

## Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Decision Making Styles among University Students

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### ABSTRACT

The present study was sought to examine the role of emotional intelligence in the prediction of rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous decision making styles. Hypotheses of the present study were included “emotional Intelligence will positively predict rational and intuitive decision making style among university students” and “emotional Intelligence will negatively predict dependent, avoidant and spontaneous decision making style among university students”. Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law, 2002) and General Decision Making Style Questionnaire (Scott & Bruce, 1995) were used to collect the information. Sample of the present study consisted of 300 university students. Purposive convenient sampling technique was used for data collection. Linear Regression analysis was applied to test the hypotheses. The results indicated that emotional intelligence has significant positive effect on rational and intuitive style whereas significant negative effect on avoidant decision making style. Emotional intelligence has non-significant effect on dependent and spontaneous decision making style. The present study has multiple practical implications in understanding the role of emotional intelligence in decision making of the students studying in higher education institutions.

**KEYWORDS:** Emotional Intelligence, Decision Making Styles, Students

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Emotions play a vital role in decision making. Emotions allocate worth to objects, assist in the understanding of the ways to get those objects, and provide motivation in doing so (Gifford, 2002). The importance of emotions in decision making is apparent from the fact that most of the times decision making itself is an emotional process. A detailed analysis of all possible alternative courses of actions and their accompanying attributes often leads to negative emotional experiences (Beattie & Barlas, 2001; Luce et al., 2001). Likewise the importance of a decision or the extent to which we feel emotionally involved in it may influence our choice. Strong emotional involvement might make us more likely to go with ‘gut feelings’ (intuition) whilst decisions involving significant financial expenditure are unlikely to take place without some rational analysis (it is hoped) (Spicer & Sadler-Smith, 2005).

In order to understand the role of emotions in decision making it is important to consider two concepts “the feeling-is-for-doing approach” proposed by Zeelenberg, Nelissen<sup>1</sup>, Breugelmans, and Pieters (2008) and “the Somatic Marker Hypothesis” proposed by Damasio et al., (2000) and Bechara, Tranel, and Damasio (2002) must be taken into consideration.

The basic principle of feeling-is-for-doing approach is that emotions serve as motivational processes (Zeelenberg et al., 2007; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2006). Decision is taken in uncertainty without any information about their positive or negative outcomes. The somatic marker hypothesis which is basically a neurological theory of decision making indicates that emotions regulate bodily changes that facilitate in decision making. Especially in neural bodily connections and emotional bodily changes assist in the process of decision making (Naqvi, Shiv, & Bechara, 2006).

The feeling-is-for-doing approach stresses on looking ahead the motivational function of emotions (Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2007; Zeelenberg, Nelissen, & Pieters, 2007). This approach illustrates the instrumental role of emotions in striving for goal achievement and eventually achieving it (Zeelenberg, Nelissen<sup>1</sup>, Breugelmans, & Pieters, 2008). It also makes a prediction of the various effects of different emotions like regret, disappointment, shame, and guilt (De Hooze, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2008). The “Somatic Marker Hypothesis” offers a neural account of decision making defects of various kinds of patients.

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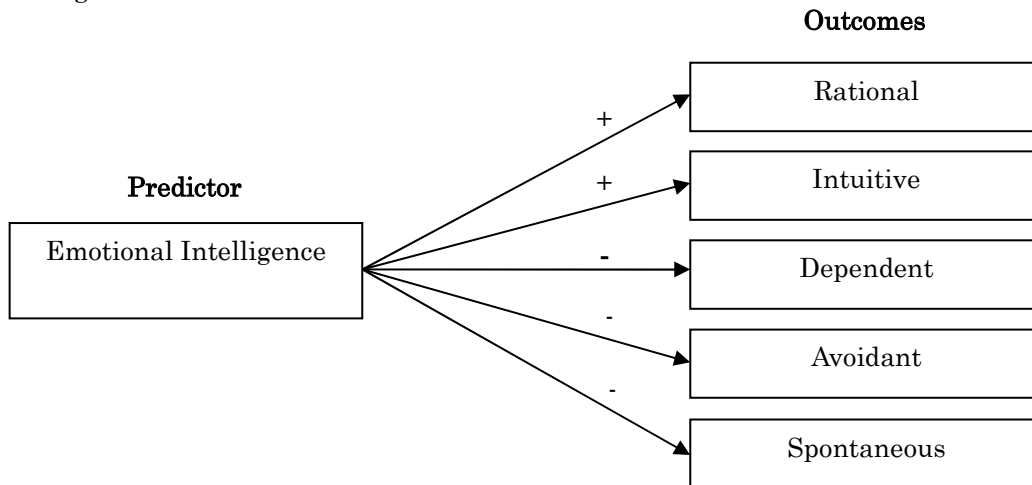
The core premise of the hypothesis is that emotions guide decision making. Patients suffering from bilateral lesions of the VM cortex develop severe impairments in personal and social decision-making, inspite of holding good intellectual abilities like intelligence and creativity. These patients even find difficulties in routine life decisions showing a connection between these abnormalities and impaired decision making resulting in poor quality decisions (Bechara, 2004; Damasio *et al.*, 2000; Bechara, Tranel, & Damasio, 2002).

Emotions remain present after we have decided. After having made a choice and before the outcomes are known people often feel squeezed between the hope and fear. Sometimes people are wishful to know the outcomes, expecting the best. Other times they avoid seeking such information because they fear the worst (Shani & Zeelenberg, 2007; Shani, Tykocinski, & Zeelenberg, 2008). Finally, mental states play a critical role in how perceptual information is processed. Our hopes, fears, and expectations affect what we perceive. In a recent laboratory experiment, emotional states were shown to affect whether two visual patterns were perceived as the same or as being different (Dror, Charlton, & Peron, 2005).

Affect and emotions are considered 'hot topics' in decision literature (Peters, Vastfjall, Garling, & Slovic, 2006) that were regarded 'neglected topics' in the past (Bohm & Brun, 2008). Intuition decision makers never involve in processing of the details of information in a systematic manner, rather they look for overall context and take an overview of details in the flow and make a decision. They are more inclined toward focusing on premonitions, hunches, feelings, insights, instincts, emotions, sixth sense, and impressions (Scott & Bruce, 1995). Emotional self-awareness is regarded as bases of decision making (Hablemitoglu & Yildirim, 2008). Rational approaches deal a task in an objective, unemotional, analytical, and logical manner whereas intuitive approaches handle tasks holistically, emotionally, personally, which depict feelings of the concerned individual (Scott & Bruce, 1995). Wolff, Pescosolido and Druskat (2002) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and decision making styles. The results indicated that emotional intelligence had significant positive relationship with rational decision making style and significant negative relationship with avoidant decision making style. Findings were non-significant with reference to intuitive, dependent, and spontaneous decision making styles. It is for the first time that role of emotional intelligence in decision making styles among university students is being investigated.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Figure 1.



**3. Hypothesis.** On the basis of the prior literature, following hypotheses are formulated:

**H1.** Emotional Intelligence will positively predict rational and intuitive decision making style among university students.

**H2.** Emotional Intelligence will negatively predict dependent, avoidant and spontaneous decision making style among university students.

## 4. Method.

**4.1. Participants.** A total of 300 university students were included in the sample. Both male (n = 150) and female students (n = 150) were part of the sample. Purposive convenient sampling technique was used to

collect the data from participants. Data was collected from Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, International Islamic University Islamabad, FAST National University Islamabad, and COMSATS Islamabad. Students were belonging to BS, MS, and PhD in various disciplines. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before administering the questionnaires. Students were ensured to be confident as all the information will be kept highly confidential and will only be used for research purpose.

**4.2. Measures:** Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) developed by Wong and Law (2002) was used to measure emotional intelligence among students. The scale consisted of 16 items and it is a six point Likert-type scale. There is no cut off score and high scores on scale means high emotional intelligence and low scores mean low emotional intelligence. The possible score range is from 16-96 where 16 is lowest score and 96 is maximum score for whole scale. Past research in the indigenous context indicates that EIS is a reliable and construct valid instrument to measure emotional intelligence (Atta, 2008). General Decision Making Style Questionnaire (GDMSQ) devised by Scott and Bruce (1995) was used to measure the different decision making styles of students. It is based on five point Likert-type scale. It contains 25 items and five subscales including rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous decision making style. Each style is measured through five items. For each style, the possible score range is from 5-25 where 5 is lowest score and 25 is maximum score for whole scale. Past research in the indigenous context indicates that GDMSQ is a reliable and construct valid instrument to measure decision making styles among students (Bechara et al, 2002).

**4.3. RESULTS:** The present study was carried out to examine the role of emotional intelligence in the prediction of decision making styles. Zero-order correlations, alpha reliability coefficients and descriptive statistics were computed for all study variables. Linear Regression analysis was applied to test the hypotheses.

**Table 1:** Mean, Standard deviation, alpha reliability coefficients and zero-order correlation for all study variables ( $N = 300$ )

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6
Emotional intelligence	58.92	9.04	.84	-	.35**	.17**	.10	-.19**	.04
Rational	18.23	3.17	.75		-	.34**	.23**	-.06	-.08
Intuitive	18.26	2.83	.82			-	.16**	.22**	.25**
Dependent	18.98	2.93	.76				-	.36**	.02
Avoidant	15.96	3.90	.70					-	.07
Spontaneous	15.47	4.09	.72						-

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 1 shows Mean, Standard Deviation, Alpha Reliability Coefficients and Pearson correlation among all the variables used in the study. All the variables have satisfactory internal consistency as indicated by the reliability coefficients. The correlation matrix indicates that emotional intelligence has significant positive correlation with rational ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ) and intuitive decision making style ( $r = .17, p < .01$ ) whereas significant negative correlation with avoidant decision making style ( $r = -.19, p < .01$ ). Rational decision making style has significant positive correlation with intuitive ( $r = .34, p < .01$ ) and dependent decision making style ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ).

Intuitive decision making style has significant positive correlation with dependent ( $r = .16, p < .01$ ), avoidant ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ), and spontaneous decision making style ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ). Dependent decision making style has significant positive correlation with avoidant decision making style ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ).

**Table 2:** Regression analysis showing the effect of emotional intelligence on the prediction of (a) rational, (b) intuitive, (c) dependent, (d) avoidant, and (e) spontaneous decision making style ( $N = 300$ )

Independent variable	Dependent variables				
	Rational	Intuitive	Dependent	Avoidant	Spontaneous
Emotional Intelligence	$\beta(a)$	$\beta(b)$	$\beta(c)$	$\beta(d)$	$\beta(e)$
	.352***	.173**	.103	-.187**	.035
$\Delta R^2 =$	.121	.027	.007	.032	.001
$F(1, 298) =$	42.030***	9.160**	3.209	10.832**	.375

\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Regression analysis was conducted separately with emotional intelligence as a predictor variable and rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous decision making styles as outcome variables. The

results of the Regression analysis shows that emotional intelligence has significant positive effect on rational decision making style  $\{\beta(a) = .352, p < .001\}$ . The  $\Delta R^2$  value of .121 shows that EI explains 12.1% variance in rational style  $[F(1, 298) = 42.030, p < .001]$ . Emotional intelligence has significant positive effect on intuitive decision making style  $\{\beta(a) = .173, p < .01\}$ . The  $\Delta R^2$  value of .027 shows that EI explains 2.7% variance in intuitive style  $[F(1, 298) = 9.160, p < .01]$ . Emotional intelligence has significant negative effect on avoidant decision making style  $\{\beta(a) = -.187, p < .01\}$ . The  $\Delta R^2$  value of .032 shows that EI explains 3.2% variance in avoidant style  $[F(1, 298) = 10.832, p < .01]$ . Results are non-significant for dependent and spontaneous decision making style.

**5. DISCUSSION:** The results indicate that from 2.7% to 12.1% variance in the decision making styles can be accounted for, by the emotional intelligence. The traditional view of decision making was based on the assumption that decision should be made by keeping the emotions aside. But the empirical evidence proved that awareness regarding emotions and intelligence plays a vital role in effective decision making (Kalat & Shiota, 2007).

The 1st hypothesis “Emotional Intelligence will positively predict rational and intuitive dependent decision making style among university students” was supported in the present study. Emotional intelligence displayed a significant positive effect on rational decision style. Rational decision making style is considered as an ideal style of decision making (Mau, 1995; Chartrand, Rose, Elliott, Marmarosh, & Caldwell, 1993; Harren, 1979; Scott & Bruce, 1985). Rational decision making is based on the deliberate analysis and evaluation of alternatives to reach at an ideal goal through most effective means (Gross, Crandall, & Knoll, 1980). The rational approach to decision making stressed on establishing cause-effect connections while identifying solutions to problems, keen search and true consideration of all potential alternative solutions, maintaining the priority of primary objectives, optimizing choice, and maximizing the choice opportunities by searching for an ideal solution (Hendry, 2000).

Emotional intelligence displayed a significant positive effect on intuitive decision style. Now-a-days researchers rely on intuition which was explained by recently advanced neuroscience and psychology as an experimental phenomenon governed by tacit knowledge. Interplay of cognitive and affective processes results in intuition (Sinclair & Ashkanasy, 2005). Intuitive decision making style is the brainchild of emotional self and environmental awareness (Harren, 1979; Hablemitoglu & Yildirim, 2008; Singh & Greenhaus, 2004). Self and environmental awareness produced by intuitive decisions is based on the reliance on limited sources and relatively less quantity of information (Singh & Greenhaus, 2004). Thus, without involving in minute things, intuitive decision makers look for overall context. They focus on futuristic potentials; imagine, predict, anticipate, and hypothesize possibilities; see opportunities as a creative and innovative endeavor; prefer variation and change; and attempt to design overall plan (Miller & Ireland, 2005). Due to decision making in short time-spans (Harren, 1979), intuitive decision making is more appropriate under the conditions of uncertainty (Bergstrand, 2001; Callan & Proctor, 2000). Intuitive decision makers accept the personal responsibility of their decisions just like rational decision makers (Harren, 1979).

The 2nd hypothesis “Emotional Intelligence will negatively predict dependent, avoidant and spontaneous decision making style among university students” was partially supported in the current research. As hypothesized, emotional intelligence has significant negative effect on avoidant decision making style whereas the findings are non-significant with respect to dependent and spontaneous decision making style. Avoidant decision making style is defined as an attempt to avoid decision making whenever possible.

It involves indecision, postponing, avoiding, and delaying decisions and keeping oneself away from decision scenarios (Scott & Bruce, 1995). Research sees avoidant decisional style negatively. Russ, McNeilly, and Comer (1996) found a negative correlations between avoidant decision making style and first level managers' effectiveness. Loo (2000) discovered that positive correlation exists between the avoidant decision making style and avoidant conflict management style which shows that individuals with an avoidant decision making style are also inclined toward avoiding conflicts.

People opting avoidant decision making style face difficulties while taking decisional initiatives and they are unable when they have to act upon their intentions (Scott & Bruce, 1995). Avoidant decision making style is ineffective in nature and outcomes. Its ineffectiveness is attributed to the lack of self and environment awareness (Philips, Pazienza, & Farrin, 1984). Avoidant decision making style was positively correlated to external locus of control indicating that individuals with avoidant style are controlled by the external factors rather than their internal control orientation (Scott & Bruce, 1995). Blais, Thompson, and Baranski (2003) illustrates that individuals with high Personal Fear of Invalidity (PFI) are reluctant decision makers who feel

frustrated when errors occur, are uncomfortable regarding the costs of errors, hesitant while evaluating alternatives, and mostly delay and postpone decisions. Thus, researchers demonstrate that such individuals with high PFI are avoidant decision makers.

In the present study, EI displayed non-significant effect on dependent and avoidant decision making style. The current findings are consistent with the Katyal and Awasthi, (2005) research on the relationship between EI and decision making styles, illustrating the EI is non-significantly related to dependent and spontaneous decision making style. Beside the importance of EI in decision making, one hypothesis advocates that emotions with mild and moderate intensity are appropriate for effective choices whereas severe intense emotions are problematic for effective decisions (Kalat & Shiota, 2007). Dependant decision making style is positively related to external locus of control (Scott & Bruce, 1995). In this way, dependant decision makers try to get rid of responsibility. But ultimately they are announced responsible for decisional outcomes (Argyropoulou & Sidiropoulou, 2003). Too much reliance on others' information and guidance (i.e. increased use of others) leads to relatively less effective choices (Phillips, 1997; Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001). Dependant decision making style results in decreased validity of the information, decline in accuracy of awareness, and downfall in decisional effectiveness (Singh & Greenhaus, 2004). Finally, the hasty and impulsive spontaneous decision makers (Scott & Bruce, 1995) are prone to miss some important information in haste. Consequently, a balanced approach in decision making can be more appropriate for effective decision making (Spicer & Sadler-Smith, 2005).

**5.1.Limitations and Suggestions:** First, the present study was limited to the role of just emotional intelligence in the prediction of decision making styles. In future research it would be more appropriate to study the effect of multiple intelligences especially the role of cognitive, social, and spiritual intelligence in the prediction of decision making styles. Secondly, the current research was based on studying the role of overall emotional intelligence in the styles of decision making, in future research, the role of various facets and dimensions of emotional intelligence in the prediction of decision making styles should also be investigated.

**5.2. Conclusion:** The present study was sought to examine the role of emotional intelligence in the prediction of decision making style. The current research is an initiative in the university setting. Out of two, one hypothesis was completely supported whereas the second hypothesis was partially supported in this research. Emotional intelligence has significant positive effect on rational and intuitive decision making style whereas significant negative effect on dependent and spontaneous decision making style. The findings were non-significant with respect to dependent and spontaneous decision making style. The recent study is pretty insightful in understanding the role of EI in decision making among the university students.

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