Compulsive buying tendencies through materialistic and hedonic values among college students in Turkey
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Abstract

Compulsive buying behaviour which is generally thought to be an uncontrollable chronic tendency to buy beyond someone’s needs or financial limits out of control is a new shopping phenomenon from which millions of consumers and even countries have been suffering due to its awful consequences. In such a consumer society, it becomes one of the “new normal consumer behaviour” even though it has been classified as “abnormal consumer behaviour”. Further, college students represent a profitable market and also identifying their compulsive buying tendencies through their materialistic and hedonic values, found as two of the most important determinants for compulsive buying is crucial for estimating future shopping behaviours. This study investigates the compulsive buying tendencies through materialistic and hedonic values among college students in Turkey. Data were collected from 861 students enrolled in different universities in Turkey. The hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling, and significant direct effects of both materialism and hedonism on compulsive buying are found. Finally, the limitations of the study and the suggestions for future research will be presented.

Keywords: Compulsive buying, Materialistic values, Hedonistic values, College students, Turkey

1. Introduction

Consumer culture, people have been assumed to experience after 1980’s, is defined as a culture in which the large majority of consumers desire, buy and consume goods and services to become a good member of this culture. As a result of this, especially in affluent countries, consumer spending has already exceeded disposable income (Roberts and Jones, 2001), because excessive shopping has caused individuals’ lives to go out of a control (Ureta, 2007). Thus, it becomes a hot issue that estimated millions of people from all over the world suffering from. Most research and scholars consider that excessive buying defined as consumer spends more than he/she affords or beyond his/her needs is responsible for this situation. The results of this painful issue for individuals, families, societies as well as countries and business environment are all unfavourable. For this reason, this behaviour has been of theoretical and practical...
interest to psychologists, psychiatrists, economists, sociologists and marketing scholars and practitioners. Marketing scholars, in particular, have been called this behaviour as “compulsive buying”, “addictive buying” or “excessive buying” on one hand, and they used “consumption”, “shopping” or “spending” instead of buying regarding identical characteristics. One characteristic is an irresistible urge to do this behaviour, and the other characteristic is severe financial and societal consequences. Although there may be significant or sometimes slight differences between these terms, scholars generally tend to use them interchangeably. Present study uses “compulsive buying” to refer this kind of behaviour to be in conformity with the majority of the related literature. This term was chosen instead of “addictive buying”, because college students’ irresistible extrinsic urge to buy is aimed to investigate, not intrinsic urge like alcohol or drug addiction.

Exploring compulsive buying tendencies of adolescent consumers (d’Astous et al., 1990) or college students (Roberts, 1998; Mowen and Spears, 1999; Roberts and Jones, 2001; Joireman et al, 2010; Palan et al., 2011) are of importance because when they begin their new career after graduation, they will make money and wealth so they will designate the new frame of shopping behaviour. In Turkey, there is scarce resource examining either all consumers’ or college students’ compulsive buying tendencies. This study to understand their predisposition to compulsive buying behaviours and its relations with materialistic and hedonistic values is proposed to fill a gap in related marketing literature in Turkey as well as provide a valuable insight for the marketers.

This study aims to explore compulsive buying tendencies through materialistic and hedonistic values among Turkish college students. Estimating compulsive buying tendencies of college students is important because they are considered important actors in market in today and future. Thus, exploring relationships between their materialistic and hedonic values and compulsive buying tendencies shed light on the future shopping trends. In this context, the present study begins by reviewing the literature of compulsive buying, materialistic and hedonic values, then hypotheses are developed. After that, methodology and analyses will take place. At the last section, the results of the analyses will be discussed. Besides, the limitations of the study and the suggestions for future research will be presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Compulsive Buying

There is diversification on defining compulsive buying behaviour in academia. In psychiatric literature, Kraepelin (1915) use “onimania” to describe this behaviour, while Bleuler (1924) use “buying mania” besides “onimania”. Compulsive buying is medically defined as an impulse control dysfunction, a mental disorder characterized by irresistible impulses to engage in harmful or senseless behaviours (Palan et al, 2011). Some scholars mention compulsive purchasing behaviours through similarities in traits and symptoms with obsessive-compulsive behaviours while talking about impulsive buying (Weinberg and Gottwald, 1982; Rook and Hoch, 1985). In conformity with the medical identification and previous explanations, marketing scholars use the term “compulsive buying” to define the behaviour as “chronic, repetitive purchasing that becomes a primary response to negative events or feelings” (O’Guinn and Faber, 1989). Authors discuss compulsive buying in terms of personality traits, demographic variables, family structure and the patterns that classify buyers as compulsive and non-compulsive (Faber, O’Guinn and Krych, 1987; Faber and O’Guinn, 1988, 1989, 1992; O’Guinn and Faber, 1989).

Compulsive buying is one of the “new normal” shopping behaviour in recent consumption culture. As “compulsion” has been a topic of psychiatry and psychology in “obsessive-compulsive disorders” for years, especially after 1980’s it became a crucial issue for marketing authors as well. The most remarkable reason of this situation is that people have experienced their compulsion symptoms during shopping by force of consumption culture so it becomes a new normal shopping or buying behaviour. However, it has been accepted as an abnormal form of consumer behaviours (DeSarbo and Edwards, 1996). Previous researches have stated that approximately ten percent of population is suffering from compulsive buying (Arthur, 1992) in especially industrialized countries because compulsive buyers cannot control their buying behaviour, exceed their limits—as amount or budget-, then they get into trouble through both financial and societal considerations.
Compulsive buyers generally have large debts (O’Guinn and Faber, 1989; Christenson et al, 1994) but they may not recognize the long-term painful outcomes (Roberts and Jones, 2001). On the other hand, compulsive buying can be taken as a pathological issue, such as gambling. Because of its addictive structure, some researchers, in particular European ones, name this phenomenon as “addictive buying” by underlying the difference between compulsion and addiction (Scherhorn, 1990; Scherhorn et al., 1990; Elliott, 1994; Ureta, 2007). In regard to these authors, one’s feeling being pressed to do something repeatedly against one’s will is inferred by compulsion while addiction means that one experiences an irresistible urge to do something which one wants or need (Scherhorn, 1990). Major functions of this behaviour are repairing mood and getting socially desirable aspect (Elliott, 1994). Addictive buyers are lack of self-esteem and they seem material or consumer goods as a means of compensation (Scherhorn et al., 1990).

2.2. Materialistic Values

Materialistic values have constantly been correlated to compulsive buying in various researches (O’Guinn and Faber, 1989; DeSarbo and Edwards, 1996; Mick, 1996; Mowen and Spears, 1999; Friese, 2000; Yurchisin and Johnson, 2004; Dittmar, 2005). After Rokeach (2000) and Schwartz (1992), Richins and Dawson (1992) identified materialistic value as expressing the importance of material things and their possession for a person as well as finding happiness, satisfaction and welfare in person’s life through these material things and person’s tendency to judge own and other people’s success by means of the amount of material things acquired. According to the research, materialistic values have three sides which are acquiring material possessions as a sign of success, placing material objects in the center of life and acquisition material things as a means of being happy through possession of a key for life satisfaction and well being. When viewed from this aspect, compulsive buyers may buy material things because obtaining material possessions means success, life itself and happiness as well as enjoyment. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) found that materialism is positively associated with individualist values and another research shows that compulsive buyers are also materialistic individuals. Dittmar et al. (1996) investigated the relationship between compulsive buying tendencies and the use of specific buying considerations, the use of purchased goods in a symbolic self-completion strategy, and the amount of perceived self-discrepancy between actual and ideal self. Their findings show that compulsive buyers tend to be more materialistic.

Many similar researches indicate that compulsive buyers have high materialistic tendencies than non-compulsive buyers (O’Guinn and Faber, 1989; Dittmar, Beattie and Friese, 1996; Mowen and Spears, 1999). Materialism can easily be correlated with the compulsive buying that is said to be a helper for mood repair and identity development (Dittmar, 2005).

Additionally, it is important to study college students’ materialistic values and its relations with their compulsive buying tendencies in Turkey because materialistic tendencies are increasing among youth and college students dramatically (Nguyen, 2003). Possession of materialistic things is accepted as a means of self-expression, by adolescent consumers in particular (Achenreiner, 1997). Present study aims to examine college students’ materialistic tendencies and its relation with compulsive buying behaviours. In the light of all these information, the first hypothesis of the present study is that:

**H1: There is significant relationship between college students’ materialistic values and compulsive buying tendencies.**

2.3. Hedonistic Values

People with higher hedonic values cannot be satisfied with utilitarian or functional aspects of buying behaviours but enjoyable and pleasurable aspects of them (Wang et al., 2000). Hedonic values are assumed to be associated with gratification through fun, fantasy, playfulness and enjoy (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Babin et al, 1994). People with higher hedonic values, modern consumers, tend to use their surplus-income for their ever-growing new desires for buying (Campbell, 1987). In “Personal Value Questionnaire” of Schwartz (1992), one of the ten value constructs is hedonism and its motivational goal is “pleasure and gratification for oneself”. According to the identification, person with hedonic value aims the enjoy life and it is important to have a good time for him/her (Caprara et al., 2006). Because it is believed that people consider pleasure and gratification more than utilitarian value of the material products during buying process in consumer culture, hedonic value has attracted many researchers’
attention. Its relations with various variables such as utilitarian values, novelty seeking, responsiveness to promotion stimuli, brand consciousness, preference for foreign brands have been studied.

Consumers satisfy their needs by two types of benefits; utilitarian and hedonic (Ödabaş and Barış, 2002). Hedonic buyers are not fulfilled the utilitarian value of the possessions but satisfied with the emotional and hedonic value like brand, design, appearance rather than price and quality (Wang et al, 2000). In addition, hedonic buyers are expected to be novelty and variety-driven. They tend to be the pioneers for innovations (Leawitt and Walton, 1975). In the research (Wang et al, 2000), buyers with higher hedonic values are tend to be more responsive to promotion influences in their product choice and more brand-conscious which may concern more with its symbolic value.

Babin et al. (1994) presented that most buying behaviours combine both utilitarian and hedonic attributes. However, recently, the traditional shopping behaviours of product possession cannot explain consumers’ buying behaviours. Researches show that hedonic values have played the main role anymore. On the other side, shopping centre managers try their places to be more entertaining places with full of fun and enjoyment for consumers. By the way, compulsive buyers which buy things with irresistible urge and repetitively may be expected to be the most affected segment from these enjoyable and amusing shopping experiences which may trigger the hedonic values. Furthermore, it’s also expected that college students, as the most appropriate segment for fun and enjoy attributes of buying behaviour, may be affected by hedonic values of shopping. If they have higher tendency for compulsive buying, it would be ordinary to expect that they have stronger hedonic values, because of its age segments. For this reason, it seems significant to examine the relationship between compulsive buying and hedonic values of the college students as below:

\textit{H2: There is a significant relationship between college students’ hedonistic values and compulsive buying tendencies.}

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Goal

In this research, examining the presence of significant relationships between materialistic and hedonistic values with compulsive buying is aimed. A survey is conducted to test the hypotheses.

3.2. Measures

Three existing scales are utilized in the questionnaire instrument in the research. The first scale is adapted from Valence et al. (1988) compulsive buying scale. It is adapted to measure compulsive buying tendencies of college students. There are four dimensions in the original version of the scale; however one dimension was eliminated. Remained three dimensions were tendency to spend, reactive aspect and post-purchase quilt. In order to measure materialistic values, Richin’s (2004) four dimensions, namely success-orientation, enjoyment, possession and distinctiveness were employed. Hedonic values of the college students are measured by Schwartz Personality Value Questionnaire (1992). The dimensions are enjoy, sense of adventure, pleasure and self-indulgent. All constructs are measured using five-point Likert scales ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Respondents were also asked to state whether it makes them happy to be a member of the consumption culture. Their demographic characteristics were also demanded.

3.3. Sample and Data Collection

Surveys were distributed to college students, using a convenience sampling technique. The data was collected at the Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Biga Faculty of Economics and Administration Sciences and at different universities in Turkey. The final sample was comprised of 861 college students.

3.4. Analyses and Results
Descriptive statistics indicate that 56.6% of the participants are female, while 43.4% of them are male. Have looked at the monthly expenses, 62.4% of the participants have expenses between 400 – 750 TL monthly and 21.7% of them have less than 400 TL monthly. Present questionnaire contains an item which asks whether to be a member of a consumption society makes him/her happy. The mean of this item is 2.93 which states that participants do not concern feeling happy or not with the consumer culture. No significant relation between gender and being happy to be a member of consumption society exists, while there’s significant relation between different expenses groups. Namely, higher-expense groups feel happier with the consumption culture than lower-expense groups.

The hypothesized relationships are tested using structural equation modelling through path analysis. The results indicated a moderately good fit of the model: the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom \((x^2/df) = 5.99\), CFI = 0.921, TLI = 0.877, NFI= 0.908, IFI= 0.922, RMSEA = 0.076.

In order to test the hypotheses, standardized path coefficients between variables were analyzed. Figure 1 summarizes the model and the standardized regression weights. As seen from the results, there is a significant positive relationship between materialistic values and compulsive buying tendencies. Hypothesis 1 (H1) was therefore supported \((\beta: 0.471)\). Additionally, a significant positive relationship propounded in Hypothesis 2 (H2) between hedonic values and compulsive buying tendency was also supported \((\beta: 0.226)\).

**Figure 1. Conceptual Model**

4. Conclusion

In the marketing literature, lots of research exist studying compulsive buying itself and its relationships with several variables like personality traits, values, family structure, other dysfunctions (binge eating and gambling) and from the perspective of various discipline such as psychology. These studies were conducted mainly in the USA (O’Guinn and Faber, 1989), Canada (d’Astous, 1990), and Europe (Scherhorn, 1990) and very few were carried out in other countries (Ureta, 2007). Few research relating to compulsive buying behaviours exists in Turkey (e.g. Erkmen and Yüksel, 2008; Ünsalver, 2011), thus main purpose of this study is to add to the scanty literature on the subject of compulsive buying in Turkey.

In the light of the literature, it is expected that people with higher compulsive buying tendency would have higher materialistic research (O’Guinn and Faber, 1989; DeSarbo and Edwards, 1996; Mick, 1996) and hedonic values which means existing a positive significant relationship between materialistic and hedonic values with compulsive buying tendency. Findings of the present research acknowledge that there is a positive significant relationship between compulsive buying tendency with materialistic and hedonic values. People with higher compulsive buying tendency have higher materialistic and hedonistic values. Related literature found that people with higher materialistic values have higher tendency to have compulsive buying behaviours and vice versa. Present study investigates this
relationship in Turkey because there is no such a research previously. Results of this research’s analyses confirm the previous literature findings which were found in different countries. A positive significant relation between materialistic values and compulsive buying tendency is found among Turkish college students too. “Success” dimension of materialistic values least affect, whereas the “possession of expensive and luxury materials makes happy” dimension most affect the materialistic values according to the findings of the present research. Previous literature indicated that people do not value “possession of a material to feel happy” (Richins and Dawson (1992) as a crucial dimension of materialistic values, however this research’s finding show that college students in Turkey give importance to acquire an expensive and luxury materials to be happy as a sign of materialism, although they do believe that possession of expensive things means success is not an important indicator of materialistic values. It means that the more they acquire luxury things, the happier they become according to the participants’ answers. Had associated with compulsive buying tendencies, participants with higher compulsive buying tendency might be more disposed to have luxury and expensive materials as a means of happiness.

As expected, the relationship was found between hedonic values and compulsive buying tendency among Turkish college students in parallel with the former literature in different countries. Realizing wishes and especially giving importance to take pleasure and enjoy are the main determiners of hedonic values correlating with compulsive buying tendencies among the participants. Pleasure is not seen as one of the key determiners for the compulsive buying behaviour because people cannot control their buying behaviours and buy something which they don’t need and above their financial limits through an extrinsic “irresistible urge” which is alien to them. However, researches which call this kind of buying behaviour as “addictive buying” instead of “compulsive buying”, European authors in particular (Scherhorn et al, 1990; Elliott, 1994), suggest that people who experience this kind of buying behaviour have some pleasure through an “intrinsic urge” during shopping and they want to conduct this behaviour themselves although they know the severe results of the behaviour like alcohol, they want to give it up due to its results but they cannot because they take pleasure and they become addictive. For this reason, it may be more appropriate to investigate this kind of buying behaviour among college students as “addictive buying behaviour” and precautions should be taken as it is a kind of addiction. Additionally, materialistic values predominate hedonic values in relation with compulsive buying tendency. Participants with higher compulsive buying tendency perform this behaviour mostly through their materialistic values than hedonic ones.

Findings show that there are some points to be underlined. Firstly, some participants with higher compulsive buying tendency concern possession of expensive and luxury things to feel happy rather than take a pleasure. Although the findings of this research cannot be generalized, they give some clues about the compulsive buying tendencies of Turkish college students so it could be said that Turkish college students who tend to be a compulsive buyer buy materials as an addictive and they think that this buying behaviour will make them happy. Authorities may take precautions to decrease this behaviour by taking it as an “addiction” so they fight with it like fighting with alcohol or drugs among college students. Furthermore, it is necessary to do that college students must be told that to be happy is not just about possession of luxury materials, but the other values in life. From the marketers’ side, these findings may be valuable to see the general perspective of college students’ compulsive buying tendencies through their hedonic and materialistic values in Turkey. They may benefit from these finding while preparing their advertising campaigns and marketing strategies to this segment.

Secondly, the lack of attention to compulsive buying behaviour in Turkey calls for different researches. Further studies need to be conducted with different samples of consumers in order to find out antecedents and consequences of this issue as well as relationships with various variables. Although it brings some theoretical and practical contributions, there are some limitations of the present research. It cannot be generalized, but present an overview about the issue. Relationships with other personal traits and values may be investigated as well as several societal factors’ affects. In addition, it may present a valuable insight to study affects of development level differences on compulsive buying behaviour because the topic generally investigated in developed countries, so findings acquired from a developing country may be fruitful to make significant comparisons through industrialization. Finally it is hoped that findings of the study provide useful preliminary comprehension and understanding about compulsive buying behaviour in Turkey to all interested parts.

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Significant at <.05