Viechtbaver, 2006) supports the assertion of personality change even in adulthood. Moreso, the social cognitive theory of personality development assumes that the adoption of values, standards and attributes is governed by a much broader social reality. It favours a model of causation involving a triadic structure known as reciprocal determinism. In this view cognition and other personal factors; environmental influences and behaviour operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally though not with equal strength (Bandura, 1989). Although social cognitive theory and trait approaches are portrayed as antagonistic, they are perfectly complementary and mutually informative. The integration of social cognitive constructs (e.g., mental maps, encoding, etc) advances an understanding of how traits are manifested in adulthood.

In addition, worldwide registers of data on twins and their relatives have made it possible to understand the extent of genetic and environmental influences on personality across the life course (Boomsma, Busjahn & Peltonen, 2002). The search for genes for personality is difficult because unlike classical single gene disorders in which a single gene is necessary and sufficient to produce the disorder, there is little evidence of such major effects of genes on personality (Caspi, Roberts & Shiner, 2005). Several researchers (e.g., Caspi, Mcclay, Moffit, Mill & Martin, 2002; Caspi, Sugden, Moffit, Taylor & Craig, 2003) suggest the possibility that some complex traits instead of resulting from many genes of small effect results from relatively fewer genes whose effects are conditional on social influence.

Furthermore, a more recent trend which is evolutionary theory maintains that the human mind is an evolved/evolving adaptive mechanism and so personality development can be explained as such. This grandiose

theory is rooted in Social Darwinism which upholds that the society and all life forms inevitably move successively to a higher state. Social cognitive view and Social Darwinism are the theoretical bases for this study. Elder (1979) and Stewart and Healy (1989) have shown that the stage of life affects the nature of the influence of social changes. Youths in a period of transitions are believed to be mostly susceptible (Duncan & Agronick, 1995). Those at a crossroad or in a vulnerable position that would be affected by social movement are undoubtedly susceptible to influence of social movement. Individuals who are drawn into a cultural shift in an early or late phase may differ in personality from those who are affected at the peak when the change is in full swing. As found in a cross-temporal metal-analyses (Twenge, 2000, 2001), social changes over the last decades, have powerfully influenced the personality profiles of young people with the effects accounting for over 20% of the variance on neuroticism and extraversion. The alleged Cohort effects were discovered to be due to historical social transformations.

A study by Terraciano, Costa & McCrea (2006) showed support for the effects of secular trends on neuroticism and extraversion. There was evidence of a secular trend of declining trust, along with additional small effects on other facets of neuroticism. In fact, a major aspect of the reflections of social change on personality development is in the psychosocial transitions. A study of young adults in former Eastern and Western Germany (Silbereisen & Pinquart, 2006) found that social change was loosely coupled (partially related) with personality development, a claim that has been made with regard to personality traits. In a nutshell, the vast potentials and possible limits of plasticity in human personality development in times of social change has been portrayed.

It has also been noted that personality development occurs when people are faced with changing life circumstances that require adaptation (Haan, Millsap & Hartker, 1986). The influence of increasing individualism in United States of America on personality development was investigated in a study by Roberts and Helson (1997). Using a sample of women, increase in the scores on the Secular Trends Index (Gough, 1991) were associated with increase in personality characteristics such as self-focus and norm adherence (agreeableness). Regrettably, there are virtually no previous studies on social change and the personality traits in Nigeria. Even though a few extant European and American Studies exist, the studies as highlighted above have considered social change as a predictor of personality development. The possibility of personality traits as factors in social trends has not been explored in existing literature. With a view to filling this gap in researches on this area, the following hypotheses were tested:

Ho1. Extraversion will not significantly predict social trends among Nigerian students.

Ho2. Agreeableness will not significantly predict social trends among Nigerian students.

Ho3. Conscientiousness will not significantly predict social trends among Nigerian students.

Ho4. Neuroticism will not significantly predict social trends among Nigerian students.

Ho5. Openness to experience will not significantly predict social trends among Nigerian students.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Four hundred and two students, who were randomly selected from the faculties in University of Nigeria Nsukka, participated in the study. The mean age of the participants was 24 years. By their gender, 47.76% were males while 52.24% were females. In terms of religious affiliation, 84.57% were Christians, 6.47% were Moslems while 8.06% did not indicate their religion. The participants were from these ethic groups: Igbo (60.70%), Hausa (5.22%), Yoruba (9.71%) and other ethnic groups such as Efik, Ijaw, Urhobo, e.t.c. (24.37%).

2.2 Instruments

The participants completed two sets of inventories namely: Index of Social Trends and the Big Five Inventory

2.2.1 Index of Social Trends

This is a 29-item instrument which was developed by the researchers because there was no available instrument that measures the trends in social changes especially with regard to Nigerian setting. Roberts & Helson (1997) had studied social change in western countries following the stipulations of Gough (1991) as cited in Roberts & Helson (1997). The original draft of the inventory contained 42 items derived from extensive review of relevant literature in Psychology of Social change as well as Social Change and Social Problems. Discussions with professionals in these areas were used to ascertain the face/content validity of the items which were later administered to 214 participants for the pilot validation study. The Cronbach alpha of internal consistency was .88 based on standardized items. Following the recommendations of researchers such as Kline (1994), only the 29 items which yielded a corrected item total correlation of .30 and above (out of the original 42 items)

were retained and used for this study. The poorly correlated items (13 items) which had a co-efficient of less than .30 were detected excluded from the items that made up the instrument. A factor analysis of the 29-item measure indicated 3 factor structures and indicators of it validity with coefficients which were as follows: Political trends (.63), Socio-economic trends (.68) and Religious trends (.71). Examples of items in the scale are as follows: I believe that traditionally powerless groups like women and children are becoming empowered; I have no doubt that people do not take proper care of their environment; I believe that education is worthless if it has no economic value, etc.

2.2.2 Big Five Inventory

This is a 44-item inventory developed by John (1990), as cited in Omoluabi (2002). It assesses personality from five distinct dimensions: Extraversion (8 items), Agreeableness (9 items), Consciousness (9 items). Neuroticism (8 items) and Openness to experience (10 items). According to Omoluabi (2002), BFI was adapted for the use of professionals in Nigeria after several yeas of research at restandardizing it in order to enhance its suitability and relevance for Nigerians. John, Dominue & Kenie (1991) reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of reliability of .80 and a 3 month test retest reliability of .85 for the BFI. The authors also reported mean convergent validity coefficients of .75 and .85 with the Big five Instruments authored by Costa & McCrae (1992) and Golberg (1992) respectively. Using a Nigerian sample, Umeh (2004) obtained the following divergent validity coefficients with University Maladjustment Scale (Kleinmontz, 1961): Extraversion = .05, Agreeableness = .13, Conscientiousness = .11, Neuroticism = .39 and Openness to Experience = .24. According to Umeh (2004), the low correlation coefficients obtained when the scores of the participating students on the BFI was correlated with their scores on the Maladjustment Scale shows the divergent nature of the two instruments. Thus, it is an evidence of BFI's cross-cultural validity. Sample items in the BFI includes I see myself as: Someone who is full of energy (Extraversion), someone who has a forgiving nature (Agreeableness); someone who is a reliable worker (Conscientiousness); someone who gets nervous easily (Neuroticism); someone who is inventive (Openness to experience).

2.3 Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to the participants by the researchers in groups with the aid of two research assistants. There was no monetary reward or any other form of inducement that was given to the participants for taking part in the research. Hence, participation in the study was voluntary and there was informed consent. All the participants were very co-operative and had no difficulty in completing the inventories for the study.

2.4 Design/Statistics

This is a cross-sectional survey research. Multiple Regression analysis was adopted to analyse the data and test the hypotheses of the study. The choice of this statistics is in line with recommendations such as Terraciano, McCrae & Costa (2006). The scores of the participants on the five traits in the FFM were individually regressed on Social trend. Demographic variables such as age, gender and ethnic groups were not used as covariates in this study, hence they were not included in the analysis of results.

3. Result

It was found that the students had a mean score of 77.52 (SD=20.17) on social trend. It was also found that on the personality traits, the mean scores were: Extraversion = 2.36, (SD = 7.28), Agreeableness = 25.53 (SD = 8.18), Conscientiousness = 31.21 (SD = 7.81), Neuroticism = 24.27 (SD = 8.73) and Openness to Experience = 29.13 (SD = 9.24).

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship of social change and personality development in a sample of Nigerian students. Social change was represented by some of the trends of social life in the society. In other words, social trend was adopted as a description of the perceptions of social life. The findings of this study did not provide support for majority of the hypotheses. It was found that personality traits generally predicted social change in a sample of Nigerian students (R=.99, p<.001). This result is consistent with the outcome of previous studies in western societies such as Silbereisen and Pinquart (2006) who reported some level of relationship between social change and personality development with reference to the personality traits.

Specifically, it was found that extraversion significantly predicted social trends ($\beta = .05$, p< .001). Thus the hypothesized relationship that extraversion will not significantly predict social trend was not supported. In other words, people who are marked by high energy and activity level, dominance, sociability, expressiveness and positive emotions (Omoluabi, 2002), also tend to score higher on the measure of perceptions of social change.

The results also showed that agreeableness significantly predicted social trends ($\beta = .27$, p< .001). It was earlier hypothesized that agreeableness will not be a significant predictor of social trends. The hypothesis was rejected. This implies that more manifestation of agreeableness is related to higher perception of social change by the students. It should be noted that agreeable persons have prosocial orientation, altruism, tender-mindedness, trust and modesty.

Another hypothesis of the study stated that conscientiousness will not significantly predict social trends among students. However, the results of this study showed that social trends was significantly predicted by conscientiousness ($\beta = .62$, p< .001). Thus the hypothesis was rejected. This finding implies that higher perception of social change is associated with more conscientiousness as such people exhibit more impulse control, task orientation and goal-directedness.

The hypothesized relationship that neuroticism will not significantly predict social trends among students was confirmed. This is in the light of the finding that neuroticism was not a significant predictor of social trends (β = -.02, p> .05). Thus the hypothesis was accepted as stated. This result is contrary to the outcome of a meta analyses (Twenge, 2000, 2001) which showed that variations in neuroticism was associated with changes in the society. The possible explanation for the present finding could be the cultural milieu in which the study was carried out. In addition, Terraciano (2010) emphasises the role of a distinction between cohort and period effects emphasising the role of cultural influences on personality traits. Even though there is a thin line between purely individualistic and a collectivist society as no society is purely individualistic or collectivist, there is always a higher predominance of either collectivism or individualism in any society. The effects of personality traits also vary accordingly.

Finally, it was found that openness to experience significantly predicted social trends ($\beta = .10$, p< .001). That is to say that the hypothesis which stated that openness to experience will not significantly predict social trends was rejected. Higher manifestations of openness to experience was associated to higher perceptions of social change. This trait is expressive of increased, breath, depth and complexity of an individual's mental and experiential life. As things are seen to be changing, the spirit of enquiry and desire to discover new things are manifested by individuals.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded from the high levels of support provided in this study that beliefs which are prone to modifications by social changes are associated with the way the human personality develops and manifests at any point in time. It is only a progressive perception of social change in a positive direction that will lead to an organic reconstruction of the human society which Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Quadregesimo Anno* refers to as an indispensable prerequisite for the fulfillment of rights and obligations of social life which has personality traits as its basic foundation. Identified Society Question raised by over 50% of the respondents in a random survey by Uzoka (2006) included "How shall we cope with cost and social changes" "Why can't my parent see hat the times have changed" (p.6). This means that the individual is tasked by the moving trends.

The cross-sectional nature of this study is an important weakness which hampers causal interpretations of the results. However, the results of the study were in line with existing theoretical backgrounds and previous studies which had reported that social changes have strong associations with personality development. One of the forces that drive social change could be the behavioural manifestations of people's personality traits. Evidence of this possibility was found in the results of this study. Furthermore, useful suggestions for questionnaire design that may reduce the risk of common method variance (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) were followed in this study (e.g., anonymity, instructing the participants that there is no right or wrong answers, changes in the response format, etc.)This study is an attempt to spear-head researches in the Nigerian context on the area of Psychology of Social Change. Researchers should seek to discover the individual and cohort patterns of social change and the human personality across the lifespan especially in African societies like Nigeria.

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Table 1. Model summary of predictive effect of personality traits on social trends

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	.99***	.97	.97	3.43

*** p < .001

The multiple R value of .99 showed that personality trait was a significant predictor of social trend (p<.001).

	Unstd. Coefficient		Std. Coefficients	
Model	Beta	Std. Error	Beta	Std. Error
Extraversion	1.13	.04	.05	3.65***
Agreeableness	.67	.06	.27	12.20***
Consciousness	1.61	.06	.62	28.28***
Neuroticism	.03	.06	02	57NS
Openness to Experience	.22	.07	.10	3.33***

Table 2. Summary of beta coefficients and statistical significance of social trends and personality traits

*** p < .001, NS = Not significant, p > .05

It is evident in the table that social trend was significantly predicted by. A regression coefficient (β) of .27 was obtained when agreeableness was regressed on social trends. This result indicated a predictive relationship of agreeableness on social trends (p< .001). When social trend was regressed on conscientiousness, a coefficient (β) of .62 was obtained. It means that social trend was significantly predicted by conscientiousness (p< .001). For the regression of neuroticism on social trends, a coefficient (β) value of -.02 was found. This is an indication that neuroticism did not significantly predict social trends (p>.05). Social trends was significantly predicted by openness to experience as shown in the coefficient (β) value of .10 (p < .001).