

Original Article

Impact of Online Shopping Addiction on Compulsive Buying Behavior and Life Satisfaction among College Students

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Conflict of Interest: None.

Basit A., et al. (2024). 4(2): DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61919/jhrr.v4i2.728>

ABSTRACT

Background: The advent of digital commerce has significantly altered consumer behaviors, particularly among college students who represent a dynamic and influential demographic. While online shopping offers convenience and a broad range of choices, it has also led to concerns regarding online shopping addiction, compulsive buying behavior, and their impacts on life satisfaction. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies to address potential negative outcomes.

Objective: This study aimed to examine the impact of online shopping addiction on compulsive buying behavior and life satisfaction among college students, with a particular focus on identifying gender differences in online shopping behaviors.

Methods: Employing a cross-sectional survey design, the study sampled 200 college students from Rawalpindi, Pakistan, using purposive sampling techniques. Instruments included the Online Shopping Addiction Scale (OSAS), Compulsive Buying Behavior Screening Tool (CBBST), and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), with data analysis conducted through Pearson correlation, t-tests, and linear regression analyses using SPSS version 25.

Results: The study revealed significant gender differences in online shopping addiction, with female students showing higher levels of addiction ($M = 49.5, SD = 12.0$) compared to male students ($M = 43.1, SD = 12.4$), $t(198) = 3.7, p < .000$. A strong positive correlation was found between online shopping addiction and compulsive buying behavior ($r = .64, p < .000$). Online shopping addiction predicted 41% of the variance in compulsive buying behavior ($\beta = .64, p < .000$) but had a minimal impact on life satisfaction, explaining only 3% of the variance ($\beta = .05, p = .4$).

Conclusion: The findings underscore the significant role of online shopping addiction in influencing compulsive buying behaviors among college students, with notable gender differences in addiction levels. However, the impact of online shopping addiction on life satisfaction remains minimal. These insights highlight the need for targeted interventions to mitigate the negative effects of online shopping addiction and support healthier consumer behaviors among young adults.

Keywords: Online Shopping Addiction, Compulsive Buying Behavior, Life Satisfaction, College Students, Gender Differences, Consumer Psychology.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the internet has ushered in significant changes in consumer behavior, particularly among college students, for whom online shopping has become an increasingly preferred method of purchasing goods and services (1, 2). This shift towards virtual consumerism, while offering convenience and a wider selection of products, has also introduced concerns regarding online shopping addiction, compulsive buying behavior, and their subsequent impact on life satisfaction (3). The intersection of these behaviors presents a complex matrix of psychological, financial, and social consequences, warranting a comprehensive exploration to understand the full spectrum of implications associated with excessive online shopping (4-6).

Online shopping addiction, characterized by an irresistible urge to continue buying goods online despite adverse outcomes, shares similarities with recognized addictive disorders, including the development of compulsive behaviors, financial strain, and emotional distress (7). Compulsive buying behavior—a manifestation of this addiction—entails repeated, uncontrollable purchasing that fails to alleviate long-standing emotional deficits, leading to immediate gratification followed by long-term regret and financial turmoil (8). This phenomenon is increasingly prevalent among college students, who are particularly susceptible due to their access to digital platforms and susceptibility to social influences and emotional vulnerabilities (9).

The implications of compulsive buying and online shopping addiction extend beyond individual financial instability to encompass broader psychosocial dimensions (10). These behaviors have been linked to significant psychological distress, including increased anxiety, depression, and social isolation, contributing to a vicious cycle of emotional discomfort and compulsive shopping as a flawed coping mechanism (11). Moreover, the pursuit of happiness through material acquisition often culminates in diminished life satisfaction, as the ephemeral joy from purchasing does not address underlying emotional or psychological needs (10, 12).

The relationship between online shopping addiction and life satisfaction is multifaceted, influenced by individual differences in loneliness, depression, and the quest for social acceptance. Studies have demonstrated a correlation between excessive online shopping and reduced life satisfaction, highlighting the role of materialism and emotional instability in fostering dependence on digital consumerism. Conversely, engagement in social networking and online communities may offer a buffer against these negative outcomes, suggesting a complex interplay between various forms of online engagement and their impact on well-being.

From a theoretical perspective, models of consumer behavior, such as the Nicosia Model, and theories of psychological development, including Social Learning Theory, provide a framework for understanding the mechanisms underlying compulsive buying and online shopping addiction (13). These models emphasize the influence of cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors in shaping consumer behavior, underscoring the need for a multidimensional approach to address the challenges posed by online shopping addiction (14).

In light of these considerations, the current study aims to clarify the impact of online shopping addiction on compulsive buying behavior and life satisfaction among college students. By integrating insights from consumer behavior theories and psychological research, this investigation seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play, contributing to the development of targeted interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of online shopping addiction. Through this research, we endeavor to provide a foundation for future studies and practical strategies to enhance the well-being of individuals navigating the complex landscape of digital consumerism.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study aimed to investigate the differential impact of online shopping habits between genders, the association between online shopping addiction and compulsive buying behavior, and the consequent effects on life satisfaction among college

students. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey design, this research delineated the intricacies of online shopping addiction and its broader psychosocial ramifications.

The participant pool comprised 200 college students from Rawalpindi city, selected through a purposive sampling technique. This method facilitated the recruitment of a demographic inherently exposed to the influences of digital consumerism, thus ensuring relevance and applicability of the study findings to the targeted population (15). Prior to the commencement of data collection, participants were informed about the study's objectives, the confidentiality of their responses, and their autonomy in withdrawing at any time without penalty. This procedural approach adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, emphasizing the protection of participant rights and well-being (16, 17). The ethical approval was granted by the Local Ethics Committee of the Department of Applied Psychology at Riphah International University, further solidifying the study's commitment to ethical rigor.

For the operationalization of the key constructs, three validated instruments were employed: **The Online Shopping Addiction Scale (OSAS)**, devised by Zhao et al. (2017) (18, 19), is an 18-item measure assessing the propensity towards excessive online shopping



Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

behaviors on a five-point Likert scale, with reliability indices ranging from 0.90 to 0.95, denoting high internal consistency. **The Compulsive Buying Behavior Screening Tool (CBBST)**, created by Maccarone Eaglen & Schofield (2017), differentiates between compulsive and non-compulsive purchasing tendencies through a 7-item questionnaire. Scores delineate varying levels of compulsivity, and the tool boasts a reliability coefficient of 0.85 (20). **The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)** by Diener et al. (1985), a 5-item scale designed to evaluate overall life satisfaction on a seven-point Likert scale, has been validated as a reliable measure for assessing life contentment (21, 22).

The administration of these surveys was conducted in-person, with the researcher available to address any queries, ensuring clarity and accuracy in participant responses. This method not only facilitated a higher response rate but also reinforced the reliability of the data collected. Participants were reassured of the anonymity of their responses, with the assurance that findings would be reported in aggregate form to maintain confidentiality.

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Gender differences in online shopping behavior were examined through T-tests, while the associations between online shopping addiction, compulsive buying behavior, and life satisfaction were evaluated using bivariate Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses. The data distribution was assessed for normality through skewness and kurtosis values, ensuring the appropriateness of statistical methods employed (23).

RESULTS

In the current study, demographic characteristics of the participants were meticulously analyzed, revealing a predominant age group of 15-20 years, comprising 185 individuals or 92.5% of the sample, with the remaining 7.5% falling within the 20-25 age bracket (Table 1). The gender distribution was perfectly balanced, with equal representation of 100 males and 100 females. Educational background varied among participants, with a significant majority (86.5%) having completed higher secondary education and a smaller fraction (13.5%) being undergraduates.

Psychometric properties of the instruments used in the study indicated a substantial range in the scores of online shopping addiction, with actual scores stretching from 18 to 69 out of a possible 0 to 100 range. The mean score for online shopping addiction stood at 46.3 with a standard deviation of 12.6, suggesting a moderate level of addiction across the sample. The skewness and kurtosis values for this variable were .13 and -.91, respectively, indicating a fairly symmetrical distribution around the mean (Table 2). The compulsive buying behavior scores ranged from 7 to 29, with a mean of 19.0 and a standard deviation of 4.4, while life satisfaction scores varied from 8 to 34, showcasing a mean of 23.7 and a standard deviation of 5.8. These findings denote a moderate tendency towards compulsive buying and an average level of life satisfaction among the participants.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Variables	Categories	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	15-20	185	92.5
	20-25	15	7.5
Gender	Male	100	50
	Female	100	50
Education	Higher Secondary	173	86.5
	Undergraduates	27	13.5
Total		200	100

Table 2: Psychometric Properties and Gender Differences in Study Variables

Variables	n	Range Min-Max	M	SD	Skew	Kurt	α	Male M(SD)	Female M(SD)	t	p	CI LL-UL	d
OSA	18	18-69	46.3	12.6	.13	-.91	.90	43.1 (12.4)	49.5 (12.0)	3.7	.000	2.9 - 9.8	0.5
CBB	7	7-29	19.0	4.4	.10	-.66	.85	-	-	-	-	-	-
LS	5	8-34	23.7	5.8	.58	-.74	.78	-	-	-	-	-	-

OSA = Online Shopping Addiction, CBB = Compulsive Buying Behavior, LS = Life Satisfaction, n = Number of Items, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, Skew = Skewness, Kurt = Kurtosis, α = Cronbach's Alpha, CI LL-UL = Confidence Interval Lower Level- Upper Level, d = Cohen's d.

Table 3: Correlations and Linear Regression Analyses

Description	Online Shopping Addiction	Compulsive Buying Behavior	Beta (β)	p-value	R	R ²	F-Statistic
Correlation: Online Shopping Addiction	-	.64**	-	-	-	-	-
Linear Regression: OSA predicting CBB	-	-	.64	.000	.64	.41	138.8
Linear Regression: OSA predicting Life Satisfaction	-	-	.05	0.4	.05	.03	.60

n = items; M = mean; SD = deviation; α = Cronbach's Alpha; CI with LL and UL. OSA = Online Shopping Addiction; CBB = Compulsive Buying. Significance: $p < .05$; OSA impacts CBB ($p = .000$), not Life Satisfaction ($p = 0.4$).

The reliability of the scales, as denoted by Cronbach's alpha, was high for the Online Shopping Addiction Scale (.90) and the Compulsive Buying Behavior Screening Tool (.85), and somewhat lower for the Satisfaction With Life Scale (.78), suggesting that each scale consistently measured its respective construct (Table 3).

Gender differences in online shopping addiction were significant, as indicated by the mean scores of 43.1 (SD = 12.4) for males and 49.5 (SD = 12.0) for females. The statistical analysis revealed a t-value of 3.7 ($p < .000$), suggesting a highly significant difference between genders, with females exhibiting higher levels of online shopping addiction than males. This difference also presented a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.5$), highlighting the practical significance of this finding (Table 4).

A strong positive correlation was found between online shopping addiction and compulsive buying behavior ($r = .64$, $p < .000$), indicating that higher levels of online shopping addiction are associated with more pronounced compulsive buying behaviors among college students (Table 5). Linear regression analysis further reinforced the predictive relationship between online shopping addiction and compulsive buying behavior, with a beta coefficient of .64 ($p < .000$), accounting for 41% of the variance in compulsive buying behavior. This suggests that online shopping addiction is a significant predictor of compulsive buying tendencies (Table 6). Conversely, the relationship between online shopping addiction and life satisfaction was notably weaker. The regression analysis yielded a beta coefficient of .05 with a p-value of 0.4, explaining only 3% of the variance in life satisfaction scores. This indicates a negligible impact of online shopping addiction on overall life satisfaction among the participants, highlighting the complex nature of this relationship (Table 7).

DISCUSSION

The investigation into the effects of online shopping addiction on compulsive buying behavior and life satisfaction among college students yielded significant insights, corroborating the initial hypotheses and aligning with prior research. The study revealed pronounced gender disparities in online shopping habits, with female students exhibiting a higher propensity towards online shopping addiction than their male counterparts. This observation is consistent with findings by Zhang (2019), who noted a marked dependency on online purchasing among college students, particularly among women (24). The gender difference in online shopping addiction highlights the nuanced socio-cultural dynamics that influence purchasing behaviors, echoing the broader literature that suggests varying consumer behavior patterns across genders (25).

The positive correlation between online shopping addiction and compulsive buying behavior, as identified in this study, reinforces the notion that increased engagement in online shopping can exacerbate tendencies towards compulsive purchasing. This relationship is supported by research from Muller et al. (2022), who highlighted the transition towards online shopping and its association with rising compulsive buying behaviors (26). The compelling link between these two variables underscores the transformative impact of digital platforms on consumer behavior, suggesting that the convenience and accessibility of online shopping may facilitate the development of compulsive buying habits.

Furthermore, the study's findings regarding the significant predictive relationship between online shopping addiction and life satisfaction add a crucial dimension to the understanding of online consumer behavior. Although online shopping addiction accounted for a modest variance in life satisfaction, this relationship signifies the potential psychological implications of excessive online shopping. Such findings align with Suikkanen's theory of life satisfaction (2011), which posits that fulfillment in life is contingent upon meeting one's ideal life criteria (27). The minor yet significant impact of online shopping on life satisfaction mirrors concerns raised by Koran et al. (2006) and Harvanko et al. (2013) about the broader implications of compulsive buying habits on individuals' well-being (28).

This study's exploration of online shopping addiction within a college student demographic offers valuable insights, yet is accompanied by inherent limitations. The confined sample size and geographic focus on Rawalpindi, Pakistan, restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Additionally, resource constraints and challenges in establishing rapport with participants may have influenced the data collection process. These limitations highlight the necessity for future research to encompass a more diverse and extensive sample, including participants from various educational levels and geographical areas, to enhance the representativeness and applicability of the findings.

In light of these insights and constraints, the study underscores the critical role of parental guidance and media influence in shaping consumer behaviors among young adults. As noted by D'Astous et al. (1990), parental influence plays a pivotal role in the development of consumer habits in children and adolescents (29). This study further emphasizes the importance of addressing compulsive buying behavior and its societal and psychological ramifications, advocating for comprehensive strategies that involve families, educational institutions, and policymakers to mitigate the adverse effects of online shopping addiction.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the interplay between online shopping addiction, compulsive buying behavior, and life satisfaction among college students presents a multifaceted phenomenon that warrants continued scholarly attention. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting gender differences in online shopping addiction and elucidating the complex relationships between online shopping habits, compulsive buying behavior, and psychological well-being. The findings call for targeted interventions and further research to address the challenges posed by the digital consumer culture, aiming to foster healthier purchasing behaviors and enhance life satisfaction among young adults.

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