

<http://dx.doi.org/10.35630/2199-885X/2021/11/5.14>

SHOPPING ADDICTION — A REAL CHALLENGE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Received 30 August 2021;
Received in revised form 18 September 2021;
Accepted 20 September 2021

Raluca Cojocariu¹ , Petronela Nechita²,
Codrina Moraru² 

¹ "Elisabeta Doamna" Psychiatry Hospital, Galați, Romania

² "Socola" Institute of Psychiatry Iași, Romania

✉ raluca.cojocariu@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT — We live in a modern society, which imposes an alert pace of daily life for all of us. As a result, there are constant attempts to find ways for people to access any service as quickly as possible. The COVID-19 pandemic has made drastic changes in human behaviour, lifestyle and the reality people live in. There is a concern that people are living in times of multiple existential, economic and instability threats due to drastic changes in daily life. Also known as Oniomania, the habit of compulsive shopping has come to the attention of the medical world. Studies show that the habit of buying excessively has become a concern in today's society, being similar to other well-known compulsive or addictive disorders, such as substance abuse, gambling addiction, or eating disorders. Online shopping offers multiple benefits, therefore there has been an increase in using online shopping, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people had no other option than to stay at home and use the Internet for various purposes.

METHOD: The review of the literature draws on searches within databases including Pubmed, Science Direct, Elsevier, EBSCO, Medline.

CONCLUSION: Health crises, such as epidemics and pandemics, can be a key factor in compulsive shopping. There are seven variables which are thought to influence the possible development of online shopping addiction: low self-esteem, low self-regulation; negative emotion, enjoyment, gender, social anonymity and cognitive overload.

KEYWORDS — online shopping, shopping addiction, compulsive shopping, pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Internet has become an important resource for people all around the world, as it has improved almost every aspect of everyday life. When it comes to shopping, the development of online environment, the use of credit cards, along with various media campaigns have made shopping much more efficient and accessible (Luca, Burlea et al 2020).

However, if used excessively, Internet can have a negative impact on individuals and can affect them in many ways, especially from a psychological point of

view (Diaconu, 2019; Jousselein, 2021; Lefter, 2018; Sandu & Nistor, 2020).

COVID-19 pandemic is a global public health emergency. People from all over the world confronted with several challenges related to mental health, such as panic attacks, phobias, anxiety, sleep disorders or dissociative symptoms (Luca, Baroiu et al, 2020; Luca, Ciubara et al, 2020, Baroiu et al, 2021). Moreover, addictive behaviour worsened during this period of crisis, especially among people with preexistent mental health conditions (Rocco et al., 2021; Sujita et al., 2020).

Although it is not officially described in Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), it is thought that oniomania or the unstoppable impulse to buy, gathers patterns not only from obsessive-compulsive disorders but also elements from impulse control disorder. Faber and O' Guinn tried to define it as "a type of consumer behaviour which is inappropriate, typically excessive, and clearly disruptive to the life of individuals who appear impulsively driven to consume" (Bighiu et al., 2015).

However, it is a chronic repetitive behaviour which interferes with the wellbeing of the individual. Studies have shown that this behaviour is frequently associated with depression, anxiety, substance abuse or weak impulse control. It is not very common in the general population, but it seems to be a place or increase in insecurity, being an important variable in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic because of the significant increase in fear and anxiety (Liese & Monley, 2021; Rick et al., 2014).

METHODS

The present paper is the result of the investigation and critical interpretation of numerous studies and reports, documents elaborated on a national and international level regarding the topic under research. The literature that was used is included in the bibliography. The titles and abstracts were evaluated thoroughly in order to determine whether they meet the necessary criteria and information. Additional findings were obtained through manual search and cross referencing. By this method the authors identified the nature of existing research in the field, epistemological assumptions and methodological approaches. This classification provided a framework through which to analyse the literature.

Specialists in social psychology have published preliminary conclusions on the change human behavior during the pandemic. When it comes to COVID-19 pandemic, first of all people confronted with the feeling of uncertainty, a state that comes with others many feelings such as: isolation, anxiety, sadness, which represent normal reactions to the abnormal conditions people needed to adapt (Grigoras & Ciubara, 2021).

During the coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19), quarantine was used as a health strategy to reduce the transmission of the disease. Quarantine efforts ranged from quarantine to mass of large cities, to isolation in facilities provided by the state, to self-isolation at home. Even if quarantine generally serves the public good, it is also associated with psychological challenges (Mueller et al., 2007; Neaga, 2020).

The purchase of goods is rather impulsive than necessary, which leads to a elevated state. Then comes the guilt and the diminution of the positive state when one realises the impact on the financial situation. Then comes the anticipation, manifested by a strong need to shop and finally the preparation for action is made. Then the cycle restarts. People who have this condition say that there is often an uncomfortable tension that is alleviated by the act of shopping. Despite this temporary relaxation, the majority of them feel disappointed due to their lack of self-control (Lejoyeux & Weinstein, 2010).

BOX 2 The four stages of compulsive buying

- 1 Anticipation: individuals feel an urge to shop
- 2 Preparation: they start to prepare for shopping and spending, e.g. deciding where to go, what to wear and which credit cards to use
- 3 Shopping: the most important phase – individuals experience either a temporary relief or a great sense of excitement or even sexual feeling
- 4 Spending: soon after buying the item, they start to feel frustrated with their actions

(Black 2007a)

Source: Cambridge University Press (Vijaya et al., 2012)

RESULTS

There are seven predictor elements that are thought to influence the possible development of online shopping addiction, and they are as listed:

- low self-esteem is relieved by the reward or outcome
- low self-regulation
- negative emotion- a person in a negative emotional state is more likely to shop impulsively and excessively, as engaging in this type of activity is recognised to ease anxiety and stress.
- enjoyment- shopping leads to positive feelings and excitement (frequently people describe it as “a high” or “a rush”) are associated with compulsive buying.
- gender-women usually do the most of household shopping, therefore they are more prone to develop this kind of addiction.
- social anonymity- online shopping allows individuals to keep their behaviour private.
- cognitive overload- cognitive stimulation by the online websites increases cognitive load, which leads to a lack of self-control (Rose & Dhandayudham, 2014).

DISCUSSION

Internal and external triggers associated with the pandemic (e.g., fear of COVID-19) may increase compulsive shopping. However, it can have negative economic and psychological consequences, such as financial problems and negative effects, including guilt, remorse and anxiety. Moreover, compulsive shoppers are more likely to engage in this activity privately, thus increasing the tendency for social isolation.

In conclusion, compulsive shopping is an unhealthy habit that affects the lives of those. This condition goes beyond simple consumerism and is psychological. Some of the symptoms of compulsion include a shopping obsession, anxiety when not buying, a constant need to shop, and the purchase of unnecessary products.

Acknowledgment

This research was presented at 5th European Conference of Psychiatry and Mental Health “Galatia” 2021

REFERENCES

1. BAROIU, L., DUMEA, E., NĂSTASE, F., NICULEȚ, E., FOTEA, S., CIUBARA, A. B., STEFANOPOL, I. A., NECHITA, A., ANGHEL, L., & CIUBARA, A. (2021). Assessment of depression in patients with COVID-19. *BRAIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 12(2), 254–264. <https://doi.org/10.18662/brain/12.2/204>
2. BIGHIU, G., MANOLICĂ, A., & ROMAN, C. R. (2015). Compulsive buying behavior on the internet. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 20, 72–79. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(15\)00049-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00049-0)
3. DIACONU, A. I. (2019). Increasing economic competitiveness through the contribution of digitalization.

- Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Economics and Administrative Sciences, 4(1), 33–42. <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumeneas/11>
4. **GRIGORAS, M., & CIUBARA, A.** (2021). Looking into Pandora's box between "everything" and "but"-Depression, pain of losses the next pandemic of humanity? *BRAIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 12(2), 326–334. <https://doi.org/10.18662/brain/12.2/210>
 5. **JOUSSELLIN, C.** (2021). Habits, addiction and unknowable. *BRAIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 12(2), 303–307. <https://doi.org/10.18662/brain/12.2/207>
 6. **LEFTER, I.** (2018). Ethics and advertising - Female targeted advertisement and the ethical concerns of practitioners and scholars. *Journal for Ethics in Social Studies*, 2(2), 33–42. <https://doi.org/10.18662/jess/14>
 7. **LEJOYEUX, M., & WEINSTEIN, A.** (2010). Compulsive buying. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 36(5), 248–53. <https://doi.org/10.3109/00952990.2010.493590>
 8. **LIESE BS & MONLEY CM.** (2021). Providing addiction services during a pandemic: Lessons learned from COVID-19. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 120, 108156. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsat.2020.108156>
 9. **LUCA, L., BAROIU, L., CIUBARA, A. B., ANGHEL, R., BULGARU-ILIESCU, A. I., ANGHEL, L., & CIUBARA, A.** (2020). Covid-19 and the Spanish Flu. From Suffering to Re-silience, *BRAIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 11(3S1), 01–07. <https://doi.org/10.18662/brain/11.3Sup1/116>
 10. **LUCA, L., BURLEA, S. L., CHIROSCA, A. C., MARIN, I. M., CIUBARA, A. B., & CIUBARA, A.** (2020). The FOMO syndrome and the perception of personal needs in contemporary society. *BRAIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 11(1S1), 38–46. <https://doi.org/10.18662/brain/11.1Sup1/27>
 11. **LUCA, L., CIUBARA, A. B., FULGA, I., BURLEA, S. L., TERPAN, M., & CIUBARA, A. M.** (2020). Social implications for psychiatric pathology of depressive and anxiety disorders, alcohol addiction and psychotic disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania. Analysis of two relevant psychiatry hospitals. *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala*, 69, 261–272. <https://doi.org/10.33788/rcis.69.16>
 12. **MUELLER, A., MUELLER, U., ALBERT, P. MERTENS, C., SILBERMANN, A., MITCHELL, J. E., & DE ZWAAN, M.** (2007). Hoarding in a compulsive buying sample. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 45(11), 2754–63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2007.07.012>
 13. **NEAGA, S.** (2020). Efectele pandemiei asupra psihicului și comportamentului uman [The effects of the pandemic on the human psyche and behavior]. *Danubius Universitas*.
 14. **RICK, S. I., PEREIRA, B., & BURSON, K. A.** (2014). The benefits of retail therapy: Making purchase decision reduces residual sadness. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 24(3), 373–380. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2013.12.004>
 15. **ROCCO, S., BARTOLO, M. G., PALERMITI, A. L., & COSTABILE, A.** (2021). Fear of COVID-19, depression, anxiety, and their association with Internet addiction disorder in a sample of Italian students. *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports*, 4, 100097. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadr.2021.100097>
 16. **ROSE, S., & DHANDAYUDHAM, A.** (2014). Towards an understanding of internet-based problem shopping behaviour: The concept of online shopping addiction and its proposed predictors. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 3(2), 83–89. <https://doi.org/10.1556/jba.3.2014.003>
 17. **SANDU, A., & NISTOR, P.** (2020). The effects of mass-media on social behavior, emotions and cognitions. *Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Political Sciences and European Studies*, 6(2). <https://lumenpublishing.com/journals/index.php/lumenps-es/article/view/4294>
 18. **SUJITA, K. K., YASIR, A., PAWAN, S., AYUSHI, D., MARTHOENIS, M., & RUSSELL, K.** (2020). COVID-19 pandemic and addiction: Current problems and future concerns. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 51, 102064. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102064>
 19. **VIJAYA, M., RAJASHREE, R., & MOHAMMED, S.** (2012). Shopping addiction. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 18, 263–269. <https://doi.org/10.1192/apt.bp.109.007880>