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Compulsive buying behavior on the internet

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Abstract

Despite the prevalence of Internet in our everyday life, little is known about consumer buying behavior in on-line purchases. Moreover, consumer buying disorder (CBD), one of the new addictions of the era, is poorly researched in the Romanian literature. This study aimed at identifying whether this disorder is present among Romanian students that purchase on-line through a questionnaire applied to 100 students attending the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of Iași. An analysis of the responses yields that a 13% of the studied sample indeed presents characteristics of this disorder and confirms previous global studies that the compulsive buyers are majoritarian women. This work increases our understanding of on-line consumer buying behavior and will contribute to future research on similar topics.

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1. Introduction

In today's society shopping is not solely for the purpose of satisfying some basic needs, such as the need of food, water, clothing etc. and very often it is done without thinking and without actually needing the said products/services. The buying is often impulsive and the reasons behind it are not evaluated rationally and most of the time people do not even realize it, especially since shopping has become a socially acceptable addiction. Almost 6% of the population in America it is said to be suffering of the Compulsive Buying Disorder (CBD) but the "trend" is on the rise and the percentage may very well apply to Romania as well.

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The impulsive buying behavior problem concerns more and more people, fact demonstrated by the increasing number of studies done on the topic in the last few years. Together with other pathologies, such as gambling, internet, food and sex addiction- CBD is part of the new “addictions” that have taken over the world.

The purpose of this thesis is to study the compulsive buying phenomenon from a behavioral and marketing perspective. The study is about identifying whether the Romanian student population suffers to a certain degree of CBD in their online shopping behavior and what are the factors that favor it: the internet history, personality, or income level or other. This is particularly important both from a sociological point of view and a marketing point of view.

This type of research has application both in the creating a sociological-psychological sketch of Romanian online consumers but also in the field of Marketing. Knowing what determines consumers to buy without having a prolonged decisional process is helpful in designing promotions for online sites that sell, for example, vouchers. And not solely for these fields- this type of information is applicable in any field concerned with buying decision. Moreover, it will provide an insight into the decisional buying process of online consumers which is helpful in creating a portrait of typical Romanian online consumer adding to the existent data.

Internet and the new technologies have become an integrated part of our lives making is easier to communicate, research information and purchase any kind of products and services. The online transactions are becoming simpler and faster and have definitely made our lives easier since only one click can bring in a few days whatever we want on our doorstep.

However, the generation that has been brought up with the Internet – the students of today- is mainly at risk of developing CBD considering that they are the most accustomed to the online world than any other generation. A US study (Pastore, 2000) has revealed that students spend almost 12% of their budget online.

With this in mind, in the second part of the research paper I will discuss about the new “addiction”, compulsive buying behavior, and the online world.

2. Literature review

2.1. Compulsive buying behavior

Compulsive shopping is part of the new age addictions, yet this behavior has been identified before. At the beginning of the 20th century the German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin invented the term “oniomania” to describe the unstoppable impulse to buy.

Many authors have attempted to define the syndrome of compulsive shopping but a consensus was never reached. McElroy (1994) has described it as a chronic and repetitive behavior developed as a primary response to unhappy events, while Faber and O’Guinn (1992) define CBD as a “type of consumer behaviour which is inappropriate, typically excessive, and clearly disruptive to the lives of individuals who appear impulsively driven to consume”.

2.2. Compulsive and impulsive buying

A few clarifications are necessary to be made in order to understand the concept of compulsive behaviour.

Impulsive and compulsive behaviour, while similar, are not the same issue. Impulsive buying is the purchase determined by outside stimuli- for example, when waiting in line at the cashier register you add a snack, or a soda or gum to your shopping cart. In the case of compulsive buying, the desire to buy comes from within, maybe an anxiety feeling that the individual wants to calm, or maybe buying to make oneself feel happier, better etc. On the other hand, the compulsive buyer tends to not resist to impulses associated with positive feelings, such as pleasure, gratification and relief. However, immediately after the purchase, these positive feelings are replaced with guilt and even depression.

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