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From personality to connection: the mediating role of tie strength in HEXACO traits and job networking behaviour

Son-Tung Le

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From personality to connection: the mediating role of tie strength in HEXACO traits and job networking behaviour

Son-Tung Le

Faculty of Economics,
Vietnam Maritime University,
484 Lach Tray Street,
Le Chan District, Hai Phong City, 180000, Vietnam
Email: lesontung@vimaru.edu.vn
Email: sontungvimaru@gmail.com

Abstract: The HEXACO model and social network theory have been used to investigate the effect of personalities on level of the networking behaviour for finding employment, however, the mechanism explaining the relationships is unknown. The purpose of this research aims to examine the mediating role of tie strength in the relationships between HEXACO personalities and job search networking behaviour. The study applied the quantitative method with the sample of 773 university graduates collected at two points with a 3month-lagged time. Our findings indicate that Honesty-humility, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness influence positively individuals' tie strength. Our study provides evidence that an individual tends to spend more time networking for stronger ties. The findings also demonstrate that tie strength plays a mediating role in the relationships between Honesty-humility, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and job search networking behaviour. Implications for mentors, counsellors, and researchers are discussed.

Keywords: HEXACO traits; tie strength; networking behaviour; job search; individual difference theory; social network theory.

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Biographical notes: Son-Tung Le received his PhD in Business Administration from the National Yunlin University of Science and Technology (Taiwan) in 2020. He is currently a Lecturer at the Faculty of Economics, Vietnam Maritime University. His research explores how personality traits – especially HEXACO and proactive personality – affect job search outcomes through networking behaviour. He also focuses on sustainable ports, green supply chains, and digital transformation in logistics. He has published in international journals such as *SAGE Open*, *Sustainability*, and *Environmental Health Insights*, with notable studies on green port development, reverse logistics, and graduate employment behaviour in Vietnam.

1 Introduction

Wanberg (2012) provided evidence of the harmful impacts of unemployment on both psychological and physical health. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people are experiencing a great deal of mental stress as a result of increasing loneliness, panic attacks, financial problems, sadness, and worry (Ramkissoon, 2021). A lot of thought has gone into developing a successful job search strategy to shorten job seekers' jobless periods (Bao and Luo, 2015; Côté et al., 2006; Lin and Le, 2019; O'Connor, 2013; Saks, 2006; Van Hoya et al., 2009; Wanberg, 2012). To enhance career prospects, job searchers might use networking techniques in addition to the traditional approach (Forret, 2014; Wanberg, 2012). According to Wanberg et al. (2000), networking behaviour is when a person contacts family, friends, or acquaintances to inquire about a job. Previous research has established that networking is a productive informal job search technique and career management tactic (Batistic and Tymon, 2017; Forret, 2014; Le and Lin, 2021; Mowbray et al., 2017; Mowbray and Hall, 2019; Wanberg et al., 2000). Networking behaviour was found to be positively associated with job search results such as a number of job interviews and job offers, employment outcomes, and organisation-person fit (Forret, 2014; Lin and Le, 2019; Le and Dang, 2022; Van Hoya et al., 2009). Finding a job using social networks is common, according to Franzen and Hangartner's (2006) research of network usage for job search in 27 countries. In Italy and Switzerland, respectively, 39% and 51% of job searchers utilise social media. It is remarkable that so many people prefer to shy away from networking, despite the fact that it helps to enhance career chances.

According to a growing body of research, personality traits are among the most significant variables influencing job candidates' networking behaviour during the recruiting process (Forret, 2014; Forret and Dougherty, 2001; Lin and Le, 2019; Van Hoya et al., 2009; Wanberg et al., 2000). First, Wanberg used the five-factor model (FFM) of personality to explain the effect of personality on networking intensity. In their study of the impact of personality on job seekers, Wanberg et al. (2000) found that those with greater levels of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience – and lower levels of neuroticism – express a higher intensity of networking activity. Similarly, Forret and Dougherty's (2001) research demonstrated that extraverted individuals are more likely than their introverted counterparts to engage in more intense networking. While Lin and Le (2019) applied the HEXACO model of personality and found that job seekers with high honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, or low emotionality are more likely to network when looking for employment.

In social network theory, social relationships are classified as 'strong' or 'weak' (Granovetter, 1973). Strong ties may provide emotional closeness, while weak ties may provide social support, implying the importance of having both strong and weak ties in order to provide individuals with access to new information, new opportunities, and skills, as well as social, emotional, and practical support (Lam et al., 2023; Lin and Le, 2019). Molho et al. (2016) used the individual difference theory to study the influence of HEXACO personalities on sympathy group connection strength and discovered that honesty-humility and emotionality were significant and positively associated with emotional closeness to the sympathy group. Although prior research has demonstrated

the link between personalities and tie strength, as well as the relationship between tie strength and networking behaviour, the mediated role of tie strength in the relationship between personalities and networking behaviour remains unexplained.

The goal of this study is to close this gap by looking at the mediating effects of tie strength on the link between personality characteristics and networking behaviour for job hunting. The research model is built using two ideas from the investigation. To begin, individual difference theory is used to describe how personality traits affect the composition of job seekers' social networks. Second, using social network theory, the study will explain the composition of the social network impacting job search networking behaviour. This study is to explain the connections between HEXACO personalities, tie strength, and job search networking behaviour. This research provides mentors and counsellors with methods to help students understand their personalities in order to strengthen their tie strength for job search.

2 Literature review

2.1 HEXACO

The HEXACO model of personality, developed by Ashton and Lee (2007), is a six-dimensional framework that extends the widely used FFM introduced by Costa and McCrae (1992). While the FFM comprises the dimensions of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism (emotionality), and openness to experience, it has been critiqued for its omission of key ethical and prosocial traits. In response, the HEXACO model introduces a sixth factor – Honesty-Humility – which captures individual differences in sincerity, fairness, modesty, and the avoidance of greed (Ashton et al., 2004). This dimension reflects moral character and altruistic tendencies that are insufficiently represented in the FFM (Lee and Ashton, 2004). Lexical studies conducted across diverse languages, including those in Europe and Asia, have consistently supported the distinctiveness of these six traits, affirming the cross-cultural robustness of the HEXACO structure. Recent applications of the model in education and work settings further highlight its predictive utility for behaviours such as ethical decision-making, cooperation, and interpersonal trust (McAbee et al., 2019; Le and Lin, 2023). Thus, the HEXACO model offers a more comprehensive and culturally grounded approach to understanding personality, particularly in contexts where integrity and prosocial behaviour are critical.

2.2 HEXACO vs. big five: comparative usage

Although the Big Five model (Costa and McCrae, 1992) has long been the dominant framework for personality research, particularly in organisational and career studies, it has faced criticism for its limited scope in capturing morally relevant traits. In response, the HEXACO model (Ashton and Lee, 2007) was developed to address these limitations by introducing a sixth dimension – Honesty-Humility – which encompasses traits such as sincerity, fairness, and modesty. Comparative studies have demonstrated that while both models predict broad outcomes like job performance and interpersonal behaviour, HEXACO often provides incremental validity, especially in predicting prosocial behaviours, ethical decision-making, and trust (Lee and Ashton, 2004; McAbee et al.,

2019). For example, HEXACO's Honesty-Humility trait has been found to predict lower levels of workplace deviance and higher ethical standards, outcomes that the Big Five's agreeableness or conscientiousness dimensions only partially explain (Bailey et al., 2016). Moreover, lexical studies across multiple languages have reinforced the cross-cultural robustness of HEXACO traits compared to the Big Five, suggesting broader applicability across diverse social contexts (Ashton et al., 2004). In employment and educational settings, the HEXACO model has emerged as a more nuanced and comprehensive alternative, particularly for research focused on relational behaviours, integrity, and personality-based social capital.

2.3 Tie strength in job search networking

In the context of job search networking, tie strength refers to the closeness, frequency, and emotional intensity of relationships between job seekers and their social contacts (Granovetter, 1973). Strong ties – such as those with family, close friends, and mentors – are typically characterised by trust, reciprocity, and sustained interaction, and have been shown to provide psychological support, reliable information, and direct job referrals (Spurk et al., 2015). While early research emphasised the advantages of weak ties for accessing novel job information, recent studies suggest that strong ties are more predictive of job search success when the employment process involves relational strategies, especially in collectivist or high-context cultures (Rai and Blunsdon, 2011; Le and Lin, 2023). Tie strength also plays a mediating role between personality traits and job search behaviour, functioning as a relational channel through which traits like extraversion, conscientiousness, and honesty-humility influence networking intensity (Ashton and Lee, 2007; McAbee et al., 2019). Furthermore, in longitudinal studies of graduate employment, strong ties have been positively associated with increased networking frequency, job clarity, and the number of job offers, suggesting their critical role not only as a resource conduit but also as a behavioural enabler (Le and Lin, 2023). This highlights the importance of incorporating tie strength as a core construct in job search models, especially when examining the social mechanisms linking personality and employment outcomes.

2.4 Current gaps in literature and research need

Despite the growing recognition of the HEXACO model as a robust alternative to the Big Five, its application within the job search context remains limited, with most existing studies continuing to rely on traditional five-factor frameworks (McAbee et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2016). This underutilisation restricts a comprehensive understanding of traits like honesty-humility, which are particularly relevant in networking behaviours and ethical self-presentation during the job search. Furthermore, there is a marked lack of longitudinal and cross-cultural research exploring how personality traits influence job search outcomes over time and across different societal contexts. Most empirical studies have adopted short-term, single-nation samples, limiting the generalisability of findings to diverse labour markets, especially those with collectivist cultural orientations such as Vietnam (Rai and Blunsdon, 2011; Le and Lin, 2023). Another critical gap is the sparse integration of social network theory, which offers valuable insights into how structural and relational dimensions of networks – such as tie strength – mediate the relationship between personality and job-seeking behaviour. While networking has been frequently

examined as a behavioural outcome, relational mediators like tie strength remain underexplored, despite evidence that they significantly shape access to information, emotional support, and job referrals (Spurk et al., 2015; Ashton and Lee, 2007). Addressing these gaps calls for research that not only incorporates HEXACO-based personality frameworks but also leverages relational mechanisms and longitudinal, culturally sensitive designs to more fully capture the complexity of modern job search processes.

2.5 *Theoretical foundations and conceptual model*

This study is grounded in two primary theoretical lenses: individual differences theory and social network theory, both of which provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how personality traits and relational variables influence job search networking behaviour. According to individual differences theory, inherent personal attributes shape a wide array of work-related outcomes, including social skills, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), counterproductive work behaviour (CWB), job satisfaction, and career success (Anglim et al., 2018; Fullarton et al., 2013; Pletzer, 2021; Sutin et al., 2009; Smidt et al., 2018). These dispositional traits are considered stable predictors of behavioural tendencies and interpersonal effectiveness in professional contexts.

The HEXACO personality model, in particular, offers a refined structure of personality by including the honesty-humility dimension, which captures moral and prosocial tendencies such as sincerity, fairness, and modesty – traits that are essential in social interactions like networking (Ashton and Lee, 2007; McAbee et al., 2019). Empirical studies have consistently shown that individuals high in extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and honesty-humility are more likely to demonstrate high levels of OCB and reduced CWB (Anglim et al., 2018). Extraversion, in particular, has been strongly associated with enhanced networking activity, given its link to sociability, assertiveness, and enthusiasm in social situations (Fullarton et al., 2013; Chandrasekara, 2019; Wanberg et al., 2000). Conversely, individuals high in emotionality may exhibit reduced networking behaviour, possibly due to anxiety or social discomfort, as shown by Lin and Le (2019).

Beyond personality traits, this study incorporates theoretical insights from social network theory and social capital theory to explain how individuals' social connections function as a form of capital that facilitates access to job information, opportunities, and employment outcomes (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Inkpen and Tsang, 2005). While early studies emphasised the quantitative size of social networks, recent evidence suggests that tie strength – defined by the closeness, emotional intensity, and frequency of contact between network members – may be more influential in predicting job search success (Granovetter, 1973; Cannata, 2011). Strong ties provide trustworthy information, emotional support, and direct job referrals, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of job search networking (Lin and Le, 2019; Shen, 2015; Le and Lin, 2023).

Social capital theory further elucidates that network quality, not just quantity, contributes to individual outcomes such as creativity, job performance, and career advancement by offering access to diverse knowledge, technology, and collaborative opportunities (Sou et al., 2022; Nieto and González-Álvarez, 2016). Place-based social bonds, as another form of social capital, have been shown to predict higher levels of satisfaction and engagement (Ramkissoon and Mavondo, 2015). Within this framework,

the current study posits that tie strength acts as a relational mechanism through which individual personality traits influence networking behaviour. Specifically, individuals who exhibit socially facilitative traits (e.g., extraversion, honesty-humility) are likely to form and maintain stronger ties, thereby increasing their networking intensity and improving their job search outcomes.

This integrated conceptual model positions HEXACO personality traits as distal antecedents, tie strength as a key mediating variable, and networking behaviour as the proximal predictor of job search success. The model seeks to bridge the gap between personality psychology and relational dynamics, offering a more nuanced and theory-informed understanding of how individual and social factors interact during the job search process.

2.6 Hypothesis development

2.6.1 HEXACO personality traits and tie strength

Le (2022) investigated the relationships between HEXACO personalities and networking behaviour for job information and discovered that job seekers with high honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and low emotionality are more likely to network. The mechanism that explains the link between HEXACO and networking behaviour has received a lot of attention. A number of studies have demonstrated the influence of personalities on networking behaviour via mediating variables (Le, 2023; Mai et al., 2020). For example, Le (2023) demonstrates that people with high openness to experience or low emotionality are likely to have a greater network size, which is positively related to a higher degree of networking behaviour. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of tie strength as a mediator in the relationship between honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness, and networking behaviours.

First, it seems that people want to connect and keep close relationships with friends with high honesty-humility (Lee and Ashton, 2004). Individuals who score high on honesty-humility are likely to reflect a higher level of moral righteousness and trustworthiness than those who are low in honesty-humility. Individuals who have a high level of interpersonal trust are more likely to build an emotional tie with their community, which may lead to civic behaviours (Ramkissoon, 2020). Next, Molho et al. (2016) studied closeness in the relationship and found that individuals with high honesty-humility tend to make emotional closeness to members of the group. Given these basic attributes of honesty-humility, it is unsurprising to understand that it tends to be associated with stronger social relationships.

People who are high in extraversion actively participate in social activities and find connections with others (Allen et al., 2020; Selden and Goodie, 2017; Smółka and Szulawski, 2011). In this line, Iveniuk (2018) believed that those who are more extroverted tend to develop stronger social network connections across different social domains, which contribute to their deeper relationships. The network composition of introvert and extrovert people is much different (Selden and Goodie, 2017). Compared to introverts, extroverts are related to a greater number of people with support, sympathy, and 'outer' layers (Pollet et al., 2011). Similarly, Döeven-Eggens et al. (2008) investigated individuals' five most 'focal core' relationships in the network, extroverted people tend to include more friends (as opposed to family) than introverted counterparts.

Past research confirmed that the personality of extraversion is positively related to tie strength (Iveniuk, 2018).

Selden and Goodie (2017) stated that agreeableness has some influence on the perception of the size and composition of the network. More agreeable people include more family in their network and relate to greater nonkin networks than less agreeable individuals. According to Graziano et al. (1996), those who score highly on agreeableness are less likely to see conflict in others because they can deal with upsetting circumstances. Granovetter (1973) stated that strong ties are reflected by the characteristics such as the amount of interaction time between individuals, and the level of emotion and closeness. In this line, Iveniuk (2018) found that people with high agreeableness are positively associated with the time as well as closeness that they spend in their relationships.

“Conscientiousness is related to conscientiousness and organisational ability, while openness to experience is reflected in aesthetic appreciation, curiosity, creativity, and nonconformity” (Lee and Ashton, 2004). Some research have revealed that conscientiousness has little influence on network size, such as social support or friendship networks among college students (Le, 2022; Zhu et al., 2013; Totterdell et al., 2008). Conscientiousness has been connected to relationship maintenance (Wagner et al., 2014), as well as friendship quality and reduced conflict in young people (Demir and Weitekamp, 2007). As a result, we expect that job searchers with high honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness will have more socially linked interactions than individuals with low scores on these qualities.

Hypothesis 1: Job seekers with high honesty-humility are related to strong ties.

Hypothesis 2: Job seekers with high extraversion are related to strong ties.

Hypothesis 3: Job seekers with high agreeableness are related to strong ties.

Hypothesis 4: Job seekers with high conscientiousness are related to strong ties.

2.6.2 Tie strength and job search networking behaviour

Tie strength has been seen as a controversial antecedent of networking behaviour because of its different findings (Brown and Konrad, 2001; Granovetter, 1973; Marin, 2012; O'Connor, 2013; Van Hoya et al., 2009). Many studies argued that weak ties that are more heterogeneous might provide more novel information than strong ties (Brooks, 2019; Granovetter, 1973), which results in the growing behaviour of networking. However, it appears that in the same spanning range, strong ties are better in exchanging information than weak ties (Larson, 2017; Marin, 2012; O'Connor, 2013) because strong ties (e.g., family or close friends) tend to have more responsibilities and motivations to help job seekers than those who are only acquaintances (weak ties) (Marin, 2012). Moreover, in general, job seekers are likely to prefer and confide employment difficulties to their strong ties and they feel more comfortable with the support from their family and close ties than with weak ties (Wright and Miller, 2010). Van Hoya et al. (2009) also confirmed that job seekers tend to spend more time networking for strong ties than weak ties. Based on the logical explanations, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 5: Job seekers' tie strengths are positively related to their networking behaviour for finding employment.

2.6.3 Tie strength as a mediator on the links between HEXACO personality traits and job search networking behaviour

Job searchers with high honesty-humility have more strong ties because they are likely to be fair and sincere (Lee and Ashton, 2004), and make emotional closeness in the relationship (Molho et al., 2016). Extraverted individuals actively develop their social network (Selden and Goodie, 2017), and have a greater number of people with support, sympathy, and ‘outer’ layers (Pollet et al., 2011). Job seekers with high agreeableness seem to have fewer conflicts with people and spend more time and closeness to their relationships (Graziano et al., 1996; Iveniuk, 2018). Finally, conscientious job seekers are positively related to friendship quality and unrelated to conflicts (Demir and Weitekamp, 2007). Based on the logical explanations, we propose that job seekers who are high on honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are inclined to have a greater number of strong ties, which in turn predict an increase in networking behaviour in looking for employment. Thus, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 6: Tie strength mediates the relationship between honesty-humility and job search networking behaviour.

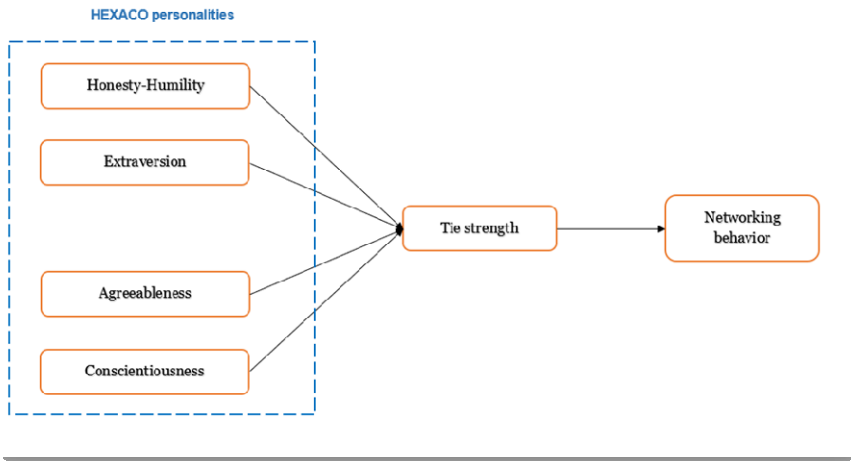
Hypothesis 7: Tie strength mediates the relationship between extraversion and job search networking behaviour.

Hypothesis 8: Tie strength mediates the relationship between agreeableness and job search networking behaviour.

Hypothesis 9: Tie strength mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and job search networking behaviour.

The research hypotheses are visually presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the overall conceptual framework of the study.

Figure 1 The research model (see online version for colours)



3 Method

3.1 Participants

First, we met with students from three institutions in North Vietnam to explain the goal of the research and obtain their agreement. We then gather student emails via the student administrator. 982 students were approached via email roughly one month before graduation (Time 1) and encouraged to participate in the survey. They would be issued another questionnaire three months (Time 2) after graduation if they participated in Time 1. During Time 1, the HEXACO personality characteristics, network size, and tie strength were measured, whereas networking behaviour was measured at Time 2. We anticipated that three months following graduation would be an acceptable time lag for graduates to search for work.

87% of the 850 survey participants completed the questions the first time. In the second round of the survey, 773 out of 850 respondents participated (91%). According to the study results, 96.4% of respondents are single. Participants had a mean age of 23.22 years, with $SD = 0.523$. Business administration made up 23% of the majors under study, followed by accounting (26%), finance (18%), engineering (28%), and others (5%) (Table 1).

Table 1 Summary of the sample profile

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>
Gender	Male	54.1	418
	Female	45.9	355
Marital status	Yes	3.6	28
	No	96.4	745
Age	20–21	1.7	13
	22–23	78.3	605
	24–25	16.5	128
	Over 25	3.5	27
Occupation	Finance	18.1	140
	Business administration	23.3	180
	Accounting	25.7	199
	Engineering	28.2	218
	Other areas	4.6	36
Working experience	Below 1 year	86.3	667
	1–2 years	11.2	87
	Over 2 years	2.5	19

3.2 Measures

There were four parts to the survey questions. In the first part, demographic data was gathered, including gender, age, marital status, employment, and working history. A scale of the HEXACO personality characteristics, comprising “honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience”, was

included in Section 2. The participants' tie strength was evaluated in Section 3. The final part's nine items examined the degree of networking intensity during the job search. The 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree, was used to evaluate every item in the current study. Constructs' operational definition was shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Operational definition of constructs

<i>Operational definition</i>	<i>Construct</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Modesty, Sincerity, Greed-avoidance, Fairness	Honesty-humility	Ashton and Lee (2007)
Liveliness, Social boldness, Expressiveness, Sociability	Extraversion	
Patience, Gentleness, Forgiveness, Flexibility	Agreeableness	
Prudence, Diligence, Organisation, Perfectionism	Conscientiousness	
The degree to which a person is socially connected to other members of a network	Tie strength	Granovetter (1973)
Individuals take action to reach out to friends, acquaintances, and others to obtain career information or guidance	Networking behaviour	Wanberg et al. (2000)

3.2.1 *HEXACO traits*

In the current study, we employed the HEXACO model of personality traits developed by (Ashton and Lee, 2009). This model consists of six dimensions such as "honesty-humility (H), emotionality (E), extraversion (X), agreeableness (A), conscientiousness (C), openness to experience (O)". One dimension was measured by 10 items. However, this study investigates 4 dimensions: honesty-humility (H), extraversion (X), agreeableness (A), and conscientiousness (C). Therefore, there are 40 items used to measure personalities.

The example statements of honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are respectively followed as "I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed", "On most days, I feel cheerful and optimistic", "I am usually quite flexible in my opinions when people disagree with me", "When working on something, I don't pay much attention to small details". The Cronbach's alpha of these dimensions were 0.91, 0.91, 0.90, and 0.89, respectively.

3.2.2 *Tie strength*

Granovetter (1973) defined tie strength as the closeness of the relationship between a person and others in his/her social network. We used five items built by Van Hoya et al. (2009) to measure the scale of tie strength. An example statement is "most people who might help me find a job are people I feel comfortable talking to, even about touchy subjects". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.86.

3.2.3 Networking behaviour

The scale of networking behaviour was measured by nine items designed by Wanberg et al. (2000). An example statement is “Contacted people you know to ask for their advice or leads regarding your job search”. The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.93.

3.2.4 Control variables

Based on past studies (Batistic and Tymon, 2017; Forret and Dougherty, 2004; Lin and Le, 2019; Van Hove et al., 2009; Wanberg et al., 2000), gender, age, education, occupation was used as control variables. Men probably receive more promotions and pay than women, despite networking at a similar level (Forret and Dougherty, 2004). As a result, networking activity and gender are associated. Moreover, Wanberg et al. (2000) showed that occupation influences networking intensity. More people tend to be interested in job information concerning marketing, business administration, and accounting than they do in engineering or technological jobs.

3.3 Analysis

This study adopts a quantitative research design, employing a two-stage analytical approach as proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), implemented using SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0. The first stage focuses on assessing the measurement model to ensure the validity and reliability of the constructs used in the study. Initially, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted to identify underlying factor structures, followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the measurement model's robustness. Reliability and validity were assessed using multiple indices, including Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency, composite reliability (CR) for construct reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) for convergent validity. These metrics collectively ensured that the measurement items accurately represented the intended latent constructs.

In the second stage, structural equation modelling (SEM) was utilised to test the proposed conceptual model and examine the hypothesised relationships between constructs. This included an analysis of how personality traits influence job search networking behaviour through the mediating effect of tie strength. SEM enabled the testing of direct and indirect path coefficients (β), offering a comprehensive evaluation of the structural relationships and the mediating role of relational factors. The model fit was verified using standard goodness-of-fit indices, including the Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardised root mean square residual (SRMR). According to Kline (2011), acceptable model fit is indicated by $\chi^2/\text{df} < 3.0$, CFI and TLI > 0.90 , RMSEA < 0.06 , and SRMR < 0.08 . These rigorous evaluation criteria enhance the credibility and generalisability of the findings by ensuring both measurement integrity and structural validity.

Through this two-tiered approach, the study provides robust, data-driven insights into the relational mechanisms through which personality traits influence networking behaviours in job search contexts, contributing empirically to both individual differences theory and social network theory.

4 Results

4.1 *Principal components analysis*

To assess the underlying structure of the measurement items, principal component analysis (PCA) with Promax rotation was employed as an initial step in the construct validation process. PCA revealed a five-component solution that accounted for 60.03% of the total variance, suggesting a moderately strong underlying factor structure. However, further inspection through the scree plot indicated an inflection point consistent with a six-factor solution, prompting refinement of the measurement model. This adjustment aligns with best practices in factor analysis, which recommend integrating both statistical output and theoretical coherence when determining factor retention (Costello and Osborne, 2005).

As part of the refinement, two items – Strength4 and Strength5 – were removed due to significant cross-loadings and a lack of conceptual alignment with the intended constructs. Their removal resulted in a more coherent factor structure and improved model fit, raising the total explained variance to 63.15%, thereby enhancing the interpretability and discriminant clarity of the factor solution. This decision was guided by criteria outlined in Hair et al. (2010), which recommend excluding items that compromise factor independence or theoretical clarity.

Following the PCA, a CFA was conducted to validate the revised measurement model. The CFA confirmed acceptable levels of model fit and provided further support for the factorial validity of the six-construct structure. The iterative approach of combining exploratory and confirmatory techniques reinforces the reliability and validity of the constructs, ensuring that the measurement model is both statistically sound and conceptually coherent.

4.2 *Confirmatory factor analysis*

To establish the structural validity of the refined measurement model, CFA was performed using AMOS 22.0. The primary objective was to examine whether the proposed six-factor structure adequately reflected the latent constructs and their interrelationships. The analysis yielded highly favourable results, indicating that the model provided an excellent fit to the data. Specifically, the fit statistics were as follows: $\chi^2 = 1585.292$, $df = 903$, producing a χ^2/df ratio of 1.756, with RMSEA = 0.031, CFI = 0.968, and TLI = 0.965, all significant at $p < 0.001$. These values suggest minimal discrepancy between the model-implied and observed covariance matrices, supporting the hypothesised factor structure's empirical adequacy.

According to widely cited fit criteria by Hu and Bentler (1999), model acceptability is achieved when the χ^2/df ratio is below 3, RMSEA is ≤ 0.08 , and both CFI and TLI are ≥ 0.90 . The obtained indices exceed these benchmarks, affirming the model's statistical robustness and internal coherence. The low RMSEA value, in particular, indicates a close fit of the model to the population data, while the high CFI and TLI scores demonstrate excellent incremental fit relative to a null model. These results also satisfy the methodological expectations for measurement model evaluation in SEM, as emphasised in psychometric and behavioural research (Kline, 2011; Hair et al., 2010).

Beyond statistical confirmation, the CFA reinforces key theoretical considerations underpinning the study. The validated six-factor structure – comprising core personality

traits from the HEXACO model, tie strength, and networking behaviour – aligns with both individual differences theory and social network theory, confirming the conceptual distinctiveness and empirical relevance of each construct. This model specification ensures that latent constructs are not only internally consistent but also externally distinguishable, which is critical for avoiding construct redundancy and common method variance (CMV). In sum, the CFA results substantiate the construct validity, reliability, and discriminant integrity of the measurement model. This validation provides a strong foundation for advancing to the next phase of structural modelling and hypothesis testing, ensuring that subsequent analytical outcomes are grounded in a rigorously evaluated measurement framework.

4.3 The validity and reliability

To ensure the psychometric soundness of the measurement model, a series of established reliability and validity tests were conducted. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR), with all constructs demonstrating strong reliability. As shown in Table 3, both α and CR values exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating a high degree of item homogeneity within each construct (Hair et al., 2010). This confirms that the measurement scales are internally consistent and statistically robust.

Table 3 Confirmatory factor analysis

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Variable codes</i>	<i>Factor loading</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>CR</i>
Honesty-Humility				0.53	0.91	0.91
	HH9	0.792	***			
	HH8	0.738	***			
	HH4	0.726	***			
	HH7	0.711	***			
	HH10	0.686	***			
	HH3	0.713	***			
	HH6	0.709	***			
	HH1	0.684	***			
	HH2	0.664	***			
	HH5	0.670	***			
Extraversion				0.52	0.91	0.91
	EX10	0.810	***			
	EX9	0.810	***			
	EX6	0.687	***			
	EX4	0.750	***			
	EX7	0.703	***			
	EX5	0.697	***			
	EX8	0.708	***			
	EX2	0.664	***			
	EX3	0.599	***			

Table 3 Confirmatory factor analysis (continued)

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Variable codes</i>	<i>Factor loading</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>CR</i>
Agreeableness				0.60	0.90	0.90
	AG5	0.897	***			
	AG7	0.914	***			
	AG1	0.779	***			
	AG4	0.675	***			
	AG10	0.645	***			
	AG9	0.649	***			
	AG8	0.647	***			
Conscientiousness	AG3	0.579	***			
				0.52	0.89	0.90
	CO7	0.798	***			
	CO1	0.774	***			
	CO8	0.706	***			
	CO4	0.786	***			
	CO6	0.744	***			
	CO9	0.684	***			
Tie strength	CO10	0.651	***			
	CO3	0.546	***			
				0.67	0.86	0.90
	TS3	0.860	***			
	TS2	0.844	***			
Networking Behaviour	TS1	0.769	***			
				0.65	0.93	0.93
	NB8	0.894	***			
	NB9	0.892	***			
	NB1	0.884	***			
	NB3	0.865	***			
	NB2	0.777	***			
	NB7	0.651	***			
	NB5	0.645	***			

$N = 773$; *** $p < 0.001$.

HH: Honesty-Humility; EX: Extraversion; AG: Agreeableness, CO: Conscientiousness; TS: Tie strength; NB: Networking behaviour.

Convergent validity was evaluated through AVE and standardised factor loadings. All AVE values were above 0.50, and factor loadings ranged from 0.585 to 0.929, exceeding the minimum standard of 0.50 and suggesting that each item explains a substantial portion of its associated latent construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Kline, 2011). These

results affirm that the indicators are not only individually reliable but also collectively represent their respective constructs effectively.

To establish discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was employed. The square root of each construct's AVE was found to be greater than its correlations with other constructs, confirming that each construct is conceptually distinct from the others in the model. This is essential for ensuring that the measurement model captures discrete psychological traits and behaviours without conceptual overlap (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Collectively, the results of these analyses provide strong evidence of the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs used in the study. These findings support the overall measurement integrity of the model and validate its application for subsequent SEM.

4.4 *Common method variance*

To address the potential threat of CMV – a concern in behavioural research where self-reported data are used to measure both independent and dependent variables – this study employed both statistical and procedural remedies. Statistically, Harman's Single Factor Test was conducted through PCA without rotation. As presented in Table 2, the analysis revealed that eight components together accounted for 63.15% of the total variance, with the first unrotated factor contributing only 21.56%, well below the commonly accepted threshold of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This suggests that no single factor dominated the covariance structure of the data, and thus, CMV is unlikely to pose a significant threat to the validity of the results.

Complementing this statistical test, procedural strategies were also implemented to mitigate CMV during the survey design phase. These included randomised ordering of questionnaire items, anonymity assurances, and neutral phrasing of statements – all aimed at reducing response consistency bias, evaluation apprehension, and socially desirable responding (Tehseen et al., 2017; Podsakoff et al., 2012). These proactive measures align with best practices for minimising method bias and ensuring that observed relationships among constructs reflect substantive effects rather than artefact-driven inflation.

4.5 *Correlation analysis*

Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the primary constructs. The findings indicate several noteworthy relationships that support the study's theoretical assumptions. Tie strength was found to be positively correlated with honesty-humility ($r = 0.073$, $p < 0.05$), extraversion ($r = 0.011$, $p < 0.05$), and conscientiousness ($r = 0.018$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that individuals with higher levels of prosocial traits, social energy, and goal-directed behaviour are more likely to form and maintain strong interpersonal ties. Surprisingly, agreeableness was not significantly related to tie strength ($r = -.013$, $p > 0.05$), contrary to prior literature which has often associated agreeableness with interpersonal closeness and cooperative behaviour. This result may reflect the context-specific nature of tie strength, where emotional bonding and interaction frequency are influenced more by assertiveness and conscientious social engagement than by general agreeableness.

Table 4 Correlations among research variables

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
1 Honesty-humility	3.31	0.86	1				
2 Extraversion	3.85	0.55	0.029	1			
3 Agreeableness	3.96	0.54	0.038	0.170**	1		
4 Conscientiousness	3.92	0.47	0.011	0.048	0.066	1	
5 Tie strength	3.79	0.64	0.073*	0.011*	-0.013	0.018**	1
6 Networking behaviour	3.98	0.52	0.259**	0.434**	0.279**	0.190**	0.175**

N = 773; *SD*: Standard deviation; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

All four personality traits – honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness – showed significant positive correlations with networking behaviour, reinforcing the premise that personality plays a key role in facilitating proactive job search efforts. Specifically, the strongest associations were observed for extraversion ($r = 0.434$, $p < 0.01$) and honesty-humility ($r = 0.259$, $p < 0.01$), followed by agreeableness ($r = 0.279$, $p < 0.01$) and conscientiousness ($r = 0.190$, $p < 0.01$). These results align with existing research suggesting that socially active and ethically grounded individuals are more inclined to engage in purposeful networking (McAbee et al., 2019; Lin and Le, 2019).

Moreover, a moderate positive correlation was identified between tie strength and networking behaviour ($r = 0.175$, $p < 0.01$), supporting the theoretical proposition that stronger relational bonds facilitate more intensive networking activities. This relationship emphasises the mediating role of relational dynamics in the expression of personality through job search behaviour, further validating the inclusion of tie strength in the conceptual framework.

4.6 Hypothesis testing

4.6.1 Testing the direct effect

In the current research, we used the structural equation model (SEM) to test the direct effect of exogenous variables on endogenous variables with unstandardised and standardised regression weights by using AMOS 22.0 edition. The results of the data analysis indicated that the proposed model fits the data well: $\chi^2 = 1585.292$, $df = 903$, $\chi^2/df = 1.756$, $RMSEA = 0.031$, $CFI = 0.968$, $TLI = 0.965$, and $p < 0.001$. The unstandardised and standardised regression weights were summarised in Table 5.

As predicted in Hypotheses 1,2 and 3, the relationship between honesty-humility and tie strength ($\beta = 0.080$, $S.E = 0.025$, $p < 0.05$), the relationship between extraversion and tie strength ($\beta = 0.006$, $S.E = 0.037$, $p < 0.05$), the relationship between conscientiousness and tie strength ($\beta = 0.010$, $S.E = 0.048$, $p < 0.01$), were significant.

It is surprising that the personality of agreeableness ($\beta = -0.008$, $S.E = 0.038$, $p > 0.05$), did not influence tie strength. Thus, hypothesis 4 was rejected.

As predicted, tie strength ($\beta = 0.080$, $S.E = 0.025$, $p < 0.05$) had a positive effect on networking behaviour, which is supported by prior research (Van Hoya et al., 2009). Hypothesis 5 was supported.

Table 5 Unstandardised and standardised regression weights

			<i>Estimate</i>		<i>S.E.</i>	<i>C.R.</i>	<i>P</i>
	<i>Path</i>		<i>Unstand.</i>	<i>Stand.</i>			
Tie strength	←	Conscientiousness	0.012	0.010	0.048	0.247	0.005
Tie strength	←	Honesty-Humility	0.050	0.080	0.025	1.992	0.046
Tie strength	←	Extraversion	0.004	0.006	0.037	0.102	0.019
Tie strength	←	Agreeableness	−0.008	−0.008	0.038	−0.201	0.840
Networking behaviour	←	Tie strength	0.102	0.107	0.027	3.841	***
Networking behaviour	←	Agreeableness	0.088	0.097	0.025	3.450	***
Networking behaviour	←	Extraversion	0.340	0.392	0.027	12.688	***
Networking behaviour	←	Conscientiousness	0.097	0.087	0.031	3.085	0.002
Networking behaviour	←	Honesty-Humility	0.076	0.129	0.017	4.457	***

N = 773. Unstand.: unstandardised, Stand.: standardised. ****p* < 0.001.

4.6.2 Testing the indirect effect

In the mediation model, it was hypothesised that tie strength mediated the relationships between personality traits and job seekers' networking behaviour (Figure 2). We employed the percentile bootstrap confidence interval to examine the mediating effects. Scholars confirmed that bootstrapping is based on multiple replacement resampling to test the indirect effect, which is used popularly (Bollen and Stine, 1990; Shrout and Bolger, 2002). In this line, a confidence interval is applied to confirm whether there is an indirect effect among variables or not. If zero exists in the confidence interval, the indirect effect happens (Kenny, 2018).

Shrout and Bolger (2002) suggested three conditions: "1, The independent variable has a significant total effect upon the dependent variable; 2, The indirect effect of the independent variable upon the dependent variable through a mediator is significant; and 3, The direct effect of the independent variable upon the dependent variable is not significant". There is a full mediation if all three of these prerequisites are met at once. A partial mediation does, however, occur when criteria 2 or 3 were satisfied at the same time.

Tie strength mediates HEXACO traits and job search networking behaviour. It can be seen from Table 6 that the total effect of four personality dimensions of the HEXACO model on networking behaviour was significant.

Figure 2 The standardised path coefficients (see online version for colours)

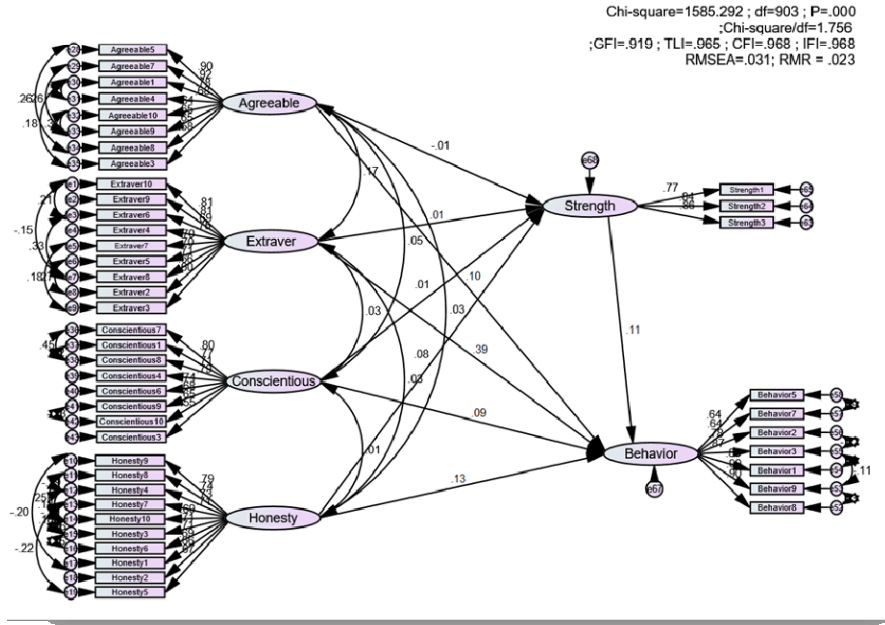


Table 6 Standardised specific indirect effects among latent variables

Hypothesis	Pathways	Estimate	95%BCa (5000 bootstraps)		p
			Lower	Upper	
H15	HH → NB (total effect)	0.137	0.074	0.197	***
	HH → TS → NB (indirect effect)	0.009	0.001	0.020	0.028
	HH → NB (direct effect)	0.128	0.068	0.177	***
H16	EX → NB (total effect)	0.429	0.361	0.503	***
	EX → TS → NB (indirect effect)	0.005	0.001	0.007	0.037
	EX → NB (direct effect)	0.424	0.358	0.495	***
H17	AG → NB (total effect)	0.129	0.066	0.193	***
	AG → TS → NB (indirect effect)	0.001	-0.009	0.007	0.837
	AG → NB (direct effect)	0.125	0.075	0.175	0.002
H18	CO → NB (total effect)	0.088	0.030	0.144	0.003
	CO → TS → NB (indirect effect)	0.006	0.001	0.010	0.013
	CO → NB (direct effect)	0.082	0.028	0.134	0.003

*** $p < 0.001$, $N = 773$,

HH: Honesty-Humility; EX: Extraversion; AG: Agreeableness, CO: Conscientiousness; TS: Tie strength; NB: Networking behaviour.

There was the indirect effect of honesty-humility, extraversion, and conscientiousness on networking behaviour through tie strength ($\beta = 0.009$, $p < 0.05$), ($\beta = 0.005$, $p < 0.05$), and ($\beta = 0.006$, $p < 0.05$), respectively. It is clear that tie strength plays a role in mediating partially the relationships between extraversion, conscientiousness and networking behaviour as well as the relationships between honesty-humility and networking behaviour. Therefore, hypotheses 6, 7, and 9 were supported.

However, the indirect effect of agreeableness ($\beta = 0.01$, $p < 0.05$) on networking behaviour via tie strength was not significant. Therefore, hypothesis 8 was rejected.

5 Discussion

Our study implies that job searchers with various personality qualities may be differentially motivated to utilise networking activities for employment, according to the individual difference theory (Boudreau et al., 2001; Box et al., 2019; Lin and Le, 2019). The literature on networking activity in the job search, however, has mostly concentrated on antecedents and results, explaining little about how personality factors influence networking intensity. We would like to point out that while the association between the variables in the current study may have been evaluated in the past, little emphasis has been given to examining the mechanism connecting personality characteristics and networking activity. As a result, managers may find it difficult to encourage job candidates with different personalities to engage in job search networking behaviour, which is positively correlated with the number of job interviews and offers, employment status (such as salary), person-job fit, and person-organisation fit (Forret, 2014; Lin and Le, 2019; Rodríguez-Villalobos and Rangel-González, 2020; Van Hove et al., 2009; Wanberg et al., 2000). We discovered that the HEXACO personalities significantly influenced the mediating social network composition of job searchers, which in turn significantly and significantly influenced networking behaviour for job searching. As a result, we provide both theoretical and practical insight to explain why employees are likely to have various social networks and degrees of networking behaviour throughout the job search.

This study makes a significant contribution by demonstrating the connection between personality and tie strength. According to this study's interpretation of the theory of individual differences, individuals with different personalities will create relationships with varying degrees of closeness. Focusing first on honesty-humility, our findings showed that job searchers who exhibit these traits have a tendency to establish more solid relationships, which are subsequently linked to a higher level of networking activity. Our findings suggested that individuals are likely to be able to create numerous close ties if they are fair and truthful in their relationships. These close ties appear to be more available and responsible in aiding people during their job search than acquaintances. These results are in line with earlier research (Molho et al., 2016). A person who is extroverted also exhibits expressiveness, social bravery, friendliness, and liveliness (Lee and Ashton, 2004). Those who exhibit extraversion appear to have stronger connections than those who are passive and less sociable because they are proactive in their interpersonal interactions and open to sharing and communicating. According to our research, conscientious job candidates are more likely to maintain connections, have better friendships, and have fewer problems in their interactions with other people. They have more strong ties as a result, which is consistent with other findings (Demir and

Weitekamp, 2007; Wagner et al., 2014). Surprisingly, the effect of agreeableness on tie strength was not significant. Dimensions for extraversion such as patience, gentleness, and flexibility may be necessary, but not sufficient conditions to build a close relationship. This study found that tie strength mediated the relationships between Honesty-humility, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and networking behaviour throughout the job search process, supporting previous research (Lin and Le, 2019; Le, 2023).

Our results are in line with the social network theory (Adler and Kwon, 2002) on the influence of social network composition on networking behaviour. The results matched previous research that indicated tie strength increased the chance that job searchers would use their social network to locate employment. While earlier research has shown that job seekers with various personalities display varying networking intensities, this is crucial in relation to the success of job searches. As a result, networking intensity and job search outcomes will largely depend on a person's personality. These findings, however, do not clarify why various personalities have varying degrees of networking activity. Therefore, the explanation of the link mechanism between HEXACO personality characteristics and networking intensity through tie strength is one of the study's major contributions. The link between honesty-humility, extraversion, conscientiousness and networking activities is specifically mediated by tie strength. On the one hand, people with these characteristics are good at building solid relationships. Strong relationships, on the other hand, offer a lot of assistance to job searchers in terms of readiness to share information and job openings. As a result, our research has significantly advanced knowledge of how these variables interact. A good social network may also shape and affect a leader's success or orientation (Hristov et al., 2018; Hristov and Ramkissoon, 2016). Individuals should be engaged in expanding their networks to achieve their goals.

5.1 Theoretical and practical implications

This study contributes several important theoretical insights to the fields of personality psychology, career development, and social network theory. Drawing upon data from a sample of 773 recent university graduates, the findings empirically affirm that individual personality traits significantly influence job search networking behaviour, a key informal strategy for career advancement. Consistent with prior literature (Lin and Le, 2019; Wanberg et al., 2000), the results indicate that individuals high in honesty-humility, extraversion, conscientiousness, and to a lesser extent, agreeableness, are more likely to engage in active networking behaviours. This supports the theoretical premise of individual differences theory, which posits that enduring dispositional traits account for variability in work-related behaviours and outcomes (Anglim et al., 2018; McAbee et al., 2019).

Importantly, this study advances existing theory by demonstrating how specific personality traits shape the structure and quality of job seekers' social networks. Traits such as extraversion, honesty-humility, and conscientiousness were positively associated with the formation of strong relational ties, whereas agreeableness showed no significant relationship with tie strength. This nuanced finding suggests that certain personality dimensions may be more influential than others in fostering the kind of deep, trust-based social connections that facilitate access to job opportunities – a distinction that warrants further theoretical exploration.

Furthermore, the study reinforces foundational ideas from social network theory (Granovetter, 1973; Van Hoya et al., 2009) by confirming that tie strength is a significant predictor of networking behaviour. The integration of tie strength as a mediating mechanism between personality and job search networking introduces a novel pathway for understanding how personality traits are behaviourally expressed in the labour market context. This theoretical refinement provides a more dynamic and relational understanding of personality influences, moving beyond static trait-outcome models to account for the interactive processes through which individual differences are enacted in social systems. In summary, the findings offer a multi-theoretical contribution by linking HEXACO-based personality traits, tie strength, and networking behaviour within a coherent conceptual framework. This enhances the explanatory power of both individual differences theory and social capital theory, and opens avenues for future research examining how personality shapes career outcomes through interpersonal and relational mechanisms.

The findings of this study offer a number of important practical implications for career development practitioners, educators, and organisational stakeholders. While prior research has established the influence of personality traits on networking behaviour during job search activities (Mai et al., 2020; Wanberg et al., 2000), the current study extends this understanding by revealing the mediating role of tie strength in shaping these relationships. Rather than a simple linear influence of personality on networking behaviour, the results highlight that individual traits interact with relational dynamics – particularly the quality and closeness of social ties – to influence how effectively job seekers utilise their networks. For example, although some individuals may possess broad networks, those with lower levels of extraversion may engage minimally in active job search networking due to social discomfort or communication difficulties. These individuals may not leverage available contacts effectively, leading to underutilisation of valuable network resources. As a result, career counsellors, educators, and employment support services should provide targeted interventions aimed at improving communication competence, confidence in social engagement, and help-seeking behaviours. Practical workshops focused on assertiveness training, interpersonal communication, and social interaction skills could be especially beneficial for introverted or emotionally withdrawn individuals.

Furthermore, the study finds that honesty-humility – a trait often overlooked in traditional career counselling – plays a critical role in fostering strong, trust-based relationships during the job search process. Individuals high in honesty-humility tend to exhibit dependability, sincerity, and modesty, traits that make them more likely to build deeper, supportive ties. These individuals may benefit not from expanding their networks indiscriminately, but from nurturing existing relationships that provide reliable information and social support. Thus, career mentors should encourage such individuals to capitalise on their relational integrity and guide them to deepen meaningful connections that enhance their access to job opportunities.

Additionally, individuals high in extraversion and agreeableness show a greater natural tendency to expand and activate their social networks. Educators and practitioners should harness this strength by incorporating structured social-skills training into employability programs – such as modules on networking strategies, emotional intelligence, and professional relationship-building. As suggested by Seevers and Jones-Blank (2008), teaching students to enhance their interpersonal skills can significantly improve their capacity to form and maintain valuable social connections. Overall, these

practical implications suggest that career preparation programs should move beyond generic job search advice, instead embracing a personality-informed, relationally focused approach. By aligning interventions with individuals' trait profiles and emphasising the strategic use of strong ties, stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness of job search strategies across diverse personality types.

5.2 Lessons learned

This study yields several key lessons that deepen our understanding of how personality traits and relational dynamics jointly influence job search behaviour, particularly among recent university graduates. One of the most critical insights is the importance of moving beyond traditional trait-outcome frameworks to explore the mechanisms that mediate personality effects, especially in applied career contexts. While previous research has established that traits such as honesty-humility, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are positively linked to job search success (Wanberg et al., 2000; Mai et al., 2020), this study demonstrates that these relationships are more complex and nuanced, with tie strength serving as a meaningful mediator in the trait-to-behaviour pathway.

A particularly important lesson concerns the differential role of personality traits in building and leveraging social capital. For example, while extraversion and conscientiousness were found to enhance tie strength and, consequently, networking behaviour, agreeableness did not demonstrate a significant association with relational closeness – contrary to common assumptions. This finding challenges conventional thinking and underscores the value of empirical validation over theoretical assumptions, especially when designing interventions aimed at enhancing networking behaviour.

Another lesson learned is the situational dependence of networking outcomes. Even when job seekers possess extensive networks, their ability to translate these connections into meaningful job search activity is shaped by individual traits and social engagement skills. This highlights the need for career development practitioners to adopt a personalised, skills-based approach to job readiness training – one that accounts for both dispositional strengths and relational capacities.

Lastly, this study serves as a reminder that the quality of social connections – not merely their quantity – plays a pivotal role in job search outcomes. As such, career strategies and educational programming must shift focus from expanding contact lists to strengthening relational depth, particularly for individuals with traits that predispose them to forming trustworthy and supportive ties. In sum, the lessons from this study suggest that effective job search behaviour arises not only from who individuals are, but also from how they connect with others and mobilise those connections. This insight invites both researchers and practitioners to adopt a more holistic, interactionist perspective in understanding and supporting career transitions.

5.3 Limitations and future research directions

Despite its theoretical contributions and practical implications, this study is subject to several important limitations that warrant consideration and offer avenues for future research. First, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for CMV, a well-known issue in organisational and psychological research. Although the use of a time-lagged design – where predictor and outcome variables were collected at different

points in time – serves as a methodological strength and helps mitigate CMV for key relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2003), it does not entirely eliminate the risk. Specifically, because both mediating variables and outcomes were assessed concurrently, there remains a possibility of inflated or deflated correlations due to consistency biases or respondent fatigue (Richardson et al., 2009; Tehseen et al., 2017). To strengthen causal inferences and reduce CMV in future studies, researchers are encouraged to adopt multi-source or multi-wave data collection strategies, where mediators, predictors, and outcomes are captured from distinct informants or across at least three time points.

Second, the sample characteristics present certain limitations to the generalisability of the findings. The study focused exclusively on graduates who had completed their studies within the past three months, a group still in the early transition phase from academia to the labour market. While this demographic is highly relevant for understanding initial job search behaviour, their social networks are typically more limited to family and close friends, unlike more seasoned professionals who maintain broader, professionally oriented networks (Seah et al., 2011). As a result, the findings may not be directly transferable to re-employment contexts or to individuals who have more fully integrated into the workforce. Future research should therefore explore the model across a wider range of populations, including mid-career professionals, returning workers, and displaced employees, to assess whether the mechanisms uncovered in this study remain consistent across career stages.

Additionally, the geographical and institutional scope of the study may restrict its external validity. Data were collected from three universities in Vietnam, and cultural, economic, or institutional differences may influence both personality expression and networking norms. As such, the context-specific nature of social ties and job search behaviour calls for cross-cultural validation of the model in other settings, including Western and collectivist cultures with differing employment structures and social capital dynamics.

Taken together, these limitations highlight the need for future studies to expand the current framework by employing longitudinal, multi-method, and cross-contextual designs. Such approaches will not only validate the robustness of the present findings but also deepen our understanding of the interaction between personality, relational mechanisms, and job search strategies across diverse populations and labour market environments.

6 Conclusion

The current study clarified the mechanism between HEXACCO personality characteristics and job searchers' networking behaviour by utilising social network theory and individual difference theory. The study polled 773 recently graduated students from universities in the North of Vietnam and used CFA-SEM for data analysis in order to illustrate the suggested model. The findings demonstrated that personality qualities such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and honesty-humility have a positive effect on people's networking behaviour throughout the job search process, which is positively correlated with job search outcomes (Lin and Le, 2019; Wanberg et al., 2000). According to the study, the degree of networking activity among job searchers was significantly influenced by the closeness of relationships. Those who maintain closer relationships are more likely to have a high degree of networking at the same network

size. Our results made it evident how personality variables affect networking behaviour by way of tie strength. According to the findings, job searchers with high levels of conscientiousness, extraversion, and honesty-humility are more likely to engage in high levels of networking activity with the help of close friends who are highly motivated to assist them in finding employment.

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