Deliberate Self-Indulgence Vs. Involuntary Loss of Self-Control: Exploring the Influence of Culture on Consumer Impulsiveness Trait

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Impulse buying is a prevalent phenomenon world-wide and researchers have developed several scales to measure the consumer impulsiveness trait. However, many inherent complexities of this phenomenon remain unexplained. Moreover, recent studies in countries outside the US have used scales developed in the US and have not adequately addressed the issue of measurement equivalence of these scales across different cultures. Therefore, it is still not clear if impulse buying actually has the same meaning and implications for all consumers either within the same culture or even across different cultures. This gap is addressed with three studies. The first two studies explore the differences in component structures of the consumer impulsiveness construct between Singaporean and US respondents, to develop a modified scale to measure consumer impulsiveness trait. In the third study, confirmatory factor analysis is used to show that consumer impulsiveness trait has a two-dimensional structure for the individualistic respondents and three-dimensional for collectivists. Specifically, there is a clear distinction between deliberate self-indulgence and involuntary loss of self-control for collectivists but not for individualists.

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Deliberate Self-Indulgence vs. Involuntary Loss of Self-Control: Exploring the Influence of Culture on Consumer Impulsiveness Trait

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INTRODUCTION

Impulse buying is considered an important and widespread phenomenon by consumer researchers as well as marketing practitioners in the US and other western countries and it has been considered largely universal in nature (Beatty and Ferrell 1998; Hausman 2000; Rook and Fisher 1995). However, there is no consensus among researchers on the exact structure or nature of this complex psychological construct and extant literature is replete with its several significantly different interpretations and conceptualizations e.g. buying impulsiveness (Rook and Fisher 1995), consumer impulsiveness (Puri 1996), impulse buying tendency (Weun et al. 1998) and consumer buying impulsivity (Youn and Faber 2002).

Moreover, researchers have begun investigating impulse buying behavior in other countries besides US such as Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam (Kacen and Lee 2002; Tuyet Mai et al. 2003). However, most cross-cultural studies into impulse buying did not adequately address the issue of measurement equivalence despite using scales developed in the US among their non-US respondents. Hence, there is still no conclusive evidence to support the assumption that impulse buying has the same meaning and implications for consumer across different cultures or indeed even within the same culture.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this research, we address this gap with three studies. In our first study, we used an existing scale to measure consumer impulsiveness construct, which is defined as a combination of two components—prudence and hedonism each of which along with the situational factors may influence the accessibility of the costs and benefits leading to either resistance or enactment of the buying impulse (Puri 1996). These two components of consumer impulsiveness are expected to be independent of each other and opposite in terms of their association with impulse buying behavior i.e. negative for prudence and positive for hedonism.

STUDY 1

Based on this conceptual framework, we investigated the consumer impulsiveness trait as a part of another larger study with 204 Singaporean undergraduate student respondents. We were unable to establish measurement equivalence for the consumer impulsiveness scale with our Singaporean sample showing a three-component structure compared to the two-component for US respondents as reported in prior studies. Six out of the seven items related to the original “prudence” component loading as expected on one single component, but the five items of “hedonism” component and item 7 from “prudence” component loaded on two different components, which we named “impulsivity” and “self-indulgence”.

STUDY 2

These findings prompted us to conduct another study to explore the possibility that the consumer impulsiveness construct may actually have different meaning in different cultures and also rule out other explanations like chance factor or idiosyncrasies of the sample in our first study. In our second study, we again used a similar approach with 648 Singaporean undergraduate respondents and then we ran exploratory factor analysis to demonstrate if consumer impulsiveness did indeed have an extra “self-indulgence” dimension for our Singaporean respondents. We once again discovered a three-dimensional structure and used these findings to develop a modified three-dimensional scale to capture the consumer impulsiveness construct across different cultures.

STUDY 3

Finally, in our third study with 160 Singaporean and US student respondents each, we ran confirmatory factor analysis on this new scale using a Structural Equation Modeling approach and our analysis did show that the three-dimensional measurement model provided a better fit for the Singaporean sample and a two-dimensional model for the US sample. We also measured level of individualism and collectivism for both our samples and split the pooled data into individualists and collectivists. We found that the three-dimensional measurement model provided a better fit for the collectivists and the two-dimensional model for the individualists.

CONTRIBUTION AND IMPLICATIONS

Our research represents one of the first few conceptual efforts to acknowledge and explore the cross-cultural differences in the consumer trait associated with impulse buying behavior. Using a series of three studies among Singaporean and US respondents we were able to demonstrate that the consumer impulsiveness construct does indeed have a different underlying structure for these two groups. We also developed a modified scale for consumer impulsiveness trait which should be useful in future research in this area especially in cross-cultural studies.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

However, we do have a few limitations. We have used only student respondents and a similar methodological approach in all our studies and explored only the trait aspects of impulse buying behavior. Future research should replicate our studies with non-student respondents using other research methods to eliminate the possibility of common method variance and also explore cross-cultural differences in the influence of relevant situational factors such as time and money availability, mood and involvement level.

REFERENCES


