EXPOSÉ

Influence of self-discrepancy feelings on materialist consumption behavior

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Title

Influence of self-discrepancy feelings on materialist consumption behavior.

Background

Previous studies propose that self-discrepancies together with the endorsement of materialistic values are the drivers of compulsive consumptions. However, there are no studies showing the dimensions of self-discrepancy that lead to a materialistic behavior. At the same time, there is no clear indication of the nature of the goods bought as a consequence of a behavior that tries to close the self-discrepancy gap with a materialistic behavior. While previous literature is only focusing on the UK and the US, this study will focus mainly on Italy and a comparison with the US will be carried out.

Purpose

The aim of this study is to examine in depth the behavior of consumers affected by self-discrepancy feelings and present the discrepancies that are more likely to cause a materialistic consumption. Moreover, the study also seeks to explain which are the goods or services that are more likely to be acquired when such a materialistic behavior occurs.

Method

Questionnaires will be designed with Sphynx and they will target only women in the age range 18-50. The questionnaires will be spread in the US and in Italy both through personal contacts in both counties and the help of Amazon Mechanical Turk.

Keywords: self-discrepancy, materialism, compulsive consumption, consumer behavior
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and problem statement

In the past ten years, the increases of personal disposable income together with the blooming possibilities to obtain a credit have contributed to the growth of an increasing phenomenon: compulsive buying of material goods (Dittmar, 2005; Reisch, Neuner & Raab, 2004). Previous studies have largely covered the motives that underlie this atypical behavior. The two factor theory (Dittmar, 2005) which is based on the self-completion theory (Wicklung & Gollwitzer, 1982), proposes that self-discrepancies together with the endorsement of materialistic values are the drivers of compulsive consumptions. While the literature describes the different dimensions of self-discrepancies and the different types of mood they lead to (Higgins, 1987), previous studies do not show the dimensions of self-discrepancy for which some materialistic behaviors are more likely to be observed. Additionally, previous literature focuses on the role that materialism has had in the construction or compensation of our identity based on the possession of material goods. (Chang, & Arkin, 2002; Dittmar, 2005; Dittmar, 2000; Park & John, 2011). However, no previous author conducted a research on the nature of these materialistic consumptions. Therefore, there aim of this paper is to explore the dimensions of self-discrepancy based on the classification made by Higgins that lead to a materialistic behavior and the nature of these consumptions. The term dimension refers to the different type of self-discrepancy that leads to a different psychological mood, but this topic will be deepened in the literature review section.

Another important thing to highlight is that even though in the past ten years we have seen an increase in the compulsive spending, there are no recent studies which focus on the relationship between materialism, compulsive behavior and self-discrepancies. Moreover, most of the previous studies were conducted in the USA, with a few exceptions in the UK. While previous literature focused only on one country, our study will target at two different countries, the US and Italy, and we will create a link between the two. According to a poll run by Ipsos Mori in September 2013 for Global Trend 2014, Italy and the US result to be much closed to each other in the materialist scale.
1.2 Research questions

This paper will reply to the two following questions:

- Which are the dimensions of self-discrepancy that lead to a materialistic behavior?
- What is the nature of the goods resulting from the materialistic consumption, in an attempt to deal with the self-discrepancy?

1.3 Contributions

The results of this paper will have an influence and impact on both firms and the society.

As the results of this study will show which are the dimensions that results in materialistic behavior and which are the objects or services that are favored by consumers affected by those dimensions, companies could potentially exploit this information for marketing purposes. This will allow them to create tailor-made marketing campaigns targeting at those sensitive products.

The study will be of particular importance also for the society. By knowing the discrepancy feelings that lead to a given psychological mood, which could be caused both by the absence of positive outcomes or by the presence of negative outcomes (Higgins, 1987), therapists and psychologists can have a better insight on the behavior, suggesting therefore a more appropriate intervention to the patient.
2. HYPOTHESES

Hypotheses 1: The dimensions which are more likely to lead to a materialistic behavior are the ones that include the “other” standpoint.

As there are no previous studies that correlates the different types of self-discrepancies to the materialistic consumption, this hypothesis has been formulated based on personal assumptions. However, evidences from the literature also support this assumption. For instance, it is said that the fear of negative evaluations from others is likely to lead to greater level of compulsive buying behavior (Roberts at al., 2014). This implied therefore that a self-discrepancy between the actual-own and either ideal-other or ought-other will lead a person to believe that by not matching what others expect from him/herself, there will be negative evaluations that will result in materialist consumptions.

Standpoint is defined as “a point of view from which you can be judged that reflects a set of attitudes or values” (Higgins, 1987, p.321) and it can be either the “own” personal standpoint or the “other” standpoint, who is represented by someone significant for the subject.

Hypotheses 2: The goods bought as a materialist consumption to cope with self-discrepancies are clothes and jewelry.

Previous studies have already the explored the nature of goods bought by compulsive buyers and results have shown how clothes and jewelry are the most bought categories (Dittmar, 2005). The study was conducted in the UK. As we have no other information available for the US and for Italy, we came to the assumption that the same type of behavior can be observed also in the target countries.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses mainly on three topics: the concept of self-discrepancy, materialism and . Apart from these two categories, we will also review some concepts of possessions and consumer behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>JOURNAL</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>TYPE OF RESEARCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-discrepancy theory</td>
<td>Self-Discrepancy: A Theory Relating Self and Affect</td>
<td>Higgins, E. T.</td>
<td>Psychological Review, Vol. 94, No. 3, 319-340</td>
<td>It presents a theory of how different types of discrepancies between self-state representations are related to different kinds of emotional vulnerabilities. <strong>Findings:</strong> Discrepancies between the actual/own self-state and ideal self-states signify the absence of positive outcomes, which is associated with dejection-related emotions (e.g., disappointment, dissatisfaction, sadness). Discrepancies between the actual/own self-state and ought self-states signify the presence of negative outcomes, which is associated with agitation-related emotions (e.g., fear, threat, restlessness).</td>
<td>Mixed method: First part quantitative, later qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-discrepancy in Self-esteem</td>
<td>More than meets the eyes: The influence of implicit and explicit self-esteem on materialism</td>
<td>Park, J., &amp; John, D. R.</td>
<td>Journal of Consumer Psychology, 21, 73–87</td>
<td>Shows the relationship between self-esteem discrepancy and materialism <strong>Findings:</strong> Increases in self-esteem discrepancies between implicit and explicit cause increases in materialism. Moreover, those people with larger gap between implicit and explicit self-esteem are with self-enhancing benefits more likely to buy products that can be linked to the self.</td>
<td>Study 1 Qualitative; Study 2 Qualitative; Study 3 Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession</td>
<td>Possessions and the Extended Self</td>
<td>Belk, R. W.</td>
<td>The Journal of Consumer Research, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Sep., 1988), pp. 139-168</td>
<td>Our possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities <strong>Findings:</strong> -the main categories of extended self are: body, internal processes, ideas,</td>
<td>Only literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Influence of self-discrepancy feelings on materialist consumption behavior

| Materialism and self-discrepancy | A New Look at “Compulsive Buying”: Self–Discrepancies and Materialistic Values as Predictors of Compulsive Buying Tendency | Dittmar, H. (2005) | The aim of the paper is to deepen the understanding of compulsive buying by focusing on a two-factors model: materialism and self-discrepancies. **Findings:**

- Compulsive buying is motivated by shortcomings in the self that results in an urge to compensate acquiring material goods to symbolize the aspects that we lack. Compulsive buyers have chronically high self-discrepancies.

- A person who endorses materialistic values believes that the acquisition of material goods is a key to self-image and therefore a person construct the identity through material goods. Materialistic values jointly with self-discrepancies predict compulsive buying tendencies.

- As youngers have a less defined and stable sense of identity, ideal-self buying can be a mayor motivation of their compulsive purchases. |

| Materialism | Materialism: Trait Aspect of Living in the Material World | Belk, R. W. (1985) | In this paper the author wants to present the three subtraits used to measure materialism: envy, non-generosity and possessiveness. **Findings:**

- There is a negative correlation between envy, non-generosity and possessiveness and satisfaction/happiness.

- Materialism substitutes for a lost sense of community.

- Three materialistic traits are presented to measure materialisms: possessiveness – the inclination to |

Study 1: qualitative exploration through diaries; Study 2 and 3: Quantitative surveys
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence of self-discrepancy feelings on materialist consumption behavior</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>retain control – nongenerosity – the unwillingness to share possessions with others – and envy – displeasure at the superiority of another in happiness, success,..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Findings:</strong> these three studies show that some people turn to materialism when they experience uncertainty within the self (self-doubt) or perceive uncertainty relating to society (anomie). The author underlines a negative correlation between materialism and well-being, quality of life, life satisfaction and happiness while a positive correlation can be observed with social anxiety and self-consciousness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study 1</strong> Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study 2</strong> Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsive behavior</td>
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</table>
Influence of self-discrepancy feelings on materialist consumption behavior

| Materialism and self-discrepancy | Self-image – is it in the bag? A qualitative comparison between “ordinary” and “excessive” consumers | Dittmar, H., Drury, J. (2000) | Findings:
- Perceived self-discrepancies are important determinants of impulse buying.
- Goods which relate to self-image are bought more frequently impulsively than utility items

| Compulsive behavior | Contingent Self-Esteem, Self-presentational concerns, and compulsive buying | Roberts, J. A., Manolis, C., & Pullig, C. (2014) | Contingent self-esteem lead to greater level of compulsive buying and fear of negative evaluation and social identity play an important role in it

| Compulsive behavior and materialistic values | When a better self is only a button click away: associations between materialistic | Dittmar, H., Long, K., & Bond, R. (2007) | - the endorsement of materialistic values predicts individuals’ seeking to enhance their emotions and identity when they buy goods.
- the paper underlines four main buying
<p>| Influence of self-discrepancy feelings on materialist consumption behavior |
| --- | --- | --- |
| <strong>Influence of self-discrepancy feelings on materialist consumption behavior</strong> | values, emotional and identity-related buying motives, and compulsive buying tendency online | motives: economics aspects, social-experiential, emotional and identity-related benefits, where the latest category is a central concern in compulsive buying. |
| <strong>Self-discrepancy</strong> | Discrepancies Between Explicit and Implicit Self-Concepts: Consequences for Information Processing | Individuals with discrepancies between explicit and implicit self-conceptions might similarly be motivated to engage in processing of discrepancy-related information, even though they might not be aware of the discrepancy. <strong>Findings:</strong> As the discrepancy between the explicit and implicit measure increased, people engaged in more thinking about information framed as related to the self-dimension on which the discrepancy existed. Individuals might be motivated to examine relevant information as a strategy to minimize the implicit doubt that accompanies an inconsistency between explicit and implicit self-conceptions. |
| <strong>Actual vs. Ideal self in Brand attachment</strong> | Emotional Brand Attachment and Brand Personality: The Relative Importance of the Actual and the Ideal Self | One way to accomplish emotional brand attachment this is to match the brand’s personality with the consumer’s self. A key question, however, is whether the brand’s personality should match the consumer’s actual self or the consumer’s ideal self. <strong>Findings:</strong> Actual self-congruence has the greatest impact on emotional brand attachment. Product involvement, self-esteem, and public self-consciousness increase the positive impact of actual self-congruence but decrease the impact of ideal self-congruence on emotional brand attachment. |
| <strong>Materialism</strong> | Materialism in Consumer | Materialism as a socio-cultural |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Influence of self-discrepancy feelings on materialist consumption behavior</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior and Marketing: A Review</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(2003)</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Marketing Challenges for the Knowledge Society, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 329-352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phenomenon as well as an individual phenomenon;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Materialism as an individual phenomenon based on a conceptual framework materialism conceptualizations in consumer behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Ten different materialism measurement scales were discussed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-A newer materialism conceptualization proposed and the advantages of the newer definition of materialism over prevailing definitions are explained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumption behavior</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>What drives college-age Generation Y consumers?</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Journal of Business Research</em> Volume 62, Issue 6, June 2009, Pages 617–628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations behind the Generation Y consumption behavior. <strong>Findings:</strong> Issues related to socialization, uncertainty reduction, reactance, self-discrepancy and feelings of accomplishment drive Y consumers’ product purchases.</td>
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</table>
3. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, there are no primary data that can be analyzed and we therefore need to collect on secondary data.

The research method should aim at gathering data that include the following information:

- level of SD of respondent;
- whether the respondent is a compulsive vs. normal buyer;
- nature of goods bought through compulsive behavior
- level of materialism or materialistic values that a respondent shows.

By gathering data on the discrepancies of respondents and on their value of materialism and compulsive behavior, we are able to put the variables in correlation to reply to the first research question, and therefore illustrating which are the discrepancies that lead to larger materialistic values. Furthermore, to analyze the type of goods that will be bought in an attempt to cope with the self-discrepancy, we need to understand what types of goods a respondent buys as a planned purchase and which one as an impulse purchase. Knowing already the level of materialism and self-discrepancy that the respondents have, we are able to reply to the second research question.

Data will be gathered with a quantitative survey. The questionnaire aims at gathering 300 responses in the US and 300 responses in Italy. The questionnaire will be developed with Sphynx and it will be spread in the target countries through personal contacts and Amazon Mechanical Turk.

As far as the target is concerned, the study will target only women because literature has proven that men are not likely to try to close the actual-ideal-self gap through the acquisition of material goods (Dittmar, 2005) and therefore men data would not show any insight on materialistic consumption.

In order to measure self-discrepancies of respondents a pre-existing scale will be used: the SELVES Questionnaire, or SQ (Higgins, 1985). In our SQ, respondents are asked to fill three different columns by indicating five traits for each category that represent the actual self, the ideal self and the ought self. Initially, the SQ requires indicating ten traits, but previous
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studies indicate five as the optimal number (Francis et. Al, 2006). After writing the adjectives in a free way, participants are given a list of 100 traits to implement or modify the list created before. This list will be shown only after the first phase. The 100 traits are selected from Anderson’s 555 traits list. In the second step, respondents are asked to indicate from a scale from 1 to 5 how much they think their ideal- and ought-self correspond to their actual self at that time. The traits are graded as followed: “1 = completely applies to me, 2 = applies to me very much, 3 = applies to me somewhat, 4 = applies to me a little, and 5 = doesn’t apply to me at all” (Hardin & Lakin, 2009, p. 248). However, this questionnaire will reveal only information on the self-standpoint and gives us no information regarding the other standpoint.

An alternative to the Selves Questionnaire is the use of self-discrepancy scale developed by Philippot (2015). The only problem is that the scale is in the process of validating and currently nothing has been written. However, we were able to get the scale directly from Philippot and it will be shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideal Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Features I would like to have:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features I wouldn’t like to have:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each desirable feature, indicate in the right column the extent to which you possess this feature, the ideal being 100%. For example, if you have a generosity ideal and that you think to actually possess this characteristic at 80% of your ideal, please write « Generous : 80% ».

Choose the correct answer.

How big is globally the discrepancy between this ideal and the way you perceive yourself?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I feel very close to this ideal</th>
<th>I feel moderately close to this ideal</th>
<th>I feel very far away to this ideal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How strong is the distress caused by this discrepancy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I don’t feel distress about this discrepancy</th>
<th>I feel a moderate distress about this discrepancy</th>
<th>I feel an important distress about this discrepancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

Table 1. Self-discrepancy Scale for ideal self
Table 1 shows only the process for the Ideal Self from the own standpoint. Respondents are asked to reply to four sections that look like Table 1 but that will include: ideal self “own”, ought self “own”, ideal self “other” and ought self “other”.

A pre-existing compulsive buying scale developed by Valence, D’Astous and Fortier will be used to measure the compulsive vs. normal buyer behavior. In this questionnaire, 11 sentences are shown and respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 to five where “5 = Strongly agree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 1 = Strongly disagree”. The points will be added up and a score equal or above 36 shows that the respondent might be a compulsive buyer.

A scale to measure the materialism level will be chosen subsequently.

4. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

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ABSTRACT

Title
Background
Purpose
Method
Keywords

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   3.1.1 Sample
   3.1.2 Research design
   3.1.2 Measurements instruments
   3.1.3 Procedures
   3.2 Data analysis

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   4.3 Limitations

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.09.15-22.09.15</td>
<td>Exposé</td>
<td>Selection of the topic, literature review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.09.15-31.10.15</td>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>Design of the questionnaires, interviews and other research methods. Find people to interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.11.15-30.11.15</td>
<td>Field Research</td>
<td>Run the survey and interview people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.11.15-30.11.15</td>
<td>Introduction and Methodology</td>
<td>While the survey is running, start writing the introduction and methodology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.12.05-20.12.15</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Analysis of the survey and interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.12.15-deadline</td>
<td>Final thesis</td>
<td>Writing results and conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY


