

## Not Everyone Will Experience the Pandemic in the Same Way: The Mediating Role of COVID-Stress in the Relationship between the Big 5 Personality Traits and Shopping Intentions

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### Background and Literature Review

Despite several instances of changes in shopping patterns after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Liu et al., 2021; Ikizer et al., 2022; Schmeideberg & Thonnissen), and the fact that shopping helps in coping with stress (Kang & Johnson, 2011), there is a dearth of literature on how the stress stemmed due to COVID-19 (i.e., COVID-stress) mediates the relationships between the different personality traits and intentions for shopping. We addressed this literature gap in this research. Based on John et al.'s (1991) big 5 personality model, people's personalities are described in terms of 5 major traits – openness (i.e., someone who is imaginative and likes to do new things), conscientiousness (i.e., someone who is rational and reliable), extraversion (e.g., someone who is talkative and assertive), agreeableness (i.e., someone who is complaint and helpful), and neuroticism (e.g., someone who worries a lot and gets nervous easily) (John et al., 1991). Higher the degrees of extraversion and neuroticism higher is the negative emotional and psychological responses to life challenges (Liu et al., 2021; Ikizer et al., 2022; Schmeideberg & Thonnissen, 2021). People with higher extraversion and neuroticism had higher negative perceptions of COVID-19 and had higher stress during the pandemic (Liu et al., 2021; Schmeideberg & Thonnissen, 2021). Higher degrees of openness (Ahmed et al., 2021; Schmeideberg & Thonnissen, 2021) and agreeableness (Rettew et al., 2021) make people more adaptive to life challenges, lowering the perceived stress. Higher degrees of conscientiousness help people rationalize life challenges and face problems in a calmer way, reducing the stress (Rettew et al., 2021). Stress positively influences intentions for shopping for pleasure and fun (i.e., hedonic shopping) to escape from the reality (Kang & Johnson, 2011). During the pandemic people engaged in hedonic (Chauhan et al., 2020) and panic buying (i.e., impulsive buying and stockpiling things in the fear of the products getting out of stock; Addo et al., 2020; Hao et al., 2020). Higher degrees of openness, extraversion (Chen & Lee, 2008; Tsao & Chang, 2010), and neuroticism (Tsao & Chang, 2010) positively influence intentions for hedonic shopping and impulsive buying. Higher agreeableness (Gohary & Hanzae, 2014) and conscientiousness (Gohary & Hanzae, 2014; Chen & Lee, 2008) positively influence utilitarian shopping (i.e., need-based buying). Thus, we hypothesized that the personality traits in terms of (H1) openness, (H2) conscientiousness and (H4) agreeableness will negatively influence COVID-stress and (H3) extraversion, and (H5) neuroticism will positively influence COVID-stress and; Covid-stress will positively influence intentions for (H6) therapeutic shopping and (H7) panic buying and negatively influence intentions for (H8) need-based buying; COVID-stress will mediate the relationships between the big 5 personality traits in terms of (H9a) openness, (H9b) conscientiousness, (H9c) extraversion, (H9d) agreeableness, and (H9e) neuroticism and intentions for hedonic shopping; COVID-stress will mediate the relationships between the big 5 personality traits in terms of (H10a) openness, (H10b) conscientiousness, (H10c) extraversion, (H10d) agreeableness, and (H10e) neuroticism and intentions for panic buying and; COVID-stress will mediate the relationships between the big 5 personality traits in terms of (H11a) openness, (H11b) conscientiousness, (H11c) extraversion, (H11d) agreeableness, and (H11e) neuroticism and intentions for need-based buying.

### Method and Data Analysis

A Qualtrics survey was administered on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to collect the data ( $n = 490$ ). MTurkers who were 19 years or older were recruited to participate in the survey. Extant measurement scales

were adapted to measure the big 5 personality traits (John et al., 1991), COVID-stress (Taylor et al., 2020), intentions for hedonic shopping (Kang & Johnson, 2011), need-based buying (Jones et al., 2006), and panic buying (Lins & Aquino, 2020). All the variables were measured in 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed in Mplus (version 8.6) which fitted the data well ( $\chi^2 = 7370.61$ ,  $df = 3958$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2 / df = 1.86$ ; RMSEA = .04; CFI = .91, TLI = .90, SRMR = .06). The hypotheses were tested in Structural Equation Modelling as a comprehensive model in Mplus. In Model 1, we tested H1-H8. Model 1 fitted the data well ( $\chi^2 = 7554.03$ ,  $df = 3973$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2 / df = 1.90$ ; RMSEA = .04; CFI = .90, TLI = .90, SRMR = .07). **H2** ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ), **H3** ( $\beta = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ), **H5** ( $\beta = .52$ ,  $p < .001$ ), **H6** ( $\beta = .54$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and **H7** ( $\beta = .67$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were supported. **H1** ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $p = .26$ ), **H4** ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $p = .12$ ), and **H8** ( $\beta = -.04$ ,  $p = .44$ ) were rejected. We ran Model 2 to test the mediation hypotheses. Model 2 fitted the data well ( $\chi^2 = 7554.03$ ,  $df = 3973$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2 / df = 1.90$ ; RMSEA = .04; CFI = .90, TLI = .90, SRMR = .07). **H9b** ( $\beta = -.07$ ,  $p < .05$ , C.I. = [ -.12, -.02]), **H9c** ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .001$ , C.I. = [ .13, .24]), **H9e** ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ , C.I. = [ .21, .35]), **H10b** ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p < .05$ , C.I. = [ -.15, -.03]), **H10c** ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ , C.I. = [ .16, .30]), **H10e** ( $\beta = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ , C.I. = [ .26, .44]), were supported. **H9a** ( $\beta = .03$ ,  $p = .26$ , C.I. = [ -.02, .08]), **H9d** ( $\beta = -.07$ ,  $p = .12$ , C.I. = [ -.14, .00]), **H10a** ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $p = .26$ , C.I. = [ -.02, .10]), **H10d** ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .12$ , C.I. = [ -.18, .00]), **H11a** ( $\beta = .00$ ,  $p = .52$ , C.I. = [ -.01, .01]), **H11b** ( $\beta = .01$ ,  $p = .46$ , C.I. = [ -.01, .02]), **H11c** ( $\beta = -.01$ ,  $p = .44$ , C.I. = [ -.04, .02]), **H11d** ( $\beta = .01$ ,  $p = .48$ , C.I. = [ -.01, .02]), and **H11e** ( $\beta = -.02$ ,  $p = .44$ , C.I. = [ -.06, .02]) were rejected. The variance explained in COVID-stress ( $R^2 = 51.2\%$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and intentions therapeutic shopping ( $R^2 = 29.2\%$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and panic buying ( $R^2 = 45.3\%$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were significant.

#### Discussion and Conclusion

We found that extraversion and neuroticism positively influence COVID-stress and conscientiousness negatively influences COVID-stress. Although, openness had a positive path coefficient and agreeableness had a negative path coefficient in their relationships with COVID-stress as hypothesized, the path coefficients were not significant. Therefore, our findings indicate that all the big 5 personality traits except for agreeableness and openness influenced COVID-stress. COVID-stress mediated the relationships between the big 5 personality traits in terms of conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism and the shopping intentions in terms of hedonic shopping and panic buying. Specifically, higher the degree of extraversion and neuroticism higher would be the COVID-stress which in turn would encourage intentions for hedonic and panic buying. On the contrary, higher the degree of conscientiousness lower would be the COVID-stress minimizing the intentions for hedonic and panic buying. Therefore, if a target market exhibits higher degrees of extraversion and neuroticism, the marketers and brands can expect the consumers' COVID-stress to be higher thereby giving them an opportunity to offer products that they could buy to escape the reality of the pandemic and/or indulge in material possessions and hoarding to cope with their COVID-stress. However, a target market exhibiting a higher degree of conscientiousness may not indulge in intentions for hedonic and panic buying because that might be perceived as unethical and selfish when products have limited availability due to the pandemic. None of the personality traits had an indirect influence on need-based buying. From these findings we implied that utilitarian shopping motives are not relevant during the pandemic among the consumers of the U.S. who might be driven by hedonic shopping motives to escape the reality of the pandemic. However, we did not test the effect of the underlying shopping motivations on the intentions for different forms of the shopping. This gap could be addressed in the future research.

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