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The influence of trait affect and the five-factor personality model on impulse buying

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ABSTRACT

Research into the influence of affect on impulse buying has to date produced contradictory results, partly due to confusion between the potentially discrete influences of, respectively, state and trait affect. Additionally, studies on how the five-factor personality model's dimensions influence impulse buying have also produced contradictory results. Moreover, while the established link between trait affect and personality suggests dimensions of this latter could account for whatever influence the former has on impulse buying, no study has yet attempted to examine this possibility. We draw on self-regulation theory to examine three unanswered questions: (1) the extent to which trait affect influences impulse buying whilst controlling for state affect; (2) establish which dimensions of the five-factor personality model predict impulse buying; and (3) test whether or not any influence of trait affect on impulse buying is additive to the effects of the five-factor personality model. Analyses of cross-sectional data ($n = 842$) find that trait affect does have a significant ($p < .05$) influence on impulse buying controlling for state affect, but that this influence is fully accounted for by the five-factor personality model ($p < .001$), the extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism dimensions of which are found consistently to predict impulse buying.

1. Introduction

While the psychological determinants of general impulsivity and compulsive buying disorders have attracted considerable research attention (Billieux, Rochat, Rebetez, & Van der Linden, 2008; Claes et al., 2010; Mueller et al., 2011; Otero-Lopez, Pol, Bolano, & Marino, 2011; Otero-Lopez & Pol, 2013), the individual difference and personality determinants of *compulsive* buying's milder *impulse* buying antecedents have received relatively little attention (Bratko, Butovic, & Bosnjak, 2013; Lucas & Koff, 2014), and empirical results have been equivocal.

Beatty and Ferrell (1998, p. 184) suggest 'individual difference variables ... contribute to the impulse buying process,' but focus mainly on examining and finding an influence for *state* affect, a transient mood determined as much, and arguably more, by environmental circumstances than stable individual differences. Studies on the influence of the stable individual personality difference of *trait* affect on impulse buying have produced contradictory results (Verplanken, Herabadi, Perry, & Silvera, 2005; Silvera, Lavack, & Kropp, 2008), and whether or not *trait* affect has any influence on impulse buying after controlling for possible confounding effects from *state* affect remains open to question.

Verplanken and Herabadi (2001, p. 81) suggest 'the tendency to buy on impulse is rooted in personality'. However, their findings in relation to the five-factor personality model are only partially supported by Bratko et al.'s (2013) subsequent research, suggesting further research is needed to resolve the question of how this personality model influences impulse buying. Moreover, the established link between personality and affect found in meta-analyses (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998) begs the question of whether or not any influence that trait affect may have on impulse buying is in fact partially or wholly accounted for by personality.

Resolving these unanswered questions is important because around 90% of people make impulse purchases (Hausman, 2000). Such impulsive buying behavior is argued (d'Astous, 1990; Verplanken & Sato, 2011) and empirically found (Sun, Wu, & Youn, 2004) to predict compulsive buying, a self-regulation disorder affecting around 5% of individuals (Claes et al, 2010). We empirically address these unanswered questions through the theoretical lens of self-regulation dysfunction (Baumeister, 2002).

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1.1. Impulsive and compulsive buying

Common to all conceptualizations of impulse buying are unplanned, unreflective, spontaneous purchasing (Piron, 1991). Several researchers (d'Astous, 1990; DeSarbo & Edwards, 1996) consider such purchasing as the initial stage of a continuum leading some individuals progressively to become habituated, addicted, and then, ultimately, compulsive buyers who exhibit marked 'repetitive buying and a lack of impulse control over buying' (Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney, & Monroe, 2008, p. 662). This contention is supported by Sun et al. (2004, p. 8) who find a significant path coefficient of .59 from impulsive to compulsive buying in a structural equation model of this latter's causality.

1.2. Determinants of impulse buying

Several researchers suggest impulse buying results from self-regulation dysfunction (Claes et al., 2010; Rook, 1987; Vohs & Faber, 2007). Baumeister (2002) argues that individuals' maintenance of self-regulation depends on goal adherence, self-monitoring, and impulse-restraint capacity. Hence, self-regulation can fail and result in impulse buying when (a) longer-term goals (like saving money) cease to be adhered to because they are temporarily superseded by short-term objectives seemingly achievable by unplanned purchasing; when (b) conscious self-monitoring of buying and its consequences is suspended; or when (c) impulse-restraint capacity is reduced through ego depletion. Self-regulation dysfunction has been linked to several impulsive behaviors and compulsive disorders (Magar, Philips, & Hosie, 2008), and found to be facilitated by individual differences in both affect and personality (Solberg Nes, Carlson, Crofford, de Leeuw, & Segerstrom, 2011).

1.2.1. Affect

Affect has long been suggested to influence impulse buying (Rook & Gardner, 1993), but there is little consensus about how it does so because there is little consensus about how affect influences self-regulation (Aspinwall, 1998; Fedorikhin & Patrick, 2010). This stems partly from the sometimes differing influences of negative and positive affect on self-regulation (Leith & Baumeister, 1996), and partly from the difficulty of separating the differing influences of, respectively, *trait* and *state* affect.

Little research on *trait* affect and specifically impulse buying exists, and what there is provides inconsistent results. Verplanken et al. (2005) find no relationship between trait affect and impulse buying. Silvera et al.'s (2008, p. 28) research finds support for this non-relationship regarding *positive* trait affect, but finds a significant positive correlation between impulse buying and *negative* trait affect. This latter finding is in line with research on self-regulation where the roles of positive and negative trait affect have received more research attention (Aspinwall, 1998).

Positive trait affect is suggested by Trope and Pomerantz (1998) to result in a hedonic surplus that obviates subconscious needs to supersede long-term affective goals with short-term mood rectification objectives. Further, Aspinwall (1998) suggests that positive trait affect enables better self-monitoring due to improved thoroughness, efficiency and flexibility in information processing. Aspinwall (1998) also indicates that positive trait affect may facilitate greater psychological resource deployment to counter ego depletion. *Negative* trait affect, a chronic hedonic deficit, would seem to produce the opposite effect, with Koff and Lucas (2011) finding self-regulatory dysfunction associates negatively with trait positive affect and positively with trait negative affect.

Studies on compulsive buying consistently find associations with trait affect that are predicted by research on self-regulation. Positive trait affect is found by Faber and Christensen (1996) to be negatively associated with compulsive buying. Conversely, negative trait affect is found to be positively associated with compulsive buying in several studies (Billieux et al., 2008; Faber & O'Guinn, 1992; Mueller et al., 2011). Overall, these findings suggest positive trait affect should diminish, and negative trait affect should increase, impulse buying.

However, studies of *trait* affect's influence on compulsive and impulsive buying do not control for the influences of *state* affect, influences that appear in impulse control studies to vary depending on context (Fishbach & Labroo, 2007). For example, Fedorikhin and Patrick (2010) find that positive *state* affect decreases self-monitoring efficacy, concluding that elevated mood heightens arousal and thereby distracts from both motivation and perceived need for self-monitoring while simultaneously producing ego depletion. But Aspinwall (1998) suggests positive *state* affect may actually increase self-monitoring and assessment of costs and benefits of switching from long- to short-term goals. Negative *state* affect has been found by Leith and Baumeister (1996) to decrease self-regulation. But other research finds negative *state* affect can increase effort to self-regulate (Erber & Tesser, 1992).

Contradictory evidence on the influences of positive and negative *state* affect on impulsive behavior is reflected in research specifically on impulse buying, with Rook and Gardner (1993) finding both positive and negative state affect are related to increased impulse buying. Clearly, with the influences of *state* affect on impulse buying being equivocal, any examination of the role of *trait* affect in impulse buying needs overtly to control for *state* affect. Hence we hypothesize that:

> *H1. Controlling for state affect, positive trait affect will decrease impulse buying, while negative trait affect will increase impulse buying.*

1.2.2. Personality

Self-regulation (Gramzow et al., 2004) and effortful control (Jensen-Campbell et al., 2002) are consistently found to be associated positively with the conscientiousness, and negatively with the neuroticism, dimensions of the five-factor personality model, although their relationships to extraversion, agreeableness and openness are equivocal (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001). Studies on compulsive buying broadly mirror these associations (Mowen & Spears, 1999; Mueller et al., 2011; Sun et al., 2004). Recent research by Otero-Lopez and Pol (2013) finds compulsive buying positively associated with neuroticism and negatively associated with conscientiousness and agreeableness.

However, studies specifically on the relationship between impulse buying and the five-factor model have produced inconsistent findings. Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) find significant relationships between impulse buying and only extraversion (positive) and conscientiousness (negative). But Bratko et al. (2013) find significant relationships for only extraversion and neuroticism, both positive. As the only two studies we could locate on the five-factor model and impulse buying concur that extraversion predicts the latter, and because we suspect that impulse buying's association with conscientiousness and neuroticism should reflect consistent findings relating to self-regulation and these two dimensions, we hypothesize that:

> *H2. Impulse buying will be negatively associated with conscientiousness, but positively associated with neuroticism and extraversion.*

1.2.3. Trait affect and personality

The five-factor model's dimensions are found to predict positive and negative trait affect (Stafford, Ng, Moore, & Bard, 2010), raising