



Five-Factor Model personality traits, materialism, and excessive buying: A mediational analysis

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown consistent relationships between the Five-Factor Model personality traits, materialism and excessive buying. However, little is known about the channels of influence through personality traits and materialism leading to excessive buying. Therefore, the main objective of this current study is to examine whether materialism is a mediating variable in the relationship between the Five-Factor Model and excessive buying. The results of the path analysis using a sample of 667 women generally confirm the suitability of materialism as a vehicle for the effects of Big-Five personality traits on excessive buying. Specifically, neuroticism exerts both positive direct and indirect influences on excessive buying. Moreover, materialism mediates the influence of extraversion, openness, and agreeableness on excessive buying. Whereas extraversion shows a positive association with materialism, openness and agreeableness present negative relations with materialism which, in turn, is associated with higher excessive buying propensity. Conscientiousness is the only exception to the mediating model, and presents a direct and negative relation with excessive buying. Generally speaking, the finding that five factors effects are mediated by materialism increases the probability that preventive and interventive efforts aimed at reducing materialistic values effectively influence the associated risk for excessive buying originating from certain personality traits.

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1. Introduction

There has been growing consensus over the last few decades supporting the Five-Factor Model (FFM) as a comprehensive and parsimonious taxonomy of personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 2008). According to the FFM, there are five main independent dimensions underlying personality differences: (a) neuroticism, (b) extraversion, (c) openness, (d) agreeableness, and (e) conscientiousness. This model has become especially useful in predicting the risk of developing addictive patterns such as alcoholism (e.g., Kuntsche, von Fischer, & Gmel, 2008), tobacco dependence (e.g., Terracciano & Costa, 2004), pathological gambling (e.g., Mowen, Fang, & Scott, 2009) and workaholism (e.g., Clark, Lelchook, & Taylor, 2010). Specifically, researchers working in the excessive buying field have recently shown an increasing interest in examining the links between personality traits and this casuistry (e.g., Mueller et al., 2010; Rose, 2007).

In empirical studies, as some authors have recently pointed out (see, for instance, Rose & Segrist, 2009), the excessive buying construct has often been operationalised with measures of “impulsive

buying” (e.g., Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001), “compulsive buying” (e.g., Mowen & Spears, 1999), and “addictive buying” (e.g., Scherhorn, Reisch, & Raab, 1990). Excessive buying refers to “an enduring purchasing pattern that has reached a level so high that it is deemed problematic by either the consumer or people close to the consumer” (Rose & Segrist, 2009, p. 2). Hence, in the present study, the expression “excessive buying” has been employed not only because it is more inclusive, but also because it seems to require less in terms of the existence of a clinical diagnostics of the behaviour. There is solid empirical evidence supporting the important role of the FFM personality traits in the buying problems (e.g., Mueller et al., 2010). For instance, neuroticism has emerged in some earlier studies as one of the most important vulnerability factors in compulsive buying (e.g., Mick, 1996). Furthermore, some investigators have demonstrated that this is also linked with other personality traits in the FFM, including conscientiousness (e.g., Claes et al., 2010), openness (e.g., Troisi, Christopher, & Marek, 2006), and extraversion (e.g., Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001). Most of these previous studies have focused primarily on analysing the bivariate relationships between personality traits and compulsive buying. However, there is some evidence that these traits could influence through indirect mechanisms (e.g., Rose, 2007). In this sense, materialism has been postulated by some researchers as a potential mediator variable in the effect of personality traits on compulsive buying (e.g., Johnson & Attmann, 2009; Mowen &

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Spears, 1999). It is precisely in this context where this study intends to contribute new knowledge to the existing body of research by elucidating if materialism channels the influence of the personality traits according to the Five-Factor Model on excessive buying.

The influences order in our proposal (Big Five–materialism–excessive buying) is in clear agreement with specific frameworks which articulate and integrate personality units. Specifically, and in agreement with the model by McCrae and Costa (2008) and the levels proposal by McAdams (1995), personality traits like “basic tendencies” would constitute the antecedent variables, whilst values (in this case, materialism) would fit with “middle-level units”. Research regarding the relationships between traits, materialism, and excessive buying is particularly scarce, and as such further advancement in knowledge about the integrative functions of personality variables in this behavioural problem seems necessary. Moreover, this model was created taking account the available literature exploring the interrelationships between FFM–materialism, FFM–excessive buying, and materialism–excessive buying.

There is evidence that FFM personality traits are linked with materialism (e.g., Shafer, 2000). Materialism was conceptualised as a personal value relating to a set of centrally held beliefs about the relevance of possessions in life, and consists in three dimensions labelled importance, or the prominent role assigned to material goods in one's life, success, understood as the tendency of materialists to judge their own and others' prestige by the possessions accumulated, and happiness, defined as the consideration of possessions as essential to well-being (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Indeed, materialistic values have been found to be positively associated with neuroticism (e.g., Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Mick, 1996) and negatively with openness (e.g., Troisi et al., 2006), and agreeableness (e.g., Bosnjak, Galesic, & Tuten, 2007). Furthermore, Shafer (2000) confirmed that some of the Big-Five factors were significant predictors of materialism dimensions. Specifically, whilst low levels in both conscientiousness and agreeableness predicted the centrality materialism facet, the high scores in neuroticism explained both the centrality and happiness dimensions.

Big-Five framework of personality traits have also emerged as a helpful proposal for understanding individual differences in excessive buying. An instance of this is the study by Verplanken and Herabadi (2001), who found that conscientiousness and autonomy personality traits were negatively associated with impulse buying tendency. These authors also confirmed negative correlations between conscientiousness and the impulse buying cognitive facet, and between autonomy and the affective dimension. Moreover, the results of this research showed that extraversion correlated positively with the impulse buying tendency and the cognitive and affective dimensions of this phenomenon. Herabadi (2003), using the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992), demonstrated that whilst conscientiousness and agreeableness correlated negatively with the impulse buying tendency and the cognitive dimension, neuroticism was positively associated with the impulse buying affective factor. Recently, Mueller et al. (2010) identified two distinct personality prototypes in a compulsive buyers' sample through cluster analysis considering the Big-Five model. Specifically, subjects in cluster II scored significantly higher than those in cluster I on neuroticism and lower on extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness. The authors concluded that whilst cluster I may include excessive buyers who do not fulfil all the criteria for the compulsive buying diagnostic, the higher scores in neuroticism and lower in the remaining personality traits detected in participants belonging to cluster II may probably deviate into the chronic experience of more severe symptoms of this problem.

Some studies have demonstrated that materialistic values endorsement is among the most important risk factors for develop-

ing addictive buying (e.g., Otero-López, Villardefrancos, Castro, & Santiago, 2011). Along these lines, materialism has generally been found to have a high explanatory capability in excessive buying, independent of the type of sample employed. For instance, Dittmar (2005) proved that materialism was the main predictor of compulsive buying in three different samples (compulsive buyers, consumer panellists, and adolescents). Also recently, Lo and Harvey (in press), demonstrated experimentally that addictive shopping was related to reduced levels of behavioural control, and in particular with consumer choices implicating materialistic items that showed an exclusive design or pertained to luxury brands.

In short, there is a sizeable amount of research supporting the relationships between Five-Factor Model–materialism (e.g., Shafer, 2000), Five-Factor Model–buying disorders (e.g., Mueller et al., 2010), and materialism–addictive buying (e.g., Otero-López et al., 2011), but not much is known about the joint influence of the Big-Five and materialism in explaining excessive buying.

In reviewing the literature, only some timid proposals are found that, although not focused on the excessive buying phenomenon, have jointly included the Big-Five personality traits and materialism in explanatory models of compulsive buying. An example of this is the earlier study by Mowen and Spears (1999) who examined a model of relationships in which the need for arousal and materialism were postulated as intervening determinants between the Big-Five personality traits and compulsive buying. Specifically, these authors considered two samples of students who completed the shortened version of Goldberg's Five-Factor Model scale, five of the eighteen items of the Richins and Dawson's materialism scale. Their results showed that the need for arousal was the variable that firstly captured the influence of three of the Big-Five traits (namely, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness) and channelled it towards materialism, this being the personal value which finally influenced on compulsive buying.

Nevertheless, there are no prior studies that have examined the potential mediator role of materialism in the link between the Big-Five personality traits and excessive buying. To fill this gap, and in an attempt to contribute to the cumulative knowledge on the subject, we have carried out research in which materialism was postulated as a “filter” of the effect of the Five-Factor Model personality traits on excessive buying. Our approach presents some special features that are important to take into account. Specifically, we have included excessive buying as criterion variable. Moreover, we have considered the complete measure of materialism developed by Richins and Dawson (1992), and the 240-items of NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992), which is the most comprehensive and the highest heuristic value instrument to measure Five-Factor Model of personality traits. These aspects constitute, therefore, some of the strengths of this research project whose main objective is to clarify if the influence of the Big-Five personality traits on excessive buying might be channelled by materialism. Specifically, we hypothesise that materialism acts as a mediator variable in the relationships between the Five-Factor Model and excessive buying.

2. Method

2.1. Procedure

This investigation is part of a research project on the excessive buying phenomenon among the Galician urban population. Data collection was conducted between November 2011 and February 2012 in the seven largest cities in Galicia (more than 100,000 inhabitants). A paper-version of questionnaires were administered by personnel from the research project who presented to passersby's the possibility to take part in the study. Moreover, researchers provided information to participants on how to complete

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