Extended Abstract

Online Shopping Addiction: Symptoms, Causes and Effects[*]

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Abstract

One of the various forms of technology used to make life easier is online shopping. Reasons for which one might prefer online shopping over real life shopping include such factors as ease of search, lower prices, a variety of goods, time saved, ease of use, entertainment, promotions, and impulsive behaviors in the shopper. A number of individuals have found themselves addicted to online shopping due to a lack of self-control. This study aims not only to reveal participants' reasons for preferring online shopping, but also to define and describe the hedonic nature of online shopping addiction. The study follows a mixed method design in which both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied in the data collection process. Qualitative data was collected from a total of 105 participants who had stated that they frequently used the internet to shop using the snowball sampling method. Quantitative data, on the other hand, was collected by asking open-ended questions to 18 randomly selected individuals from the original 105 participants. The researcher collected data through face-to-face and internet interviews over a period of five months. The sample group was composed of 80% women (n = 84) and 20% men (n = 21) with participants' ages ranging from 18 to 55 (mean: 29). The tools used to collect data were an open-ended questionnaire, a form soliciting demographic information, and the Hedonic Shopping Scale. Quantitative data were subjected to descriptive analyses, a *t*-Test, ANOVA analyses, and in order to classify hedonic shopping scores, to a two-stage clustering analysis. Qualitative data, on the other hand, were analyzed using content analysis. This work concludes with an evaluation of the qualitative and quantitative data on online shopping followed by a discussion on factors contributing to online shopping addiction as well as related concepts.

Keywords

Online shopping addiction • Online shopping • Buying • Technology addiction • Hedonic shopping

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Online shopping eases consumers' decision-making process by offering them such advantages as the ability to search and compare prices as well as the ability to attain the lowest price possible for a desired product (Häubl & Trifts, 2000). International literature has shown internet users to prefer online shopping over real life shopping for such reasons as good product selection, competitive prices, and ease of use (Ernst & Young, 2000), and it is for these reasons that online shopping continues to increase in popularity (Tong, 2010).

Descriptions and Symptoms

It is important to first define the following concepts: online shopping, Online Shopping Addiction (OSA), Compulsive Buying (CB), and hedonic shopping. Compulsive Buying Disorder (CBD) is an important concept related to OSA. Causing both personal and family problems, CBD is defined by the presence of repetitive, impulsive, and excessive buying (Lejoyeux, Mathieu, Embouazza, Huet, & Lequen, 2007) and is characterized by excessive shopping cognitions and buying behaviors that lead to distress or impairment (Black, 2007). The best term to describe CB behaviors is "addiction" (Clark & Calleja, 2008). CBD is related to the mesolimbic dopamine reward circuit (Hartston, 2012) and because a relation has been established between CBD symptoms and reward sensitivity, CBD is more often defined as an addiction (Lawrence, Ciorciari, & Kyrios, 2014). Still, due to its similarities with pathological gambling, it is deemed more appropriate to describe CB as an addiction and not as a mood or as an obsessive-compulsive disorder (Lawrence et al., 2014). As such, it is possible to use the more popular concept of OSA, or other similar concepts, to describe CBD.

Although no common criteria identifying OSA have yet to be established, similar related concepts and criteria used to identify other behavioral addictions can be benefited from in discussing OSA. Two types of factors affecting OSA are worth mention. The first factor is shopping for entertainment purposes, which can be defined as Hedonic Shopping, and the second factor is Utilitarian Shopping, in which one shops specifically for things s/he wants and needs (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). Dittmar (2004) however, discusses shopping addiction in light of hedonic, instrumental, and psychological gains and motivations. This specific definition of hedonism can be defined as seeking distraction, entertainment, pleasure, enjoyment, and having a good time. Hedonist consumers practice certain shopping behaviors in which they seek out information. Yet, hedonist consumers not only shop online to collect information, but also to seek fun, excitement, arousal, joy, festive, escapism, fantasy, and adventure (Monsuwe, Dellaert, & de Ruyter, 2004). Those who practice utilitarian shopping shop with a specific goal in mind, one which is based on rational necessities (Kim & Shim, 2002). Since utilitarian shoppers shop in a duty-oriented,

efficient, rational, and conscious manner instead of seeing shopping as a form of entertainment (Wolfinkhatbarger & Gilly, 2001), it is more difficult for them to become shopping addicts. The relation between hedonist and utilitarian shoppers shares features observed in internet addiction. The risk of addiction for one who uses the internet for entertainment purposes, such as for gambling, games, and chatting, for example, is higher than for one who uses for real needs, such as for education, communication, or accessing the news (Günüç, 2013).

Reasons for Online Shopping Addiction and Factors Affecting It

Among the various reasons for which one might prefer to shop online are ease of search, cheaper prices, wider selection, time convenience, ease of use, fun, promotions, and impulse (Khatibi, Haque, & Karim, 2006). Most online shoppers shop as a result of such hedonic motivations as to achieve feelings of enjoyment (Koufaris, Kambil, & Labarbera, 2001) and excitement (Jayawardhena, 2004). Another reason that individuals' might prefer to shop online is that people are now being required to spend increasing longer amounts of time at their workplace due to changing world conditions, leaving them less time not only for shopping, but also for spending time with their family, friends, and other people. Another reason is the fact that many individuals simply consider online shopping to be a form of entertainment. Most of the time however, shopping online for the above reasons, while also being under the effect of external factors and unable to control one's shopping impulses, turns into OSA.

Lee and Park (2008) argue that since people with compulsive shopping behaviors may wish to avoid being seen by others while shopping so as not to be reminded of important normative standards and since online shopping allows them this opportunity (LaRose, 2001; Lee, Lennon, & Rudd, 2000; Schlosser, Black, Repertinger, & Freet, 1994), online shopping may be the best alternative for one exhibiting compulsive shopping behaviors. While there are many reasons for one to prefer shopping online, it is still difficult to state what the basic cause of OSA is. In other words, direct factors, including enjoyment, happiness, relaxation, and entertainment as well as indirect factors, including stress, depression, boredom, and loneliness, work together to lay the groundwork for OSA. Such that in some situations, although one has no need for a specific object, s/he may indeed purchase it. In fact, there are even instances when an item purchased is never actually used.

Offering a wide array of information and services as well as the ability to compare products, online shopping allows consumers to shop at ease without being restricted to time or space constraints (Kim & Kim, 2004; Levy & Weitz, 2004; Ward & Lee, 2000). Also worthy of note is the fact that online shoppers spend a great deal of time using a wide range of search motors to gather information on a product both before

and after making a purchase (Bessière, Kiesler, Kraut, & Boneva, 2008). Since this process constitutes constant activity and since individuals obtain their desired results, it is felt to be a rewarding and entertaining experience.

Effects and Results of Online Shopping Addiction

CB in real life affects every individual. Over time, online shopping has led increasingly more internet users not only to do their shopping on online retail sites, but also to spend their money on the internet (Shanmugam, 2011). It is, however, not yet possible to state that online shopping has become a problem, or even excessive, in every society. When online shopping starts to become a problem in various societies however, data related to its effects will begin to appear. The number of studies that have aimed at revealing the effects of such online activities, in other words the potential negative effects of CB behaviors, are considerably few in number. Yet, it is predicted that just as OSA will have economical effects as it becomes increasingly common in a society, so too will it entail negative effects for individuals and their families. As such, unlike game and internet addictions, OSA's negative economical effects will find themselves at the forefront of the discussion on it.

When spending is repetitively used to alleviate worries and stress, CB can turn into a buying and/or shopping addiction (Johnson & Attmann, 2009). Patwardhan and Yang (2003) have asserted that online shopping activities are positively related with internet addiction. Not only is there a limited number of studies that have attempted to understand internet users' practices and addiction levels, there is also insignificant evidence as to whether virtual communities and e-compulsive behaviors are influential in leading online shoppers to develop internet addiction (Shanmugam, 2011). Although there is insignificant evidence for the dangers resulting from online CB tendencies, it is believed that uncontrolled buying may lead an individual not only to excessive internet use, but also to cause harm to his own well-being. Furthermore, since one can more easily and comfortably find the items for which s/he is searching, the popularity of online shopping, as compared to real life shopping, is increasing daily (Panwar & Chahal, 2013).

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Research Aim

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Since there is currently an insignificant amount of research on the symptoms, causes, and effects of OSA and since online shopping is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon, this study aims to identify and describe the relation between OSA and hedonic shopping.

Method

Research Design

The study follows a mixed method design in which both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms will be applied to collect data. In this study, the reasons for which participants shop online will be examined using qualitative research techniques whereas hedonic shopping, including a number of its variables, will be examined using quantitative research techniques. Both the qualitative and quantitative research techniques employed in this study will be used in an attempt to describe the reasons for which participants shop online and to offer a better definition of OSA.

Sample

In order to collect qualitative data for this study, a total of 105 individuals who stated to shop online frequently were contacted. Concerning quantitative data, 18 individuals from among the original 105 participants included in the sample were selected at random. Data were collected over a 5-month period. The age of participants included in the sample ranged from 18 to 55 years and their average age was 29.

Data Collection Tools

While qualitative data were collected using three open-ended questions, quantitative data were collected using the "Demographic Variable Form" and the "Hedonic Shopping Scale."

Hedonic Shopping Scale. Developed by Babin, Darden, and Griffin (1994), this scale includes 11 statements and was translated into Turkish by Aydın (2009). While the scale's validity-reliability coefficient was calculated as .90 in Aydın's (2009) study, it was calculated as .914 in this study.

Data Analysis

During the qualitative data analysis process, data were divided into main and sub-themes by two specialists after conducting a content analysis. Quantitative data, however, were subjected to descriptive analyses, a *t*-Test, ANOVA analyses, and, in order to classify hedonic shopping scores, to a two-stage clustering analysis.

Findings

Pertaining to the demographic information of online shoppers included in the sample, a large majority of participants (87.6%) were found to have earned either an undergraduate and/or graduate degree. The majority of participants (73%) stated to do their own shopping online. Regarding income, it was found that both high- and

low-income earning individuals shopped online. Regardless of how frequently (or infrequently) participants shopped online, when they actually did do so, they were found to spend an average of 1 to 2 hours online.

Participants' feelings of pleasure, relaxation, enjoyment, and satisfaction—all considered to be signs of online shopping addiction—were measured using the "Hedonic Shopping Scale." Participants' hedonic shopping scores were categorized based on their similarities to each other using a two-stage clustering analysis was used (Table 1).

Table 1
Results of the Two-stage Clustering Analysis Based on Hedonic Shopping Scores

Hedonic Shopping	N	%	Mean	Ss.
Low Hedonic Shopping	56	53.3	25.9	5.1
High Hedonic Shopping	49	46.7	40.6	5.5
Total	105	100.0	32.7	9.1

As can be seen in Table 1, sample group participants' scores have been divided into two groups, *low* and *high*. As per the graph, nearly half of the participants experience pleasurable feelings as a result of shopping. A comparative analysis was then administered both to hedonic shopping scores and a number of variables.

Using a *t*-Test, hedonic shopping scores were compared with the variables *experiencing problems with one's environment* and *lying*, in which it was found that as participants' hedonic shopping scores increased, not only did the amount of problems experienced with their environment increase, so did the amount of lies they told. Participants were also asked about what changes in emotions they felt after shopping, and their responses were compared with their hedonic scores. Participants reported feelings of *relaxation* and *happiness* as well as *no change in emotions* after shopping online. Hedonic shopping scores were then examined according to these three sub-variables using ANOVA, revealing a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$). The source of this difference was then examined using Tukey's test. It was seen that the hedonic shopping scores of participants stating to experience feelings of *relaxation* and were *happiness* after shopping online were higher than those of the participants who reported feeling *no change in emotions* (No Change in Emotional State) after shopping online. Both the quantitative data obtained and participants' reasons for shopping online are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 is illustrates participants' reasons for shopping online. The most frequently cited reasons are enjoyment/relaxation, the ability to find whatever one is looking for (practicality), ease, and product selection (practicality).

Table 2
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Reasons for Shopping Online

Reason(s)	F	%
Enjoyment/Psychological relaxation	9	8.6
Ability to find whatever one is looking for (practicality)	23	21.9
Ease of use	17	16.2
Unable to find time to shop	4	3.8
Need	17	16.2
Product selection (practicality)	21	20.0
Boredom	7	6.7
Other	7	6.7
Total	105	100.0

In order to obtain more detailed, in-depth data on the reasons participants shop online, 18 individuals from the original 105 participants included in the sample were randomly selected and asked open-ended questions, their answers to which being classified into themes. Table 3 presents the answers to the questions asked as well as the main and sub-themes emerging as a result.

Table 3
Main and Sub-Themes Emerging from Online Shoppers' Answers to Open-Ended Questions

Main Theme	Sub-Theme
What are your reasons for shopping online?	
Cost and economic factors (Products being cheap and there being no travel expenses)	Cheap or reasonably priced products Product discounts No travel expenses when traveling from store to store
Ease	Easy access Easy to reach otherwise difficult to reach products Not required to walk around (can shop while sitting)
Time convenience	Ability to choose a product quickly Can shop at any desired time and place Less overall time spent
Practicality (Product and model variety)	Everything in a single place There being a variety of options Ability to compare items
In your opinion, what differences exist being real life shopping and online shopping?	
Real life shopping (advantages compared to online shopping)	The ability to see and test the product in real life Easy to find the right size in real life Real life shopping is more reliable Real life shopping is more enjoyable, ability to socialize in real life shopping The ability to look and see what one is buying in real life Real life shopping allows for a more positive shopping experience Ability to "wind down" in real life shopping The product bought in real life "feels better" Not feeling stressed when exchanging an item, easier to exchange items
Online shopping (advantages compared to real life shopping)	Everything can be found on the internet at reasonable prices Shopping on the internet hassle-free There being more options to choose from Time-saving Price options and finding the most reasonable price No need to be subjected to "crowded shopping centers" or to "store clerks' inattentiveness" like in real life
What changes in your emotional state do you experience as a result of shopping online? (Cause and effects)	
Change in emotions	Regret when it comes time to pay the credit card bill Stress and worry "(Will it turn out the way I wanted? Will I need to exchange it?)" Excitement "Waiting for a packet to arrive can be especially exciting" Relaxation, winding down (in the work place)

As seen in Table 3, there are four main themes of note: (1) cost and economic factors, (2) ease, (3) time convenience, and (4) ease of use (product and model variety). The *cost and economic factors* theme did not appear as part of the quantitative data, being obtained instead after conducting a more in-depth, qualitative review of the data.

Concerning the advantages of real life shopping to online shopping, participants mentioned that they had the ability to see, test, and handle the product that they were considering to buy. As for online shopping's advantages, the following themes show similarities with participants' reasons for shopping online, these being ease, and practicality (dubbed *ease of use* in other studies). Another finding was the change in emotional state caused by shopping online, regarding which a number of participants stated that they experienced feelings of regret, stress, worry, excitement, and relaxation/winding down either during or after shopping.

Discussion and Conclusion

In addition to evaluating the study's qualitative and quantitative data, participants' reasons and objectives for preferring to shop online, online shopping's effect on emotional state, and the advantages and disadvantages of online shopping were revealed in this study. The data shows that the 105 participants described their reasons for shopping online to include enjoyment/psychological relaxation, the ability to find whatever one is looking for (practicality), ease, time restrictions, a wide variety of products (practicality), and boredom (free time). A more in-depth analysis of the qualitative data on participants' reasons for preferring to shop online revealed the following main themes: cost and economic factors, ease, time convenience, practicality (product and model variety). Although the qualitative and quantitative findings resembled each other to a great extent, the theme *cost and economic factors* emerged as part of the study's qualitative findings after a conducting a more in-depth analysis of the data.

Another result revealed in this study is that a number of participants experienced a change in their emotional state as a result of shopping online. While some participants experienced such negative feelings as regret, stress, and worry either during or after shopping online, others experienced positive feelings, such as excitement and relaxation/winding down. These concepts can also be considered as the cause and effects of both online shopping and OSA. Despite the fact that a number of negative emotions appeared while shopping online, after initial feelings of pleasure, happiness, excitement, enjoyment, and relaxation, feelings related to paying or to the product itself are then experienced. Moreover, feelings of regret, stress, and worry may actually cause feelings of pleasure, excitement, and impulse in an individual, and although an individual experiences such negative feelings, it does not necessarily mean that s/he will always be unable control his shopping impulses. Concerning changes in one's

emotional state, such feelings of excitement, happiness, relaxation, and pleasure may also be considered related to the concept of hedonism. As such, these emotions and OSA related hedonic impulses are both thought either to indicate addiction or to be addictive themselves. In any case, this study has found further evidence that post-shopping feelings and behaviors such as experiencing problems with those in one's environment, lying to others, and feeling relaxed and/or happy after shopping online are related with hedonic shopping. This entails that hedonic shopping can therefore be used as an indicator for OSA. In the literature, experiencing problems and lying to others are used as an indicator of internet and video game addiction (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Gunuc, 2015; Young, 1996). Given these indicators, reasons such as need, problems related to time and transportation, and other similar factors may be considered possible causes of OSA. In any case, actual factors causing addiction may be listed as (1) hedonic impulses–including pleasure, relaxation, happiness, and fun; (2) motivational impulses–including the existence of cheap products, wide selection, promotions, and the ability to compare products; (3) technological factors–including ease of use and practicality; and (4) psychological factors–including stress and boredom.

An individual may experience differences between online shopping and real life shopping. In real life shopping, one is able to recognize how many things s/he has purchased, how much money s/he has in his wallet, how much time s/he has spent shopping, and whether s/he is tired or not, leaving him the ability to end his shopping experience. In addition, real life shopping can be turned into a social activity in which members of a family come together and spend time with each other, rendering it a beneficial experience for those partaking in it. Shopping experienced in this manner plays an important role in keeping family members from developing OSA. However, virtual and/or online shopping does not include any similar external inhibitors. Since an individual is able to complete his entire shopping experience from wherever he is and because s/he most likely uses a credit card to shop online, one may not be aware of how many things s/he has purchased, how much money s/he has spent, and since s/he does not experience physical fatigue, how much time s/he has spent shopping. Since these factors are not present, an individual is able to focus more on pleasure while shopping online, possibly leading him to continue shopping longer than s/he otherwise would. As such, since the existence of internet technology is a prerequisite of OSA, without which OSA cannot exist, and since OSA is affected by a number of user-related variables, these two factors need to be taken into consideration together in any discussion on OSA prevention and treatment.

In harmony with the literature, pleasure is the fundamental factor appearing in online shopping (Hassanein & Head, 2007) and pleasure has been found to be positively related to both customer satisfaction and online shopping (Lee & Lee, 2003).

While pleasure related to online shopping is the fundamental emotion experienced in OSA, ease of use and practicality aid in laying the groundwork for online shopping to develop into OSA. Perceived practicality in regards to online shopping has been found to positively affect one's future shopping intentions (Tong, 2010). Data has been found indicating a strong relation between ease of use and practicality in online shopping (Tong, 2010; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). For this reason, perceived ease of use and practicality may be said to have a positive effect on online shopping.

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