

To Think, to Feel, to Have: The Effects of Need for Cognition, Hedonism and Materialism on Impulse Buying Tendencies in Adolescents

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abstract

In industrialized countries, teenagers are likely to engage in consumerism, given the influence of their peers and the media. Consumer behaviour is often irrational, as shown by research on impulse buying. An impulse buying tendency (IBT) is characterized by hedonic shopping motivation, materialism and need for cognition (NC). We hypothesize (1) that hedonism mediates the relationship between materialism and IBT; (2) a negative correlation between NC and IBT; (3) that NC moderates the relationship between hedonism and IBT, as well as between materialism and IBT. We will collect data from six countries with participants being adolescents 13–18 years old.

Keywords: need for cognition, hedonic shopping motivation, materialism, impulse buying tendencies, adolescents, cross-cultural study, consumer behaviour

The vast majority of individuals in industrialized countries purchase goods and services in order to fulfil their needs and desires. Consumer behaviour is often

irrational in that it is not always based on a cost-benefit analysis, as shown in part by research on impulse buying, a widespread phenomenon in modern society (Wood, 1998). Rook and Fisher (1995) define impulse buying as "a consumer's tendency to buy spontaneously, without reflection, immediately (. . .) stimulated by the physical proximity of the desired object, dominated by emotional

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attraction and absorbed towards the promise of instant gratification" (p. 306). Impulse buying tendency (IBT) refers to the degree to which an individual is likely to make an impulse purchase of products in general (Jones, Reynolds, Weun, & Beatty, 2003).

It should be noted that *impulsive* and *compulsive buying* are terms that have often been used interchangeably (e.g. Dittmar, Beattie, & Friese, 1996), yet they should be distinguished because they differ in their frequency, cause, outcome and severity (Faber, 2010). Nevertheless, impulsive and compulsive buying are related and it is therefore possible to assume that they are affected in similar ways by the same variables.

In the present study, we incorporated the three psychological constructs underlying impulse buying, according to our understanding of Rook and Fisher's (1995) definition, into a model, which are materialism, hedonism and need for cognition (NC). Although Rook and Fisher's definition of impulse buying is one of the most pervasive ones, there is currently no theoretical model that can support it since no research has tested the interplay of materialism, hedonism and NC together on IBT. Our study therefore aims to provide support for Rook and Fisher's (1995) definition of impulse buying by positing a model explaining the impact of materialism, hedonism and NC on IBT in adolescents, a population particularly vulnerable to impulse buying.

To Desire: Materialism

Materialism reflects the relative importance of acquiring and possessing material objects in a person's life. According to Richins and Dawson (1992), materialism is "the importance ascribed to the ownership and acquisition of material goods in achieving major life goals or desired states" (p. 304). Materialism has been shown to be related to compulsive buying with numerous studies reporting a positive association between these two variables (Dittmar, 2005; Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997). Although most studies in this field investigated the relationship

between materialism and compulsive buying, there is also evidence for a positive relationship between materialism and impulse buying. For instance, Troisi, Christopher, and Marek (2006) demonstrated that highly materialistic people had higher IBTs; furthermore, they argued that materialistic people buy possessions because of the positive sensation it provides. Different lines of work posit that materialism is a strategy for alleviating the adverse effects of having unfulfilled psychological needs by enhancing self-esteem (e.g., Dittmar, Beattie, & Friese, 1996). Thus:

Hypothesis 1: Materialism should be positively related to IBT.

Emotional Attraction: Hedonic Shopping Motivation

Consumption activities can be motivated by hedonic and/or utilitarian outcomes (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). Previous research suggests that impulse buying rather involves hedonic motives (Rook, 1987; Silvera, Lavack, & Kropp, 2008). For instance, Herabadi, Verplanken, and van Knippenberg (2009) demonstrated that impulsive purchases were often accompanied by high-arousal emotions such as excitement and enthusiasm, and that there was a strong correlation between the occurrence of these emotions and IBT. Činjurević, Tatić, and Petrić (2011) investigated the influence of hedonic shopping motivations on impulse buying behaviour and found a positive effect of adventure and gratification. Thus:

Hypothesis 2: Hedonic shopping motivation should be positively related to IBT.

However, an individual's tendency to satisfy his/her hedonic needs through impulse buying does not only result from her drive for positive experiences - evidence indicates that impulse buying is often related to negative emotions (Silvera et al., 2008), and, as a consequence, certain people try to improve their mood through impulse buying, which they consider as a rewarding experience.

Verplanken and Sato (2011) argue that impulse buying is a form of self-regulatory behaviour that can either serve as a promotion motive (i.e. to obtain positive outcomes, such as positive emotions) or as a prevention motive (i.e. to avoid negative outcomes, such as low self-esteem). Hausman (2000) developed a hedonic consumption scale comprising the factors of novelty and entertainment, but also emotional lift, thereby adding to the conception that hedonic consumption can serve the purpose of mitigating negative affect or low self-esteem. Based on these observations, it is expected that hedonic shopping motivation represents the mechanism through which materialism (which is associated with low self-esteem) manifests itself and affects IBT. Thus:

Hypothesis 3: Materialism is expected to affect IBT through its effect on hedonic shopping motivation (see Figure 1).

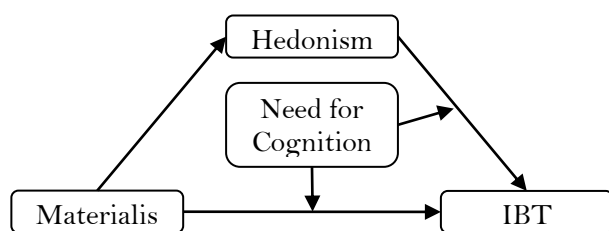


Figure 1. A graphical representation of the mediation postulated in Hypothesis 3.

Without Reflection: Need for Cognition

Need for cognition is the tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive activity (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). In research on consumer behaviour, results suggest that high NC individuals develop their attitudes towards products on the basis of elaboration of product attributes, whereas low NC individuals are more susceptible to peripheral cues (Haugtvedt, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1992; Zhang, 1996). For instance, Zhang (1996) showed that low NC individuals were more persuaded by humor in

advertisements than by the strength of the argument in the advertisement message. Given that impulsive buying behaviour is characterized by a lack of deliberation and planning (Rook, 1987; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001), a negative relationship between NC and IBT is expected. To our knowledge, the only study that directly examined the relationship between NC and IBT is that of Verplanken and Herabadi (2001), yet no significant correlation between these authors' IBT scale and NC was found despite their results going in the right direction. Since the authors used a different IBT scale and because their sample size was relatively small, it seems plausible to further explore this relation and thus we postulate:

Hypothesis 4: NC should be negatively related to IBT.

Furthermore, high NC is expected to attenuate the effect of materialism and hedonism because high NC consumers have an intrinsic motivation to process product information, a process that should interfere with the tendency to impulse buy:

Hypothesis 5: NC is expected to moderate the relationship between materialism and IBT.

Hypothesis 6: NC is expected to moderate the relationship between hedonic shopping motivation and IBT.

Adolescents' Vulnerability to IBT

Marketers are increasingly targeting adolescents. Furthermore, in most countries, adolescents grow up in a culture of consumerism, which makes them more prone to engage in buying behaviour (Bush, Martin, & Bush, 2004). Shopping has been identified as a daily routine for adolescents (Lin & Chuang, 2005). Adolescents have more spare time and enjoy shopping more than their parents (Taylor & Cosenza, 2002). Also, when they shop, they do so with peers. Luo (2005) has shown that shopping with peers increases impulse purchasing by reducing risk perception and uncertainty (Kiecker & Hartman, 1993),

and by increasing the buyer's confidence that a wise purchase decision was made (Kiecker & Hartman, 1994). Lin and Chen (2012) examined impulse buying among adolescents and found that high susceptibility to peer influence led to greater impulse buying.

Method

Sample

Participants will be adolescents (ages 13-18) recruited from one high school in six European cities: Zagreb (Croatia), Gödöllő (Hungary), Warsaw (Poland), Belgrade (Serbia), Almería (Spain), and Geneva (Switzerland). Each sample will consist of around 200 participants. The research hypotheses will be tested in each sample individually.

The choice of the locations for recruiting the participants was primarily related to the proximity of the respective researchers. No preference was given to which types of high schools were contacted for the study. Several high schools were approached and those that first authorized the data collection were the ones selected. Given the different regulations for conducting studies in high schools throughout the countries represented in the present research, the specific administrative procedures for obtaining approval from the high schools varied for each country.

Materials

The data for this study will be obtained through a questionnaire combining published scales as well as questions developed specifically for the current study. Since no versions of the published scales existed in any of the languages spoken by the participants of this study, the scales were translated using the method of back translation (Brislin, 1970). First, the scales were translated into each country's native language (Croatian, Hungarian, French, Polish, Serbian, and Spanish) by the respective bilingual researcher, then they were translated back into

English by another person, after which the accuracy of the translation was checked by the researcher. We will use the following scales:

Impulse buying tendencies. Participants' IBT will be measured using the scale by Rook and Fisher (1995), a nine-item scale that measures buying impulsiveness with items such as "I often buy things without thinking".

Hedonic Consumption Scale. We will measure hedonic shopping motives with the Hedonic Consumption Scale (Hausman, 2000), a seven-item scale that measures hedonic tendencies in consumers with items such as "I get a real 'high' from shopping". The Hedonic Consumption Scale incorporates the Fun scale developed by Faber and O'Guinn (1988), the Novelty Scale originally developed by Unger (1981) and several items suggested by interview data.

Materialism. The Material Values Scale (Richins, 2004) is an 18-item scale that measures materialism in consumers. An example of an item would be "Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions".

Need for cognition. We will use the Need for Cognition Short Form Scale by Cacioppo, Petty, and Kao (1984), an 18-item scale, which uses items such as "I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems".

Each item of these scales can be scored on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Consumption habit questions. The questionnaire contains a section of 10 questions on participants' consumption habits, for example "When I shop, I shop alone", "Do you go to shopping centers and if so, how often?", or "How much money do you on average have to spend on your own every month (e.g. pocket money, gift money, money from jobs)?". These questions have been developed specifically for our study.

Socio-demographic questions. The last section of the questionnaire includes 11 socio-demographic questions such as gender, age, years of education, nationality, education and parents' occupation. This section was created for the purpose of our research.

Procedure

Participants will be asked to fill out the questionnaire in the classroom. Depending on the preference of the teacher, this will occur either before the class begins or once it has ended. Also depending on the high school's preference, either the respective researcher will conduct the data collection in the classrooms, or the school will distribute the questionnaires among its teachers who will then ask their students to participate in the study. Participation will be voluntary and anonymous: the high schools will be informed about this and it will also be indicated in the questionnaire.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the method of data collection (questionnaires), and the nature of the questions, no potential harm or discomfort was identified for the participants. Therefore no significant ethical issues were needed to take into consideration. However, national guidelines of ethical consideration for each participating country were followed. Ethical approval was obtained in each country separately from the researchers' respective universities.

In order to obtain informed consent from participants in the present study, all participants, and in certain cases their parents, were fully informed about the aim and procedure of the research. Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and that their answers are anonymous. In Geneva, the participants were asked to sign consent forms before filling out the questionnaire.

Practical

During the initiation of the present research project at the EFPSA European Summer School in Portugal in 2012, the members of the research group developed an action plan as well as a schedule in order to facilitate carrying out the necessary tasks. The schedule pinned down deadlines and important steps needed to take in order to meet these deadlines, while allowing for unexpected delays, such as the process of obtaining ethical approval taking longer than expected. The action plan includes bullet points with tasks to complete. At the European Summer School and during the following weeks, we agreed upon preferred ways of communication, e.g. using mailing lists, shared virtual storage of documents, and monthly Skype meetings.

We designated a Communications Officer (CO) who is responsible for ensuring an efficient communication between group members, as well as between the group and external actors such as the Research Officer from the Junior Researcher Programme (JRP). The group is supervised by a PhD candidate who has been selected by the JRP team, and the supervisor is responsible for coordinating and guiding the academic aspects of the research. We also designated a Lead Analyst who is responsible for managing the data (e.g. creating the database template, keeping the data uncorrupted, etc.).

In order to facilitate the working process with regard to the different schedules of the group members, the workload has been divided and each group member was assigned one or more tasks to be responsible for.

The only expenses of the research have been incurred by printing the questionnaires. We have applied for funding through grants and organizations, with no success thus far.

Gathering data from six countries with different native languages required us to translate the scales and questionnaires that were used in the research. It is

noteworthy to point out that the ethical considerations concerning the research design required us to gain parental approval in several countries, which has prolonged the data collection process.

Current Status of the Project

Thus far, ethical approval has been obtained from the University of Zagreb (Croatia), the University of Budapest (Hungary), the University of Warsaw (Poland), the University of Belgrade (Serbia), Lund University (Sweden) and the University of Geneva (Switzerland). Ethical approval for the entire project has been obtained from the University of Porto (Portugal).

Before beginning the data collection, a pilot test conducted on ten adolescents from each country was performed in order to ensure the comprehensibility of the translated scales. Currently, data has been collected in Croatia, Hungary and Switzerland. In Serbia and Spain we are in the process of organizing the questionnaire distribution with the chosen high schools. Parental consent is currently being collected in Poland, after which the data will be collected.

Prospective Discussion

Our prospect is to gather data as scheduled in six countries, thereby enabling us to confirm or reject our hypotheses, which should shed additional light on how hedonism, materialism and need for cognition affect impulse buying tendencies. The cross-cultural data collection in our study opens up the opportunity to obtain a wider perspective on the topic. It is, however, a challenge to conduct research in several languages and settings, which might cause limitations to the validity of the study. Furthermore, differences in sample sizes as well as socio-demographic differences in the samples are also cause for limitations in the current research.

Nevertheless, taking all possible limitations into careful consideration, it is our belief that the possibility of

comparing the samples from many diverse countries will lead us to a fuller conclusion of the postulated research questions.



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