

Compulsive Buying Behavior, Fashion Orientation, and Self-Esteem among Female College Students in Fashion and Business Majors

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Abstract

Compulsive buyers are individuals who experience and routinely act on powerful, uncontrollable urges to purchase. The relationships that existed between compulsive buying behaviors among college undergraduates are associated with intended majors, self-esteem and fashion orientation for female college students between the ages of 18 and 24 were investigated. A random sample of 182 undergraduate students completed a questionnaire that contained measures of compulsive buying, self-esteem, and fashion orientation. Based on literature review, three hypotheses were proposed. For data analysis, descriptive statistics, t-test, Pearson Correlation, and Cronbach Alpha were used. The results found that the compulsive buying tendency is negatively related to self-esteem among college students among female college students. Also, the tendency toward higher levels of fashion-orientation was positively related to compulsive buying tendencies. Fashion major was more prone to have compulsive buying tendency when compared to business major. Based on these results, some implications for educators, marketers, consumers and would be suggested.

Key Words : Compulsive buying, Fashion orientation, Self-esteem,
Female college students

I. Introduction

Compulsive buying and impulse buying are both unplanned purchasing. However, compulsive buying is related to more negative consequences¹⁾. According to O'Guinn and Faber²⁾, compulsive buying is a label which has been used recently in both psychiatric and consumer research contexts

to refer to the inability to shop or buy normally. Compulsive buyers are individuals who experience and routinely act on powerful, uncontrollable urges to purchase. Generally, young women tend to suffer from low self-esteem and the social acceptance of the use of buying to improve one's mood³⁾. This can lead to women to engage in compulsive buying.

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Compulsive buying behavior affects consumers' life in a materialistic nation. As a result, they can accumulate sizeable amounts of debt and a preoccupation with purchasing an ever-increasing amount of items in spite of the debt. So, compulsive buyers often damage relationships with their family members and friends⁴⁾.

Especially, compulsive buyers tend to buy products related to physical appearance such as clothing jewelry and cosmetics⁵⁾. A few studies have also shown that fashion interest significantly influenced compulsive buying directly⁶⁾⁷⁾. There is positive relationship between fashion involvement, impulse purchasing and compulsive buying behavior. Thus, students in apparel related majors may be more susceptible to this behavior.

Therefore, the primary objective of the present study is to investigate the relationships in compulsive buying, self-esteem, and fashion orientation among female college students. The second purpose of this study is to compare which students, among fashion major and business majors, are shown to be the most susceptible to compulsive buying tendency.

II. Literature Review

According to Faber and O'Guinn⁸⁾, compulsive buying is described as chronic, repetitive purchases to overcome negative feelings. Compared to non-compulsive buyers, compulsive buyers have higher out of control and engage in compulsive buying to relieve some problems such as low self-esteem, or unhappy events⁹⁾. Women are more tendencies to engage in compulsive buying than men. Also young generations are shown more compulsive buying

tendency than adults or old generation¹⁰⁾.

O'Guinn and Faber¹¹⁾ also stated that individuals prone to addictive behaviors likely experience childhood and adolescence marked by feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Low self-esteem has consistently been found to increase the likelihood of compulsive. Individuals experience fear and guilt because of their inability to control their purchasing behavior. Compulsive buying may be an attempt to temporarily block or overcome these feeling. Thus, low self-esteem is posited to be both an antecedent and consequence of compulsive buying.

Aboujaoude et al.¹²⁾ used the compulsive buying scale to classify the samples as either compulsive buyers or not. The results of the research concluded that the estimated point of prevalence of compulsive buying was 5.8%. Compared to other samples compulsive buyers were younger. They were also four times less likely to pay off credit card bills

Dittmar¹³⁾ examined how compulsive buying is an increasing consumer disorder that has serious consequences for an individual's psychological health, as well as their finances. Through analytical research, the author found that gender, age and the endorsement of materialistic values are good predictors of this psychiatric disorder. The results stated that younger people are more prone to compulsive buying and the core values of current consumer culture are reflected their need to spend beyond their financial needs.

Roberts and Jones¹⁴⁾ found that college students exhibit high levels of compulsive buying. Gender was also found to be a factor in explaining compulsive buying with females comprising a large percentage of compulsive buyers. This type of behavior may have severe

consequences for affected individuals, others around them, and society at large. Increases in personal bankruptcies and credit card debt are other possible negative economic aspects of compulsive buying.

Another study, Roberts¹⁵⁾, found that the consumer culture has evolved into one of the most powerful forces shaping individuals and societies. The desire to become a member of the consumer culture appears to be universal. Changing attitudes toward money are important catalyst behind the spread of the consumer culture. Money is important; especially the easy access to credit card use plays an important role in compulsive buying behaviors. Findings suggest that money attitudes power prestige, distrust, and anxiety are closely related to compulsive buying and that credit card use often moderated these relationships.

2. Fashion Orientation

As mentioned before, female compulsive buyers tend to purchase fashion-related items such as clothing, jewelry, and cosmetics. Park and Burns¹⁶⁾ stated that persons who encompass compulsive buying indications are usually extremely fashion orientated and are enabled to do so with credit cards. The results showed that fashion interest significantly influenced compulsive buying directly and indirectly influenced credit card use. This may be able to apply that fashion majors are more susceptible to engage in compulsive buying than other majors are, because fashion major students are typically more interested in fashion orientation—fashion leadership, interest in fashion and the importance of being well-dressed.

Also Yurchisin and Johnson¹⁷⁾ found that the typical compulsive buying consumer is female,

ages 18 to 24 with low self esteem and a preoccupation with apparel products, most often college students. Often times they find themselves deeply in debt before they finish their degrees.

Thus, it usually beings in late adolescence or early adulthood, the age range in which individuals are typically enrolled in college. These individuals place a high degree of importance on apparel and fashion-orientated products. They place a great deal of emphasis on social status and make an effort to demonstrate certain self-definitions. Individuals enrolled in apparel-related majors are often exposed to idealized images in their coursework in design, marketing, promotion, and advertising. Frequent exposure to these images may be associated with expectations concerning increased wealth and consumption.

III. Hypotheses Development

Given that the overall purpose of the research is to examine compulsive buying behaviors among college students, based on the literature reviewed, the following hypotheses were proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Among female college students, compulsive buyers will have lower scores on self-esteem than non-compulsive buyers.

Hypothesis 2: Among female college students, compulsive buyers will have higher scores on fashion orientation than non-compulsive buyers.

Hypothesis 3: Among female college students, fashion major students will have higher scores on compulsive buying tendency than business major students.

IV. Methodology

A quantitative questionnaire designed for the study of compulsive buying behavior was used to examine both business and fashion female college students in a major university. Participants were chosen randomly to complete the questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to 198 students in May, 2008. After removal of inappropriate responses, a total of 182 subjects were used for data analysis (92 fashion majors and 90 business majors). Christenson et al.¹⁸⁾ stated that many undergraduates are between the ages of 18 and 24, which is the age range when compulsive buying behavior typically begins. Thus, this age range was selected for this study. For the instruments, Faber and O'Guinn¹⁹⁾'s Compulsive buying scale, Rosenberg²⁰⁾'s Self-esteem scale, and Gutman and Mills²¹⁾'s Fashion orientation scale were used. The three scales were well known to have high reliability. For this study, three scales' reliabilities were also measured. As a result, all reliabilities showed higher than 0.83. Each participant's compulsive buying level was determined by calculating the average of his or her responses to Compulsive buying scale items. All items asked respondents to indicate either their agreement with statements on five-point Likert scales or their frequency of experiencing a feeling or behavior on a five-point scale ranging from "very often" to "never." For data analysis, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, t-test, and Cronbach's Alpha were used.

V. Results

1. Classified as Compulsive Buyers

Out of the 182 participants surveyed, thirty-

four participants (24 fashion majors: 10 business majors) were classified as compulsive buyers, composed of 18.5%. This number is very significant in showing that students in fashion majors (26.1%) may be more susceptible to compulsive buying behavior than business majors (11.1%).

2. Correlation Analysis

To understand the relationships among compulsive buying, self-esteem, and fashion orientation, Pearson correlations were calculated (Table 1). As the results, compulsive buying was related negatively to self-esteem, and positively to fashion orientation.

3. Compulsive buying & Self-Esteem

To test Hypothesis 1, t-test was performed. As a result, consist with other findings, this study showed that compulsive buyers are found to have lower levels of self-esteem than non-compulsive buyers significantly (Table 2). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported.

4. Compulsive buying & Fashion Orientation

When compared to non-compulsive buyers, compulsive buyers had higher scores on fashion-orientation than non-compulsive buyers (Table 3). This means that compulsive buyers are more conscious of fashion, spending a lot more time on fashion activities and possess higher-levels of apparel-product involvement. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

5. Compulsive buying & Majors

Finally, hypothesis 3 was tested using t-test if there will be difference in majors between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers

<Table 1> Correlations among three variables

	Compulsive buying	Self-Esteem	Fashion Orientation
Compulsive buying	1		
Self-Esteem	.38***	1	
Fashion Orientation	-.19**	ns	1

@ Lower compulsive buying scores indicate higher compulsive buying tendency.

p<.01, *p<.001

<Table 2> Self-esteem between compulsive buyers and non-buyers

	Compulsive Buyers		Non-Compulsive Buyers		t-value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Self-Esteem	2.66	3.27	3.47	2.98	10.85***

***p<.001

<Table 3> Fashion orientation between compulsive buyers and non-buyers

	Compulsive Buyers		Non-Compulsive Buyers		t-value
	M	SD	M	SD	
Fashion Orientation	3.67	2.89	3.27	2.45	7.70**

**p<.01

<Table 4> Compulsive buying between fashion and business majors

	Fashion Major		Business Major		t값
	M	SD	M	SD	
Compulsive Buying Scores@	1.21	3.07	3.27	3.29	5.08**

@ Lower compulsive buying scores indicate higher compulsive buying tendency.

**p<.01

(Table 4). The result revealed that fashion major students showed higher compulsive buying tendency than business major students.

V. Conclusion

The overall purpose of this research was to examine compulsive buying tendencies in college students, specifically comparing self-esteem, fashion-orientation, and majors. The results revealed that

among female college students, the tendency toward higher levels of fashion-orientation was positively related to compulsive buying tendencies. Also, the compulsive buying tendency is negatively related to self-esteem among college students. Fashion majors are more prone to have compulsive buying tendencies when compared to business majors. Also, fashion majors exhibited higher levels of fashion orientation and lower levels of self-esteem as compared to business majors.

College students enrolled in fashion majors are often exposed to idealized images in their coursework in design, marketing, promotion, and advertising. Frequent exposure to these images may be associated with expectations concerning increased wealth and consumption.

Based on these results, there are three important implications of this study's findings from an educator's perspective, a marketer's perspective, and a consumer's perspective. First, from the educator's perspective, an improved understanding of the relationship between compulsive buying and majors of study in a college student population provide educators in these fields to balance their message about consumerism. Specifically, curriculums in these fields frequently require students to take courses that emphasize consumerism and the importance of purchasing products to communicate a social identity.

Second, from a marketing perspective, apparel the industry should be aware of what the research has shown. Marketers should reduce aggressive marketing campaigns targeting students and younger adults. Of course, marketers need to consider their profits; however, it would be more important them to understand 'long-relationship with their customers', leading consumers more to engage in reasonable purchasing behavior. Thus, the long-relationship strategy with their customers as one of the social responsible marketing strategies would provide more profits in the long term eventually.

Finally, from a consumer's perspective, consumers need to recognize these tendencies, if they exist, and monitor they behavior. Especially when using credit cards. Easy access to credit is one of the causes of overspending, increasing the number of consumers who are

suffering from mounting credit card debts resulting from abusing the credit that came easy.

The results of this study must be qualified by the limits of the study sample. Since the sample size was small, it may not accurately convey actual compulsive buying tendencies among all college students. In addition, the respondent's ages do not represent all consumers, mostly only those of the college age. Also, compulsive buying tendencies and self-esteem are sensitive issues. Thus, respondents may have been less truthful, and results in this study may under represent the degree of compulsive consumption in our sample.

Future researchers need to investigate compulsive consumption among multiple age sets. As the scope of this study was limited to merchandising and business majors only, further research should be conducted with more representative college students and possibly age groups. This may reflect broader demographical characteristics and would add additional credibility to the finding. In addition, one might isolate a demographic group, such as women in their 20s, and compare them to the mainstream population. Second, as it was beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to expand this study cross culturally and compare cultures with different degrees and economic development. Third, future researchers should also consider other fashion-related variable and compare the results with those of non-fashion-related variable to determine if fashion-related variables as a whole can be considered a major determinant of compulsive buying.

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