

Compulsive Buying: Facts and Findings

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Buying is a normal phenomenon but excessive buying has been indicated as a clinical disorder. Compulsive buyer has a different state of mind while making purchase. He has an altogether unusual psychology and reason to indulge in shopping that is different from the psychology of a normal buyer. Compulsive buying is a recent terminology added to the study of consumer behavior. An inquiry into consumer behavior is essential for marketers to understand the psychology of a customer. Aim of marketers is to devise stratagems to exert a pull on maximum buyers. The compulsive buying aspect of consumer behavior is important for marketers, policy makers and academicians. Consumer behavior studies the buying behavior and compulsive buying is the excessive buying behavior of consumer. Buying behavior becomes compulsive when the impulse of buying become severe and consumer is not able to refrain from buying even the product that has no utilitarian purpose. The compulsive buyer is interested in the process of buying and does not have any functional approach towards buying. The present article supports the central theme that the compulsive buying is a strong intensity to buy which is an outcome of various factors and affects the psychology of consumer adversely.

Compulsive Buying has been defined as “a response to an uncontrollable drive or desire to obtain, use, or experience a feeling, substance, or activity that leads an individual to repetitively engage in a behavior that will ultimately cause harm to the individual and/or to others.” Compulsive buying has been associated with negative emotions as it leads to low self esteem, dissatisfaction and aggravation. A compulsive buyer uses process of buying as a means to divert from negative emotions but ultimately returns back to the same state of emotions after a temporary relief from the pain. He gets trapped into the vicious circle of negative emotions and buying spree. The buyer spends money to compensate for his/her internal bareness.

Compulsive buyer shops to divert his mind from present state and search for relief from negative emotions by spending money. But this diversion is only temporary. Whenever compulsive buyers experience anxiety or stress, which may only be relieved by buying, they go on a buying spree. The anxiety and stress mollified for the time being by making purchase is soon replaced by culpability, depression, and self-criticism.

Researchers have conceptualized compulsive buying as 'compensatory behavior' that compensates for negative emotions such as anxiety, distress, annoyance and lack of self-esteem. Compulsive buyers try to covenant with the problems related to individuality and disposition by buying goods.

Compulsive buying tendencies of consumers strongly grasp and supersede social and personal values and have direct bearing on the psychology of the consumer.

It is often correlated to low self-esteem, discontentment in life and low subjective well-being. Researchers has found out various reasons for emergence of such behavior. First and foremost factor that influences the buying behavior of individual is socialization. Learning behavior of a kid makes him follow the trajectory and adapt to the buying behavior of his family and peers. A child is affected by the social environment in which he is brought up. The observational nature of a kid makes him acclimatize his parent's attitude towards shopping. Research has shown that the compulsive buying behavior among young adults, who have experienced family stress and destruction, depicted in parental separation or lack of compatibility, has been interpreted as the outcome of their attempt to deal with insecurity.

Compulsive buying has also been associated with negative emotions like frustration, disappointment and low self-esteem. To do away from

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negative emotions he goes on a shopping binge but after making purchase his pessimistic thoughts aggravate on realizing his ham-fisted decision of useless spending. This way a compulsive buyer gets pinioned in catch 22 situations. Compulsive buyers feel anxious and sad before shopping and then feel guilty and depressed after shopping. The compulsive buying process starts with putting off emotions and end up with the same. Compulsive buyers behave in a pathological manner. Their behaviour is extreme and unacceptable. When they experience negative emotions they develop a powerful feeling to buy, which they cannot control.

Compulsive buying shoves the consumer into harmful financial circumstances. Compulsive buyer indulges in excessive shopping and overspends. That leads to indebtedness and huge credit card bills. They indulge in credit abuse. It is difficult for compulsive buyers to refrain from spending even if they do not have enough money. Compulsive buyers overspend to make up for inner blankness and missing happiness and hack into economic failure and bankruptcy. Compulsive buyers demonstrate a steadfast assurance to money as gesticulation of power and persona. Compulsive buyers who are heavy users of credit card are more liable to have positive attitudes towards borrowing money, and to overspend.

Mass media plays an important role and act as a tool to the marketers who utilize the advertising to influence people to indulge into buying and spending money that they might otherwise circumvent. This pressure on marketers to attract maximum buyers leads them to indulge in persuasive and deceptive advertising. There are some buyers who are aware of these tactics of marketers and avoid indulging in buying, but there are others who get swayed with these disingenuous campaigns of marketers. Thus, every time they see a new launch or improved version of existing product they just cannot stop them sellers from buying it. This is alarming situation. Since compulsive buying is a behavior of people when they cannot stop themselves from indulging in wrong, harmful and unnecessary shopping, they can be easily deceived and misled by marketers.

The studies conducted previously have confirmed gender variance, and upheld that younger people are more prone to compulsive buying but the difference is less pronounced among youngsters. Women are generally associated with shopping. Compulsive buying behaviour is found to be excessively expected from women as shopping has been strongly related to femininity and female's societal & individual identities, and, is a psychosomatic reparation stratagem for those who are still tied into household and children. The other reason for this biased influence is that the conversation among women is more acquisitive than that among males. This bantering among females is more covetous. They indulge in shopping to show off and to prove themselves better off than others. This tendency of women makes them more prone to compulsive buying behavior. They shop more often to make an impression on others and tend to consider shopping as self-rewarding.

Status Consumption is another reason for which compulsive buying is being encouraged. Compulsive buyers get encouraged by designer's brands. Compulsive buyers consider buying as a manifestation of a high societal standing. Compulsive buyers presume that shopping would surface the socially desirable appearance. Status consumption necessitates consumers to constantly augment their eye-catching gestures of wealth and power. The things they buy are kept unopened, unused as they are purchased without any utility or requirement. They are bought during the compulsive buying process in order to move closer to an idyllic individuality. Compulsive buyers use purchase process as a reparation strategy for unhappiness and discontentment of life and in search of a better self.

Age is a significant factor that affects the compulsive buying tendencies. It has been researched that compulsive buying tendency reduces with age i.e. compulsive buying is inversely associated with age. Compulsive buying amid young consumers is higher as compared to the aged consumers. Younger people hold and exhibit more compulsive buying tendencies as compared to older ones. Younger people are more desirous, ambitious and contend to be better off. They

find shopping and buying as an indicator of their level of success. The divergence in age and compulsive buying is present even at gender level. The difference of compulsive buying behavior across gender is well established. The studies on adolescents have found that there is no gender difference in compulsive buying tendencies among them. Males as well as females are equally affected by compulsive buying tendencies. But as they grow old the compulsive buying tendency reduces with faster rate among males than in females. Thus gender difference is more pronounced among grown ups. Thus issue of increasing compulsive buying tendencies is of great trepidation in a sense that it is affecting the young generation specifically.

Materialistic values play the most important role in the process of development of compulsive buying tendencies. Materialistic value is a factor that supports and makes consumers more vulnerable to compulsive buying. Studies have shown that materialistic values transpire as the strongest endorser of individuals' compulsive buying tendencies. It is an important predictor as a person who is acquisitive aims at possessing more and more material goods by indulging in buying process. He panders to possess the objects he wants and indulge in excessive shopping behavior. Less pronounced gender difference for compulsive buying tendencies among adolescents can be attributed to high materialistic orientation among them. This emphasis on materialistic values, that is the significance attributed to the possession and acquirement of material goods in achieving major goals of life such as happiness, fulfillment and accomplishment. Materialistic values have been linked to lower subjective well-being. Materialistic values make individuals more committed to buying and possessing material goods.

Compulsive buying induces financial problems, disparagement and disharmony with family. Compulsive buying, too, has been consistently linked with symptomatic psychology, such as impulse control disorder (ICD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) or substance abuse. Compulsive buyers perceive shopping as an impression of supremacy. They become heavy credit card users and develop a habit of borrowing money to overspend.

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