

The Relationship Between Compulsive Buying And Internet Addiction In The Context Of Consumer Behavior

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Abstract— Compulsive buying and internet addiction represent significant phenomena in contemporary consumer society, potentially leading to negative consequences on both individual and societal levels. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between these two phenomena and analyze their impact on consumer behavior. The research is based on a questionnaire survey, the results of which provide insights into respondents' behavioral patterns, shopping habits, and intensity of internet use. The study focuses on identifying potential factors contributing to the development of compulsive buying in connection with excessive use of digital technologies. The findings suggest that a higher degree of internet addiction may correlate with compulsive purchasing decisions and an increased tendency toward excessive shopping. Additionally, the research highlights the need for further investigation into the mechanisms through which the digital environment influences consumer behavior, as well as the potential for preventive measures.

Keywords— digital technologies, compulsive buying, consumer behavior, impulsive decision-making, internet addiction

I. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, consumer behavior is increasingly shaped by the pervasive influence of online technologies and media platforms. Two particularly prominent phenomena emerging within this context are compulsive buying and internet addiction. Both have been associated with adverse psychological, financial, and social outcomes, especially among young adults who are the most active users of digital technologies. While previous studies have examined these constructions independently, less attention has been paid to their possible interaction and the mechanisms through which one may influence the other. The present study aims to explore the relationship between compulsive online shopping and internet addiction among university students. Furthermore, it investigates the potential influence of socio-demographic variables such as gender, parental education, and perceived material security during childhood on compulsive shopping behavior. By integrating theoretical insights from behavioral addiction models and empirical data from a targeted population, this research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the complex interplay between digital engagement and maladaptive consumption patterns.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. Compulsive Buying

Compulsive buying, also referred to as oniomania, is a maladaptive form of consumption marked by a persistent and uncontrollable urge to make purchases. While often mistaken for impulsive behavior, it reflects a deeper psychological condition situated within the obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) spectrum [1], [2], [3], [4]. Individuals suffering from this disorder frequently engage in repetitive shopping episodes as a means of coping with negative emotional states such as anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem. These episodes are commonly followed by feelings of guilt, shame, or regret, contributing to a cyclical pattern of emotional distress and dysfunctional spending [5]. As a form of behavioral addiction, compulsive buying involves acquiring goods that individuals either do not need or cannot afford, often at the expense of their financial stability and social functioning [6], [4]. Behavior serves as a coping mechanism aimed at relieving psychological discomfort or regaining a sense of control. In some cases, it is linked to other addictive tendencies, such as brand addiction, further highlighting its severity and multifaceted nature [7], [8]. The phenomenon is prevalent globally and is influenced by a variety of factors, including individual consumer characteristics—such as hedonistic orientation and specific demographic variables—as well as contextual factors like the retail environment [9]. Notably, aggressive and manipulative marketing strategies can intensify compulsive tendencies, raising ethical concerns regarding consumer protection and the responsibilities of marketers [6]. Although compulsive buying is generally viewed through a pathological lens due to its harmful consequences, some perspectives propose

that it may also serve as a form of self-expression or an emotionally motivated coping strategy for certain individuals. This duality emphasizes the complexity of modern consumer behavior and the need for a nuanced understanding of its psychological and social dimensions.

B. Internet Addiction

The psychological and social consequences of Internet addiction (IA) are profound, affecting both individuals and society at large. Internet addiction manifests through various symptoms, including increased tolerance, loss of control, and withdrawal symptoms, all of which are associated with significant mental health issues such as anxiety and depression [10]. The ubiquitous presence of the internet in modern life fosters both connectivity and isolation, as individuals may engage more with digital platforms than with face-to-face interactions [11]. IA has been closely linked to a range of psychological disorders. Among the most prominent is social anxiety, which intensifies fear and discomfort in social situations, further exacerbating individuals' avoidance of offline social contact [10]. Excessive internet use also appears to disrupt cognitive functioning, leading to difficulties in sustaining attention and making effective decisions [12]. While the internet offers opportunities for increased connectivity, it frequently contributes to social withdrawal and diminished in-person interaction, fostering a sense of isolation [11]. Moreover, the normalization of digital communication has driven cultural shifts in social norms and expectations surrounding interpersonal relationships and communication styles [12].

Internet and social media addiction among young people manifests in various ways, significantly impacting their emotional, cognitive, and social functioning. These manifestations are often characterized by excessive and uncontrolled use of technology, leading to negative consequences in personal and social life. Research identifies several common signs of this addiction, which can be categorized into emotional, cognitive, and social aspects. Young people addicted to the internet often experience heightened levels of anxiety and depression, particularly when they do not have access to the internet or social media [13], [14]. Additionally, there is a significant emotional investment in online activities, which leads to mood swings and irritability when offline. Internet addiction also manifests in the cognitive domain, where young individuals demonstrate a persistent interest in online activities, disrupting their ability to focus on offline tasks [15]. Furthermore, it is associated with high impulsivity, especially in planning, making it difficult for them to regulate their online behavior and increasing their tendency to make impulsive decisions [13]. Social manifestations of addiction include a tendency to withdraw from personal social interactions, which can lead to weakened social bonds and feelings of loneliness [16]. Addiction also results in neglecting academic, work responsibilities, and personal relationships, which can have long-term negative consequences [15], [17].

C. Social Media and Compulsive Buying

Social media has become a key factor in shaping young people's purchasing decisions. Young adults often rely on recommendations from friends and acquaintances on social media, significantly influencing their shopping behavior [18]. Influencer marketing is another powerful tool that impacts purchase decisions, as influencers with large followings create a sense of trust, which businesses leverage through sponsored posts [19]. The integration of e-commerce into platforms like Instagram and TikTok facilitates impulsive purchases, contributing to the rise of shopping addiction among young people [19], [20].

Social comparison and materialism play a significant role in compulsive shopping behavior. Social media encourages comparison of life and possessions with others, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and a desire for material goods. Materialism, fueled by the portrayal of lifestyle by influencers and celebrities on social media, leads to the development of materialistic values and compulsive shopping [21], [22].

This relationship is further mediated by envy and FOMO (fear of missing out), where social media comparison increases impulsive purchases to compensate for negative emotions [23]. FOMO is associated with a constant stream of information about new trends and products, creating pressure on young people to engage in impulsive purchases to avoid missing out on opportunities [24].

Impulsive shopping is supported by techniques such as targeted advertisements, time-limited offers, and exclusive promotions that create urgency and reduce the ability to make rational decisions [20], [25].

Smartphone and social media addiction are other factors leading to compulsive shopping behavior. Young people who are addicted to smartphones are constantly exposed to marketing messages and influences, increasing the likelihood of impulsive purchases [24]. Social media addiction also supports

financial social comparison and materialism, which are key driving forces of compulsive shopping [26], [27]. Materialism, as a mediating factor, plays a role between social media use and compulsive shopping behavior. Social media promotes materialism through the display of wealth and lifestyle by influencers and celebrities, leading to a desire for material goods and compulsive shopping [21], [22].

The relationship between social media fatigue and compulsive shopping may be mediated by loneliness, as young people use shopping to cope with negative emotions [28].

Self-control and media literacy are important in mitigating the negative effects of social media. Young people with higher self-control are less prone to impulsive shopping, as they can better regulate their purchasing decisions [29], [25]. Media literacy helps young people critically evaluate marketing messages, enabling more informed decision-making and reducing the risk of impulsive purchases [25].

III. METHOD

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between these two phenomena and analyze their impact on consumer behavior. Based on previous theoretical knowledge and empirical research, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of internet addiction and the level of compulsive shopping.

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between gender and the level of compulsive shopping.

H3: There is a statistically significant relationship between parental education and the level of compulsive shopping.

H4: There is a statistically significant relationship between perceived material security in childhood and the level of compulsive shopping.

To measure the level of compulsive online shopping, the COSS – Compulsive Online Shopping Scale, developed by [30], was used. This is a validated tool specifically focused on the online environment, based on behavioral addiction theory. The scale consists of 28 items rated on a Likert scale (typically ranging from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree), capturing five factors: salience (the importance of shopping in an individual's life), mood modification, conflicts, relapse, and withdrawal symptoms.

The items are aggregated into a total score, with higher scores indicating a higher level of compulsive online shopping. The authors confirmed high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.90$) and a good structure of factors in various panel samples. The level of internet addiction was measured using a scale based on the Internet Addiction Disorder Test, as described in the Italian study by [31]. This tool was adapted from [32] and consists of 20 items measuring behaviors associated with excessive internet use – such as problems in interpersonal relationships, neglect of duties, emotional reactions to the absence of the internet, and disruption of daily routines. Respondents answer on a scale that reflects the frequency of behavior occurrence (e.g., 1 = never to 5 = always). The total score serves as an indicator of the severity of internet addiction – the higher the score, the higher the level of problematic behavior related to internet use. In the referenced study, the scale demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$).

A. Research Sample

Data collection took place in October 2024. The sample consisted of students from the Faculty of Management and Business at the University of Prešov in Slovakia and was selected through a convenience sampling method. The research sample consisted of 110 respondents aged 17 to 25 years ($M = 19.80$; $SD = 1.56$). In terms of gender composition, 54.5% of the participants were female and 45.5% were male. Most respondents reported growing up with one sibling (47.3%) or two siblings (24.5%); 9.1% of respondents had no siblings, while 19.1% grew up with three or more siblings.

Regarding the parents' education level, the highest proportion of mothers had completed secondary education with a high school diploma (62.7%), followed by a second-degree higher education (17.3%) and first-degree higher education (7.3%). A small portion of mothers had only completed secondary education without a high school diploma (7.3%) or a third-degree higher education (2.7%). Similarly, 2.7% of respondents did not know their mother's educational level.

Fathers of the respondents most commonly had completed secondary education with a high school diploma (45.5%), secondary education without a high school diploma (18.2%), or second-degree higher

education (15.5%) or third-degree higher education (7.3%). The father's education was unknown to 5.5% of respondents, and only 0.9% of fathers had completed only basic education.

Most respondents (82.7%) indicated that they lived continuously with both parents during their childhood. Another 9.1% grew up with only their mother after the parents' divorce, 3.6% alternated between both parents, and smaller percentages grew up exclusively with their mother (2.7%) or father (0.9%). One respondent (0.9%) stated that after the parents' divorce, they lived exclusively with their father. Subjective perceptions of material security in childhood indicated that 68.8% of respondents felt they had a constant abundance of things they wanted, 20.2% experienced occasional lack, 7.3% reported a constant surplus, and 3.7% experienced constant deprivation.

IV. RESULTS

In this study, the level of compulsive buying was measured using the COSS (Compulsive Online Shopping Scale), which captures aspects such as salience, mood modification, conflict, relapse, and withdrawal symptoms. COSS scores ranged from 27 to 151 points, with a mean score of 51.29 (SD = 24.10). These results indicate considerable variability in shopping behavior among young adults, with a portion of the sample displaying elevated compulsive tendencies. Regarding internet addiction, results from the scale based on the Internet Addiction Disorder Test showed that respondents' scores ranged from 20 to 86 points, with a mean value of 46.52 (SD = 12.12). This score suggests a moderate level of internet dependency among most participants; however, cases at the higher end of the scale indicate the presence of individuals at greater risk. Following the descriptive analysis of the key variables—compulsive online shopping and internet addiction—the next step in the research involves testing the proposed hypotheses. The aim is to determine whether statistically significant relationships exist between compulsive shopping behavior and selected factors, including the level of internet addiction, gender, parental education, and perceived material security during childhood. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used for the analysis due to the ordinal nature of some variables and the non-parametric distribution of the data. Each hypothesis was tested independently, and the results are presented in Table 1.

TABLE I RESULTS OF THE CORRELATION ANALYSIS (SPEARMAN'S RHO) BETWEEN SELECTED VARIABLES AND THE LEVEL OF COMPULSIVE SHOPPING (COSS)

Variable	ρ (rho)	p-value
Internet addiction	0.277*	0.003
Gender	0.203*	0.045
Mother's education	0.093	0.336
Father's education	0.277*	0.003
Material security in childhood	-0.069	0.478

* $p < 0.05$

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of internet addiction and the level of compulsive shopping. To test this hypothesis, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used. The analysis confirmed a statistically significant positive correlation between the internet addiction score and the compulsive shopping score ($\rho = 0.277$; $p = 0.003$). This result suggests that respondents with a higher level of internet addiction also tend to exhibit higher levels of compulsive shopping. Hypothesis H1 was supported.

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between gender and the level of compulsive shopping. This hypothesis was also tested using Spearman's correlation between the variable "gender" (coded likely binary) and the COSS score. The result showed a weak but statistically significant positive correlation ($\rho = 0.203$; $p = 0.045$). Higher scores in women suggest that females exhibited higher levels of compulsive shopping compared to men. Hypothesis H2 was supported.

H3: There is a statistically significant relationship between the parents' education level and the level of compulsive shopping. The mother's education did not show a statistically significant relationship with the COSS score ($\rho = 0.093$; $p = 0.336$). In contrast, the father's education level showed a statistically significant positive relationship with the level of compulsive shopping ($\rho = 0.277$; $p = 0.003$). This result suggests that respondents with more highly educated fathers tended to have higher scores on the

compulsive shopping scale. Hypothesis H3 was partially supported – it holds true for the father, but not for the mother.

H4: There is a statistically significant relationship between perceived material security in childhood and the level of compulsive shopping. This hypothesis was not supported by the results. The correlation between the subjective perception of material security and compulsive shopping was low and not statistically significant ($\rho = -0.069$; $p = 0.478$), indicating that respondents did not show differences in their tendencies toward compulsive shopping depending on their perceived material security in childhood. Hypothesis H4 was not supported.

These findings indicate that compulsive shopping behavior among young adults is significantly linked to digital behavior (internet use), gender, and certain family background variables, specifically paternal education. However, perceived material circumstances during childhood do not appear to significantly influence this behavior within the sample examined.

V. DISCUSSION

The research findings confirmed a statistically significant positive relationship between the level of internet addiction and the level of compulsive buying. This relationship is consistent with several previous studies indicating that higher digital exposure increases the risk of impulsive and compulsive purchasing decisions [33], [34]. The study also showed that women scored higher on compulsive shopping than men, which aligns with earlier research. For example, [35] states that women are more likely to shop in response to negative emotions and social stimuli, which may lead to compulsive behavior. An interesting finding emerged in the analysis of parental education. While maternal education was not statistically associated with compulsive buying, higher paternal education was linked to higher levels of compulsive shopping. A more affluent environment may also intensify exposure to materialistic values, which are associated with a higher likelihood of compulsive behavior [36]. Conversely, subjective perceptions of material security during childhood were not statistically significantly related to compulsive shopping. This result is surprising, as other studies, such as that by [37], suggest that childhood financial insecurity may influence the development of attitudes toward money and ownership. One possible explanation for this inconsistency is the homogeneity of the research sample (university students), which may suppress differences in perceived economic deprivation. Overall, the study underscores the importance of preventing internet addiction and suggests that future research on compulsive buying should more thoroughly examine the family and cultural factors shaping consumer attitudes. The contemporary digital environment - characterized by constant access to online stores and personalized advertising - significantly contributes to the rise in compulsive shopping. Studies suggest that algorithms used by e-commerce platforms may increase impulsive buying behavior by targeting users with product suggestions based on previous interactions. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among younger generations who are more exposed to digital technologies [38]. The family environment plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' purchasing behavior. Research shows that children growing up in households with parents who tend to engage in compulsive shopping are more likely to develop similar habits. This intergenerational transmission may be driven not only by genetic factors but also by behavioral modeling and the value systems present in the family [39]. Compulsive shopping is frequently linked to emotional and psychological factors such as low self-esteem, depression, or anxiety. Shopping may serve as a coping mechanism for alleviating negative emotions and restoring a sense of control. However, this effect is short-lived and may lead to a vicious cycle of excessive spending followed by feelings of guilt or stress [40].

Findings from recent studies highlight the need for effective intervention programs aimed at preventing and treating compulsive buying. These programs should include financial literacy education, emotional regulation training, and the promotion of healthy purchasing habits. In addition, it is essential to raise awareness of this issue among mental health professionals and the public [41].

VI. CONCLUSION

This study confirms a statistically significant positive relationship between internet addiction and compulsive online shopping, highlighting the potential for digital overuse to escalate maladaptive consumption behaviors. Gender differences were also observed, with female participants displaying

higher levels of compulsive buying, consistent with prior literature. Interestingly, higher paternal education was associated with greater compulsive shopping tendencies, suggesting a possible link to socioeconomic status or value transmission within families. Contrary to expectations, perceived material security during childhood did not significantly correlate with compulsive buying, indicating that subjective economic experiences may not directly influence later shopping behavior in homogeneous youth samples. These findings underscore the importance of preventive measures that focus on media literacy, emotional regulation, and responsible digital consumption - particularly among digitally active young populations. The study has several limitations. The use of a convenience sample composed of university students from a single institution limits the generalizability of the results to broader populations. The cross-sectional design prevents any conclusions about causality between internet use and compulsive buying behavior. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias or inaccuracies in reporting behavior. Finally, the study did not control potentially relevant psychological variables such as anxiety, depression, or impulsivity, which may mediate or moderate the observed relationships. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, diverse and representative samples, and multivariate models that include additional psychological and behavioral factors. Interdisciplinary approaches combining psychology, digital sociology, and marketing science could further clarify the dynamics of consumer behavior in digital contexts.

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