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Relation between dispositional mindfulness and impulsive buying tendency: Role of trait emotional intelligence

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between dispositional mindfulness and impulsive buying tendency (IBT) has been studied in the present work. An attempt has been made to examine whether trait emotional intelligence (EI) is distinctive and useful in explaining the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and impulsive buying tendency or not. A survey based on self-administered questionnaires comprising the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale–Revised and Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale has been conducted on 319 subjects in India. Results revealed that dispositional mindfulness is negatively related to IBT and positively related to all components and total scores of EI. It has been observed that the total EI scores as well as the use of emotion, self-emotion appraisal and regulation of emotion components of EI fully mediated the relationship between mindfulness and IBT. The findings of this study may prove helpful in an empirical understanding of the mechanism through which mindfulness enhances emotional intelligence which further influences impulsive buying tendency among individuals.

1. Introduction

An increasing number of consumers have easy access to impulse purchasing opportunities. Impulse buying is an unplanned purchase characterized by rapid decision-making and subjective bias in favor of immediate possession (Rook & Gardner, 1993). Previous research that considered consumer impulsivity as lifestyle trait has suggested that consumers vary in their general proclivity to purchase items on impulse (Rook & Fisher, 1995; Rook & Gardner, 1993). The psychological antecedents of general impulsivity have received extensive attention from researchers, but only a few studies have examined the influence of individual differences and personality characteristics on impulse buying tendency (IBT) (Thompson & Prendergast, 2015). IBT is a personal trait (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998) that influences relatively consistent responses to environmental stimuli. Individuals with high IBT are likely to be tempted to buy impulsively and act frequently on those urges. Existing studies demonstrated that chronic impulse buying is related to personal factors, such as low emotional intelligence (EI) (Peter & Krishnakumar, 2010), lack of control (Shen & Khalifa, 2012), extraversion, neuroticism and low conscientiousness (Thompson & Prendergast, 2015), variety seeking (Sharma, Sivakumaran, & Marshall, 2010), low autonomy, need for evaluation, and need for structure (Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001).

Impulse buying is accompanied by solid emotional responses, such as a strong urge to purchase or feelings of excitement and pleasure (Rook, 1987). Prior research provides evidence that impulse buying reduces unpleasant psychological states. Baumeister (2002) revealed that individuals with high IBT sacrifice their self-control to make themselves feel better. For such individuals, impulse buying acts as a self-regulatory mechanism that alleviates negative feelings, especially when these feelings have a structural basis, such as low self-esteem or a failure to live up to valued standards (Verplanken, Herabadi, Perry, & Silvera, 2005).

1.1. Mindfulness and impulsive buying

Mindfulness is a state of mind characterized by non-judgmental awareness of the present and non-reactionary attention to one's own thoughts, sensations, feelings, and emotions (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). The state of consciousness that involves awareness and attention of the self, others, and the outside environment substantially supports decision-making (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The initiation of mindfulness increases awareness of things happening around, which enables an individual to be present-minded, to notice the flow of moment-to-moment change, and to make important decisions by not being governed by careless tendency, pattern, or reaction (Ward, 2014). Mindfulness can be enhanced through various interventions, such as meditation and practices involving mindfulness training; however, mindfulness is also regarded as a dispositional trait characterized by a tendency to be mindful in everyday life (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

A number of studies in clinical psychology explored various psychological conditions with the help of mindfulness. For instance, studies indicate that mindfulness is positively related to increased self-esteem,

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emotional stability, successful self-regulation including reduced reactivity to emotional stimuli or reduced impulsive reactions and reduced compulsive buying (Armstrong, 2011; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Giluk, 2009; Masicampo & Baumeister, 2007; Papies, Barsalou, & Custers, 2012; Peters, Erisman, Upton, Baer, & Roemer, 2011; Rasmussen & Pidgeon, 2011). However, no study has empirically investigated the impact of mindfulness on impulsive buying and only a few studies have been conducted to explore the relationship between mindfulness and compulsive buying (CB). Impulsive and CB are terms that are commonly confused for each other, but represent behaviors that differ in their origin, consequence and severity. Impulsive buying is a state where "a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately" (Rook, 1987 p. 191). CB, on the other hand, is defined as a "chronic, repetitive purchasing that becomes a primary response to negative events or feelings" (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989, p. 155). Mindfulness intervention creates awareness and controls the factors that increase CB behavior (Armstrong, 2011). Furthermore, it is revealed that CB is related to several domains of impulsivity, decreased dispositional mindfulness and emotional regulation deficits (Williams & Grisham, 2012).

This study examines whether the findings of CB will manifest in impulse buying. Even though reasonable amount of impulsive buying can be satisfying and pleasant, yet it is regarded as a chronic problem with a compulsive component which functions as a departure from negative psychological states. Therefore, it is important to find antecedents of IBT because it is more widespread than addictive, uncontrollable CB and it can predict a certain extent of CB (Claes et al., 2010). As impulsive and CB are generally regarded as manifestations of regulatory-control dysfunction (Thompson & Prendergast, 2015) and individuals with low attentional, emotional, and mental self-control are likely to indulge in impulsive buying (Vohs & Faber, 2003), it is assumed that both behaviors may exhibit similar patterns of association with mindfulness.

1.2. Trait EI, dispositional mindfulness, and impulsive buying

Petrides, Pita, and Kokkinaki (2007) have proposed two different constructs of EI, namely ability EI and trait EI. Ability EI is referred to as a cognitive ability that relates to true capacity of an individual "to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10). Trait EI, on the other hand, is defined "as a constellation of behavioral dispositions and emotional self-perceptions located at the lower-levels of personality hierarchies assessed through questionnaires and rating scales" (Petrides et al., 2007). Prior studies report that high EI results into reduced stress (Bao, Xue, & Kong, 2015), better physical and mental health, greater life satisfaction, emotional adjustment and greater psychological well-being (Chien-Huang & Chuang, 2005; Johnson, Batey, & Holdsworth, 2009; Petrides et al., 2007; Schutte & Malouff, 2011).

Consumers who buy on impulse are not likely to consider the consequences of their purchases or think carefully before making decisions (Rook, 1987). They tend to focus on the immediate gratification of responding to the urge to buy. By contrast, consumers with high EI have a heightened understanding of their emotional state and they can prevent themselves from getting caught in a negative emotional state that might activate mood repair response including impulsive buying. According to Chien-Huang and Chuang (2005), individuals with high EI showed a lower tendency to engage in impulse buying than individuals with low EI. They posited that individuals with high EI are not likely to yield to impulse buying because they can control their feelings and use strategies based on facts. Peter and Krishnakumar (2010) also found that EI was negatively related to impulsive buying.

Prior studies also report the positive association of mindfulness with EI (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006; Bao et al., 2015; Schutte & Malouff, 2011). This suggests that mindful people can effectively use, manage, and understand their emotions. According to Schutte and Malouff (2011), promoting the development of EI could facilitate the desirable effects of mindfulness because this trait enables individuals to develop EI competencies. Mindfulness can enhance metacognitive awareness, improve the capacity to be attentive, increase positive emotions, and decrease negative emotions and anxiety. People in a mindful state can view events in an objective and dispassionate manner (Weinstein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009) and can address their emotions in an observational state with strong self-control. Thus, mindful individuals can effectively perceive, manage or regulate their emotions, thoughts, and physiological reactions (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2007), which in turn may enhance their capacity and tendency to inhibit or overrule immediate urges to buy. According to Bao et al. (2015), dispositional mindfulness is positively associated with all four EI components, namely, self-emotion appraisal (SEA), others' emotional appraisal (OEA), regulation of emotion (ROE), and use of emotion (UOE).

2. The present study

The preceding rationale and existing literature suggest that mindfulness contributes to EI (Baer et al., 2006; Bao et al., 2015; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Schutte & Malouff, 2011), which then leads to low impulsive buying (Chien-Huang & Chuang, 2005; Peter & Krishnakumar, 2010). With dispositional mindfulness contrasting conceptually with trait impulsivity (Peters et al., 2011) and emotions obviously determining impulse purchasing, the present study explores the relationship between mindfulness and IBT and examines the mediating effect of EI on this relationship. Schutte and Malouff (2011) emphasized the need to determine the possible mediating effect of EI on the relationship between mindfulness and other constructs. As EI is a multidimensional construct (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), the components of EI that mediate the relationship between mindfulness and IBT should be explored. However, the study endeavors to examine those factors, which can be controlled and thereupon it becomes possible to analyze predictability of buyer's tendency to make impulsive purchases. This study investigates mindfulness and EI in an Asian context involving participants from India. The following hypotheses were based on the findings of previous studies: (1) mindfulness is negatively related to IBT; (2) mindfulness is positively related to EI; (3) EI is negatively related to IBT; and (4) EI may mediate the relationship between mindfulness and IBT. The present study explains the potential mechanism by which mindfulness influences IBT.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and procedure

A total of 319 respondents (165 females and 154 males) from a University in India participated in this study. Respondents anonymously completed the survey questionnaire and the mean age was 28.24 (SD = 11.53).

3.2. Measurement of constructs

3.2.1. Mindfulness

Prior studies that have utilized self-report measures have demonstrated that trait mindfulness is significantly associated with psychological health, behavior regulation and constructs reflecting openness to experience, self-awareness, clarity of experience, emotional intelligence, as well as other measures of mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2007; Weinstein et al., 2009). In this study, the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale–Revised (CAMS–R) developed by Feldman et al. (2007) was used to evaluate trait mindfulness of respondents. CAMS–R has