

# **The Relationship between Consumers' Tendencies to Buy Compulsively and Their Motivations to Shop and Buy on the Internet**

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Keywords: compulsive buying, Internet buying, buying motivations, shopping motivations

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a survey of customers of an Internet clothing retailer examining how consumers' preferences to shop and buy on the Internet rather than at bricks-and-mortar stores differ depending on their compulsive buying tendencies. Using shopping motivations such as seeking product and information variety, the ability to buy unobserved, avoiding social interactions, and experiencing positive feelings during shopping and buying, we find there exists a positive relationship between a tendency to buy compulsively and Internet buying motivations. The research demonstrates that the items used to measure these shopping motivations can also be used to identify buyers who have a tendency to buy compulsively. The paper also offers important retailing, managerial and public policy implications of the findings.

## **The Relationship between Consumers' Tendencies to Buy Compulsively and Their Motivations to Shop and Buy on the Internet**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between consumers' motivations to shop and buy on the Internet as compared to bricks-and-mortar stores and their tendencies to buy compulsively. For over 20 years, researchers in marketing and consumer behavior have explored what can be referred to as an abnormal consumption behavior—compulsive buying (Faber and O'Guinn 1992; O'Guinn and Faber 1989). Compulsive buying refers to consumers' tendencies to be preoccupied with buying that is revealed through repetitive buying and a lack of impulse control over buying (Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney, and Monroe 2008). Compulsive buying may result in numerous negative consequences for the affected consumers, such as financial problems, emotional harm (e.g., negative feelings, feeling guilty), and social and relationship problems (Faber and O'Guinn 1992). Numerous research articles, popular press articles, books, and websites dedicated to compulsive buying and problems it may cause show that the issue remains of concern today (e.g., Benson 2000; Faber and Christenson 1996; Seligman 2003; [www.stoppingovershopping.com](http://www.stoppingovershopping.com)). Recently it has been estimated that between 5.8 percent (Koran et al. 2006) and 8.9 percent (Ridgway et al. 2008) of the U.S. population could be compulsive buyers.

In addition to the current interest in compulsive buying, the importance of Internet retailing also has been growing steadily (Grewal, Iyer, and Levy 2004). Reports indicate that approximately 70% of consumers are using the Internet to buy products (Plunkett Research, Ltd. 2007). For 2007, it was estimated that total retail Internet sales ranged between \$136.B and \$175B, with an annual growth rate near 20% (Forrester Research 2007; U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Moreover, relative to bricks-and-mortar sales, the percentage of Internet sales is

increasing (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Investigating the relationship between Internet buying and compulsive buying is important because the Internet retail environment possesses characteristics that seem to encourage compulsive buying. For example, the Internet offers the opportunity to buy frequently, at any time, and unobserved. Also, the Internet allows consumers to satisfy the urge to buy more quickly. (Indeed, quite a few Internet retailers encourage “Express Checkout”, which means that once a customer enters their email and password, just one click completes the order.)

The goal of the present research is to enhance our knowledge about compulsive buying in the Internet retailing environment. Building on previous research on compulsive buying and on the influence of the Internet on purchasing behavior, we investigate how consumers’ motivations to shop and buy on the Internet differ depending on their compulsive buying tendencies. We find that, compared to shoppers with low compulsive buying tendencies, consumers with higher compulsive buying tendencies prefer shopping and buying online over traditional stores to: avoid social interactions, buy unobserved, and experience immediate positive feelings.

In addition to identifying the shopping and buying motivations that can be useful in predicting consumers’ tendencies to buy compulsively, we show that the identified motivations can be used to cluster consumers into different segments depending on their shopping and purchase behaviors. Because of an e-tailer’s cooperation, we were able to match consumer actual purchase data with survey (i.e., self-report) responses; we are also able to validate the shopping motivations and the resulting consumer segments with actual buying behavior, allowing us to minimize any potential common method bias. The research has important managerial and consumer research implications with regards to customer segmentation, communication

strategies, ways of identifying compulsive buyers, and explaining the reasons for consumers' choice of online or offline retail channels. Finally, the research offers public policy implications.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

Motivation has been defined as goal-directed arousal (Park and Mittal 1985). In the current context, the goal, and our focus, is restricted to consumer shopping or buying activities and motivations. The topic of shopping and buying motivations has been of interest in marketing research for some time. For example, several typologies have been developed for retail shopping motivations (Bellenger and Korgaonkar 1980; Moschis 1976; Westbrook and Black 1985). Motives studied have included product-oriented motives, experiential motives (including the recreational and hedonic aspects of buying), shopping convenience, information search, recreational shopping, and variety seeking (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Darden and Ashton 1975; Dawson, Bloch, and Ridgway 1990). One typology developed for Internet shoppers includes the convenience shopper, the variety seeker, the store-oriented shopper and the balanced buyer (Rohm and Swaminathan 2004). Recently, researchers found significant differences between Internet shoppers with utilitarian motives and hedonic motives (To, Liao, and Lin 2007). Similarly, Noble, Griffith, and Adjie (2006) compared information search, price comparison, uniqueness seeking, product assortment, convenience seeking, social interaction and browsing as Internet shopping motives. We build on Noble et al. (2006) to select the motivations used in this research. Further, to develop the hypotheses linking motivations with compulsive buying tendencies, we draw on previous research on compulsive buying (e.g., Dittmar and Drury 2000; Faber and O'Guinn 1992; McElroy et al. 1994).

## **Ability to Buy Unobserved and To Avoid Social Interaction**

Compulsive buyers have been found to experience shame, guilt, and regret because of their frequent buying episodes (O'Guinn and Faber 1989). Because of these feelings, compulsive buyers may not want others (including family members) to see what, how frequently, and how much they buy. Consequently, these consumers may feel the need to hide their buying activities. Also, they may fear that instant recognition by sales clerks labels them as buyers who buy too often (Lee, Lennon, and Rudd 2000). Compared to the bricks-and-mortar store environment, the Internet retail environment enables consumers to be alone while shopping and buying, and offers a low to non-existent level of social interaction, as it is free of direct, face-to-face social contact (Alba et al. 1997). Because of these features, the motivations to: 1) shop and buy unobserved, and 2) avoid social interactions will be more strongly associated with preferences for Internet buying by compulsive relative to non-compulsive buyers. Therefore, we propose a positive relationship between these motives and consumers' compulsive buying tendencies.

*H1: There is a positive relationship between consumers' motivation to shop and buy unobserved on the Internet and their compulsive buying tendencies.*

*H2: There is a positive relationship between consumers' motivation to avoid social interactions while shopping on the Internet and their compulsive buying tendencies.*

## **Variety and Choice**

Compulsive buyers desire to experience positive, stimulating feelings while buying (Faber and O'Guinn 1992). When feeling down, compulsive buying can help them relieve the negative feelings by producing a temporary "high" (Ridgway et al. 2008). Greater product variety provides compulsive buyers with a way to achieve more positive feelings, as it offers a more stimulating and exciting buying experience (McAlister and Pessemier 1982). Relative to a bricks-and-mortar store environment, the Internet enables consumers to shop for and buy

products across a much larger number and variety of stores, products, and brands that may otherwise be inaccessible. Consequently, the greater the consumers' compulsive buying tendencies, the greater should be their motivation to shop and buy on the Internet due to the ability to access a larger number of products and brands via Internet relative to bricks-and-mortar stores.

*H3: There is a positive relationship between consumers' motivation to access a large variety of products on the Internet and their compulsive buying.*

### **Information Search**

The Internet environment offers vast amounts of information. The existence of search engines and shopping robots can help consumers identify greater amounts of pertinent information than could be found in a bricks-and-mortar setting (Alba et al. 1997; Bakos 1997; Smith 2002). Given a positive relationship between compulsive buying and fashion interest (Park and Burns 2005), the desire to be aware of the most current fashion trends should be relatively more important for compulsive buyers, as they have been found to be suffering from low self-esteem (d'Astous 1990; Dittmar and Drury 2000; O'Guinn and Faber 1992). Wearing fashionable clothing may help these primarily female consumers feel better about themselves (Dittmar and Drury 2000; O'Guinn and Faber 1989). Thus, due to their lower self-esteem and the desire to feel better about themselves, compulsive buyers are expected to have a greater need to gather information about the latest fashion trends. The ability to find information about the newest fashions on the Internet as well as being able to receive continuous electronic updates about new product offerings<sup>1</sup> should thus be an important motivator of compulsive buyers to prefer the Internet (over bricks-and-mortar) buying.

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<sup>1</sup>Many e-tailers send electronic newsletters to their customers (as frequently as twice weekly) alerting them to new product arrivals and the latest styles. See, for example, Anthropologie.com, BananaRepublic.com, Nordstrom.com, Spiegel.com and urbanoutfitters.com. Each of these sites (and many others) has a "what's new" button.

*H4: There is a positive relationship between consumers' motivation to search for product information on the Internet and their compulsive buying tendencies.*

### **Immediate Positive Feelings from the Shopping and Buying Experience**

Prior research findings indicate that experiential or hedonic motives also influence consumers shopping and buying behaviors (e.g., Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Bellenger and Korgaonkar 1980; Ridgway, Bloch, and Dawson 1989). Hedonic motives pertain to the positive feelings (e.g., pleasure, excitement) experienced while shopping or buying. Compulsive buyers have been found to experience an emotional lift from buying (Faber and O'Guinn 1992). As such, the positive feelings obtained during the buying process motivate these consumers to buy more. Thus, compulsive buyers strongly focus on the buying process and the immediate relief of prior negative feelings along with the stimulation of the positive feelings that it brings. The immediacy of positive feelings pertains specifically to the shopping and buying process, rather than to actually receiving or consuming the product. In fact, compulsive buyers may end up buying products, only to return them later or to leave the bags of purchases unopened in their closets (Ridgway et al. 2008). When feeling blue, an Internet (as compared to bricks-and-mortar) buying experience may elicit these positive feelings more quickly, given the speed and ease of making a purchase (e.g., most fashion e-tailers offer express check-out by "remembering" your information, if a consumer requests it). Hence, the online buying behavior should be more strongly motivated by the immediate positive feelings associated with the Internet shopping and buying experience

*H5: There is a positive relationship between consumers' motivation to experience immediate positive feelings while shopping on the Internet and their compulsive buying tendencies.*

## **Investigation of Additional Relationships**

To further validate and extend the knowledge of compulsive buying on the Internet, our research also investigates additional relationships, such as the extent to which consumers' compulsive buying tendencies are related to specific aspects of their buying behaviors (e.g., average amount spent for clothing and accessories at Internet and bricks-and-mortar stores, average frequency of buying from Internet and retail stores). We also look at the extent to which the identified shopping and buying motivations correlate with actual purchase behavior data obtained from the Internet retailer. Finally, to demonstrate the predictive power of the identified motivations, we show how the motivations can be used to cluster consumers into different segments based on their compulsive buying tendencies without actually measuring this tendency.

## **THE SURVEY**

### **Sample**

To test the hypotheses and address the additional areas of investigation, a survey of customers of an Internet women's clothing retailer was conducted. An email message was sent to a sample of 1490 customers, alerting them to the survey. After accounting for bounce-back messages from this initial mailing, an invitation to participate with the link to the survey was sent to 1310 customers. Additional technical problems, such as problems with the loading of the webpage containing the survey and the inability to return to and finish the survey after a certain length of inactivity, reduced the final number of potential respondents to 1294. From this final set, 314 people from 42 states responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 24.3 percent. The sample consisted of 98.5 percent women, 63 percent of the respondents were

married, their average age was 53 years (range 28 to 75 years), and average household income was \$82,000.

As an incentive to complete the survey, the respondents had a choice of a \$10 reward or receiving free shipping on the next order (value up to \$24.95) from the Internet clothing retailer. The survey contained questions about general shopping and buying behavior (including compulsive buying statements) on the Internet and at bricks-and-mortar stores, shopping motivations, questions about individual consumer characteristics, and demographic questions.

## **Measures**

*Compulsive buying.* Consumers' tendency to buy compulsively was measured using the recently developed six-item compulsive buying scale (see Table 1; Ridgway et al., 2008). In the present research, reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the scale was .85, and all six items displayed item-to-total correlations above .50. Nine respondents who did not answer one or more compulsive buying items were removed from the analysis. We composed an index of compulsive buying by summing the responses to the six items (each measured on a 7-point frequency or Likert-type scale). The average value of the compulsive buying index was 17.17, the median value was 16 and the range was 6 to 42.

*Motivations to shop and buy on the Internet.* Using existing research on shopping motivations and compulsive buying, we developed 22 statements describing shopping motivations hypothesized to differ according to the tendency to buy compulsively. These were seven-point disagree-agree statements in response to the following: "*In comparison to retail stores, I shop on the Internet when buying clothing and accessories for myself because*" (e.g.,

suitable retail stores are not available close by). Please note that all motivation measures focused on the situation where the customer chooses the Internet over traditional stores. The italicized part of the statement above was present in every motivation statement, while the ending part was different and concluded with the actual motivations listed in Table 2.

Principal component analysis with oblique rotation (Promax) was used on the 22 shopping motivation items. Items were retained if they loaded .50 or more on an underlying component (i.e., shopping motive), did not load .50 or more on two different components, and their item-to-total correlation in reliability analysis exceeded .40 (Hair et al. 1998). Six items were eliminated because they did not meet these criteria. The remaining 16 items loaded on four components, explaining 73% of the total variance. While the majority of the items loaded on the hypothesized shopping motivation, the items for the “product variety” motive and “the ability to gather information” motive loaded onto the same component. A possible explanation for this result is that both motivations may arise from the compulsive buyers’ need for approval, and are therefore closely linked. These two motives were consequently combined into one measure, named the “product and information variety” motive. All items measuring the same underlying motive were averaged, and the averages were used in further analyses.

Results of the principal component analysis are displayed in Table 2. All components exhibited item and construct reliabilities above the recommended levels. Table 3 shows construct reliabilities for individual motivations (i.e., ability to buy unobserved, avoiding social interaction, product and information variety, and immediate positive feelings) and the compulsive buying index as well as correlations among the constructs.

---- Insert Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 about here ----

## ANALYSES AND RESULTS

### Hypothesis Testing

To analyze the relationship between compulsive buying and motivations to shop and buy on the Internet, we conducted a series of linear regression analyses, with individual shopping and buying motivations in the role of the dependent variable, and compulsive buying index as an independent variable. Social desirability bias was significantly correlated with compulsive buying ( $\rho = -.26, p < .01$ ), and was used as a covariate in all subsequent analyses. Income and gender were initially used as covariates, but were dropped from the analysis because they were non-significant. The results are summarized in Table 4.

We propose that there is a positive relationship between the motivations to shop and buy on the Internet and consumers' compulsive buying tendencies. That is, the higher a respondent scored on the compulsive buying index, the more she would agree with the specific Internet shopping and buying motivation.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that the greater the compulsive buying tendency, the stronger the consumers' motivation to shop and buy on the Internet in comparison to bricks-and-mortar stores due to the ability to hide their buying behavior (i.e., buy unobserved). The results support this hypothesis ( $\beta = .34, p < .01$ ).

Hypothesis 2 proposes that there is a positive relationship between a tendency to buy compulsively and a motivation to shop and buy on the Internet as compared to bricks-and-mortar stores because it is easier to avoid social interactions with other shoppers and sales clerks. The regression analysis results support the hypothesis that the motivation to avoid social interaction is positively associated with respondents' compulsive buying tendencies ( $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ).

Recall that the two product variety and availability of information motives were combined into a broader motive of *product and information variety*. This action further required that hypotheses 3 and 4 be consolidated into a single hypothesis. However, this combined proposition was not supported ( $\beta = .06, p > .10$ ). Consumers feel equally motivated by the product and information variety on the Internet regardless of the extent of their compulsive buying tendency.

We predicted in hypothesis 5 that relative to less compulsive buyers, consumers with greater compulsive buying tendencies are more motivated to shop and buy on the Internet versus bricks-and-mortar stores because of the immediate positive feelings stimulated by the Internet shopping experience. The significantly positive standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta = .42, p < .01$ ) provides support for the hypothesis that this motivation to quickly obtain positive feelings would have a positive association with respondents' compulsive buying tendencies.

### **Investigation of Additional Relationships**

To offer additional insights into the differences between shopping and buying behavior of consumers with different levels of compulsive buying tendencies, we examined the variables: average monthly amount spent on clothing and accessories at Internet and bricks-and-mortar stores, average amount spent at the top five retail and top five brick-and-mortar stores per month, and frequency of buying from the top five retail and top five Internet stores per month. As Table 4 indicates, there was a positive trend relationship between these variables and the compulsive buying scores. Those respondents who scored highest on the compulsive buying index reported spending more on clothing as well as buying more frequently at both traditional retail and Internet stores than the respondents with lower levels of compulsive buying index.

## Cluster Analysis

To determine whether a compulsive-buying segment can be identified based on motives to shop and buy online, we next conducted a cluster analysis. The goal of this analysis was to uncover existing consumer segments relative to online shopping motivations and to see whether any segments match with the shopping motivations of the identified compulsive buyers. Using K-means (quick) cluster analysis method, three, four and five cluster solutions were obtained and compared. The four cluster solution was the most meaningful (i.e., resulting in the largest differences between the identified clusters) and interpretable. Table 5 displays these four clusters and the cluster means of the four identified shopping motivations for each cluster.

The first cluster segment scores below the midpoint of the compulsive buying scale (means < 4 on a 7-point scale) on all four Internet shopping motives, and we label these consumers “*bricks-and-mortar buyers*,” meaning that on average, consumers in this segment appear to prefer the traditional retail outlets over the online store environment. The second cluster segment scores highly (cluster means around or above the midpoint of the scale) on all of the identified shopping motives, and matches well with the identified compulsive buying motivations. Hence, we name consumers in this segment “*compulsive buyers*”. The third cluster segment scores high on the product and information variety motive (cluster mean = 5.68) and low (cluster means below 3) on all other motives. We call this segment “*product and information seeker*.” The final cluster segment exhibits high product and information variety motive (cluster mean = 5.47), a moderately high motive of avoiding contact with others (cluster mean = 4.45), while scoring low (cluster means below 3) on other motives. We name this segment “*anti-social product and information seeker*.”

---- Insert Table 5 about here ----

*Validation with actual purchase data.* Cluster analysis based only on the consumer shopping and buying motivations isolated a segment of consumers with motivations we identified as important to compulsive buyers. To add to the validity that cluster segment 2 does, in fact, contain compulsive buyers, we next compared the four cluster segments on additional variables not included in the previous cluster analysis (Hair et al. 1998). We obtained actual customer purchase data for the period 2001-2004 from the Internet retailer whose customers comprised our sample, and matched the actual purchase data with the self-report data for each customer. Using data from two different sources allowed us to minimize any potential common-method bias present in the data.

Using MANOVA, we compared the four segments on four variables: compulsive buying index, total dollar amount spent at the Internet retailer in question over the period 2001-2004, total number of purchases from the Internet retailer during 2001-2004, and the highest amount on any purchase from this retailer during the same time period (these results are shown at the bottom of Table 5). Our expectations were that the “*compulsive buyers*” segment would score the highest on all of the examined variables, followed by the “*anti-social information buyers*” segment (which exhibited characteristics most similar to compulsive buyers in comparison with other segments). Finally, the “*bricks-and-mortar buyers*” segment should score the lowest on the total dollar amount and number of purchases from the Internet retailer, as consumers in this segment appear to favor bricks-and-mortar store environment to Internet shopping, and thus are expected to shop and spend less on the Internet relative to consumers in the other segments.

The findings shown in Table 5 support our expectations. The segment identified only by their shopping motivations as “*compulsive buyers*” indeed scored the highest on the: compulsive

buying index, actual amount spent, total number of purchases at the Internet retailer, and highest purchase amount. The “*bricks-and-mortar buyers*” on the other hand, scored the lowest on compulsive buying index, total Internet dollars spent and total number of Internet purchases from the retailer, as anticipated. These findings using actual consumer purchase data support the existence of the identified consumer segments and show that the identified shopping motives can serve as an Internet shopper segmentation technique and to predict whether a consumer exhibits compulsive buying tendencies.

*Profiling the compulsive buyers cluster segment.* Now that the compulsive buyers cluster group was validated as containing consumers with compulsive buying tendencies, an additional profile of consumers in this segment can be drawn. This cluster group contains 54 respondents or 17.7 percent of our sample, providing an indication that compulsive buying indeed is more prevalent in the general population than previous research suggests.

Table 6 shows additional variables that can be used to develop the compulsive buyers cluster segment profile. Demographically, for this sample, the segment is almost identical to the overall sample (100 percent women, average age 53 years, average household income \$82,000). The compulsive buyers cluster reports spending on average \$247 per month on clothing and accessories at the top five retail stores and \$282 at the top five Internet retailers, thus, about \$530 total per month or \$6360 per year. This spending translates into 53 percent of their fashion dollars spent on the Internet as compared to 47 percent at bricks-and-mortar stores for the top five stores. In addition, when respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of their total fashion budget spent on Internet and bricks-and-mortar stores (a separate question), the Internet was also preferred to bricks-and-mortar stores (60 versus 40 percent) in this segment, increasing

our confidence in the reliability of the results. The compulsive buyer segment reported using on average 2.59 major credit cards, and paying off 1.67 of them in full each month. For additional characteristics of the compulsive buyers cluster, see Table 6.

---- Insert Table 6 about here ----

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The present research contributes to the expanding knowledge of consumer behavior on the Internet relative to the bricks-and-mortar retail environment and to the literature on compulsive buying behavior. The key contributions of this paper are 1) further development of a theory of compulsive buying, 2) identifying motivations of compulsive buyers to shop and buy on the Internet as opposed to bricks-and-mortar stores, 3) an application within the online shopping and buying context, 4) identifying the relationship between the compulsive buying tendencies, Internet shopping and buying motivations, and other behavioral variables, and 5) validating the findings with actual purchase data.

### **Theoretical Contribution**

The present research contributes to the development of a theory of compulsive buying by identifying the motivational forces underlying the purchase behaviors of consumers based on their compulsive buying tendencies. Moreover, it shows that compulsive buying is a prevalent phenomenon in the general population, as it affected 17.7 percent of respondents in our study.

## **Compulsive Buying and the Internet**

Our research findings indicate that consumer preferences for shopping and buying on the Internet as opposed to bricks-and-mortar stores differ depending on their tendency to buy compulsively. Further, this preference for the Internet and the tendency to buy compulsively can at least partially be explained by the set of shopping motivations identified in this paper. Another important contribution of the present research pertains to identifying the relationship between compulsive buying tendency and shopping motives and other relevant behavioral variables. All motives but the product and information variety showed a significant positive relationship with scores on the compulsive buying scale. In addition, all additional behavioral motives showed a similar significant relationship with compulsive buying. This finding indicates that people who exhibit strong tendencies to buy compulsively experience stronger feelings with respect to shopping and buying, stronger buying and shopping motivations, and exhibit more extreme shopping and buying behaviors.

Overall, our findings indicate that, as their compulsive buying tendency increased, consumers were more strongly motivated to buy on the Internet compared to a more traditional retail store environment. This motivation appears to be due to the consumers' ability to buy unobserved and avoid social interaction while shopping and buying online, as well as the immediate positive feelings associated with their Internet buying experience.

## **Characteristics of Compulsive Buyers**

To buy unobserved and to quickly experience strong positive feelings during the purchase episode are two motivations most common to compulsive buyers. This conclusion is supported by the largest standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ s = .34 and .42, respectively) and the largest

average values compared to other cluster segments (see Table 5). While prior research indicated that the lack of social interaction on the Internet was a limitation of the online shopping environment (Grewal, Iyer, and Levy 2004), we show that this characteristic may, in fact, not be a limitation for compulsive buyers. The Internet allows these consumers to buy secretly and without contact with others. Moreover, although an Internet shopping experience may be considered as less stimulating than shopping in the bricks-and-mortar retail stores, it may still produce positive feelings in some consumers. In fact, compulsive buyers may find it more stimulating due to a greater variety of products they can access online. While we have not measured the experience of flow, it is possible that compulsive buyers are more likely to experience “flow” while buying on the Internet, leading to more positive feelings elicited by the Internet shopping and buying experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Further, because they are preoccupied with buying and lack impulse control, compulsive buyers desire an immediate release of negative feelings and an accompanying surge of positive feelings that the Internet buying process brings them. Also, they are willing to exchange this immediacy of positive feelings for postponing the actual receipt and consumption of purchased products to a later time.

### **Theoretical, Managerial and Public Policy Implications**

Retail researchers should be interested in the results of this study for several reasons. First, there may be more consumers who have tendencies to be compulsive buyers than previous research has found. In this study, nearly 18% of our sample could be classified as such.

Second, based on their shopping and buying motivations, these consumers may prefer different retail outlets than non-compulsive buyers. While due to the nature of the Internet retail customers’ sample the compulsive buyers’ propensity to shop in a specific retail channel

(Internet vs. bricks-and-mortar store) cannot be accurately assessed in the present study (i.e., it would be overestimated), the present research does offer an indication that compulsive buyers may choose Internet more often than stores as their preferred channel. The results based on the cluster analysis show that the segment identified only by their motivations as compulsive buyers shows the highest propensity (60 percent of buying is done online versus 40 percent in stores) to buy online among all identified clusters. This finding demonstrates that the shopping and buying motivations may be a better predictor of propensity to shop and buy online (versus in stores) as compared to the compulsive buying scale, which was not found to be a significant predictor of propensity to buy online in this research. Thus, retail managers could use the motivations to assess consumers' propensity to shop and buy on the Internet. In addition to the identified motivations being able to better predict consumers' propensity to buy in a specific retail channel than the compulsive buying scale, the retail managers may want to choose these measures when desiring to obtain richer insights into the underlying reasons for consumer behavior as well as when needing measures less influenced by social desirability bias<sup>2</sup>.

The research offers further retail implications with respect to different communications strategies that may be appropriate to reach the identified consumer segments. For example, for the consumer segment high on the product and variety motive, Internet retailers should stress this quality of their shopping site in their communications. For the segments high on motivations to buy unobserved or avoid social interaction, communications should include highlighting the consumers' ability to do so when buying online. Finally, the retailers should strive to develop exciting and interactive shopping sites to stimulate consumers' immediate positive feelings and thus appeal to the customer segment most desiring such features.

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that compulsive buying scale is more strongly correlated with social desirability bias ( $\rho = -.26, p < .01$ ) than are the shopping and buying motivations ( $\rho$ s = .07 to -.15).

The present research also has implications for public policy officials. Since the Internet retail environment allows for ease of shopping, enables consumers to buy unobserved, and provides a stimulating experience, it may encourage compulsive buying. This claim is supported by our finding that consumers in the compulsive buyers cluster segment reported spending 50 percent *more* of their fashion dollars on the Internet than at traditional retail stores (i.e., 60/40 percent), compared to the non-compulsive cluster segments, who reported spending about equally across the two retail channels (50 percent of fashion budget spent on the Internet versus 49 percent in retail stores). The Internet appears to be a preferred buying medium for compulsive buyers. The above discussed features of the Internet environment may further contribute to conversion of more vulnerable consumers into becoming compulsive buyers. In addition, the Internet retail environment has been found to stimulate an addiction to buying on the Internet (e.g., Black, Belsare, and Schlosser 1999). This finding could be due to the ease of accumulating a large number of items in a shopping cart and the ease of paying (e.g., express check-out). This relative ease may, in turn, lead to a greater accumulation of consumer debt. Public policy officials may want to consider whether guidelines should be established that would help retailers identify compulsive and problematic buyers, and remove them from some of their communications (e.g., weekly newsletters) so as not to spur them repeatedly into buying sprees (Black et al. 1999).

Finally, retail researchers and public officials could use the identified shopping motivations to predict compulsive buyers without actually directly asking consumers the sensitive questions contained in the compulsive buying scale. Shopping motivations thus may provide another important method of identifying the consumer segment with the strongest compulsive buying tendencies.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

One limitation of the present research pertains to the nature of the sample used to test the hypotheses. Our sample was comprised of relatively affluent female customers of an upscale Internet clothing retailer and is thus not representative of a general consumer population. Additionally, having a single sample resulted in the necessity of using the same sample for exploratory analysis of the shopping motivations measures as well as for hypotheses testing. Now that the shopping motivation measures are developed and an initial testing of hypotheses has been performed, replication of the results across different samples is needed. Thus, the generalizability of the research findings requires additional research and the present research findings should also be replicated in other contexts.

While the sample represents a limitation of this research, at the same time, the choice of the sample enabled us to combine our survey data with actual purchase data provided by the Internet retailer. This combination allowed us to validate the existence of the consumer segment identified only with their shopping motivations as compulsive buyers with actual purchase data, thereby increasing confidence in our predictions and the obtained results.

An interesting topic needing further attention is determining consumers' propensity to shop and buy online depending on their compulsive buying tendency. While the present research offers some indication that compulsive buyers may favor Internet over traditional stores, the findings are not conclusive and should be further investigated using a non-Internet based sample.

Research in which click-stream or scanner data are collected in addition to shopping and buying motivations is also needed, as these two data sources together would be able to provide a

more complete picture of both consumers' shopping and buying behaviors, as well as the underlying reasons for their behavior.

Additional future research should investigate topics such as the relationship of compulsive buying and Internet addiction, compulsive buying at online auction sites and consumer motivations to buy from an online auction site as compared to an online retail store as well as through other retail formats, such as television shopping channels and catalogs.

**TABLE 1**  
**Compulsive Buying Scale**

Scale items
My closet has unopened shopping bags in it.
Others might consider me a "shopaholic".
Much of my life centers around buying things.
Buy things I don't need.*
Buy things I did not plan to buy.*
I consider myself an impulse purchaser.

Note: From Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney and Monroe (2008). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, except items denoted by \*, which were responses to a question "How often do you...?" and were anchored at 1 = never, and 7 = very often.

**TABLE 2**  
**Motivations to Shop/Buy on the Internet: Principal Component Analysis**

Motivations to shop/buy on the Internet as opposed to bricks-and-mortar retail stores	Buying un-observed	Avoiding social interaction	Product/information variety	Immediate positive feelings
<i>Buying unobserved</i>				
No one can see me buy.	<b>.96</b>	.00	-.02	.01
No one can see how much I buy.	<b>.97</b>	-.02	-.02	.00
No one can see what I buy.	<b>.95</b>	.04	.01	-.04
It is easier to shop without my family or partner knowing.	<b>.79</b>	-.02	.02	.07
<i>Avoiding social interaction</i>				
I can avoid other shoppers in retail stores.	.07	<b>.85</b>	.05	-.07
I do not like to interact with the sales clerks.	-.14	<b>.95</b>	-.03	.06
I do not like to shop where people know me.	.29	<b>.55</b>	-.02	.03
<i>Product and information variety</i>				
There are more product choices.	.08	-.02	<b>.89</b>	-.13
There are more choices of where to shop.	-.04	-.01	<b>.86</b>	-.07
It is easier to find things I like available in the right size.	-.06	.05	<b>.79</b>	.05
I like to see a lot of products in a short time.	-.07	.00	<b>.72</b>	.21
I can gather a lot of information on the latest fashions in a short time.	.10	-.02	<b>.62</b>	.15
<i>Immediate positive feelings</i>				
I can satisfy my urge to shop and buy faster.	-.12	.16	-.00	<b>.84</b>
I can get more immediate pleasure from buying.	.04	-.02	-.01	<b>.89</b>
Internet buying can get me out of a bad mood faster.	.05	-.05	-.07	<b>.90</b>
The Internet shopping experience is more exciting.	.08	-.07	.09	<b>.78</b>

**TABLE 3**  
**Inter-Construct Correlations and Reliabilities**

	Compulsive buying	Buying unobserved	Avoiding interaction	Product/ information variety	Immediate positive feelings
Compulsive buying	.85				
Buying unobserved	.35***	.94			
Avoiding interaction	.12**	.41***	.75		
Product/ information variety	.08*	.13**	.18***	.82	
Immediate positive feelings	.41***	.52***	.46***	.35***	.88

Notes: On the diagonal, construct reliability is displayed, and below the diagonal, correlations between the constructs are reported. Partial correlations after controlling for social desirability bias are reported. \*\*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \*\* =  $p < .05$ ; \* =  $p < .10$

**TABLE 4**  
**Comparison of Motivations to Shop/buy on the Internet**  
**Based on the Compulsive Buying Index: Hypotheses Testing Results**

Variables	Standardized regression coefficient	t-statistic	Hypotheses testing outcome
<i>Shopping motives</i>			
Buying unobserved	.34	6.19**	H1 supported
Avoiding interaction	.13	2.21*	H2 supported
Product/ information variety	.06	1.02	H3/4 not supported
Immediate positive feelings	.42	7.75**	H5 supported
<i>Self-reported behaviors</i>			
Average \$ spent at top 5 retail stores per month	.15	2.49*	
Average \$ spent at top 5 Internet stores per month	.23	3.87**	
Total \$ spent on clothing at retail stores per month <sup>a</sup>	.21	3.58**	
Total \$ spent on clothing at Internet stores per month <sup>a</sup>	.25	4.42**	
Frequency of buying from top 5 retail stores per month	.27	4.62**	
Frequency of buying from top 5 Internet stores per month	.20	3.36**	

Note: The listed variables had a role of a dependent variable, and compulsive buying index was the independent variable in the analyses.

Social desirability bias was used as a covariate. \*\*  $p$ -value  $< .01$ ; \*  $p$ -value  $< .05$ .

<sup>a</sup> Measured on a scale 1 = \$0-50; 2 = \$51-100; 3 = \$101-200; 4 = \$201-500; 5 = \$501-750; 6 = \$751+

**TABLE 5**  
**Cluster Analysis Results**

<i>Cluster</i>	<i>Bricks-and-mortar buyer</i>	<i>Compulsive buyer</i>	<i>Product and info seeker</i>	<i>Anti-social info seeker</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Shopping motives</i>					
	<i>n = 89</i>	<i>n = 54</i>	<i>n = 114</i>	<i>n = 48</i>	
Buying unobserved	1.47	<b>4.59</b>	1.28	1.53	.000
Avoiding interaction	2.01	<b>4.02</b>	1.81	4.45	.000
Product and information variety	3.27	<b>5.52</b>	5.68	5.47	.000
Immediate positive feelings	3.27	<b>3.65</b>	1.55	2.60	.000
<i>Compulsive buying index and actual purchase data - MANOVA</i>					
Compulsive buying index	14.93	<b>22.04</b>	15.76	17.45	.000
Total \$ spent 2001-04	587.32	<b>1,193.37</b>	685.93	758.11	.053
Total # of purchases 2001-04	3.87	<b>7.20</b>	4.89	5.54	.054
Highest \$ amount on any purchase (2001-04)	194.91	<b>253.23</b>	188.30	185.64	.033

**TABLE 6**  
**Profiling the Compulsive Buying Segment Identified through Shopping Motives Cluster**

Variables	Compulsive buyers as identified by the shopping motives cluster
<i>Demographic characteristics:</i>	
Number of respondents classified in the segment	54
Gender	100% female
Age	53
Marital status	67% married
Average household income	\$82,000
Highest education attained <sup>a</sup>	4.81
<i>Self-reported buying behavior:</i>	
Average \$ spent at top five retail stores/month	247
Average \$ spent at top five Internet stores/month	282
Total \$ spent on clothing at retail stores/per month <sup>b</sup>	2.78
Total \$ spent on clothing at Internet stores/per month <sup>b</sup>	3.04
Frequency of buying from top 5 retail stores per month	2.53
Frequency of buying from top 5 Internet stores per month	3.88
% of total fashion budget spent on Internet (vs. retail)	60 (40)
Number of major credit cards owned	4.18
Number of major credit cards used	2.59
Number of major credit cards paid in full each month	1.67

<sup>a</sup> Measured on a scale 1 = less than high school; 2 = high school degree; 3 = some college; 4 = college degree; 5 = some graduate school; 6 = graduate degree.

<sup>b</sup> Measured on a scale 1 = \$0-50; 2 = \$51-100; 3 = \$101-200; 4 = \$201-500; 5 = \$501-750; 6 = \$751+

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