

# ***Personality Test Effect on Marketing in Digital Era: The Case of MBTI***

**Zhanwen Zhu<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Rutgers Business School, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08854, USA*

*a. zz399@scarletmail.rutgers.edu*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** Personality test such as MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) has started to become a viral topic lately that have brought up the trend of personality test worldwide. At the same time, it also has the assignable influence on the aspect of marketing especially in this digital era. This article describes how to evaluate the skyrocketing of the popularity of “MBTI” test by researching and analyzing the key word for the on Google trend. Also, this article also utilizes the comparing method of each personality to emphasize the importance of this trending in the perspectives of marketing in this digital era. Furthermore, this article illustrates the underlying reasons of this trending impact marketing by referring other theories such as the Barnum Effect. Finally, this article concludes that besides the idea that personality tests such as MBTI can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing by allowing marketers gain better understanding about their targeted customers, they can also utilize this concept by creating the viral and trending topics which open a new market with their derivative products or even the memes that could be prevalent nowadays, especially while those younger generation socializing with each other. The significance of this study is to not only explain this personality test concept, but also to demonstrate how marketers can utilize it so that enable them to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of segmentation. In addition, this article also reveals the idea that how people’s daily life is being affect by the label of different personalities unconsciously.

**Keywords:** personality test, marketing, digital era, MBTI

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. The Case and the Background**

Lately, there are numerous amounts of content creators on YouTube started to make videos that related to the MBTI topic. One of the famous MBTI content creators “Frank James” has reached one million followers on YouTube [1]. Other than that, there is a social observation variety reality show name “MBTI INSIDE” from South Korea was launched and started to become a viral topic [2]. According to the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), each participator is classified as one of the 16 personality types after taking the test. The show provided them platform to let them get along with each other and demonstrate audiences’ different ways of collision and communication among different personality types.

## 1.2. Introducing the Concept of MBTI

This reality show raises a thought-provoking query that why people are willing to label themselves as one of those 16 4-letter combination such as “INTP” and “ISTP”. What’s more, since this show has already become viral, this MBTI test index is undoubtedly has a tremendous influence on the field of marketing in this digital era. To understand the reason why MBTI test started to become a trending topic and what influence does it have in the perspective of marketing, it is crucial to understand the metrics and approaches that makes it classifies personalities into sixteen groups. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is a self-reported personality test that used to describe and identify the personality traits of each individual in ways such as how he or she would have more tendency to make decision based on that person’s mind or feeling, whether that individual wants his or her life to become well organized or would prefer a much more flexible schedule and so on [3]. This indicator can divide up into four categories: (I) introversion and (E) extroversion, (N) intuition and (S) sensing, (T) thinking and (F) feeling, (J) judging and (P) perceiving.

## 1.3. Unusual Finding -- MBTI Test Suddenly Became Popular After it Came Out for More Than 50 Years

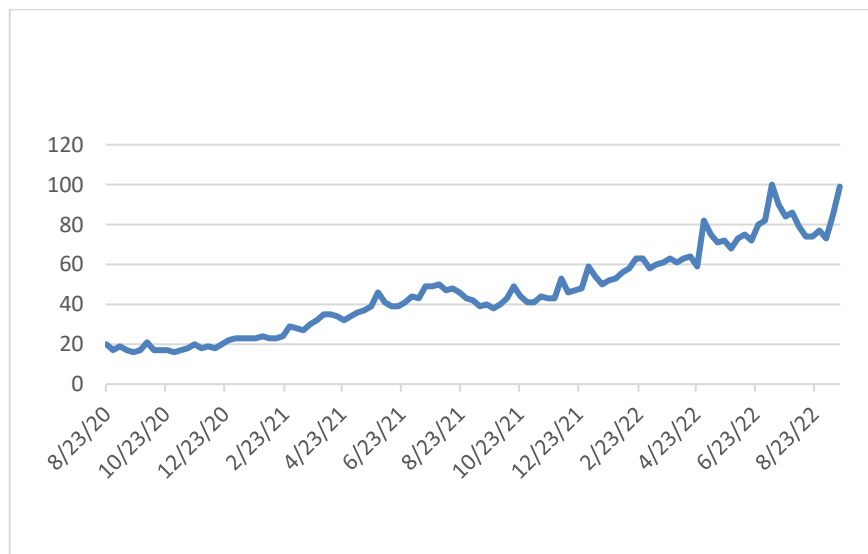


Figure 1: The interest over time for the search term "mbti" (Data exported from "Google Trends") [5]

Note: Here is the graph displays on the “trends.google.com” by searching the term “mbti” in past 2 years. The number on left column is in the unit of “interest”: the value of 100 means it reaches the peak and 0 means the insufficiency of data. The volume searching of term “mbti” has been rising ever since 2020.

According to the article that wrote by Jiesoo Kim and her group members, in order to demonstrate the prevalence of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, they sent a survey to the school’s name FIS, the result shows that 97.4% of students in this school have taken the MBTI personality test at least once before [4]. However, this Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was first developed and published in 1943, It should have some intriguing reasons behind that which make this assessment become trending after it came out for 80 years. According to the research, the first reason why this assessment become popular and gain so much attention from people is because of the outbreak of Covid-19. When this pandemic first started at the end of 2020, this virus was extremely contagious and fatal since countries did not have the solution to deal with that tough situation. In that case, some governments locked down their cities and people had to quarantine themselves in order to avoid the spreading of that contagious virus. Under that kind of situation, people lacked social interaction with each other so that they would be more active to seek some random tests online that can help them to mitigate their

boredom from the self-isolation. In this case, marketers would like to catch this opportunity since the test is so popular, further leading this test becomes popular again. Fig.1 demonstrates the rising trend for the search term “mbti” from 2020 to present.

#### 1.4. The Significance of This Study and Research

Nowadays, internet has already become one of the most significant and indispensable elements in people's daily life. Especially for those marketers since they need to switch their focus to the online marketing in order to cater the rapid development of the digital world. On top of that, there is a novel trending concept named “Personality Marketing” which has already been applied and utilized by those marketers. This article takes currently one of the most popular personality tests “Myers-Briggs Type Indicator” as an example to discuss what impact can it bring in the perspective of marketing by illustrating the meaning of different metrics and explaining how marketers can utilize this concept. On top of that, this article also allows consumers who are not familiar with this concept to have a clear understanding on how they have been unconsciously influenced in this digital era by pointing out the Barnum Effect.

## 2. Case Study

### 2.1. Case Description and how it Related to the Marketing

The case that this article chose is the Korean TV shows named “MBTI INSIDE”. It is intriguing that this metric would acquire that much exposure after it came out for 80 years. Bringing a novel show is undoubtedly letting more audiences to know this concept. In addition, this popular personality concept can let those marketers seize that opportunities and utilize this trending topic. To be more specific, MBTI not only has already become the main theme of a popular Korean TV shows, but also has developed its own derivative products and goods. It is undeniable that it has tremendous amount of influence in the perspective of marketing especially social media marketing in such a digital era. There are several impacts that such “viral” test has brought to the digital marketing.

### 2.2. Case Analysis

#### **MBTI Allow Marketer to Better Understand Their Customers**

Table 1 demonstrates the characteristics of each metric how each of them relate to marketing. The first impact that MBTI personality test have on the field of marketing is that knowing each personality can allow marketers or business owners can use this personality test to better classify them into different group and facilitate the success of marketing since marketers would gain more understanding of their customer [6]. According to the MBTI test, each customer would be grouped into each 16 types. When the marketer understanding the meaning and characteristic of different types. They would gain incredible amount of valuable information about their customers. For example, by knowing the first answer of the first metric “introversion” and “extroversion” of their customer, marketers can know whether customers get their energy from the interaction with outside world or when they stay alone. With this metric, marketer can choose to put the focus on the group activities or gregarious campaign with the customer with “extroversion” while not putting so much effort on marketing those events or sociable activities to those customers with the “introversion” metric since that action might not be worthy. On the other hand, marketers can choose to reach to those customers with “introversion” during the time while that they are mostly alone. By the same token, other metrics also can provide marketers with helpful insight: “Sensing” people pay more attention on the detail and the concrete data while “intuition” might ignore some detail but would like to shift their attention on interpreting on the deep meaning or the abstract connection of two things.

When it comes to marketing, since “Sensing” people rely more on the concrete data, in order to not let them give doubt on the marketing activities or campaigns, it is a significant that do not provide general or whimsical idea that can spark curiosity but without the support of data. On the other hand, “Intuitive” people are more open to the possibilities without the specific steps indicated, which means they are high-tolerate when it comes to a vision and a conclusion. “Thinker” relies more on their rationality while “feeler” relies more on their emotion. Marketers can utilize this metric by offering data to support the information, which means marketers should focus on the fact or evidence instead of providing the emotion-rousing story since “thinker” are more willing to make decision based on the rationality. On the other hand, marketers can create an emotional hook that can make them have resonate and feeling connection with that product or ideas. For instance, marketing can promote a brand story that could be so moved to the audiences in order to targeting those “feeler” so that can maximize the effectiveness of marketing. These metrics can bring valuable information about the customer to the marketers so that can help them to make the targeting process much more effective [7]. “Judging” does not necessarily means that individual have more tendency to give judgmental comments to others. In this metrics, “judging” means that person would love to be more organized lifestyle and willing to have plan for their action. Similar to how marketers attract “Sensing” people, it is also better for marketers to demonstrate the details or steps that can allow “Judging” people to see the plan for the future. On other hand, “perceiving” people have less tendency to stick with the plan and could be very open-minded for changing since they prefer a flexible and adaptable lifestyle. Marketers can utilize this idea by providing more choices or possibilities to the “Perceiving” people so that those group of customers would not be overwhelming because they are restricting to have a limited selection.

Table 1: Different attributes of each letter according to the four different scales. [7]

Different Metrics of MBTI	Brief Description of Each Letter	How this Trait Relate to Marketing
E (Extrovert)	Gaining energy from the social interaction with others.	Holding social events or campaign might attract extroverts more
I (Introvert)	Energizing and recharging after spending time alone	Reaching out to them through email while introverts were by himself or herself
S (Sensing)	Focusing on the reality such as the details or other concrete things that they have experienced or felt	Making sure to providing the support data or other concrete detail while holding a marketing activity
N (Intuition)	Paying more attention on the different possibilities of things, and preferring abstract theories and ideas over details	Providing vision that can demonstrate different possibilities can be a choice for them
T (Thinking)	Demonstrating more logical thought and might focus less on the emotional aspect while making a decision	Using data or evidence that with logical connection to attract them
F (Feeling)	Paying more attention on the emotional connection with each other while making a decision	Utilizing emotional-arousing story that can let them have the resonation with the story
J (Judging)	Having the tendency to demonstrate a more structure lifestyle, such as making detail schedule or plans in daily life	Demonstrating plans or other detailed steps that can show the idea or concept promoted by the marketers are achievable
P (Perceiving)	Being more open to different decision and tending to have a more adaptive and flexible lifestyle	Allowing them to have more choices and freedom and avoiding put them in a place where they need to stick with a certain plan

### MBTI would label each people with a novel identity

The second impact that MBTI personality test have on the field of marketing is that this creates a new marketing trend with derivative products and allow marketer to gain more profit from this hot topic. Nowadays, people would like to use these 16 personalities as a new label of socializing instead of the 12 signs. One of the most significant reasons that why people would like to believe in this is because for each personality, their descriptions only have the positive parts instead of showing the derogatory information. According to the Barnum Effect, which describe the idea that an individual would have the tendency to believe in a description about himself or herself specially even though that description can be so general that can be applied to almost everyone, especially when that description only mentions the positive aspects and people are much more willing to believe in that [8]. For example, when the MBTI results tells you that you are a “ESTP”: extroversion, sensing, thinking, and perceiving, they would likely to show you that you are an action-oriented individual who love to have social interaction with others. In addition, these types of people are also a charming, spontaneous problem solver. All those characteristics listed above sound positive and all compliment-like. However, they ignore an idea that “ESTP” could also be impulsive and lack of patience. In this case, people would love to believe in that. When this personality test gives people a sense of belonging by enabling them to have a label and find their identity in a big collective. Furthermore, it goes viral and becomes a trending topic no matter in the daily communication among younger generation or on the internet. In China, there are lots of “version” of MBTI test that after the users finally finish all the questions, they need to pay a certain amount of fee in order to see the answer. On Chinese largest searching engine “Baidu”, if you search “mbti”. There are lots of knockoff tests there which are totally unwarranted. Table 2 is from Wuyue Chen’s article which lists some knockoff test platform that will charge the users for test results after they finish them.[9] The trending of MBTI test would bring negative influence to the marketing and provide marketers an opportunity to take advantage of that trending topic.

Table 2: “Free Test ? You have to pay to unlock your report!” [9]

Name of the MBTI Test Platforms	Type of Tests	“Price” (in Chinese “Yuan”)
Jianze MBTI	65 questions, check your brief report	9.9
Jianze MBTI	65 questions, check your detailed report	16.5
Jianze MBTI	145 questions, only check your result	10
Jianze MBTI	145 questions, check your detailed report	19
Official Accounts: MBTI Personality Test	48 questions, check your detailed report	19.9
Official Accounts: Yiqingsu	93 questions, check your detailed report	19.9
Beiniu Test	128 questions, check your detailed report	19.9

Note: Here is a table that demonstrates the different versions of knockoff tests when users search “mbti” in “baidu” from Wuyue Chen’s article.

### 3. Discussion

Utilizing the concept of MBTI undoubtedly has some perspectives that allow the marketers to promote their business in a much more effective way since they can understand their customer more. On the other hand, this trending topic might also bring the negative impact to the marketing especially in the digital era. This kind of scenario has already developed into a situation of overmarketing. The concept of overmarketing is that selling products to the audience or customer even though they are

not demanding that much [10]. The situation with MBTI marketing is a perfect example of overmarketing. It might not seem to be that way at first since there is no products or goods directly associated in this situation. However, the product here not only can be those concrete items, but also can be the idea of label of each personality. Since those merchants use the MBTI tests to bring up different derivative products and meme that have an impact in people's daily life especially for younger generation, the test result has already lost its original meaning which is help people to better understand themselves and others, instead, this idea was over marketing and started to impact people's daily life. In order to not over marketing with this concept, such as have different version of knockoff MBTI test on the internet, people should understand the concept that I have mentioned above which is the Barnum Effect since otherwise they might totally believe in this idea and would put label on themselves and act like the stereotype that exactly fit in their result on the personality test. Other than that, in the perspective of individuals, it is totally not necessary to use the results from MBTI test as a label for himself or herself in order to gain a sense of belonging.

#### 4. Conclusion

As a matter of fact, The MBTI personality test might not be that valid or reliable than how the internet demonstrates. To be more specific, the boundaries of each metric are too clear and too definite for human being since they are too complicated to be classified into two opposite dimensions. People are not exclusively belonging to one type but not another. Another reason is that this personality test is a self-reported test, which means its result might be modified for an individual depends on their mood or feeling even though the period between taking two test is very short. However, these results do not mean that MBTI test is not valid at all. Indeed, it has its own value and meaning but people just do not exaggerate its value and putting labels on themselves, thus would act exactly as what the stereotype of the type that they were assigned by this self-reported test. If people ceased having this erroneous conception towards MBTI test, they would find out that the diversify among individuals is far complicated than just being simply classified as sixteen group.

#### References

- [1] Frank James Channel. Retrieved from Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/FrankJamesChannel>. (n.d.).
- [2] MBTI inside. Retrieved from mydramalist: <https://inf.news/en/entertainment/eebc4dac8e022eac4e568133e1b593b6.html>. (n.d.).
- [3] Cherry, K. How the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Works. Retrieved from Verywellmind: <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-myers-briggs-type-indicator-2795583>. (2022, July 28). Author, F.: Contribution title. In: 9th International Proceedings on Proceedings, pp. 1–2. Publisher, Location (2010).
- [4] Jiesoo Kim, M. J. The Trend of Personality Tests – The Reliability of MBTI. Retrieved from fisherald: <https://fisherald.com/the-trend-of-personality-tests-the-reliability-of-mbti/>. (2020, December 14).
- [5] GoogleTrends. Retrieved from trends.google: <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2020-08-28%202022-09-28&geo=US&q=mbti>. (n.d.).
- [6] Dinsdale, C. Marketing and Myers-Briggs. Retrieved from hearststorystudio: <https://www.hearststorystudio.com/blog/marketing-and-myers-briggs>. (2022, January 22).
- [7] Mowen, S. HawkPartners. Retrieved from Leveraging the MBTI to Optimize Mass Strategic Communications: <https://hawkpartners.com/strategic-communications/leveraging-myers-briggs-insights-to-optimize-strategic-communications/>. (n.d.).
- [8] Vohs, J. W. Barnum Effect. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/>: <https://www.britannica.com/science/Barnum-Effect>. (2016, August 1).
- [9] Wuyue Chen, Y. C. pingwest. Retrieved from MBTI personality test became popular: "super accurate" or "pseudoscience"? : <https://www.pingwest.com/a/267735>. (2022, July 28).
- [10] Callis, C. Are you overmarketing? Retrieved from ecallis: <https://ecallis.com/insights/general/are-you-overmarketing/#:~:text=In%20other%20words%2C%20Overmarketing%20is,can%20get%20the%20need%20fill> ed. (2017, June 22).