Who Wants to Be a YouTuber?

Personality Traits Predict the Desire to Become a Social Media Influencer

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Abstract

The rise of social media influencers as a career path has sparked both public interest and concern, particularly regarding youth aspirations. This study investigated how personality traits influence the motivation to become a social media influencer among young adults in Poland (n = 362) and the United Kingdom (n = 411). We examined the Big Five personality traits, narcissism, and histrionism as potential predictors of influencer career aspirations. Participants (N = 773, aged 16-17) completed personality assessments and rated their motivation to pursue various professions. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that higher levels of extraversion, narcissism, and histrionism were positively associated with motivation to become a social media influencer. While conscientiousness exhibited an inconsistent negative association. Country-specific analyses indicated that narcissism was a significant predictor in Poland, whereas extraversion, conscientiousness, and histrionism were significant predictors in the UK. These findings highlight the interplay between personality and career aspirations in the digital age. While pursuing influencer careers may offer opportunities for self-expression that appeal to certain personality types, it also poses psychological risks, particularly for individuals high in narcissism and histrionism. These results have implications for career counselling and mental health professionals, supporting young adults navigating the new professional landscape.

Social media has changed how people communicate, entertain themselves, and present themselves online. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have enabled the emergence of social media influencers—a novel category of celebrities (Vrontis et al., 2021). These individuals attract followers by producing relatable and engaging content tailored to that their audience's interests. Followers often regard influencers as role models, valuing their advice, entertainment, and perceived authenticity (Han & Balabanis, 2024). Through their online presence, influencers shape public opinion, drive consumer purchasing decisions, and influence societal trends (Hugh et al., 2022).

For many young people, becoming a social media influencer has evolved from a dream to a viable career aspiration. In 2017, First Choice survey revealed that 75% of 6- to 17-year-olds aspired to become online video creators, such as YouTubers and vloggers (The Sun; Dirnhuber, 2017). The survey garnered significant media attention, with outlets examining various aspects of influencer careers: including monetization strategies (Forbes; Ward, 2018), mental health challenges (Insider; Tenbarge, 2019); competitive pressures (Washington Post; Ohlheiser, 2018), and the impact of social media on children's career aspirations (CNBC; Dzhanova, 2019). Similarly, a 2019 Harris Poll/LEGO® survey found that children were three times more likely to aspire to become YouTubers (29%) than astronauts(11%; Parker, 2019). Despite the rising popularity of influencer careers among young people, little is known about the psychological drivers behind this aspiration or its potential impact on mental health and well-being.

1.1. Background and Previous Research
1.1.1. Psychological Research on Social Media Influencers

Research in psychology and consumer behaviour has predominantly centred on the marketing dynamics of interactions between social media influencers and their audiences. A meta-

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analysis identified key psychological frameworks explaining how influencers shape audience attitudes and purchasing intentions (Han & Balabanis, 2024). Extensive literature explores topics such as consumer engagement (Pradhan et al., 2023), responses to persuasion and advertising (Breves et al., 2021); influencer credibility, trustworthiness and attractiveness (Vrontis et al., 2021); and commercial marketing tactics (Hudders et al., 2021). Researchers have identified key motivations for following influencers, including authenticity, consumerism, creative inspiration, and envy (Lee et al., 2022).

While the body of research on social media influencing is growing (Pradhan et al., 2023), limited attention has been given to understanding influencers themselves. This gap may stem from the challenges of studying influencers (a small and hard-to-recruit population), such as the need for large sample sizes to ensure statistical rigor. However, this limitation can be addressed by studying the personality traits and motivations of individuals aspiring to become influencers.

1.1.2. *Personality and Career Aspirations*

Personality traits shape career interests (Nye et al., 2012). In turn, they reliably predict both occupational choices and work performance (Larson et al., 2002). Understanding the connections between personality and career aspirations provides valuable insights into the intrinsic motivations and predispositions shaping professional goals (Ryan et al., 2019). Building on this relationship, examining the personality traits of aspiring influencers may provide an early glimpse into the psychological profiles of those who succeed as social media influencer. One of the most widely used personality frameworks in career aspirations studies is the Big Five model (McCrae & Costa, 1997). It characterises personality through five dimensions (Zell & Lesick, 2022): (1) Neuroticism – reflects emotional instability and the tendency to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and stress; (2)

Extraversion – reflects the extent to which a person is outgoing, sociable, and energized by social interactions; (3) Openness to experience – reflects a person's inclination towards curiosity, imagination, creativity, and openness to new ideas and experiences; (4) Agreeableness – reflects a person's tendency to be cooperative, empathetic, and considerate of others' feelings and needs; and (5) Conscientiousness, which reflects the degree of organization, responsibility, self-discipline, and goal-directed behaviour.

Big Five personality traits are well-documented predictors of career-related choices and outcomes. Meta-analyses consistently highlight significant relationships between personality dimensions and career interests (Hurtado Rúa et al., 2019; Larson et al., 2002; Mount et al., 2005). For instance, individuals high in Openness to Experience, characterized by intellectual curiosity and creativity, are often drawn to artistic and investigative pursuits, while those high in Extraversion, marked by sociability and assertiveness,

frequently pursue leadership roles or helping professions. Additionally, higher levels of Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, and Extraversion have been linked to increased earnings, potentially due to alignment between occupational demands and personality traits (Vella, 2024). However, personality can also contribute to career decision-making challenges, with higher Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness linked to greater difficulties (Martincin & Stead, 2015). These findings highlight the nuanced role of personality in shaping both opportunities and challenges in career development.

1.1.3. Personality and Online Behaviour

Numerous studies have demonstrated a connection between personality traits and online behaviour (e.g., Moore & Craciun, 2021; Sorokowski et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). The Big Five model has been widely used to explain people's online activities, showing connections between specific characteristics and particular types of

activity. This model's widespread use enables comparisons across studies and supports the cumulative growth of personality research. Meta-analyses suggest that social media activities, such as photo posting, connecting with friends, and sharing updates, are associated with higher levels of extraversion and openness to experience (Liu & Campbell, 2017). More extraverted people are also more likely to spend more time using social media and regularly create content (Bowden-Green et al., 2020), use communication apps (Peltonen et al., 2020), have more followers on Twitter (Mahajan et al., 2022), post more selfies (Sorokowska et al., 2016), and use the Internet for sexting (Morelli et al., 2020). Those who are more open to experience are also more likely to use Twitter for socialization (Hughes et al., 2012) and visit Instagram more frequently (Lee & Borah, 2020).

Beyond the Big Five, research has revealed associations between social media use, narcissism, and histrionic personality traits. Narcissism refers to an exaggerated sense of self-importance and a focus on personal needs and goals over others (Krizan & Herlache, 2018). People with higher levels of narcissism are more likely to use Instagram for self-promotion (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016), are more likely to have more inauthentic Instagram profiles (Geary et al., 2021), are more likely to be addicted to Facebook (Brailovskaia et al., 2020), are more likely to post selfies (Sorokowski et al., 2015) and are more likely to engage in activities on TikTok (Meng & Leung, 2021).

Histrionic personality is characterised by attention-seeking behaviour, seductiveness, and dramatic emotional expression; extreme cases may be diagnosed as histrionic personality disorder (Tomiatti et al., 2012). People with higher levels of histrionic personality traits were found to use Facebook more frequently, had more Facebook friends (Rosen et al., 2013), published more selfies (Sorokowski et al., 2016) and their need for social approval and liking positively predicted social media addiction (Savci et al., 2021).

1.2. Current study

This study aimed to identify the motives and personality traits driving aspirations to become social media influencers. To examine how personality traits predict aspirations to become influencers, we assessed the Big Five (McCrae & Costa, 1997), narcissism (Krizan & Herlache, 2018), and histrionic personality traits (Tomiatti et al., 2012).These traits are frequently studied in related research, providing a foundation for outlining our hypotheses (Liu & Campbell, 2017; Savci et al., 2021; Sorokowski et al., 2015).

Personality traits can shed light on the strengths, weaknesses, and potential psychological risks associated with becoming an influencer (Naslund et al., 2020). For example, traits like narcissism and histrionic tendencies may increase the difficulties in handling public criticism (Atlas & Them, 2008), mood instability (Hefazi Torghabeh & Gholami, 2023), or dependency on external validation (Paramboukis et al., 2016).This information can be used to develop tailored interventions, training programs, and support systems to enhance the well-being and health of aspiring influencers (for example, Abdullahi et al., 2020). Finally, identifying personality traits tied to influencer aspirations enhances our understanding of their expression in digital environments (Azucar et al., 2018).

Drawing on prior research linking personality traits to social media behaviour, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: Extraversion is positively associated with motivation to become a social media influencer.

H2: Openness to experience is positively associated with motivation to become a social media influencer.

H3: Narcissism is positively associated with motivation to become a social media influencer.

H4: Histrionic personality is positively associated with motivation to become a social media influencer.

Extraverted individuals typically seek social interaction and public self-expression, making influencer roles

potentially appealing (Wilmot et al., 2019). Those high in openness to experience often pursue creative expression and are convicted of their creative abilities, aligning with content creation demands (Karwowski & Lebuda, 2016). Narcissistic traits may predispose individuals toward careers offering opportunities for self-promotion and status-seeking behaviour (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019). Similarly, histrionic personality traits, characterized by attention-seeking and dramatic self-presentation, may drive interest in influencer careers that reward these tendencies (Ferguson & Negy, 2014).

We assessed the ambition to become influencers using two measures: (1) a spontaneous declaration that a person wants to become an influencer, and (2) a scale on which a person could indicate how much they want to become one. To enhance generalizability of our results, we conducted our study in Poland and the United Kingdom. The famous commercial study, in which 75% of young people said they wanted to become video creators, was conducted precisely in the

UK (Dirnhuber, 2017). In Poland, likewise, a report by the Inspiring Girls Foundation was released, revealing that 46% of young girls have ambitions to become social media influencers (Durka et al., 2021).

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants and procedure

The study recruited a total of 773 participants from two countries: Poland (n = 362) and United Kingdom (n = 411). The Polish sample consisted of 180 women (Age M = 16.86, SD = 0.35), 181 men (Age M = 16.77, SD = 0.42) and one non-binary person (Age = 17). The UK sample included 223 women (Age M = 16.71, SD = 0.46), 181 men (Age M = 16.65, SD = 0.48) and seven non-binary people (Age M = 16.63, SD = 0.52).

Participants were categorized based on their place of residence: cities with population equal or greater than 50k (n = 263), lower than 50k (n = 246), and villages (n = 264). Participants were recruited through an online panel and

received remuneration for their participation. We found no reason to exclude any data.

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, and all participants provided informed consent. All demographic variables were based on self-identification. After giving consent, participants provided demographic information, including gender, age, and place of residence size. Following this, they were presented with questions concerning their future professional aspirations and the underlying motivations driving those aspirations. Finally, participants completed questionnaires assessing personality traits, including the Big Five, Narcissism, and Histrionic personality characteristics.

Recruiting participants from Western and Central Europe enhanced the generalizability of our findings beyond a single cultural context. Both countries have documented youth aspirations for influencer careers, with the widely cited First Choice study reporting 75% of UK youth aspiring to be video creators (Dirnhuber, 2017) and the Inspiring Girls Foundation reporting 46% of Polish girls aspiring to become influencers (Durka et al., 2021). The research team's proficiency in Polish and English ensured accurate data collection and interpretation of open-ended responses. Although the samples were not strictly matched, demographic differences were controlled for using age and gender variables in regression models.

2.2. Measures

Participants completed a set of the following questions and questionnaires. We prioritized brief, validated instruments to suit the practical needs of adolescent research. Short-form questionnaires help reduce participant fatigue and maintain response quality, particularly crucial given our target age group and the need to assess multiple personality constructs. We selected the TIPI for Big Five assessment, the Dirty Dozen subscale for narcissism, and the SCID-5 histrionic subscale, as each offers brevity while maintaining adequate psychometric properties. While shorter instruments involve a trade-off

with depth, they were essential to maintaining data quality and completion rates in our adolescent sample.

2.2.1. Professional Aspirations

Participants first responded to two open-ended questions: *(1) What profession would you like to have in the future?* and *(2) Why would you like to practice this profession?* Next, they were asked to mark the extent to which they would like to perform each of the following professions in the future: (1) a teacher, (2) a doctor, (3) an influencer, a YouTuber, a TikToker, or an Instagrammer, and (4) an IT specialist. To answer these questions participants used a 7- point Likert scale (1 – Strongly disagree, 7 – Strongly agree). Four additional professions were included to provide context and reduce ceiling effects related to influencer aspirations.

After data collection, responses to open-ended questions were classified. Career aspirations were grouped into standardized categories (e.g., "accountant," "Accountant," and "accounting" were classified as "Accountant"). Responses about underlying motives were analysed thematically and categorized into six content-based groups. While the responses were generally straightforward to classify, in cases of uncertainty, a second researcher was consulted. The final classification was reviewed and agreed upon by all authors. Examples of the thematic categories and their corresponding responses are presented in Table S1.

2.2.2. TIPI – the Big Five

The Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) is a brief self-report questionnaire designed to assess the Big Five personality traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. In our study, for the British sample, we used the original version (Gosling et al., 2003) and for the Polish sample its Polish adaptation (Sorokowska et al., 2014). The TIPI consists of ten items, with two items dedicated to each personality trait. Respondents rated each item on a 7-point Likert scale, indicating the extent to which

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they agree or disagree with statements reflecting distinct aspects of their personality (1 – Strongly disagree, 7 – Strongly agree).

2.2.3. The Dirty Dozen subscale – Narcissism

The Dirty Dozen inventory, originally developed by Jonason and Webster in 2010, is a widely used tool for assessing the Dark Triad traits, which include narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. The Narcissism subscale consists of a set of four items designed to measure tendencies associated with grandiosity, entitlement, and self-centeredness. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert scale, reflecting the extent to which the statements align with their own attitudes and behaviours (1 – Strongly disagree, 7 – Strongly agree). For the Polish sample, we used a Polish adaptation (Czarna et al., 2016).

2.2.4. SCID-5 subscale – Histrionic personality

The SCID-5 is a semi-structured diagnostic interview guide based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (First et al., 2016). In our study, we used a subscale specifically designed to assess histrionic personality disorder. According to the authors, this questionnaire, when administered independently without a detailed interview, can serve as a preliminary screening tool for identifying individuals with histrionic personality disorder. We used the Polish version of the questionnaire, which was adapted by Zawadzki and colleagues (2010). Notably, the original version consists of seven items, while the Polish version includes eight items. Therefore, we calculated the mean score instead of the sum score for our analysis. Although initially a clinical tool, SCID-5 subscales have been validated for self-report use in non-clinical contexts (Sorokowski et al., 2016).

2.3. Statistical Analyses

The first step of our analysis aimed to examine participants' motivations for becoming social media influencers. This involved analysing responses to the open-ended question, *What profession would you like to have in the future?* However, only two participants spontaneously expressed aspirations to become social media influencers—one as an influencer and one as a YouTuber. This small sample size precluded further analysis. [1]

To verify whether a motivation to become a social media influencer was predicted by personality traits we conducted a hierarchical regression characteristics of people who are motivated to become a social media influencer. Finally, to assess whether the observed effects persisted across model. In the first step, we used age, gender, population, and Big Five personality traits as predictors of the motivation to become a social media influencer. In the second step, we additionally included narcissism and histrionic personality. At each step of the analysis, we controlled for age, gender, and the country of origin. We have also tested for multicollinearity. Analogous models compared the influence of personality traits on influencer motivation with motivations to become a teacher, doctor, lawyer, or IT specialist. We compared standardized beta coefficients and regarding their strength and direction to verify the distinct

countries, the hierarchical regression model was recreated for each national sample. The dataset is available online (https://osf.io/x6hpa/).

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[1] For exploratory purposes, we conducted an ANOVA with motives as predictor categories and ambition to become an influencer as the dependent variable (measured on a scale); however, the results were not statistically significant ($p = .184$).

3. Results

Table 1 summarizes descriptive statistics, and Table 2 provides the correlation matrix for measured variables.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and populational differences

Variable		Poland M (SD)	Poland Skewness	United Kingdom M (SD)	United Kingdom Skewness	Welch's *t*	*p*
	Influencer	3.97 (2.09)	0.95	4.42 (1.83)	-0.46	-3.16	.002
	Teacher	2.27 (1.65)	1.37	3.29 (2.00)	0.26	-7.79	<.001
Professional aspiration to become:	Doctor	2.99 (2.07)	0.81	3.47 (2.13)	0.29	-3.16	.002
	Lawyer	2.99 (1.96)	0.81	3.53 (2.03)	0.19	-3.71	<.001
	IT	3.09 (2.05)	0.70	2.98 (1.93)	0.58	0.72	0.475
	Extraversion	4.75 (1.60)	-0.30	4.03 (1.32)	-0.01	6.82	<.001
	Agreeableness	5.19 (1.25)	-0.63	4.73 (1.02)	-0.05	5.55	<.001
Big Five	Conscientiousness	5.08 (1.46)	-0.69	4.90 (1.26)	-0.29	1.90	.058
	Neuroticism	3.87 (0.96)	0.02	4.40 (0.92)	0.23	-7.81	<.001
	Openness	4.74 (1.01)	0.09	4.36 (0.91)	0.09	5.43	<.001
Narcissism		2.75 (0.90)	0.10	2.92 (0.86)	-0.13	-2.59	.010
Histrionic pers.		0.41 (0.23)	0.54	0.39 (0.25)	0.40	1.18	.237

Table 2

Correlation matrix for the variables used in the study

Variables		Motivation					Big Five					Narcis.
		Influencer	Teach.	Doc.	Law.	IT	Extrav.	Agreeb.	Conscien.	Neuro.	Open.	
	Teacher	.06 (.095)										
Motivation	Doctor	.08 (.022)*	.20 (<.001)*									
	Lawyer	.09 (.014)*	.20 (<.001)*	.33 (<.001)*								
	IT	.11 (002)*	.06 (.119)	.08 (.036)*	.10 (.008)*							
	Extraversion	.09 (.014)*	-.06 (.079)	.05 (.130)	.01 (.872)	-.05 (.156)						
	Agreeableness	-.03 (.392)	-.07 (.047)*	-.01 (.918)	-.09 (.009)*	-.04 (.226)	.13 (<.001)*					
Big Five	Conscient.	-.09 (.017)*	-.03 (347)	.03 (.359)	.05 (.183)	-.03 (.382)	.20 (<.001)*	.28 (<.001)*				
	Neuroticism	.06 (.126)	.19 (<.001)*	.09 (.009)*	.12 (.001)*	.01 (.818)	-.17 (<.001)*	-.01 (.843)	.02 (.631)			
	Openness	-.03 (.397)	-.10 (.004)*	-.02 (.621)	-.03 (.413)	-.08 (.023)*	.06 (.111)	.04 (.296)	-.06 (.102)	-.36 (<.001)*		
Narcissism		.19 (<.001)*	.11 (.001)*	.10 (.006)*	.16 (<.001)*	.01 (<.776)	.12 (<.001)*	-.08 (.023)*	-.08 (.032)*	.11 (.003)*	-.01 (.952)	
Histrionic		.18 (<.001)*	.02 (.519)	.06 (.121)	.05 (.146)	-.07 (.045)*	.22 (<.001)*	-.04 (.259)	-.12 (<.001)*	-.02 (.569)	.06 (.096)	.38 (<.001)*

Note. Non-directional Pearson correlations. *P*-values are presented in the brackets and values below 0.05 were marked with *

Standardized beta coefficients for the hierarchical model are presented in Table 3. The regression model was significant: Step 1: $F(8,756) = 4.01$, $p = <.001$; Step 2: $F(10, 754) = 6.13$, $p = <.001$. In the first step our model revealed that people from the United Kingdom (compared to Poles), and those who were more extravertive and less conscientious, were more motivated to become a social media influencer.

In Step 2, after including narcissism and histrionic personality in the model, we found that people from the UK (compared to Poles), and those who were more extravertive, more narcissistic, and more histrionic, were more motivated to become a social media influencer. In Step 2, conscientiousness was no longer a significant predictor.

Table 3

Standardized beta coefficients for the hierarchical model predicting the motivation to become a social media influencer

Predictors	B (SE)	p	β
Step 1 R² = .041			
Constant	4.50 (2.80)	.110	
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	0.50 (0.16)	.001	0.25
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	0.22 (0.15)	.136	0.11
Age	-0.08 (0.16)	.608	-0.02
Extraversion	0.19 (0.05)	<.001	0.14
Agreeableness	0.02 (0.06)	.810	0.01
Conscientiousness	-0.15 (0.05)	.007	-0.10
Neuroticism	0.11 (0.08)	.169	0.05
Openness	0.03 (0.08)	.735	0.01
Step 2 R² = .075;			
ΔR² = .035			
Constant	3.54 (2.77)	.201	
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	0.46 (0.15)	.003	0.23
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	0.26 (0.15)	.070	0.13
Age	-0.08 (0.16)	.624	-0.02
Extraversion	0.12 (0.05)	.022	0.09
Agreeableness	0.04 (0.06)	.578	0.02
Conscientiousness	-0.10 (0.05)	.054	-0.07
Neuroticism	0.07 (0.08)	.370	0.04
Openness	0.01 (0.08)	.925	0.01
Narcissism	0.26 (0.09)	.002	0.12
Histrionic pers.	0.95 (0.31)	.003	0.12

Multicollinearity tests (VIF) suggested that the multicollinearity in the model was low (Table 4).

Table 4

Variance Inflation Factors for Step I and Step II for the hierarchical model predicting the motivation to become a social media influencer

Predictors	VIF	
	Step I	Step II
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	1.213	1.224
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	1.098	1.102
Age	1.041	1.041
Extraversion	1.127	1.213
Agreeableness	1.140	1.144
Conscientiousness	1.124	1.152
Neuroticism	1.252	1.270
Openness	1.244	1.247
Narcissism	-	1.209
Histrionic pers.	-	1.238

Standardized beta coefficients for the hierarchical models predicting the motivation to become a teacher, a medical doctor, a lawyer, and a computer specialist are presented in Tables S2-S5 in Supplementary Materials. A model predicting the motivation to become a social media influencer was the only model in which histrionic personality was the only significant predictor. Narcissism predicted not only the motivation to become a social media influencer—it also predicted motivation to become a lawyer ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .001$) and the direction and strength of these relationships in both models were almost identical. Extraversion was also a significant predictor of the motivation to

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become a medical doctor ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < .010$) and a computer specialist ($\beta = -0.08$, $p = .031$). In both cases this relationship was weaker, compared to the Influencer model, and in case of the computer specialist, the relationship was negative. Conscientiousness was also a significant predictor of motivation to become a lawyer, but the relationship was positive ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = .028$).

The results of the two hierarchical models, separate for the UK and Poland, demonstrate that the general effects go in the same direction, but there are differences in significance (Table S6 and S7). For the model based on Polish participants, we found that only the second-step model was significant (Step 1: $F(7,353) = 1.41$, $p = .200$; Step 2: $F(9, 351) = 3.01$, $p = .002$). We found that the motivation to become a social media influencer was predicted by narcissism ($\beta = 0.16$, $p = .004$). For the model based on the UK participants, we found both steps to be significant (Step 1: $F(7, 396) = 2.58$, $p = .013$; Step 2: $F(9, 394) = 3.32$, $p = <.001$). At Step 1, the motivation to become a social media influencer was predicted by extraversion ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = .026$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = -0.17$, $p = .001$). At Step 2, it was predicted by conscientiousness ($\beta = -0.13$, $p = .011$), and histrionism ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = .009$).

4. Discussion

The rise of social media has created a new career path: the social media influencer. Media coverage highlights the popularity of this profession among youth while raising concerns about its impact on young people's career aspirations (e.g., Dirnhuber, 2017; Dzhanova, 2019). This phenomenon raises important questions: What traits and motivations attract individuals to this career? Who envisions their future as social media influencers?

Among 773 teenagers, only two spontaneously expressed aspirations to become social media influencers when asked, *What profession would you like to have in the future?* However, when asked to estimate the extent to which they want to become influencers, it became evident that these professional ambitions exceeded those directed toward popular professions such as lawyer, doctor, teacher, or IT specialist. Those with

higher levels of professional aspiration to become social media influencers were found to be more extraverted, narcissistic, and histrionic. Additionally, UK teenagers demonstrated higher motivation to become influencers compared to their Polish peers. Contrary to our hypothesis, no significant relationship was found between openness to experience and motivation to become a social media influencer.

The contrast between spontaneous declarations and explicit intentions to become social media influencers reveals a puzzling aspect of this modern career path. While only two participants spontaneously expressed a desire to become influencers, many indicated high intentions when directly asked. This finding may reflect the unique nature of social media influencing as a career.

We hypothesize that teenagers might not view social media influencing as a standalone profession, but rather as a complementary activity to their primary career. For instance, aspiring nurses, mechanics, IT specialists, or teachers might envision creating online content related to their chosen professions. While prototypical social media influencers like Charli D'Amelio, James Charles, or Khaby Lame have amassed multi-million followings, a more accessible avenue is offered by the concept of micro-influencing. Micro-influencers operate on a smaller scale, focusing on niche topics such as anthropology (@Evolving_Moloch), ethics (@orestes.kowalski), or geostrategy (@marian_baczal; Chen et al., 2024).

This paradigm allows individuals to pursue traditional careers while leveraging social media as an auxiliary activity, potentially promoting services or engaging with a global network of experts and enthusiasts.

This perspective offers a reinterpretation of findings reported by The Sun/First Choice and Harris Poll/LEGO® (Dirnhuber, 2017; Parker, 2019). While media coverage has suggested that adolescents' preference for becoming social media influencers signals a departure from traditional career paths, an alternative explanation could be that adolescents are not

necessarily abandoning these professions. Instead, they may be envisioning a hybrid approach, where social media skills are leveraged alongside traditional careers for enhanced marketing or professional networking. Future research should explore how teenagers perceive the influencer career path, specifically whether they view it as a primary profession or a complement to traditional careers.

The contrast between spontaneous declarations and Likert-scale responses highlights the methodological influence of question framing (de Bruin, 2011). Career choice could be subject to decisional heuristics (Lent & Brown, 2020). Open-ended questions require participants to actively recall and articulate their aspirations, which may bias responses toward culturally prominent or traditional career paths. In contrast, closed-ended questions provide predefined options, reducing cognitive load and prompting participants to consider choices they might not have spontaneously identified. Additionally, explicitly presenting "social media influencer" as a career option may reduce the social desirability bias potentially associated with non-traditional careers, enabling participants to express their interests more openly (Krumpal, 2013). Future studies should explore how question formats impact the accuracy and depth of responses regarding career aspirations, as these methodological nuances can significantly shape findings in this area.

Adolescents with higher ambitions to become social media influencers were more extraverted, more narcissistic and more histrionic. These findings support our hypotheses and align with previous research on personality traits and social media behaviour (e.g., Liu & Campbell, 2017; Savci et al., 2021; Sorokowski et al., 2015), extending the understanding to career motivations specifically.

Extraversion, characterized by sociability, assertiveness, and high energy levels (McCrae & Costa, 1997), may be fulfilled through the frequent social interactions, varied content creation, and public self-expression inherent in influencer roles. The career offers

extraverts opportunities for recognition and leadership, aligning with their tendency to seek stimulation and social rewards (Ashton et al., 2002).

Narcissism, defined by grandiosity and need for admiration (Krizan & Herlache, 2018), may find expression in the status and self-promotion aspects of influencer work. The ability to cultivate a following and manage one's public image could satisfy these needs.

Histrionic traits, including attention-seeking behaviour and exaggerated emotional expression (Tomiatti et al., 2012), may be accommodated by the opportunities social media platforms provide for dramatic self-presentation and constant audience engagement. The immediate feedback mechanisms of social media platforms could also fulfil the approval-seeking tendencies associated with histrionism (Savci et al., 2021).

4.1. Implications

Our findings provide additional context by examining respondents' motivations to enter professions such as lawyer, medical doctor, teacher, and IT specialist. Higher levels of narcissism were linked to aspirations to become a lawyer, reflecting a desire for status and recognition. Extraversion was associated with an interest in being a medical doctor, but negatively with a preference for computer specialist roles, reflecting differences in social interaction demands. Histrionic traits stood out as uniquely predictive of influencer aspirations, distinguishing this path from traditional professions.

The influencer career presents a mix of psychological opportunities and risks, particularly for individuals with elevated narcissistic and histrionic traits. While these traits may initially align with the career's demands for attention and validation, they also heighten vulnerability to criticism (Atlas & Them, 2008), mood instability (Hefazi Torghabeh & Gholami, 2023), and dependency on external validation (Paramboukis et al., 2016). Narcissistic tendencies, such as grandiosity and sensitivity to criticism, are linked to problematic social media use, including compulsive behaviours and heightened

emotional distress (Brailovskaia et al., 2020; Casale & Banchi, 2020).

Similarly, histrionic traits can intensify emotional volatility, particularly when audience approval fluctuates. Research suggests these traits predict maladaptive social media behaviours, such as vaguebooking and excessive self-promotion, further compounding stress (Astleitner et al., 2023; Savci et al., 2021; Berryman et al., 2019). The pressure to maintain an idealized persona exacerbates unrealistic self-perceptions, strained relationships, and symptoms of anxiety and depression (Appel et al., 2015; Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Although social media platforms can initially accommodate these traits, they may also amplify them, increasing the risk of severe psychological distress. Extreme forms of narcissism and histrionism, recognized as clinical disorders (DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association, 2013), present additional challenges for influencers, as they may lead to impaired functioning and significant mental health concerns.

This study also has broader implications for career counselling and education. Career counsellors and educators can use these findings to guide individuals drawn to non-traditional career paths like social media influencing. By understanding the personality traits that make these paths appealing, counsellors can help aspiring influencers manage expectations, build resilience, and consider alternative careers that align with similar traits but pose fewer psychological risks (Hammond, 2001). Additionally, the research highlights the psychological dynamics of validation-seeking behaviour in digital environments. Mental health professionals could incorporate these insights into assessments and interventions, particularly when working with adolescents and young adults who are frequent users of social media platforms (Ridout & Campbell, 2018).

For social media platforms, these findings emphasize the need to create healthier digital environments. Platforms could reduce the emphasis on engagement metrics like likes and shares to diminish the addictive feedback loop. Integrating features that promote digital well-being and mental health resources

could provide crucial support for users at risk of validation dependency and other psychological challenges (Vanden Abeele et al., 2022). Finally, this study contributes to the broader literature on personality and occupational choice, extending its focus to digital-age professions. Future research could explore these dynamics in other emerging career paths, such as esports or content creation in fields beyond social media (Behnke et al., 2023).

4.2. Limitations and future directions

While our study identifies personality traits linked to influencer aspirations, it does not predict career success, job satisfaction, or performance outcomes(Gräve et al., 2018). Future research should aim to include active social media influencers in the sample, although accessing this population presents significant challenges due to their public status and the small number of potential respondents. Additionally, our focus on adolescents, while valuable for understanding early career aspirations, limits the generalizability of our findings to other age groups. Studies

examining personality traits and influencer career motivations among young adults and established professionals would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these relationships might evolve across different life stages.

Given the emerging trend of micro-influencers, the role of social media influencer may become increasingly prevalent across various niches (Chen et al., 2024). This trend underscores the importance of investigating the potential health consequences associated with this profession, particularly for psychologically vulnerable individuals. Special attention should be paid to those exhibiting high levels of narcissism and histrionism, as these traits may be exacerbated by the demands and nature of influencer work (Savci et al., 2021).

Our research presents an ambiguous picture of the relationship between conscientiousness and motivation to become an influencer. While our main model did not show a significant relationship, secondary analyses revealed that individuals with

lower levels of conscientiousness appear to have higher motivation to become an influencer. This relationship emerged in a model excluding histrionism and narcissism, and in a model tested specifically on UK youth. Notably, the UK and Polish subsamples did not differ in their conscientiousness levels, suggesting this effect stems from other factors. One explanation might lie in distinct levels of social media exposure between these countries. According to Statista (2024), 82% of the UK population uses social media compared to 71% in Poland. This higher exposure could make less conscientious individuals in the UK more likely to envision themselves as influencers, viewing it as an appealing, less structured career path. Given that conscientiousness is often associated with task persistence and organization (McCrae & Costa, 1997), these individuals might struggle with the consistent content creation and self-management required in influencer roles.

Understanding the psychological challenges of an influencer's career is crucial, particularly for individuals who display pronounced narcissistic or histrionic characteristics. Our findings could inform the development of tailored support systems, including resilience training programs that help aspiring influencers cope with criticism, support emotional stability, and manage their online presence effectively. Educational institutions can play a key role in this process by helping students develop realistic perspectives on influencer careers. Schools could integrate digital literacy programs that address both opportunities and challenges of social media careers, while raising awareness about personality traits that might be risk factors. Such integration could promote well-being by helping susceptible individuals understand the psychological risks of influencer careers and explore more suitable professional alternatives.

4.3. Conclusions

This study sheds light on the personality traits driving aspirations to become social media influencers, a career path growing in popularity among adolescents. Our findings reveal that

individuals high in extraversion, narcissism, and histrionism are more likely to express motivation to pursue influencer roles, aligning with previous research on personality traits and social media behaviour and extending our understanding to career motivations in the digital age. Our research underscores the double-edged nature of the influencer career path, highlighting that while it offers opportunities for self-expression and social connection appealing to certain personality traits, it also presents potential psychological risks, particularly for individuals high in narcissism and histrionism, as the pressure to maintain an online persona and the volatile nature of social media popularity may exacerbate underlying psychological vulnerabilities.

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Supplementary materials

Table S1

The categories of motives for pursuing a career path reported by the participants

Motive	Description	Example		No. of answers
		Profession	Argument	
Emotion	Emotional attachment to the type of career or activities carried out within it.	Musician	*I've always wanted to work with music because i'm passionate about it.*	287
Interest	Interest in matters related to career and activities carried out within it.	Interior designer	*It interests me.*	183
Mission	Desire to help other people, to be useful to society.	Nurse	*To help people.*	98
Money	Desire to earn a lot of money.	Sales specialist	*There is a lot of money to be made.*	58
Skills	Willingness to use the skills or strengths already acquired.	Electrician	*Because I'm good with it.*	25
Parents	Willingness to meet parental/family expectations or follow their path.	Builder	*Because my dad also works as a builder.*	5

Note. Three people declare they do not know their motives.

Table S2

Standardized beta coefficients for the hierarchical model predicting the motivation to become a teacher

Predictors	B (SE)	p	β
Step 1 R² = .118			
Constant	-2.92 (2.62)	.266	
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	0.86 (0.15)	<.001	0.45
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	-0.62 (0.14)	<.001	-0.32
Age	0.34 (0.15)	.027	0.08
Extraversion	0.04 (0.05)	.363	0.03
Agreeableness	-0.08 (-0.08)	.210	-0.05
Conscientiousness	-0.04 (0.05)	.490	-0.03
Neuroticism	0.20 (0.07)	.008	0.10
Openness	-0.13 (0.08)	.089	-0.06
Step 2 R² = .123;			
ΔR² = .005			
Constant	-3.22 (2.62)	.219	
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	0.83 (0.15)	<.001	0.43
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	-0.61 (0.14)	< .001	-0.32
Age	0.34 (0.15)	.027	0.08
Extraversion	0.03 (0.05)	.602	0.02
Agreeableness	-0.07 (0.06)	.257	-0.04
Conscientiousness	-0.03 (0.05)	.606	-0.02
Neuroticism	0.18 (0.08)	.017	0.09
Openness	-0.13 (0.08)	.074	-0.07
Narcissism	0.16 (0.08)	.051	0.07
Histrionic pers.	-0.02 (0.30)	.941	-0.01

Table S3

Standardized beta coefficients for the hierarchical model predicting the motivation to become a medical doctor

Predictors	B (SE)	p	β
Step 1 R² = .182			
Constant	0.30 (3.03)	.921	
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	0.50 (0.17)	.003	0.24
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	-0.33 (0.16)	.036	-0.16
Age	0.08 (0.18)	.664	0.02
Extraversion	0.14 (0.05)	.010	0.10
Agreeableness	-0.01 (0.07)	.943	-0.01
Conscientiousness	0.03 (0.06)	.642	0.02
Neuroticism	0.16 (0.09)	.058	0.08
Openness	0.03 (0.09)	.694	0.02
Step 2 R² = .193;			
ΔR² = .004			
Constant	-0.05 (3.04)	.987	
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	0.48 (0.17)	.005	0.23
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	-0.32 (0.16)	.044	-0.15
Age	0.08 (0.18)	.664	0.02
Extraversion	0.12 (0.06)	.038	0.08
Agreeableness	0.01 (0.07)	.968	0.01
Conscientiousness	0.04 (0.06)	.501	0.03
Neuroticism	0.15 (0.09)	.093	0.07
Openness	0.03 (0.09)	.756	0.01
Narcissism	0.14 (0.09)	.135	0.06
Histrionic pers.	0.16 (0.35)	.642	0.02

Table S4

Standardized beta coefficients for the hierarchical model predicting the motivation to become a lawyer

Predictors	B (SE)	p	β
Step 1 R² = .214			
Constant	0.12 (2.87)	.967	
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	0.44 (0.16)	.005	0.22
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	-0.30 (0.15)	.045	-0.15
Age	0.12 (0.17)	.451	0.03
Extraversion	0.07 (0.05)	.169	0.05
Agreeableness	-0.18 (0.07)	.006	-0.10
Conscientiousness	0.10 (0.06)	.062	0.07
Neuroticism	0.20 (0.08)	.014	0.10
Openness	0.04 (0.08)	.590	0.02
Step 2 R² = .250;			
ΔR² = .017			
Constant	-0.50 (2.85)	.860	
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	0.39 (0.16)	.013	0.20
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	-0.28 (0.15)	.062	-0.14
Age	0.12 (0.17)	.457	0.03
Extraversion	0.03 (0.05)	.531	0.02
Agreeableness	-0.17 (0.07)	.011	-0.10
Conscientiousness	0.12 (0.06)	.028	0.08
Neuroticism	0.17 (0.08)	.042	0.08
Openness	0.03 (0.08)	.700	0.02
Narcissism	0.30 (0.09)	< .001	0.13
Histrionic pers.	0.08 (0.32)	.818	0.01

Table S5

Standardized beta coefficients for the hierarchical model predicting the motivation to become a computer specialist

Predictors	B (SE)	p	β
Step 1 R² = .327			
Constant	3.11 (2.72)	.254	
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	-0.16 (0.15)	.297	-0.08
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	1.25 (0.14)	< .001	0.63
Age	0.01 (0.16)	.983	0.01
Extraversion	-0.10 (0.05)	.031	-0.08
Agreeableness	-0.01 (0.06)	.981	-0.01
Conscientiousness	-0.01 (0.05)	.816	-0.01
Neuroticism	0.04 (0.08)	.592	0.02
Openness	-0.07 (0.08)	.398	-0.03
Step 2 R² = .334;			
ΔR² = .005			
Constant	3.10 (2.73)	.256	
Country (0 – PL, 1 – UK)	-0.18 (0.15)	.230	-0.09
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	1.24 (0.14)	< .001	0.63
Age	-0.01 (0.16)	.988	-0.01
Extraversion	-0.10 (0.05)	.053	-0.07
Agreeableness	0.01 (0.06)	.996	0.01
Conscientiousness	-0.02 (0.05)	.711	-0.01
Neuroticism	0.03 (0.08)	.692	0.02
Openness	-0.07 (0.08)	.397	-0.03
Narcissism	0.13 (0.08)	.117	0.06
Histrionic pers.	-0.54 (0.31)	.084	-0.07

Table S6

Standardized beta coefficients for the hierarchical model predicting the motivation to become a social media influencer in Poland

Predictors	B (SE)	p	β
Step 1 R^2 = .027			
Constant	5.64 (4.86)	0.246	
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	0.21 (0.23)	0.363	0.10
Age	-0.15 (0.29)	0.594	-0.03
Extraversion	0.20 (0.07)	0.006	0.15
Agreeableness	-0.01 (0.09)	0.931	-0.00
Conscientiousness	-0.07 (0.08)	0.427	-0.05
Neuroticism	0.04 (0.12)	0.730	0.02
Openness	0.01 (0.12)	0.930	0.01
Step 2 R^2 = .072;			
ΔR^2 = .044			
Constant	4.49 (4.78)	0.348	
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	0.32 (0.23)	0.162	0.15
Age	-0.17 (0.28)	0.553	-0.03
Extraversion	0.12 (0.07)	0.120	0.09
Agreeableness	0.05 (0.09)	0.603	0.03
Conscientiousness	-0.04 (0.08)	0.595	-0.03
Neuroticism	0.02 (0.12)	0.838	0.01
Openness	0.01 (0.12)	0.957	0.00
Narcissism	0.38 (0.13)	0.004	0.16
Histrionic pers.	0.92 (0.51)	0.072	0.10

Table S7

Standardized beta coefficients for the hierarchical model predicting the motivation to become a social media influencer in the UK

Predictors	B (SE)	p	β
Step 1 R² = .044			
Constant	4.16 (3.33)	0.212	
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	0.24 (0.19)	0.199	0.13
Age	-0.03 (0.19)	0.867	-0.01
Extraversion	0.16 (0.07)	0.026	0.11
Agreeableness	0.01 (0.09)	0.885	0.01
Conscientiousness	-0.24 (0.07)	0.001	-0.17
Neuroticism	0.20 (0.11)	0.067	0.10
Openness	0.07 (0.11)	0.547	0.03
Step 2 R² = .070;			
ΔR² = .027			
Constant	3.76 (3.30)	0.256	
Gender (0 – W, 1 – M)	0.24 (0.18)	0.188	0.13
Age	-0.03 (0.19)	0.886	-0.01
Extraversion	0.09 (0.07)	0.208	0.07
Agreeableness	-0.00 (0.09)	0.990	-0.00
Conscientiousness	-0.19 (0.07)	0.011	-0.13
Neuroticism	0.16 (0.11)	0.151	0.08
Openness	0.03 (0.11)	0.758	0.02
Narcissism	0.11 (0.12)	0.350	0.05
Histrionic pers.	1.07 (0.41)	0.009	0.15