Influence of Personality Traits and Social Conformity on Impulsive Buying Tendency: Empirical Study Using 3M Model

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ABSTRACT

Employing eight personality traits as suggested by Mowen, this study attempts to decipher the relationships these traits have with social conformity and impulsive buying tendency and between social conformity and impulsive buying tendency within one integrated framework. With data collected from 386 respondents, the article examines the relationship of personality traits using a 3M Model with social conformity and impulsive tendency of shoppers, and also determines the association between normative social influence and instantaneous urge to buy. The findings reveal that personality traits - conscientiousness, materialism and body needs have positive association with social conformity, whereas openness to experience is negatively associated with social conformity. With respect to impulsive buying tendency, neuroticism, materialism and arousal have positive relationships. The results also reflect positive affect of social conformity on impulsive buying tendency. These finding, along with research implications have enhanced the existing literature.

KEYWORDS

3M Model, Eight Personality Traits, Impulsive Buying Tendency, Social Conformity

INTRODUCTION

The extant literature available on impulse buying reports that majority of the buying decisions taken by consumers are unplanned and are result of sudden urges. As per study by Point-of-Purchase Advertising International (2012), nearly seventy-five percent of all buying decisions are taken at the retail point and are unplanned. Hence, it is imperative for all marketers to decipher the precursors of impulsiveness in buying and the ways and means to create surge in such type of buying.

From the available literature on the theme, it is understood that initial studies on impulse purchasing pivoted around defining the concept of impulse buying, the behaviour involved and its various external antecedent factors. Of late, recent studies have even attempted to identify the type of
shoppers who indulge in impulse buying, and the potential reasons and motivations for such behaviour (Rook & Gardner, 1993; Rook & Fisher, 1995; Lin & Lin, 2005; Sun & Wu, 2011; Parsad et al., 2018, Prashar et al., 2017a, 2017b; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001). Several researchers have also noted the importance of examining impulse buying tendency from a psychological perspective (Olsen et al., 2016; Bratko, Butkovic & Bosnjak, 2013; Yoon & Lim, 2018), expressing the need to establish the impact of personality characteristics on impulse buying tendency. With consumers driving the demand, understanding the underlying psychological and social dimensions motivating them, shall offer insights to the retailers regarding imperatives of changing consumer needs.

A vast gamut of recent studies has taken a note of the influence of personality on individuals’ shopping (Punj, 2011; Sun & Wu, 2011). Since personality is an inborn trait guiding individuals’ actions, it becomes pertinent for researchers to investigate how it functions as a cause of shopping behavior (Carver & Scheier, 2008; Soto, John, Gosling & Potter, 2011). According to Mooradian and Olver (1997), consumer personality traits impact the ‘emotional response systems’ of shoppers, thereby influencing their buying decisions. On the relationship between personality (and its various traits) and impulsive buying, Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) have observed a significant negative association of shoppers’ conscientiousness and impulsive purchasing tendency. On the other hand, Olsen et al. (2016) noted a significant association of personality traits with impulse buying tendency and variety seeking behavior of consumers.

While measuring personality of an individual, most of these studies have used “five-factor model.” However, there exists a debate whether a six, seven or eight-factors model might be more robust in measuring individual traits (Ashton et al. 2004; Saucier & Goldberg 2001). Bratko et al. (2013) and Olsen et al. (2016) have recommended for including additional variables for measuring personality constructs. To address this gap, this study uses a Meta-Theoretic Model of Motivation and Personality (3M Model) proposed by Mowen’s (2000). This model consists of eight elemental personality traits these were arising from the person basic needs and it represents distinctiveness in the expressing of such needs. Using 3M Model, the present study seeks to explore the psychological roots of one of the most important buying behaviors - impulsive buying.

Besides the personal factors that influence the impulsive buying behaviour, studies like Chien-Huang and Hung-Chou (2012) and Olsen et al. (2016) have highlighted a gap in the present literature on impulsive buying. This gap pertains to the role of social conformity in influencing impulsive tendency. In human psychology, it is believed that there is a relationship between the conformity and individual expression. People commonly change their behaviour to be in congruence with the reactions of others (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). According to Cialdini and Goldstein (2004), behaviour is directed by subjective values (or attitudes), besides the perceived behavior of others, in particular by social norms. Conformity is one of the most important factors that influences shoppers’ buying behaviour. To fulfill the gap, an additional dimension of human behavior - social conformity has been incorporated in the present study.

Past studies have exclusively focused either on personality aspects (Aluja, Garcia & Garcia, 2003; Punj, 2011) or individual personality traits, which stem from the personality constructs of impulsivity and impulsive sensation seeking respectively (Zuckerman et al., 1993). Thus, very little has been explored about the relationship between social conformity and impulsive buying tendency from the general perspective of personality-trait. This paper aims to fill the gap by investigating whether and how personality traits and social conformity relate and affect IBT.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Impulse Buying Tendency (IBT)

The degree or an extent to which a shopper is likely to make unintended, instantaneous, and unreflective buying reflects impulse-buying tendency (IBT) (Jones et al., 2003). It has been observed by many
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