

Compulsive Buying in Contemporary American Culture:

An Analysis of Online Discourse

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Abstract

This Latin Honors thesis describes an in-depth analysis of compulsive buying behavior. Compulsive Buying Disorder (CBD) is characterized by a preoccupation with shopping and spending money that causes distress and anxiety to individuals. The disorder can be found in 5.8 percent of the United States population, equating to about 19 million individuals (Black, 2012). While there is still research being done to fully define all of its symptoms, CBD has been linked to obsessive-compulsive disorders, anxiety disorders, and mood disorders (Black, 2012). Many factors are associated with the cause of CBD, including advertising techniques, loyalty programs, and other means of reinforcing compulsive shopping behavior (Rick, 2013). This research addresses the content of what is being said on the Internet regarding CBD, including specifically the information that is available for those with CBD. Five key search terms were utilized in a netnographic study, which analyzed the resulting common key themes, categories, and sub-categories observed in each search. The research shows that while there is information available on the Internet for those with CBD, some of what is being said about “shopaholics” is trivialized and misunderstood. The study concludes that information is available to those who know what to search for, but much of this information is repetitive and not relatable. More research should be done to examine how current trends in society, from social media to increased technology to the economy, affect individuals with CBD.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Motivation for Research

As a senior about to graduate from the Retail Merchandising program, I have spent many hours studying how retailers succeed. I have learned marketing strategies to increase consumer spending, tools to improve customer loyalty, how to create products that consumers will want to buy, and much more. As I have taken these classes, I have been impressed with the plethora of techniques that retailers can utilize to motivate consumers to buy more and spend more. However, as I learn these techniques, I often think back to a retail ethics class that I took the first semester of my freshman year. This class focused on how retailers can maintain their integrity while staying profitable and successful. This juxtaposition makes me wonder if selling as much as possible to consumers truly maintains a retailer's integrity. If becoming a profitable business causes consumers to fall into debt, is the business ethical? Can retailers morally allow people to charge money they do not have to their credit cards or employ techniques that cause consumers to overspend? Or, should consumers be better educated at how to control their spending behaviors and spend within their means? Furthermore, what steps should retailers and consumers take to ensure healthy spending behaviors? I do not believe there is one correct answer to these questions, but it is crucial to explore them in order to shed light on harmful compulsive spending behaviors.

Another motivation for my research is that I can empathize with compulsive spenders. I have often found myself unable to focus on anything except for a designer handbag I want but cannot afford. I have convinced myself that I need products that, in all reality, I can live without. I have felt a rush of joy when making a purchase, followed by the intense guilt of spending money I should have saved or used elsewhere. I have forced myself into situations where I needed to drastically halt my spending to pay off bills that are filled with unnecessary clothing expenses. I have learned many difficult financial lessons due to mistakes I made overspending money. While I have ultimately been able to control my spending and stay out of debt, I can understand how easily others might fall into patterns of compulsive spending how these individuals may spiral out of control. I wanted to research compulsive spending to educate myself on this phenomenon, and to ensure that I understand the following: signs of compulsive shopping, techniques to curb this behavior, and how to help others with compulsive buying disorder.

Finally, I am interested to learn what is being said about compulsive spending. I believe that our society often glamorizes overspending, yet avoids discussing the consequences of this behavior. People label themselves “shopaholics” or say they engage in “retail therapy” in a flippant manner. Some even make jokes like, “I’m not a shopaholic, I’m just helping the economy”. These jokes are not funny for many consumers, who face actual issues that are trivialized by anecdotes about overspending. Moreover, many lifestyle publications publish articles telling women what they need to buy each season, but fail to publish articles about the dangers of overspending. Advertisements tell consumers that they will be happier if they buy their

new product. Spending becomes a measure of social worth, and people feel the need to purchase new items to prove their status. These observations inspired me to research what is being said online about compulsive buying, and learn if there is more serious information and education available for those with compulsive buying disorder. I want to dive deeper into what people are saying about this disorder.

Research Questions

The aforementioned factors led me to the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What is being said on the Internet regarding compulsive buying?
- **RQ2:** What information is available to those with compulsive buying disorder when they search the Internet?

To address these questions, I researched personal stories shared by those with compulsive buying disorder, education about how to prevent compulsive buying behaviors, how to identify compulsive buying behaviors, and how those with compulsive buying behaviors can find help. The analysis of this research begins with a literature review to understand what has been said about compulsive buying disorder, and utilizes a quantitative method based on netnography (Braga, 2009) to understand online communications regarding compulsive buying disorder.

Significance of the Study

This study can generate beneficial insight for consumers, retailers, policy makers, and educators. Consumers with compulsive buying disorder might feel out of

control without being able to define their problem. Moreover, many consumers with compulsive buying disorder often feel so ashamed of their behavior that they hide their purchasing actions from others, so it is important that there is accessible information to help these consumers if and when they do seek it out. As with many disorders, among the first steps to recovery is to understand the nature of the problem. This study will help consumers to understand what compulsive buying disorder is, how it might affect them, and show what information is available to them.

Furthermore, every consumer needs to understand the true effects and dangers of overconsumption. Many consumers believe that purchasing new items will increase their well-being and decrease anxiety (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). However, the compulsive buying of material goods can do more harm than good. While consumers might feel an initial rush of joy after making a purchase, overconsumption can lead to debt and anxiety, and harm interpersonal relationships (Cole, 2010). The purpose of the study is to show the potential pitfalls of overconsumption in order to educate consumers.

Retailers may also benefit from this study. When a retailer sells items to consumers, they must decide what is ethical. Certain retailers may believe that selling to compulsive spenders is unethical or find that the practice is against their code of conduct. However, in order to make this decision, retailers must understand the nature of compulsive spending. If they understand the disorder, they can implement training practices to teach their employees about the signs of compulsive spending and best practices regarding customers with compulsive buying patterns.

Policy makers and educators should be aware of compulsive buying behavior. This type of behavior affects many Americans, and policy makers should consider it as a major factor when they make laws. Laws that govern retailers, credit card companies, and impact sales tax may also affect the well-being of those with CBD and thus need to be carefully considered. Policy makers need to be proactive advocates for consumers, and in order to become an advocate, they need to understand the nature of the problem. Educators also must understand compulsive buying in order to identify those exhibiting signs of compulsive buying disorder. This will allow educators to provide help and resources for those in need. Many compulsive spenders do not understand the nature of their addiction, so they could benefit if their educator understands their problem and can provide help. Furthermore, educators must do their part to teach their students about the dangers of overconsumption. They must teach their students that compulsive buying is a serious problem that can lead to harmful consequences.

Finally, overconsumption poses serious environmental threats. The Earth has a finite amount of natural resources. A significant environmental impact exists when these resources are consumed at an unsustainable rate. People in developed countries frequently purchase new products that eventually turn into waste. Thus, overconsumption does not only harm the consumer, it also harms the environment (Bellinger, 2013). The impacts of overconsumption are vast and should be studied.

Chapter II: Literature Review

It is necessary to examine Compulsive Buying Disorder (CBD) in order to

understand its effects and impacts. Compulsive Buying Disorder is characterized by a preoccupation with shopping and spending money that causes distress and anxiety to individuals with the disorder (Black, 2012). While the majority of the United States population shops, not every “shopaholic” has Compulsive Buying Disorder. CBD occurs when normal shopping becomes an addiction. Those with the disorder cannot control their shopping, and therefore, it negatively impacts their lives. CBD causes “excessive and ritualistic behaviors designed to alleviate tension, anxiety, or discomfort aroused by an obtrusive thought or obsession” (O’Guinn & Faber, 1989, p. 147). The disorder can be found in 5.8 percent of the United States population (Black, 2012).

History of CBD

CBD was first proposed in the early 1900s by Emil Kraepelin and Eugene Bleuler. Bleuler wrote about CBD in the Textbook of Psychiatry, which described “buying maniacs...in whom even buying is compulsive and leads to senseless contraction of debts with continuous delay of payment” (1930). Kraepelin and Bleuler emphasized the lack of control in individuals with CBD, or “impulsive insanity” similar to kleptomania or pyromania. After its introduction, compulsive buying was generally ignored and underemphasized for many years.

By the 1990s, psychologists throughout the world began to identify and describe CBD (Black, 2012). After noticing the lack of information available about CBD, a group of scientists published a case study of twenty individuals with “problematic buying behavior.” (McElroy, Keck, & Pope, 1994) This behavior was categorized as

uncontrollable, problematic, and causing financial, familial, vocational, and social difficulties. The researchers found that 95% of the individuals with CBD also had major mood disorders, and therefore concluded the CBD should be studied as a mental disorder (McElroy, Keck, & Pope, 1994). After this study, more scholars began to identify and study CBD. Today, many psychologists agree on the characteristics of compulsive buying disorder, describing it as a lack of spending control that causes individuals distress and anxiety (Black, 2012). However, researchers still debate the disorder's classification. CBD has been linked to obsessive-compulsive disorders, anxiety disorders, and mood disorders (Black, 2012).

Difference Between CBD and Normal Spending

While many factors lead to compulsive buying disorder, two important factors are commonly found in those with CBD (Turnham, 2014). First is a "discrepancy factor", which has also been associated with eating disorders and alcoholism. This theory involves a difference between the perceived actual self versus the desired self. When people are not happy with who they think they are, they convince themselves that purchasing items will make themselves into their desired selves. These items can include clothing, beauty products, and more, as long as the buyer thinks it will improve who they are (Turnham, 2014). The second important factor is materialism. Those with CBD believe that their new materials will create happiness. They associate happiness with their possessions, believing that the key to their well-being is linked to what they own (Turnham, 2014).

Furthermore, two important characteristics distinguish CBD. In cases of CBD, compulsive consumption is repetitive and problematic to the individual (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). At first, individuals do not understand that their behavior is problematic. Instead, they believe that making purchases is beneficial and helpful. Thus, they tend to repeat their purchasing behavior, which causes more harm (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989).

Another important distinction between compulsive shoppers and non-compulsive shoppers is purchase motivation. Those without CBD make purchases based on their value and usage, while those with CBD make purchases in order to enhance their moods (Turnham, 2014). However, these positive moods are short-lived, and those with CBD commonly feel guilt and regret over their purchases. These negative emotions often restart the cycle of CBD, making the disorder highly addictive (Turnham, 2014).

Compulsive consumption can be defined 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 the individual and/or to others" (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989, p. 148). Consumers often begin to start compulsively consuming because they need to fill an emotional vacancy, and they believe that making a purchase will fill that vacancy (Hirschman, 1992). They are not simply purchasing products because of a necessity, they are purchasing products to fill an emotional hole (Hirschman, 1992).

Process of CBD

Individuals with CBD engage in a process of anticipation, preparation, shopping, and spending (Black, 2007). Those with the disorder become preoccupied with shopping, feel anxious before they make their purchase, and experience relief only when they buy their item. Consumers often know that they cannot afford certain items, but they make the purchase anyway (Faber, O'Guinn, & Krych, 1987). However, many experience post-purchase anxiety, which can start the cycle again, as they can only relieve the tension by buying something new (Black, 2007). This cycle can lead to debt, depression, anger, and negative self-images. People generally show their first signs of CBD in their early 20s, and can be affected by this disorder throughout the rest of their lives (Black, 2012). Many affected with CBD feel the need to keep their addiction secret (Turnham, 2014). Individuals commonly feel that their disorder is not understood or makes them seem weak, and therefore they must hide it.

Significance of CBD

Compulsive Buying Disorder affects 19 million people in the United States alone (Black, 2007). It can be found in 5.8 percent of the United States population (Black, 2007). Many of these people do not understand this disorder and the effects it has on them. For those who understand their disorder, they cannot fix it with a simple treatment. Many attempt to control the symptoms with antidepressants or behavioral therapy, though this is not always effective. Individuals with CBD feel out of control and experience repercussions including debt, anxiety, and depression (Black, 2007).

The average American household currently holds \$15,355 worth of credit card debt, the highest since the 2008 financial downturn (Tepper, 2015). In 2015, credit card debt in the United States grew \$71 billion, to a total of \$917.7 billion (Imbert, 2016). While many different and important factors cause this debt, spending on discretionary items has consistently increased (Anderson, 2015). It is now more common than ever to spend beyond one's means, as consumers are given many opportunities to do so. While CBD was not recognized until the 1990s as a contributing factor to increased debt, CBD can cause large ramifications to consumers.

While compulsive spending is an addiction, it can be argued that many factors in today's society facilitate overspending. Advertisements tell consumers that they can improve their life simply by purchasing a new item. Consumers are exposed to over 360 advertisements each day, giving them plenty of exposure to products they might believe will improve their lives (Johnson, 2014). Moreover, mass media can affect consumer views of what they want and need. Consumers are exposed to television programs in which characters are wealthy and exist without debt or monetary trouble. Consumers often believe that this is an accurate portrayal of real life, when in truth, the wealth of characters on television programs is unrealistic. However, seeing affluent characters on television programs can cause consumers to believe that they need more themselves. This social comparison can cause unhappiness and distress, which can lead to the abuse of credit and compulsive consumption (Faber & O'Guinn, 1988). Furthermore, when consumers see others that own more goods, they feel less guilty about their own purchases and can fall into more debt (Faber & O'Guinn, 1988). For this reason, television can play a significant role in causing individuals to increase their debt.

Moreover, retailers offer consumers loyalty programs that make customers believe they are saving money, but these programs are in fact designed to encourage more spending. Consumers have easy access to multiple credit cards from different banks and retailers. Individuals can simply charge their credit cards without having to worry about the bill until days or weeks later. Credit cards often encourage overspending because people do not psychologically feel what they are spending as much as when they pay with cash (Rick, 2013). Furthermore, many consumers believe that when they have a certain credit limit, they can afford to spend up to that limit (Rick, 2013). This can cause consumers to rack up credit card debt without realizing. Furthermore, consumers have easy access to goods. They can discretely purchase items online in minutes. Consumers can purchase items with just a few clicks, and might not even notice that they are spending money. They do not have to hand over a credit card or cash, as their credit card information can be stored in the website, making the transaction seemingly painless. Moreover, many consumers have access to the Internet at any given time of the day. They can purchase items on their smartphones, tablets, or computers. From credit cards, to advertisements, to online shopping, businesses consistently make spending money easier and more convenient, increasing the temptation to purchase new items and fall into potentially harmful financial situations (Iliades, 2013).

Chapter III: Methodology

Netnography

This research utilized a netnographic approach, as it provides information that is best suited to analyze the aforementioned research questions. Netnography is the study of online interactions and computer-mediated communication. This method can provide strong consumer insights by studying users of the Internet. Netnography is an important tool for researchers because it provides a window to consumers, who are frequently very active on the Internet, and it provides context into consumer behaviors and desires (Braga, 2009).

Origin of Netnography: Ethnography

The term “netnography” was derived from a combination of the words “Internet” and “ethnography”. Ethnography focuses on observing human social behavior and involves studying a subject in his or her natural environment to gain insights into unbiased human behaviors (Kozinets, 2002). The purpose of ethnography is to understand how people live their lives. Ethnographic researchers make efforts to keep their research as natural and unobtrusive as possible in order to understand the subject on his or her own terms. The researcher frequently observes and interviews the subjects while taking every precaution possible as to not disrupt the subjects’ normal lives (Kozinets, 2002). Ethnography is very adaptable and flexible to different situations, allowing researchers to choose how best to apply ethnography to their study (Kozinets, 2002). According to Robert V. Kozinets in the article “The Field Behind the Screen, Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities”, ethnographic

procedures include, “(1) providing cultural entrée, (2) gathering and analyzing data, (3) ensuring trustworthy interpretation, (4) conducting ethical research, and (5) providing opportunities for culture member feedback” (Kozinets, 2002, p. 64) Ethnographic research must be adapted to each situation, meaning each ethnographic study is conducted in a way that is unique to that study. However, in every study, researchers must clearly state what they are attempting to research, gather data, interpret the data in an unbiased fashion, stay ethical, and remain flexible and open to feedback.

As technology advanced, a new method of ethnography emerged, called netnography. Netnography utilizes ethnographic techniques to study virtual communities and computer-mediated communications (Braga, 2009). The rise of technology has connected people throughout the world and allowed individuals to easily share information. Consumers use the Internet to share stories, advice, lifestyle choices, and ideas. People have a plethora of places to communicate and share this information: blogs, message boards, comments on websites, product reviews, and more (Yadav & Pavlou, 2014). As people began to form virtual communities using the Internet, researchers saw the potential to study these computer-mediated communications. They saw netnography as a way to add context to consumer behaviors and gain valuable consumer insights (Braga, 2009). Because these virtual communities are typically easy to access, netnography is a relatively simple, fast, and inexpensive approach to research studies. Like in ethnographic research, netnographers need clear research questions, data collection methods, unbiased interpretation, ethical practices, and flexibility (Kozinets, 2002).

Netnography is an unobtrusive, naturalistic approach that is flexible and adaptable to research studies. Netnographic researchers are able to see exactly what any individual sees when he or she research the internet, allowing the researcher to gain a true understanding of online conversations regarding their field of study (Braga, 2009).

Data Collection Procedure Developed and Employed

In this research study, five key terms were searched using Google. Google was selected as it is the world's most popular search engine, accounts for 68.75 percent of online searches, and shows what many consumers see when they perform online searches (Krawczyk, 2014). The five key terms were selected to best estimate what a typical consumer might use to learn about compulsive buying behaviors. Preliminary research was conducted using the Internet to see which terms were frequently used in conversations about compulsive buying behaviors. These terms were also selected in order to best relate to the research questions. Each term was searched using Google separately, and the results from each search were studied and analyzed. The research first selected recurring themes from the results page to develop a general idea of the articles available to consumers when they use each search term. Next, the top articles of each results page (excluding advertisements) were read and analyzed in order to determine what consumers read when they search each term. From there, the study draws conclusions about Internet communication regarding compulsive spending behavior.

Key Search Terms: Definitions

Five key search terms were utilized in order to research relevant information about compulsive buying disorder and help answer the research questions. The scope of this research is focused on the two major questions, “What is being said on the Internet regarding compulsive buying?” and “What information is available to those with compulsive buying disorder when they search the Internet?” In order to answer these questions, it was crucial to select the key terms that would provide the most information on the Internet regarding compulsive buying behaviors, as well as show the information that an individual with CBD might find on the Internet. Based on these factors, the five following key search terms were chosen:

- **ST1:** Compulsive buying advice
- **ST2:** Retail Therapy
- **ST3:** Shopaholic
- **ST4:** Shopping addiction
- **ST5:** Shopping addiction community

Chapter IV: Results

Compulsive Buying Advice

The search term “compulsive buying advice” produced results that included identifying signs of compulsive buying disorder, managing CBD, helping others with CBD, and personal stories of those with CBD. The articles provided examples of compulsive buying behaviors and signs of CBD to help individuals understand and

identify the behavior. These articles also gave advice for those with CBD, which commonly included avoiding credit cards, purchasing only necessities, following a budget, and seeking help from therapists or support groups. The top articles were straightforward and would benefit individuals looking to identify and understand their problem. An article titled, *How I Stopped Compulsive Shopping: One Women's Journey*, included a personal story about a woman whose CBD forced her into bankruptcy (Iliades, 2013). Once she recognized her problem, she learned to manage a budget and purchase necessities (Iliades, 2013). Finally, each article provided more resources for individuals with CBD to get more help. These resources included more articles, websites, help lines, and therapists.

Retail Therapy

This search term produced articles that defined retail therapy, provided examples of retail therapy, questioned the validity of retail therapy as a coping mechanism, and showed images with quotes about retail therapy (for example, “shopping is cheaper than a psychiatrist”). UrbanDictionary defined retail therapy as, “an excuse for people, mostly female, to go shopping when they’re feeling bad, when in reality their bad feelings could be released/treated other ways” and “an idiot’s way of dealing with an idiotic problem.” (Retail Therapy, n.d.) The website failed to give any advice, tips, or statistics that would be helpful to an individual with compulsive buying disorder. Another article discussed the benefits of retail therapy, stating that the technique could help individuals ease transitions, dress well, relax, escape problems, and form social connections (Yarrow, 2013). The article argued that retail therapy is a good practice

when used in moderation, but it could hide bigger problems. However, the article did not go into detail about the potential consequences of retail therapy (Yarrow, 2013).

Shopaholic

The key search term “shopaholic” produced a large amount of online games and images. In the games, an individual creates a female avatar. The avatar is given a daily allowance and a daily budget, which are the same amount without any incentive to save money. The character can purchase clothing, shoes, makeup, accessories, and haircare. Once she runs out of money, she cannot purchase anything, but can get a job to make more money. The game allows individuals to easily spend large amounts of money and quickly make more money when necessary. It does not teach financial responsibility or explore any of the dangers of becoming a “shopaholic”. Players are not incentivized for saving money nor do they have to spend money on necessities. The game treats money as a disposable good to be spent solely on clothing and shoes. Furthermore, it makes it seem as though money is easily available, as players receive allowances and can easily make more money as needed (Shopaholic Games, n.d.).

The search term “shopaholic” also produced pictures of so-called shopaholics. These pictures displayed women carrying large amounts of shopping bags with smiles on their faces. They did not show any consequences of paying for the items in these shopping bags. Furthermore, some of the photos included flippant quotes, such as, “I’m not a shopaholic, I’m just helping the economy”. This search term did not produce any serious information about compulsive spending.

Shopping Addiction

The term “shopping addiction” produced the themes of understanding symptoms, causes, affects, and signs of shopping addictions. Many articles focused on the effects of a shopping addiction and how to recover from an addiction. These articles provided concrete evidence about the consequences of normal shopping turning into an addiction. The top articles explored signs of a shopping addiction, how to help family members, and resources to take advantage of to help the problem. These articles took the problem seriously and without judgment.

Shopping Addiction Community

The key search term “shopping addiction community” explored the causes, signs, symptoms, and treatments of shopping addictions. The articles were mainly from institutes that help individuals recover from addictions. They were straightforward articles that would be intended to help individuals with CBD or individuals with family members or friends with CBD. This search did not lead to any support groups, but it did provide resources that would be helpful for those with CBD.

Data

Table 1 describes the results of the data analysis. When the search term “Compulsive Buying Advice” was entered, Google generated a total of 418,000 results but did not provide a definition. Common themes from this search term included how to identify and manage CBD, how to help others with CBD, and personal stories about

CBD. For the search term “Retail Therapy”, Google produced 4,980,000 results and a definition. Common themes from this search term included definitions and examples of retail therapy, articles questioning the validity of retail therapy, and images regarding retail therapy. The search term “Shopaholic” produced 663,000 results, a definition, a plethora of online games about shopaholics, information about movies regarding shopaholics, and images. When “Shopping Addiction” was entered, Google generated 5,570,000 results, a definition, and information regarding causes, affects, signs, and symptoms of shopping addictions. Finally, when “Shopping Addiction Community” was entered, Google generated 3,400,000 results. While there was not a definition, there were articles regarding causes, indications, and treatments for shopping addictions.

Table 1. Results: Themes Identified

Search Term	Number of Results Returned	Definition	Common Key Themes Emerged from the Data
“Compulsive Buying Advice”	418,000	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to identify signs of CBD in others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to manage CBD • How to help others with CBD • Personal stories of those with CBD
“Retail Therapy”	4,980,000	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitions of retail therapy • Examples of retail therapy • Questioning the validity of retail therapy (does it work?) • Images featuring quotes about retail therapy (ex: “Shopping is cheaper than a psychiatrist”)

“Shopaholic”	663,000	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online games • Information about the book and movie “Confessions of a Shopaholic” • Images with flippant quotes about shopaholics (ex: “I’m not a shopaholic, I’m just helping the economy”)
“Shopping Addiction”	5,570,000	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding causes and affects of shopping addictions • Understanding symptoms of shopping addiction • Signs of shopping addiction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatments
“Shopping Addiction Community”	3,400,000	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Causes of shopping addiction • Signs to identify a shopping addiction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatments for shopping addiction

Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion

Insights

Netnography provided information that can be applied to the previously discussed research questions. The first research question was “What is being said on the Internet regarding compulsive buying?” After analyzing the results, it can be concluded that there is a significant amount of helpful information about compulsive buying on the Internet. From stories written by those with CBD, to tips to identify signs of CBD, to causes and effects of the disorder, consumers have plenty of resources to help them understand, identify, and manage CBD. Furthermore, much of the discussion about CBD is serious and scholarly. While some of what is being said on the Internet does trivialize compulsive buying, there are also many serious conversations. The

search terms “compulsive buying advice”, “shopping addiction”, and “shopping addiction community” returned serious articles, while the terms “shopaholic” and “retail therapy” produced less thoughtful articles. Many of the serious articles do not blame individuals with CBD, but they provide insight into their problems and help find solutions. The articles are empathetic rather than judgmental. Individuals share stories of how they overcame CBD. Furthermore, articles share statistics about the disorder, from the prevalence of CBD, to the amount of money it costs consumers, and more. This can help educate consumers that many people are affected by CBD and they are not alone. While there are good sources of information, many of the articles are very repetitive without performing their own research. They do not explore current trends in retail that contribute to compulsive spending, nor do they perform in-depth analysis of compulsive buying.

The second research question was, “What information is available to those with compulsive buying disorder when they search the Internet?” Fortunately for consumers, there is a significant amount of information available about CBD. From scholarly articles, to addiction institutes, to help websites, consumers can find information about every stage of compulsive buying disorder, from causes, to signs, to consequences, to recovery techniques and resources. However, in order to access this information, consumers need to be able to search the right term. An individual might search “shopaholic” and find only games and movie titles that glamorize overspending. Furthermore, an individual who searches “retail therapy” would find similarly impractical information, including jokes that trivialize the real problems associated with compulsive spending. If they come across this information, they might feel helpless and weak for

experiencing symptoms of CBD. If an individual understood what to search, they will have access to plenty of information about CBD, but they must know what to look for. They must search the more scientific terms of “compulsive buying advice”, “shopping addiction” and “shopping addiction community” in order to produce serious results. Searches of the colloquial phrases “shopaholic” and “retail therapy” do not provide serious, helpful information.

Key Themes

While there is ample information on the Internet for individuals with CBD, some of the conversations regarding “shopaholics” and “retail therapy” are trivialized. Many websites and articles exhibit careless attitudes about the problem, making light of those who are affected by the disorder. They act as though compulsive shopping is how weak individuals deal with their problems, and they neglect to state the true causes and consequences of compulsive shopping. This type of language can be harmful to consumers. An individual who has a disorder will be affected by jokes about their problems. If they were to read these articles or see the jokes made about shopaholics, they might begin to feel even more helpless and restart the cycle of compulsive spending.

Although there are significant resources available for those with CBD, it does not appear that there is a large amount of new research going into CBD. Current research did not produce articles about current trends in compulsive buying disorder, including how the economy and new technology have recently affected consumers. While

psychologists, consumers, and scholars identify and discuss the problem, they are not creating new research about CBD.

Furthermore, many of the articles listed the same facts and information about compulsive buying disorder, without adding a personal or relatable message. While scientific articles are generally clinical in nature, even the non-scientific articles were not personal. There are very few interviews and personal stories shared by individuals with CBD. The websites define the problem and offer solutions, but they do not humanize compulsive buying. Consumers might find it difficult to relate to the article or find a space to share their thoughts and feelings. This is an important aspect of dealing with addiction, and it should be improved.

Consumer education is an important aspect of compulsive buying disorder. Consumers have information available to them, but they must seek it out. This is an important early step in the recovery process that is crucial to individuals with CBD. Currently, if an individual can define his or her problem, that individual will be able to find resources. However, consumers who do not understand CBD will have a difficult time finding information. Discussion and information about compulsive buying should be more widespread.

CBD should be discussed more in magazine articles, blog posts, and articles about fashion. Currently, discussion about CBD is contained to articles specifically about compulsive buying, but it is not widely discussed in more common articles about retailers, credit card companies, debt, and more. This topic has been identified and

understood, but there is still an opportunity to better educate consumers about the dangers of overconsumption.

Learnings

Compulsive buying disorder is an important issue that affects millions of Americans (Black, 2012). It causes stress to relationships, families, and individuals with the disorder. While scholars have studied this disorder for many years, it is still trivialized by the media and individuals who do not understand CBD. For this reason, it is imperative to study and understand CBD and its effects.

While today's society and technologies allow the constant flow of information, it is always important to examine the content of this information. An Internet search of "shopaholic" might provide hundreds of thousands of web pages, but when these web pages trivialize or make fun of CBD, they are not useful to individuals with the disorder. Furthermore, if the scholarly articles about CBD are too impersonal, they are not always helpful for the average consumer, who may find it difficult to find the resources he or she needs. For this reason, netnography provided important insights into communication about CBD. It showed where there was ample information and what can be improved.

In the future, scholars should research how current trends in the economy and technology affect those with CBD. Many current articles define the problem and provide solutions, but do so without considering how the current society might change and affect CBD. This is an important area of study that will be useful to individuals with CBD who

find that some of the information on the Internet is outdated. Furthermore, research should be done to determine how social media affects individuals with CBD, as much of today's online communications occur on social media.

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