

Research on the Influence of the Social Comparison Orientation on Online Compulsive Buying Tendency of Young People

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Abstract. Nowadays, the online compulsive buying behavior of the young group is increasing, which has become a social problem that needs to be solved. This paper focuses on individual psychological factors and explores how social comparison orientation influences online compulsive buying. Through the research method of the questionnaire survey, this paper shows that different levels of the social comparison will lead to different buying preferences. And then we examined how mediating and moderating effects work on the influence path of the compulsive buying tendency. As a result, this study innovatively finds the mechanism of materialism values as a mediator and self-concept clarity as a moderator. It ultimately allows us to figure out a pathway that leads to the online compulsive buying tendency, and can provide new ideas for solving the problems caused by it.

1 Introduction

Along with the coming of the Internet era, as well as the improvement of the economic level and rapid development of the e-commerce industry, online consumption has become one of the most common consumption means in young people's life. The phenomena of online compulsive buying such as "online shopping addiction" "online shopaholic" etc. have been emerging endlessly [1].

In order to further explore the influential factors of online compulsive buying tendency, this paper mainly focuses on the social comparison orientation based on psychological factors. The increasing social pressure will cause individuals to form the social comparison orientation so as to influence their behavioral motives and generate negative consumption behaviors. Especially when mobile media and social networks are prevailing with the rapid and wide information transmission, the interconnection of life information is stimulating consumers to form a higher social comparison orientation. They are easily generating a higher pursuit of money and materials in the information coercing, causing the behaviors such as compulsive buying, etc.

Therefore, this paper takes the social comparison orientation as the influential factor, attaches importance to how it influences online compulsive buying, and develops the specific path by introducing materialism values as the intermediate medium. Based on the individual immanent level, it is of great benefit for people to change ideas in case of facing the relevant issues of online compulsive buying, concentrate on the balance of environment and individuals; psychological

activities, and provide new thoughts of solving the problems.

2 Literature Review

2.1. Online Compulsive Buying Tendency and Social Comparison Orientation

"Online compulsive buying" was first generated in 1998 by Kimberly. After many scholars defined it, this paper believes that the definition can be regarded as "Under the network environment, consumers try to obtain the temporary relief of the negative feelings through addicted and unstopped online buying", based on Chinese Pronunciation General Hospital of Military Region. Currently, the existing research on predictive factors can be divided into the external stimulating factors[2] and the individual's psychological factors[3].

It indicates that the exploration of individuals' psychological factors basically focuses on the psychological traits that existed in individuals. However, some psychological factors are formed by the others' stimulation.[4] In recent three years, some research has started to focus on social comparison orientation. That is, individuals directly generate the typical psychological factors due to social influences, and there is certain particularity to regard it as the predictive factor of online compulsive buying.

Social comparison orientation was first put forward by Hemphill and Lehman in 1991.[5] After many researchers' further discussions, social comparison orientation can be defined as the individual differences in the degree and frequency of social comparison[6]. So far, some studies have supported that social

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comparison orientation influences compulsive buying in different ways[7]. It can be seen that it is still unable to clarify the specific methods of influence from the individual perspective.

Moreover, the influences of social comparison orientation on online compulsive buying tendency can also be reflected by the effects on their value building. This paper directly focuses on the social comparison tendency, confirms its effects on online compulsive buying, and studies the interpretative effects of values in influence path by introducing the materialism values, which are the innovations and elaborations for relevant research.

2.2. Materialism Values and Self-Concept Clarity

In the definition of materialism, one was the personality trait[8]; The other was the value orientation[9]. This research emphasizes materialism's relationship between social comparison orientation and online compulsive buying as the value orientation.

Materialism can interpret the influence of social comparison orientation on online compulsive buying as the inner value. That is, people with a high social comparison orientation may generate value deviation due to the pressure produced by others and inner self-esteem, so as to perform unhealthy buying behavior.

Apart from the materialism values, this paper stresses self-concept clarity. Campbell first promoted "self-concept clarity"(1990), in which individuals could define their self-concept in a clear and confident, internally consistent, and stable manner. [10]Some researches have proved that social comparison is one important factor influencing individuals' self-concept clarity [11]. Meanwhile, the impact of self-concept clarity could be reflected by individuals' values and behaviors.

David (2014) presented based on the research results by taking three groups of college students as the sample that the lower the self-concept clarity of college students was, the more they were unable to control their material impulse. [12] Therefore, It can be said that the introduction of self-concept clarity into the influence path analysis is one supplement for taking the materialism values as an interpretation, making the path analysis more complete and reasonable.

3 Research Hypothesis

3.1. Relation between social comparison orientation and online compulsive buying tendency

The social comparison orientation influenced people's evaluation results on their own abilities. From the perspective of consumption, the social comparison orientation had the possibility of influencing consumers' evaluation of consumption behaviors.[13] It can be seen that the higher tendency of individuals to perform social comparison, the more easily they focus on others and

generate material desire so as to conduct compulsive consuming behavior.

In summary, the researcher of this paper believes, the higher consumers' social comparison orientation is, the higher their online compulsive buying tendency will be. Therefore, this research puts forward the following hypothesis:

H1 Social comparison orientation has a significant and positive influence on the online compulsive buying tendency of young people.

3.2. Relation between materialism values and social comparison orientation, online compulsive buying tendency

When the individuals' sense of happiness was reduced, the materialist would compensate themselves by pursuing the material wealth target [14]. This paper believes that materialism values have a correlation with online compulsive buying tendencies. Kim and Chock (2015) presented that the social comparison orientation was an important influential factor of materialism. [15] As a result, this paper believes that consumers with a higher social comparison orientation have a higher level of materialism values, which positively influence the online compulsive buying tendency of young people. Therefore, this research puts forward the following hypothesis:

H2 Materialism values play a role in mediating the effect of the influence of social comparison orientation on the online compulsive buying tendency of young people.

3.3. Relation between self-concept clarity and social comparison orientation, materialism values, online compulsive buying

Based on the existing research, the lower level of self-concept clarity, the less control over material impulses [16]. Besides, self-concept clarity and online compulsive buying may have a close and negative correlation [17]. As a result, this paper believes that low self-concept clarity will stimulate the social comparison orientation to generate influences on the level of materialism values of young people; Meanwhile, self-concept clarity can also adjust the compulsive buying tendency to a certain degree. Therefore, it is able to conclude the following hypothesis:

H3: The self-concept clarity moderates the influential process of social comparison orientation on the formation of materialism values of young people.

H4: The self-concept clarity moderates the influential process of social comparison orientation on the online compulsive buying tendency of young people.

According to the hypothesis, this paper constructs the research model as shown in Figure 1.

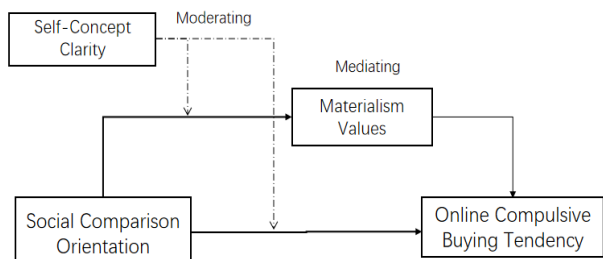


Fig. 1. Influence Path Model of Social Comparison Orientation to Online Compulsive Buying Tendency of the Young Group

4 Research Method and Results

4.1. Measuring Tool and Sample Collection

This paper mainly applies the research method of the questionnaire survey, and respectively designs the scale of four variables for measuring based on the existing research. On Likert Scale, it is able to assign “1-5” marks in accordance with the five answers of accepting level “Strongly Disagree” “Disagree” “Uncertain” “Agree” and “Strongly Agree”. All questionnaires are distributed randomly through the online platform. Upon completing the bilingual translation of the Chinese and English scale, it is issued for four days in total with 277 samples collected. After clearing and screening, the invalid samples are eliminated, and 182 valid questionnaires are collected.

4.2. Result Analysis

Prior to conducting the hypothesis testing, this paper applies SPSS reliability analysis and AMOS confirmatory factor analysis. The results indicate that Cronbach’s Alpha values of these four scales are all above 0.75, which means the reliability is good. Meanwhile, the results of the confirmatory factor analysis show that the validity of these four scales is good (RMSEA<0.06, CFI>0.96).

4.2.1, Linear Regression Analysis

Upon conducting the linear regression analysis, it is able to test that the social comparison orientation has a significant influence on the online compulsive buying tendency. It can be known that $R^2=0.172$ and VIF value is lower than 5. Based on $F=37.299$, $P<0.001$, it can be concluded that the regression equation is significant, and $\beta=0.414$, $P<0.001$, hypothesis 1 can be supported by data analysis.

4.2.2, Analysis of Mediating Effect

After applying model 4 in Process developed by Haye (simple mediation model), the results indicate that the direct effect, indirect effect and the total effect are all significant, as shown in Table 1. It means that upon putting the mediator, the social comparison orientation has significant predictive effects on both the materialism

values and the online compulsive buying tendency, and the mediator can significantly predict the dependent variable as well. Therefore, the social comparison orientation can influence the online compulsive buying tendency through the mediating effect of the materialism values. Moreover, the materialism values are partial mediation, with the direct effect and mediating effect amounting to 76.56% and 23.44% of the total effect respectively.

Table 1. Testing of Mediating Effect

Effect	Standardized Estimate	Standard Error	P	95% Confidence Interval	
				Low	Up
Total Effect	0.4143	0.0856	< 0.001	0.3537	0.6914
Direct Effect	0.3172	0.0907	< 0.001	0.2211	0.5790
Indirect Effect	0.0971	0.0512	< 0.001	0.0350	0.2335

It can be concluded that hypothesis 2 can be supported.

4.2.3, Analysis of Moderating Effect

It is able to test the moderating effect by applying models 7 and 8 in Process developed by Haye. The results indicate that self-concept clarity can positively moderate the influence of social comparison orientation on materialism values if it is at a low level; Self-concept clarity doesn’t play a role in moderating the effect of the influence of social comparison orientation on online compulsive buying tendency. Therefore, hypothesis 3 can be supported while hypothesis 4 cannot.

In summary, hypothesis 1, 2, 3 of this paper can all be supported by the research data except hypothesis 4. The influence path model (standardized) is shown in Figure 2.

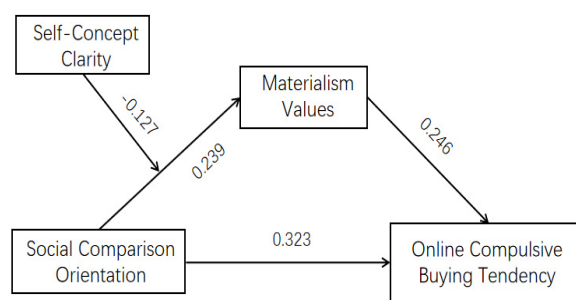


Fig. 2. Overall Path Model

5 Overall Discussion

5.1. Social Comparison Orientation Positively Influences Online Compulsive Buying Tendency

According to the above analysis, hypothesis 1 is supported in this paper, which is relatively consistent with the results of previous studies. This shows the effect

between the social comparison orientation and the online compulsive buying tendency and gives evidence to their relation.

5.2. Mediating Effect of Materialism Values

The testing results of the mediating effect explores the mechanism of hypothesis 1, which has been more explained by external environmental factors. This paper shows that individual factors like materialism values can also be used to explain how social comparison orientation influences online compulsive buying tendency. It can be a further deepening of the previous research.

5.3. Moderating Effect of Self-Concept Clarity

The self-concept clarity can moderate the influence path of the social comparison orientation on materialism values. The results indicate that the self-concept clarity of modern young people is of great importance, and different levels of clarity will lead to a change in the action mechanism. When people's self-concept is fuzzy, the higher social comparison orientation will more easily have high-level materialism values, which generate substantial online compulsive buying behavior.

6 Conclusions and Contributions

First of all, this paper focuses on the online compulsive buying that existed among young people at present, specifically showing the possibility and importance of social comparison orientation as an influencing factor.

Secondly, this paper further explored the mechanism of social comparison orientation and the online compulsive buying tendency, which provide creative and new thoughts for solving the problems relevant to negative online consumption from the individual psychological aspect.

Thirdly, the influence path promoted in this paper has an action boundary, introducing self-concept clarity as a moderating variable can not only supplement and enrich the path but also make it more feasible and extendable.

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