Culture Matters: the Impact of Power-Distance Belief on Consumers' Impulsive Buying Tendency

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We propose there is a systematic impact of power-distance belief on consumers’ impulsive buying tendency. We test this hypothesis using an ACNeilsen cross-country dataset comparing consumers from 15 Asia Pacific markets on their impulsive shopping tendency (Study 1), by measuring power-distance belief and test its effect on an established impulsive buying scale (Study 2) and by priming power-distance belief and test its effect on an indirect buying scenario (Study 3), further we test the moderating roles of hedonic versus utilitarian processing objectives. Results show that consumers with high power-distance belief tend to show less strong impulsive buying tendency than consumers with low power-distance belief. Further, the effect of power-distance belief on impulsive buying tendency is stronger when consumers engage in utilitarian than hedonic processing objectives.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Impulsive buying behaviors are very common, with some estimates attributing impulse buying to over four billion dollars of annual sales in the U.S. (Agins 2004).

Recently, research has explored the relation between culture orientation and impulsive consumption. Kacen and Lee (2002) provided correlational evidence of an interrelation between individualism–collectivism (and independent–interdependent self-construal), trait buying impulsiveness, and impulse buying behavior. They reasoned that consumers from individualistic societies may exhibit more impulsive consumption than those from collectivist societies, because collectivist members suppress the impulse more than do individualistic members. Consistent with this hypothesis, they found that measures of trait impulse buying were more predictive of actual impulse buying behavior for individualistic than for collectivist members.

Although the results are correlational, and thus vulnerable to many possible alternative interpretations, they have some interesting implications. For one implication, they suggest that cultural constructs related to individualism and collectivism such as power-distance belief should have corresponding influences on impulsive buying tendency. Building on the literature on power-distance belief and the control thesis proposed by Baumeister (2002) to explain impulsive buying tendency, we hypothesized that consumers with high power-distance belief are less likely to display impulsive buying tendencies than those with low power-distance belief. We also explored the moderating role of utilitarian versus hedonic processing objectives and the availability of self-control resource.

Four studies were run to test these possibilities. In study 1 we used a cross-country dataset comparing consumers on their impulsive shopping tendency. The dataset was from a 2003 ACNielsen lShopperTrends study which polled around 15,000 urban households across 15 Asia Pacific markets, and our hypothesis was confirmed. Building on this secondary data, in study 2 we tested the role of power distance belief by measuring power-distance belief and tested its effect on an established impulsive buying scale (Rook 1987). In study 3, we tested this hypothesis by priming power-distance belief and tested its effect on an indirect buying scenario. In study 4, we tested the moderating role of hedonic versus utilitarian processing objectives in the relationship between power-distance belief and impulsive buying tendency. Results show that consumers with a high power-distance belief tend to show less strong impulsive buying tendency. Conversely, consumers with a low power-distance belief tend to show stronger impulsive buying tendency. Further, the effect of power-distance belief on impulsive buying tendency is stronger when consumers engage in utilitarian than hedonic processing objectives.

References
ACNielsen (2003). Hong Kong shoppers ranks 1st in Asia in unplanned shopping.