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# Shopping enjoyment to the extreme: Hedonic shopping motivations and compulsive buying in developed and emerging markets

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the relationship between hedonic shopping motivations and compulsive buying in developed and emerging countries using a study with 520 female shopping mall visitors in four countries representing two developed (the Netherlands and Germany) and two emerging (Turkey and Russia) markets.

Our results indicate that hedonic shopping motivations are significantly related to compulsive buying. However, different hedonic motivations appear to contribute to the development of compulsive buying in emerging and developed countries. In developed markets gratification seeking, idea shopping, and role play were found to be the key hedonic motivations contributing to compulsive buying. In emerging markets, however, the picture looks very different. Interestingly, neither of the two motivations (gratification seeking and idea shopping) closely related to key drivers of compulsive buying according to the existing literature, predominantly based on developed countries, is found to be linked to compulsive buying in emerging markets. Instead, in such countries the main motivation is found to be adventure seeking. Moreover, interestingly, role play has a negative effect on compulsive buying, which is the opposite of what we found in developed countries. Our results, together with the limited research in emerging countries, call for in-depth and thorough research in such countries on the moderating role of national culture and economic conditions in the development of compulsive buying and shopping motives. We additionally provide several implications for marketers.

## 1. Introduction

Buying has become a crucial, easily accessible, and socially approved leisure and lifestyle activity. As a result, consumers increasingly engage in shopping for hedonistic purposes, such as gaining immediate gratification (Elliott, 1994) or immediate sensory stimulation (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). These tendencies are likely to have contributed to the worldwide development of compulsive buying. Compulsive buyers pursue “chronic, repetitive purchasing that becomes a primary response to negative events or feelings” (O’Guinn & Faber, 1989, p. 155). They engage in shopping for primarily hedonic motivations (O’Guinn & Faber, 1989, p. 147); to escape from negative feelings (O’Guinn & Faber, 1989) and instead experience positive emotions (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997; Roberts, Manolis, & Tanner, 2006); to improve their self- and social image; and to express themselves (Dittmar, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Kukar-Kinney, Ridgway, & Monroe, 2012). Additionally, compulsive buying has been found to be correlated with arousal and sensation seeking (Bridges & Florsheim, 2008). While these findings imply that the urge to shop is mainly rooted in hedonic shopping motivations, it is as yet unclear

how much the different hedonic motivations for shopping contribute to compulsive buying and which of them are the most important, possibly driving such excessive buying. In this paper, we thus fill this gap by investigating the relationship between compulsive buying and hedonic shopping motivations.

Additionally, there is evidence that compulsive buying is increasingly becoming a problem in non-Western countries as well (Rajagopal, 2009; Unger & Raab, 2015), suggesting that it is “not solely a Western problem, though sociocultural, environmental, and contextual factors may affect its development” (Horváth, Adıgüzel, & Herk, 2013, p. 9) and its motivational and behavioral foundations. For example, culture has been shown to have a significant influence on the way people cope with stress and anxiety (Chun, Moos, & Cronkite, 2006a; Triandis, 1995) and such coping mechanisms likely affect the development and nature of compulsive buying behavior, which has been found to be a response to negative feelings, stress, and anxiety (O’Guinn & Faber, 1989). Additionally, macro and structural characteristics of countries, such as the availability of means of stimulation, adventure, and escape from everyday issues, or the general wealth of a nation, may influence

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the development of, and the motivations for engaging in, compulsive buying.

Despite the possible differences between developed and emerging countries, the mass of knowledge on compulsive buying is mainly based on findings from developed societies, and literature about compulsive buying in emerging countries is rather scarce and fragmented (Baker, Moschis, Benmoyal-Bouzaglo, & Pizzutti, 2013; Guo & Cai, 2011; Horváth et al., 2013; Shoham, Gavish, & Segev, 2015; Unger, Papastamatelou, Yolbulan Okan, & Aytas, 2014; Unger & Raab, 2015). This gap in the literature is especially surprising considering the fact that 80% of the world's consumers live in emerging markets and transitional economies (Steenkamp & Burgess, 2002) and that compulsive buying is increasingly becoming a problem in such markets too (Rajagopal, 2009; Unger & Raab, 2015). Furthermore, several brands, companies, and retail stores operate globally, usually having stores in both developed and emerging countries.

Therefore, we investigate the relationship between hedonic shopping motivations and compulsive buying in both developed and emerging economies and contrast the findings. In this way, we make a threefold contribution to the literature. First, we extend previous knowledge on compulsive buying by linking it to new marketing concepts and shopping motivations. Second, we investigate the relationship between compulsive buying and shopping motivations in both emerging and developed countries, and thereby explore how findings on compulsive buying in developed countries may be transferable to emerging economies and the extent to which cultural and sociocultural, environmental, and contextual factors may influence the development of compulsive buying. Third, in the implications section, we discuss several issues that marketers should consider based on our results. Marketers may benefit from such insights as compulsive buyers constitute a large (Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney, & Monroe, 2008) and growing (Neuner, Raab, & Reisch, 2005) segment of the market, and they have been shown to behave differently from other shoppers (e.g., Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015).

## 2. Literature review

Shopping motivations have been defined as “the drivers of behavior that bring consumers to the marketplace to satisfy their internal needs” (Jin & Kim, 2003, p. 399). Additionally, since the seminal paper of Tauber (1972), it has been well known that people do not only shop to fulfill their needs, but also for hedonic reasons: a typical consumer tends to engage in shopping when “he needs attention, wants to be with peers, desires to meet people with similar interests, feels a need to exercise, or needs leisure time” (p. 48).

The literature identifies six hedonic motivations for shopping that may be related to compulsive buying. In this section we develop hypotheses (Hypotheses 1–6) about how each of these hedonic shopping motivations is related to compulsive buying. In Section 3, we turn to developing hypotheses (Hypotheses 1a–6a) about the moderation of culture; namely, whether and in what way we expect the relationship between each motivation and compulsive buying to differ in emerging countries from those hypothesized for developed ones. Fig. 1 provides a conceptual framework for our research and the hypotheses.

*Gratification seeking* involves shopping for stress relief, to alleviate a negative mood, and as a special treat to oneself (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Compulsive buyers use shopping to (temporarily) experience positive emotions, escape from negative feelings (Rindfleisch et al., 1997; Roberts et al., 2006), and relieve themselves of a depressive state (Claes et al., 2010; Sneath, Lacey, & Kennett-Hensel, 2009). In fact, the “alleviation of these negative feelings is the primary motivation for engaging in compulsive buying behaviour” (O’Guinn & Faber, 1989, p. 149). This indicates that gratification seeking is a key hedonic aspect of shopping for compulsive buyers, and much more so than for non-compulsive buyers. Therefore, our first hypothesis is as follows:

**H1.** Gratification seeking is positively associated with compulsive buying.

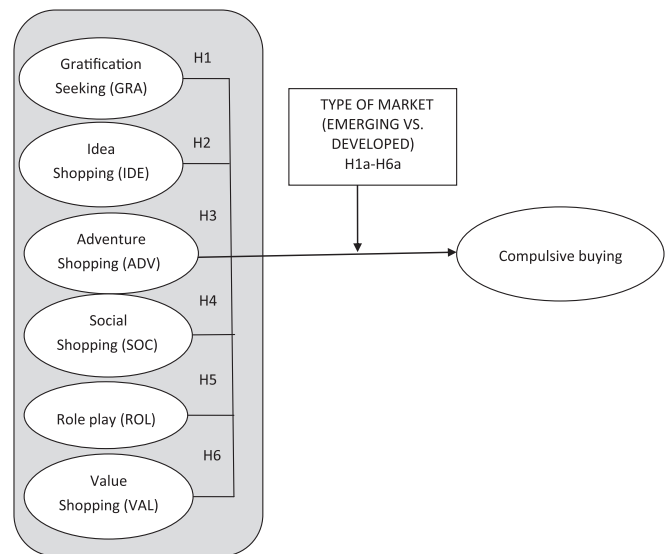


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

*Idea shopping* refers to the desire to keep up with trends and new fashions, and to see new products and innovations (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). One of its important aspects is novelty seeking, which is defined as a propensity to seek new experiences and novel stimuli and to try new products or change brands for increasing stimulation and variety (Hirschman, 1980; Leavitt & Walton, 1975; McAlister & Pessemier, 1982; Raju, 1980). Consumers often use the possession of new products and innovations as a way to express their uniqueness and self-identity (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001).

The existing literature indicates that identity and self-esteem concerns are central motivations for compulsive buyers (Dittmar, 2007; Kukar-Kinney et al., 2012). By buying something, compulsive buyers try to move closer to an “ideal self,” improve their social image, and express themselves (Dittmar, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Kukar-Kinney et al., 2012), such that perceived identity gains provide a direct predictor of compulsive buying (Dittmar, 2005; Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015). In line with these ideas, Horváth and van Birgelen (2015) found indications that compulsive buyers tend to be variety seekers and more open to new brands, products, and ideas than others. This indicates that idea shopping is a central motivation for compulsive buyers to continually engage in shopping.

**H2.** Idea shopping is positively associated with compulsive buying.

*Adventure seeking* refers to seeking stimulation, excitement, and adventure and the “feeling of being in another world” (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003, p. 80), which can be triggered by sights, smells, and sounds. Compulsive buyers have broader fantasy lives and excitement-seeking tendencies than non-compulsive buyers do (Desarbo & Edwards, 1996). The former often describe how shopping trips make them feel “intoxicated,” “high,” or “out of control,” and indicate that the only time they can escape negative feelings and fully enjoy something is when they shop (Faber & Christenson, 1996; Kukar-Kinney, Ridgway, & Monroe, 2009). Based on this, adventure seeking is likely to be another motivation for compulsive buyers.

**H3.** Adventure seeking is positively associated with compulsive buying.

*Social shopping* refers to the enjoyment of shopping together with friends and families, socializing and bonding with others while shopping (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Compulsive buyers often prefer to shop alone; 74% of them indicate that they prefer shopping alone (Black, 1996; Schlosser, Black, Repertinger, & Freet, 1994) because shopping is an escape from stress (Desarbo & Edwards, 1996), it is a very private pleasure (Woodruffe & Helen, 1997, p. 331), and they tend

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