



Personality Traits and Consumption Patterns Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background and Setting

Since the outbreak of the global pandemic, COVID-19, many researchers explored changes in consumption patterns (Addo et al., 2020; Hao et al., 2020). Particularly, instances of panic buying (i.e., impulse buying of products in the fear of the products going out of stock or increase in price; Addo et al., 2020; Hao et al., 2020) have increased during this time, along with hedonic shopping (i.e., buying for pleasure, fun, and entertainment; Chauhan et al., 2020). Although it seems natural to expect that need-based buying (e.g., utilitarian shopping based on thoughtful consideration of the product's actual need) would increase amid the pandemic due to the rampant losses of jobs and consequent financial insecurities, there is a dearth of research on how various personality traits will influence need-based buying. Although COVID-stress is suggested to be one of the antecedents for changing buying behavior (Addo et al., 2020; Hao et al., 2020), only a few researchers explored how consumers with different personality traits engaged in different kinds of buying behavior during this time (Taylor, 2021). Although, personality traits can influence hedonic, utilitarian, and impulsive buying (Gohary & Hanzae, 2014; Huang & Yang, 2010), to the best of our knowledge no researcher has investigated how the personality traits of the consumers can shape need-based, hedonic, and panic-buying amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, we filled an important literature gap by exploring how the big 5 personality traits would influence panic buying, hedonic shopping, and need-based buying. We believe that our findings will be particularly significant for the brands and marketers of various product categories in targeting their market by responding to the nuances of the consumption patterns shaped due to the different personality traits of the consumers.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

John et al. (1991) described personality in terms of five traits –openness (i.e., someone who is imaginative and likes to do new things), conscientiousness (i.e., someone who is self-disciplined and reliable), extraversion (e.g., someone who is talkative and assertive), agreeableness (i.e., someone who is compliant and helpful), and neuroticism (e.g., someone who worries a lot and gets nervous easily). When people have higher conscientiousness and openness (Chen & Lee, 2008) and lower neuroticism (Guido, 2006) they engage into utilitarian shopping. Therefore, it could be implied that higher the degree of conscientiousness and openness and lower the neuroticism, higher would be the intentions for engaging in need-based buying during the pandemic. Whereas, when people have higher extraversion, openness (Chen & Lee, 2008; Tsao & Chang, 2010), neuroticism (Tsao & Chang, 2010), and agreeableness (Guido, 2006), they engage in hedonic shopping (Chen & Lee, 2008). Therefore, higher the degree of extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and neuroticism, higher should be the intentions for hedonic shopping amid the pandemic. When the degrees of openness (Shehzadi et al., 2016;), agreeableness (Shehzadi et al., 2016), extraversion (Parsad et al., 2019), and neuroticism (Parsad et al., 2019; Shehzadi et al., 2016) are higher, and conscientiousness (Parsad et al., 2019) is lower, people engage into impulse buying. Thus, it could be implied that a higher openness, agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism and lower conscientiousness will positively influence impulse buying in the form of panic buying amid the pandemic. Therefore, we hypothesized that (H1) openness, (H3) extraversion, (H4) agreeableness, and (H5) neuroticism positively influence hedonic shopping; (H2) conscientiousness negatively influences hedonic shopping; (H6) openness, (H8) extraversion, (H9) agreeableness, and (H10) neuroticism positively influence panic buying; (H7) conscientiousness negatively influences panic buying; (H11) openness and (H12) conscientiousness positively influence need-based buying and (H13) extraversion, (H14) and (H15) neuroticism negatively

influence need-based buying.

Method, Data Analysis, and Results

We conducted an online survey by using Qualtrics. The sample frame included the national population of the U.S., representing individuals who were 19 years or older. The respondents were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. Big 5 personality traits (John et al., 1991) and intentions for hedonic shopping (Kang & Johnson, 2011), need-based buying (Jones et al., 2006), and panic buying (Lins & Aquino, 2020) were measured by adapting or adopting extant measurement scales. All the research variables were measured in 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The useable sample size was 490. The Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability of the scales were between .78 to .95 indicating required reliability. The confirmatory factor analysis was performed in MPlus. The measurement model fitted the data well ($\chi^2 = 2672.38$, $df = 1398$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 1.91$; RMSEA = .04; CFI = .94, TLI = .93; SRMR = .05). The average variance extracted were in the range .52 to .75 for all the scales and their sub-factors indicating adequate convergent validity. Therefore, all the scales were reliable and valid. The hypotheses were tested through structural equation modeling (SEM). The SEM model ($\chi^2 = 2672.38$, $df = 1398$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 1.91$; RMSEA = .04; CFI = .94, TLI = .93; SRMR = .05) fitted the data well. H2 ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .01$), H3 ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$), H4 ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$), H5 ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$), H7 ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .05$), H8 ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), H10 ($\beta = .55$, $p < .001$), H12 ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .01$), H14 ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .01$), and H15 ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .01$) were supported. H13 ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .06$) was marginally supported. H1 ($\beta = .02$, $p = .81$), H6 ($\beta = .03$, $p = .66$), H9 ($\beta = -.02$, $p = .85$), and H11 ($\beta = .11$, $p = .55$) were rejected. The variance explained in intentions for hedonic shopping, panic buying, and need-based buying were 40.6%, 39.1%, and 19.4% ($p < .001$) respectively.

Discussion and Conclusion

We found that conscientiousness negatively influences hedonic shopping and panic buying and positively influences need-based buying. This supports the extant literature that when the conscientiousness is high, people try to act ethically, according to what is right for a situation (John et al., 1991). Since the pandemic has led to shortages of products, buying for fun and pleasure (i.e., hedonic shopping), or stockpiling (i.e., panic buying) may be perceived unethical for people having higher conscientiousness, encouraging them to engage in need-based buying. Extraversion and neuroticism positively influenced both hedonic and panic buying. Agreeableness had a positive influence on hedonic shopping. Extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism negatively influenced need-based buying. Openness did not have significant influence on any of the buying behaviors. We imply that a higher degree of extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism positively influences hedonic shopping and panic buying to cope with COVID-stress. Since need-based buying imposes further restrictions on self-indulgence and escaping the harsh reality of the pandemic, people with higher extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism refrain from panic-buying because that may aggravate COVID-stress. However, we did not test the mediating role of COVID-stress in our model. This could be addressed in the future research. Thus, brands and marketers can offer/advertise utilitarian, hedonic, and limited-stock products based on their target market's personality traits (e.g., offering utilitarian products to those with higher in conscientiousness, hedonic products to those with higher agreeableness and extraversion, and limited-stock items for consumers with higher extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism). Openness may not be an important personality trait to predict the aforementioned buying behavior.

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