

# Materialism and Compulsive Buying - Conceptual Underpinning

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## ABSTRACT

In the modern life style, compulsive buying is found to be very common and consequently the studies on antecedents of compulsive buying have increased in recent years. Materialism and compulsive buying are the two important factors, which influence the buying decisions of consumers and also distinguish them from each other. India is one of the oldest civilizations and has profound values on money, materialism and consumption. However, during last two decades the wave of globalization has brought India much closer to rest of world both culturally and economically. Advancement of shopping malls, retail brand, exclusive stores and use of media with best of its creativity and reach to persuade consumers has made a positive change in the consumer response to market stimuli. In this perspective, the present study aims at exploring the existence of such behaviours in our society.

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## Introduction

Materialism and compulsive buying behaviour are underscore concepts for marketers, researchers and pollsters. A lot of research has taken place vis-à-vis materialism and compulsive buying in western countries. In the modern life style, compulsive buying is found to be very common and consequently the studies on antecedents of compulsive buying have increased in recent years. The study of emergence of these moot issues needs to be emphasized more in context to Indian culture (Manchanda, 2015; Rao et al., 2013).

India is one of the oldest civilizations and has profound values on money, materialism and consumption (Taneja, 2012). The concept of materialism is not new to Indian culture. Allusion of materialism is in ancient Indian philosophy.

Compulsive buying as a concept is also not a recent origin as well, though the term has been recently in use. The term 'Oniomaniacs' is the technical term used for compulsive buying which means buying maniac. The buying is basic necessity and part and parcel of lifestyle of common man. Compulsive buying is when one indulges in excessive buying.

Compulsive buying emphasises on materialistic values in achieving life goals such as happiness and success (Dittmar, 2007)

Materialistic attitude is one of the determinants of compulsive buying (Yurchisin and Johnson, 2004) and thus influences the buying decisions of consumer. Researchers found out that materialistic attitude are the main cause that gives rise to compulsive buying tendencies

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(Richins, 2004; Dittmar 2002b). Compulsive Buying and Materialistic attitude puts the afflicted person into severe consequences (Faber and O'Guinn, 1989) in terms of personal, social and financial difficulties. Materialism and compulsive buying are the two important factors, which influence the buying decisions of consumers and also distinguish them from each other.

However, during last two decades the wave of globalization has brought India much closure to rest of world both culturally and economically (Manchanda, 2015; Gupta, 2011). There has been drastic change in consumption habits of Indian consumers in general and Indian Youth in particular (Annadurai, P., 2014; Mishra, 2014).

## **Hypothesis Proposition**

Advancement of shopping malls, retail brand, exclusive stores, and use of media with best of its creativity and reach to persuade consumers has made a positive change in the consumer response to market stimuli. It has been found that youth are the most afflicted ones, as the age increases the compulsive buying tendency decreases. Compulsive buying attitude is inversely related to age i.e. youth easily get captured into the clutches of this bad pattern. There have been number of studies that shows how the compulsive buying tendencies emerge among youth, the context of study here is that how these deviants are badly affect the Indian Youth. Compulsive buying and materialism have been studied on vast scale all over the world. The purpose here is to study how these behaviours have affected the youth population in India. Studies have shown that level of affliction varies from person to person. The study tries to determine the relationship between the two concepts under study i.e. materialism and compulsive buying through theoretical reinforcement with focus on India.

## **Conceptual Underpinning**

### **Materialism**

Researchers have contributed towards construct of materialism (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Richins and Dawson, 1992; R W Belk, 1984) and consequences of Materialism (Larsen, et. al., 1999; Sirgy et. al., 1998; Rindfleisch, Burroughs and Denton, 1997).

Materialism has been conceptualized as a personality trait (R W Belk, 1984; 1985) and source of satisfaction in life (Richins, 1987). Materialism is inherent in almost all the cultures (Mukerji, 1983) and is a part of basic human nature and personality (Rubin, 1986). Materialism has also been conceptualized as a value to consumer (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Richins, 1987). People seek pleasure in possessing materialistic things rather than non-materialistic things such as personal associations, personal incidents and personal attainment. Materialism person confers importance to objects rather than people around them and their experiences and achievements in life (Manchiraju, 2015). For them materialism can be measured with the amount of acquisitions they have, which defines their level of success and happiness (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Studies have shown that there is inverse relationship between materialism and well-being (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Kasser and Ryan, 1993; 1996; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Materialistic tendencies get affected by Mass Media/ advertisement, Socializing factors (Parents influence, Peer influence), personality traits, consumer value (Berger, 2015; Inglehart, 2015; Yanshu & Guo, 2014; Craig, 2013; Yang, 2006; Hirschman & Thompson, 1997; McCort, & Malhotra, 1993). It has been said that excessive and uncontrolled spending and consumerism had been the major cause for US financial crisis. (Goodman, 2008)

## **Compulsive Buying**

Compulsive buying is a chronic, excessive and uncontrollable shopping and spending habit (Black, 2007; Faber & O'Guinn, 1989). Compulsive buying has been identified by O'Guinn and Faber as "a response to an uncontrollable drive or desire to obtain, use, or experience a feeling, substance, or activity that leads an individual to repetitively engage in a behavior that will ultimately cause harm to an individual and/or to others". Compulsive buying has harmful psychological and financial consequences such as low self-esteem (Scherhorn et al, 1990), greater level of depression (Sneath et al, 2009) anxiety (O Guinn and Faber, 1989) unmanageable debt. There are immediate positive rewards that reinforce the repetitive buying but these positive rewards are temporary and have negative consequences in long term (Manchanda, 2011; Eccles, 2005; Faber and Christenson, 1996; O Guinn and Faber, 1989). Compulsive buying is an erudite demeanor. People over a period of time acclimatize to the compulsive buying tendencies. The impression of compulsive buying can be observed right from childhood (Halga Dittmar, 2005; Scherhorn et al, 1990). Once habituated it is difficult to hold back (O'Guinn and Faber, 1989).

## **Materialism and Compulsive Buying**

Both compulsive buying and materialism are entrenched during childhood. Materialism is the strongest anticipator of compulsive buying. Materialistic values can be identified by the significance an individual attaches to the ownership and possession of the material objects and compulsive buying tendencies makes people buy objects to covenant with their individuality and disposition issues. Thus materialistic individual are more prone to occupy compulsive buying propensity (Manchanda et. al., 2015).

Compulsive buying is a recent terminology added to the study of Consumer Behavior. Study of consumer behavior has been essential for marketers to understand the psychology of a customer so that they can publicize their products at right time and at right place to magnetize maximum buyers. Mass media plays an important role and act as a tool to the marketers who utilize the advertising to influence people to indulge into buying and spending money that they might otherwise circumvent (Manchanda et. al., 2015). This pressure on marketers to attract maximum buyers leads them to indulge in persuasive and deceptive advertising. There are some buyers who are aware of these tactics of marketers and avoid indulging in buying, but there are others who get swayed with these disingenuous campaigns of marketers. Thus, every time they see a new launch or improved version of existing product they just cannot stop them self from trying it at least once. This impulse of buying become severe and consumes is not able to control his urge to buy things even if they are of no utility to them. This is alarming situation. The behavior in which consumer indulges in excessive buying and lacks the impulse control from indulging in buying behavior is called compulsive buying. Compulsive buying is a behavior of people when they cannot stop themselves from indulging in wrong, harmful and unnecessary Shopping.

## **Materialism and compulsive buying in India**

The current perception and behaviour of an individual is the outcome of his what he experiences. These past and current incidents sculpt the perspective for future. This study of consumer behaviour would help in understanding the relationship between one-factor leads to the other. For instance how materialism leads to

compulsive buying behaviour and what is the kind of relationship exists between materialistic behaviour and compulsive buying behaviour.

The increase in consumer culture has made the societies more prone to materialistic behavior and people of those societies are more prone to compulsive buying behavior (Workman, 2010). Indian is also showing the signs of such tendencies due to influence of west (Manchanda, 2012; Podoshen, Li & Zhang, 2011; Durvasula & Lysonski, 2010). Due to increasing fear of development of such behaviours in Indian youth there is a need to conduct a thorough analysis such behaviours.

Conventionally, Indian population is more oriented towards culture and religion convictions and this can be the reason to believe that consumer culture in India is still to push the materialistic tendencies with compulsive buying tendencies in the country. Youth are most sensitive to adapt to such changes in society, as they are most susceptible and subtle. Thus the area has become of great concern that whether the youth population is getting prone to materialistic tendencies and compulsive buying tendencies.

There are two perspectives i.e. social and psychological those have been considered for the study of materialism (Kasser et al., 2004). As per social perspective, social agents (i.e. family, friends etc.) are source of materialistic value and their impact is higher where the accumulation of materialistic possessions is considered as an indicator of success and achievement. As per psychological perspective, an individual's materialistic values are determined by the circumstances and emotional state. There have been many researches on both socialization and psychological perspectives but there is hardly any attempt to integrate them.

## Discussion

Based on the above assessment of the concepts and their evaluation, the fact has been highlighted that the youth of urban developing countries are most disposed to development of compulsive buying habits. Both the factors are affected by social, cultural and financial circumstances of an individual.

The hypothesis proposed in the study gets the sustenance from the literature. The review of literature ensues to determine the positive relationship between materialism and compulsive buying i.e. higher level of materialism supports high compulsive buying tendencies. Both psychologically and socially, the effect of materialism and compulsive buying can be seen as an increasing influence of west on India. This has resulted in increased unrequired and unethical consumption. The deep-rooted cultural impact is also being encumbered.

## Implications

Materialism and compulsive buying are important areas of focus for marketers and researchers. Since both the concepts i.e. materialism and compulsive buying are interrelated. The literature has given few evidence of materialism being a positive construct but at the same time the intension of a buyer determine the final consequence. The amalgamation of materialism with compulsive buying makes them unconstructive and undesirable peculiarities for individual and society as a whole.

Thus its study is important for policy makers, marketers and academicians to know when this situation arises and what the causes are. Materialism has been noticed and criticized by academicians, journalists and religious people,

but there are doubts about antecedents of materialism and compulsive buying. With the negative implications of combined effect of materialism and compulsive buying, there is a need to combat them for the betterment of coming generation.

## Conclusion and Future Scope of Study

The inferences deduced from the study suggest that the concept of materialism and compulsive buying are significant and should be given due focus in terms of research, their impact on individual behaviour and on society as a whole. The consequences of the integration of materialism and compulsive buying as highlighted by the study, brings in the demand for the future exploration of the concepts with quantitative and inferential techniques. There is a need to tackle the problem as predicted to be surfacing from the findings of the study. The future studies are called for to verify the positive relationship between the two concepts and the resulting negative combined effect on consumption pattern.

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