



Retail Therapy – A Study on Consumer Behavior in Women

Ananya Mittal (BSc Economics), Apeejay College of Fine Arts, Jalandhar

ananyamittal62715@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Retail therapy refers to shopping to alleviate negative moods. This phenomenon is more than just a shopping journey and taps into the realm of psychological distress and emotional well-being. However, this study examines the two major functions of retail therapy, impulsive and compulsive shopping. The study aimed to explore the aspect of female consumerism by establishing a relationship between impulsive and compulsive buying. The data was collected from 38 women in the 19-45 age group. Standardized scales were used to measure the variables. The study revealed the impact of impulse shopping, when excessive, transforms into compulsive shopping. This behavior often gives birth to several undiscovered vulnerabilities that not only influence their immediate well-being but also have long-term consequences. However, dealing with compulsive shopping requires a multifaceted approach. Consumers can recognize triggers around them and consider mindful consumption, they could also set clear budgeting goals.

Keywords: *Retail therapy, Compulsive buying, Impulsive buying, female consumerism, purchase in distress*

INTRODUCTION

In a regular sense, shopping is a simple act of buying goods and services, either by going out or browsing online. When shopping, one makes several decisions based on needs and desires. However, when these decisions happen quickly, without much thought or consideration, and are often driven by sudden urges, it turns into impulsive shopping. Over time, if this impulsive behavior becomes consistent, it can develop into compulsive buying. It might be viewed as a coping mechanism or emotional fulfillment on a deeper level. As this behavior becomes more ingrained, it can lead to a cycle of repeated buying, even when the purchases are unnecessary or lead to negative consequences. This pattern is observed more frequently in women today than men, influenced by multiple external factors too.

A woman's consumption patterns show diversification and personalization, this trend is closely linked to retail therapy where often their consumption choices become a way to cope with their emotional and identity fulfillment needs. Shi (2023) also explained in her paper how the marketing form and content of many brands are ostensibly aimed to cater women. By creating an age and appearance anxiety in women, they advertise their products as women-centric. This paper studies the subject of retail therapy from a perspective of female consumerism and learns how most brands and organizations weigh their product on emotional value.

Initially, this experience could be to reward or cheer oneself up, but once these decisions happen quickly becomes impulsive shopping. They are driven on a sudden urge and much without any logical consideration. More than the experience and after usage of that product, it's the feeling of acquisition that gives a sense of satisfaction. A consistent pattern of this behaviour in women was studied in this paper and we learnt how this repeated behaviour turns into compulsive buying. The term "acquisitive buying" has been introduced recently into the consumer behaviour literature (Bose et al., 2013). This process looks harmless in short term but has long term consequences.

Impulsive buying

According to Rook (1987), “Impulsive buying is characterized by spontaneous, immediate, and often emotional reactions to products in the shopping environment. It involves purchases made without prior planning or forethought and is typically driven by emotional or situational factors.”

Cohen and Areni (1991) defined impulsive buying as “unplanned purchasing that is motivated by a sudden urge to buy something, with the consumer experiencing a strong, immediate desire to make the purchase, often driven by external cues such as product displays or in-store promotions.”

In this study, impulsivity in women of the age 19-45 was rather high, measured using standardized scales. Generally, impulsivity and impulsiveness are often used interchangeably. Most literature explains the term impulsiveness as the incapability of controlling one’s strong immediate desires. Impulse buying was first defined as an “unplanned purchase” by the DuPont Consumer Buying Habit Studies (1945) conducted in the early 1950s. According to Chow (2020), the different facets of this phenomenon include: (1) a sudden and persistent urge to buy; (2) the hedonically complex impulse; (3) temporary out-of-control; (4) psychological conflict and struggle; (5) reduction of cognitive evaluation; and (6) neglect of consequences.

In the Indian retail context, impulse buying is one of the major factors affecting the shopping motivation of the consumers (Sharma & Chadha, 2017). Behavioral economics explains impulse buying as a consumer’s irrational buying decisions which involves a struggle between desire and willpower.

Compulsive buying

“Compulsive buying is characterized by an overwhelming and uncontrollable urge to purchase items, often leading to negative consequences such as financial strain, interpersonal conflict, and emotional distress. The behavior is driven by emotional factors, and the individual often experiences feelings of guilt, remorse, or anxiety after making the purchase” (O’Guinn & Faber, 1989).

As per Robert and Jones (2001) Compulsive buying is characterized by “an overwhelming and persistent desire to make purchases that leads to negative consequences such as distress, financial difficulties, and interpersonal problems. The behavior is typically driven by emotional needs and is compulsive in nature, often resulting in a loss of control over buying decisions.”

Compulsive buying refers to an uncontrollable urge to purchase items, often in excess amount, usually when not needed. This is also known as “*shop holism*”. In women, especially in the age of 19-45 years, was seen rather high. Excessive impulsive shopping is a significant trigger of compulsive shopping. This behaviour often escalates impulsively, without consideration of long-term impact. For some people, initially the experience may feel good, but later a feeling of guilt or regret emerges. Even Weinstein (2015) agrees that compulsive buyers strongly focus more on the buying process itself and the acquisition of the items than their possession or use.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine whether a relationship exists between impulsive buying and compulsive buying, and if so, how is compulsive behaviour in women affected by continuous impulsive buying.

HYPOTHESIS

There will be a significant positive impact of Impulsive buying on Compulsive buying as per the results.

There will be a significant positive correlation between impulsive buying and compulsive buying.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total sample of 38 women in the age 19-45 was collected mostly from the city Jalandhar (Punjab).

Measure

Impulsive buying: The scale used to measure the impulsive buying, was developed by (Rook & Fisher, 1995). The scale consisted of 9 items out of which one item was reversely coded. The rating observed 1 as strongly disagree and 5 as strongly agree.

Compulsive buying: The scale used to measure the compulsive buying, was developed by (Astous, Maltais & Roberge, 1990). the scale consisted of 10 items and the rating scale included strongly disagree (1), sometimes disagree (2), neither agree or disagree (3), sometimes agree (4) and strongly disagree (5).

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and questionnaires were issued in the form of Google Forms. All participants were thanked for their responses, consensually. Standardized scales were used for questionnaire development.

DATA ANALYSIS

Results

Table 1: Descriptives (N, Mean and Standard Deviation)

	COMPULSE		IMPULSE	
N		38		38
Mean		31.6		24.1
Standard deviation		8.13		6.79

Table 2: *Correlation Matrix*

		COMPULSE		IMPULSE	
COMPULSE		—			
IMPULSE		0.499	**	—	
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$					

Table 3: *Linear Regression*

<i>Model Fit Measures</i>							
				Overall Model Test			
Model	R	R ²	F	df1	df2	p	
1	0.499	0.249	12.0	1	36	0.001	

Model Coefficients - COMPULSE

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	17.152	4.329	3.96	< .001
IMPULSE	0.598	0.173	3.46	0.001

Discussion of Results

The results of the present study support the hypothesis that there is in fact a significant positive correlation between impulsive buying and compulsive buying ($r = 0.499$, $p < 0.01$). Further, the regression analysis indicated that impulsive buying is a significant predictor of compulsive buying. The regression equation for this analysis would turn out to be

$$\text{COMPULSE} = 17.152 + (0.598 * \text{IMPULSE})$$

Where COMPULSE stands for compulsive buying.

IMPULSE stands for impulsive buying.

The intercept of 17.152 indicates the predicted value of compulsive buying when impulse is zero. The coefficient of impulsive buying 0.598 suggests that for each one – unit increase in impulsive buying; compulsive buying is expected to increase by 0.598 units.

Statistically, their relationship is significant ($p < 0.001$), with a r^2 value of 0.249. This coefficient of determinants ($r^2 = 0.249$) shows that impulsive buying explains of 24.9% variance in compulsive buying behaviour.

The model is adequately fit ($F = 12.0$, $p < 0.001$). The result confirms the hypothesis that impulsive buying significantly influences compulsive buying. While impulsive buying explains a notable portion of compulsive buying behaviour (24.9%), other factors may also contribute, requiring further study.

A previous study conducted by Darrat et al. (2016), suggested that impulsive buying increases anxiety in consumers that is in turn, linked to compulsive buying. The study recognized an indirect, positive relationship between the two variables.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to identify a relationship between impulsive buying and compulsive buying. The study continued to achieve the same. The regression analysis found how impulsive buying can be a significant predictor of compulsive buying. A sample of 38 women (both working and non - working) in the age range of 19-45 years was collected. Standardized scales were adopted to measure impulsive and compulsive buying. While this study provides valuable insights, there were a few limitations. The sample size was relatively small, generalizing the findings. The study was focused

on a specific geographic location, which may not fully represent the diverse consumer behavior. Lastly, there might be inaccuracies or bias in participants' responses. In future, more research can address these limitations and explore the other contributing factors.

REFERENCES

- AKBIYIK, F., & ÇAĞLAR, N. (2022). RESEARCH ON DETERMINING THE PURCHASING STYLES OF WORKING WOMEN AND HOUSEWIVES. *International Journal of Eurasia Social Sciences/Uluslararası Avrasya Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 13(48).
- Chow, A. (2020). *Retail Therapy or an Urge to Splurge: A Study of Impulse Buying Among University Students*. The University of Regina (Canada).
- Cohen, J. B. (1991). Affect and Consumer. *Handbook of consumer behavior*, 188-240.
- Darrat, A. A., Darrat, M. A., & Amyx, D. (2016). How impulse buying influences compulsive buying: The central role of consumer anxiety and escapism. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 31, 103-108.
- Lee, L. (2015). The emotional shopper: Assessing the effectiveness of retail therapy. *Foundations and Trends® in Marketing*, 8(2), 69-145.
- Pallikkara, V., Pinto, P., Hawaldar, I. T., & Pinto, S. (2021). Impulse buying behaviour at the retail checkout: An investigation of select antecedents. *Business: Theory and Practice*, 22(1), 69-79.
- Rook, D. W. (1987). The buying impulse. *Journal of consumer research*, 14(2), 189-199.
- Rook, D. W., & Fisher, R. J. (1995). Normative influences on impulsive buying behavior. *Journal of consumer research*, 22(3), 305-313.
- Sarkar, D., & Das, J. K. IMPULSIVE BUYING TENDENCY-REWARD OR PUNISHMENT? AN EVIDENCE FROM INDIAN WORKING WOMEN.
- Sharma, S., & Chadha, S. K. (2017). Hedonic and Utilitarian Shopping Motivation: A Scale Validation Study in the Indian Retail Context. *IIMS Journal of Management Science*, 8(3), 284-295.
- Shovmayanti, N. A., Abadi, M. T. D., & Prakosa, F. A. (2024). The Emotional Dimensions of Retail Therapy: A Literature Review. *Jurnal Sains Sosio Humaniora*, 8(1), 61-72.

Weinstein, A., Maraz, A., Griffiths, M. D., Lejoyeux, M., & Demetrovics, Z. (2016). Compulsive buying—features and characteristics of addiction. In *Neuropathology of drug addictions and substance misuse* (pp. 993-1007). Academic Press.

Weinstein, A., Maraz, A., Griffiths, M. D., Lejoyeux, M., & Demetrovics, Z. (2016). Compulsive buying—features and characteristics of addiction. In *Neuropathology of drug addictions and substance misuse* (pp. 993-1007). Academic Press.