

Covid 19 and its impact on Compulsive buying behavior: Review of Literature

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Abstract: *Compulsive buying or shopping addiction is a mental and behavioral health condition characterized by persistent, excessive, impulsive and uncontrollable desire to shop and spend in spite of severe psychological, social, occupational and financial consequences. Their entire pattern of living surrounds this behavior and caters to this need. It has an effect on mood, anger, stress, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, adjustment issues, eating and sleeping patterns. Persons suffering from the disorder tend to understand and evaluate their feelings poorly and have low tolerance for unpleasant psychological states such as negative moods. Engaging in such behavior for long can lead to feelings of regret, remorse, shame, guilt and even depression in some. Purchases are made in order to improve mood, cope with stress, gain social approval, recognition and improve self-image etc.*

Covid 19 pandemic led to unprecedented restrictions imposed on all aspects of life including the desire to compulsively buy. This led to further complicating the 'desire to buy urge' and consequent mental health challenges. In accordance, the present study has been undertaken with a perspective to compile and review the available literature based on previous research realizing the relevance of understanding such psychological trends that define psychological health, and consumer market economies during pandemics and other challenging times.

As such, the present study was undertaken with a perspective on the relevance of such psychological behaviours and their impact on lifestyle and the economy in the long run. An attempt has been made here to review and compile the available literature from various sources on studies undertaken during and after the pandemic on this behaviour thus having heuristic and reference value for studies to be undertaken on this issue in the near future.

Keywords: COVID -19 pandemic and Compulsive buying behaviors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Compulsive buying behaviour also called pathological buying or shopping addiction is a commonly witnessed behaviour that is consistently increasing in contemporary societies and economies. In India, 79% of the population is said to be having this disorder. One out of every 20 Indians is said to be shopaholics. Shopping is a crucial aspect in any economy and customers with time are being enticed with various choices. New age shopping has taken different dimensions with increased and easy access towards purchasing via online platforms, mall culture and door to door delivery system. According to Mukhopadhyay and Johar, 2009 with different choices available for shopping has become a kind of reward and recreation in itself for people. Scholars have pointed out that excessive shopping may turn addictive in few individuals and result in a mental and behavioural health disorder termed compulsive buying behavior.

Compulsive buying behavior is comparatively a recent development which has drawn the attention of behavioural economists, consumer behaviourists and psychologists. The buyer feels an abnormal, uncontrollable desire to keep purchasing and spend money. The urge to buy is repetitive and he is overpowered by emotions to shop which he fails to have any control over. Studies have considerably proven the onset age of this disorder to be late adolescence and it takes a chronic form over time and may include various symptoms like feelings about purchasing and spending, desire, tendency and drive to spend, compulsive and dysfunctional spending and guilt post purchase. Individuals dealing with CBB have an

increasing level of urge or anxiety which finds a sense of completion or satiation only when a purchase is made.

Persons suffering from CBB have consistently depicted addiction-like symptoms that were a symptomatic, chronic and without complete remission. They also are more likely to develop eating disorders, substances abuses or any other mood or anxiety disorders due to the disorder. Often misrepresented with impulsive buying there is a prominent difference between both. Impulsive buying involves an unplanned purchase on the spur of the moment while compulsive buying has serious negative repercussions like debts, addictions and disruption in daily living. It often leads to adjustment challenges with themselves and others as well.

Compulsive buying has not been categorized as a distinct disorder within the DSM-5(American Psychiatric Association, 2013), but is considered in contemporary times to be a behavioral addiction having severe psychological, social, occupational and financial consequences. The study focused on the S-O-R paradigm to explain how the pandemic triggered people's psychological alteration which led to changes in their purchase behaviours.

As such, the present study was undertaken with a perspective on the relevance of such psychological behaviours and their impact on lifestyle and the economy in the long run. An attempt has been made here to review and compile the available literature from various sources on studies undertaken during and after the pandemic on this behaviour thus having heuristic and reference value for studies to be undertaken on this issue in the near future.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kshatriya, K.& Shah, P.S.(2023). In their paper examined the presence of impulsive and compulsive buying among consumers during Covid 19. It studied the various factors that affect and moderate the impulsiveness and compulsiveness of buying. Literature review led to analysis of four constructs – social media influence, social media preferences, hedonic motivation and shop in COVID-19 while in accordance with factor analysis in SPSS, the variables were divided under the influence of social media, social commerce, electronic word of mouth (EWOM) of social commerce, hedonic happiness, hedonic fun and shopping in times of COVID-19. All six latent variables were found to be significantly related to impulsive and compulsive buying. The regression analysis highlighted social media influence as the strongest predictor for impulse buying and hedonic happiness for compulsive buying. Also, the study found that presence of the pandemic COVID-19 led to impulsive buying as well as compulsive buying prominently in the apparel and accessory segment.

Huang, H.L. et. al.(2022) in their study focused on Internet compulsive buying which is an online shopping environment where buyers pursue the temporary positive emotions associated with shopping, without planning and not using the purchased items. Over a period of time, the positive emotions associated with excessive shopping behavior are found to be increasingly short lived, which further results in an increase in purchase frequency and spending thus adversely having an impact on the finances and social relations of such buyers.

The study aimed at understanding the rapidly changing commerce markets influenced increasingly by advanced technology in the past decade. Compulsive-buying behavior witnessed an increase because of the convenience and the characteristics of online shopping. Also, the COVID-19 pandemics spread led to, consumers changing their decision-making and behavior with preference to shop online more frequently and intensively as such the study aimed at developing and validating an instrument to measure the Internet compulsive-buying tendency (ICBT). The final instrument constructed provided a basis for predicting tendencies toward Internet compulsive shopping and evaluating consumers' abnormal behavior in online-shopping circumstances. It contained 18 items that included four subconstructs: the tendency to spend online, feelings about online shopping and spending, dysfunctional online spending, and online post-purchase guilt.

Shrivastava, R.K. & Bhanot, S.(2022) in their study surveyed the psychological behaviour and shopping behaviour of Indian consumers, especially during a lockdown. Judgement sampling was used for data collection and the sample size was 328. Variables such as age, sex, and finances were found to affect online shopping spree in the present study. The study revealed a change in behaviour leading to an increase in purchase of basics and hygiene products during COVID-19 and the theory of fear (Ruiter, et. al., 2001) was used to explain the shopping behaviour during COVID-19 in countries like India.

Maraz, A. & Yi, S.(2022) in their study found that Compulsive buying behaviour increased during the initial months of the pandemic. Individuals in high income groups were found to have the highest tendency for compulsive buying, although the increase in compulsive buying behaviours over time was most profoundly found among the economically weaker sections of society. When analysed by regression model, High income groups had the strongest effect on compulsive buying

after taking in consideration the effect of stress, finances and age. The high income section depicted the strongest correlation between stress and compulsive buying.

Nori, R. et.al.(2022) in their study on 105 participants assessed the role of short term memory and decision-making attributes in obsessive buying behaviour during the pandemic. Attempt was made to measure obsessive behaviour, decision-making abilities, short comings in short term memory and online shopping habits. The results showed that during the pandemic, people spent much more time shopping online, bought more and spent more money than before to the pandemic. Moreover, both higher levels of shortcomings in short term memory and instantaneous decision-making abilities led to a greater tendency to engage in compulsive buying. The study revealed short term memory lapses, particularly closely associated with the ability of decision making, strategising ahead, or attentional conflicts, as predictors of obsessive buying, as well as the instantaneous decision-making abilities. These results suggested the need to develop specific programs for short term memory to improve thought processes related to compulsive shopping behaviour..

Naeem, M. (2021) in his study on 40 customers from the United Kingdom tried to understand the psychology of impulsive buying during the pandemic and its impact on persons and economy. An attempt was made to explain how the fear, perspectives on risk and attitude to confirm increased impulse buying during the pandemic as such an attempt at understanding and interpreting social patterns in during this period was made in this study. Results revealed that vulnerable group of people, fear of sickness, fear of deprivation, fear of price increase , information about increasing casualties, rumours, hypes, social dilemmas to purchase more while being at home, fear of going outside, COVID-19 infected workers in shops , and govt. guidelines to stay at home, increased panic spontaneous buying behaviour among customers.

Di Crosta A et. al. (2021) in their study highlighted the effect of the virus on individuals expenditure levels. Their study focused on compulsive buying behaviour and variables that had an impact on it . Personality traits, perceived financial stability and self-justifications also were found to play a crucial role in compulsive behaviour during covid times. Compulsive behaviour towards necessities was found to be affected by anxiety and covid related fears, while compulsive behaviour towards non necessities was predicted by depression.

Celik S.&k Kose G.G. (2021) made an attempt to analyze human consumer behaviors during the pandemic period from the perspective of psychology and marketing fields of science . Their study was conducted in Turkey on 660 individuals. An assessment was made on the effect of anxiety experienced by consumers due to Covid-19 pandemic on their stress-coping strategies as well as the effect of stress-coping strategies on compulsive buying behavior. The consequence of the pandemic was a heightened level of anxiety among humans and opting for unorthodox consumption behaviors as consumers. The interrelation among anxiety, coping style with stress and compulsive purchase behavior was explored. Based on these interrelations, a structural model was suggested indicating that anxiety has high effect on the helpless approach dimension, which is one of the coping styles with stress and that helpless approach alone has an effect on compulsive buying behavior. The mediating role of intolerance of uncertainty on compulsive buying behavior as one of the stress-coping strategies was also assessed in the study. The findings highlighted intolerance of uncertainty in such an interrelation had a partial mediating effect.

Islam T. et.al. (2021) conducted their study in a multi-country setting including the U.S., China, India, and Pakistan. The study was based on the Stimuli-Organism-Response and the Competitive Arousal model and investigated how the pandemic and the panic created by it, external stimuli's such as Limited Quantity Scarcity (LQS) and Limited Time Scarcity (LTS) affect the emotional arousal among people, which in turn influenced consumers' impulsive and compulsive buying behaviors. Findings confirmed that LQS and LTS significantly increased perceived arousal in consumers, which further led to more impulsive and obsessive buying. Excessive social media was also found to intensify the relationship between scarcity messages and perceived arousal. Scarcity messages with limited quantity and time significantly developed perceived arousal and perceived arousal was found to have a significant positive relationship with impulsive and compulsive buying. The relationships between perceived arousal and impulsive & compulsive buying was found to moderated by the urge to buy impulsively".

Jaspal, R. et.al.(2020) conducted their online study on a cross sectional sample of 411 participants in the United Kingdom who completed a survey on strength of social network, political trust, fear of COVID-19, length of self-isolation and compulsive buying behaviour. Results for the various socio demographic groups revealed older people and lower income groups were less likely to work from home in response to COVID-19, people with a diagnosed mental health disorder exhibited less political trust and more fear of COVID-19, also those who had depicted covid 19 symptoms were more

susceptible to compulsive buying disorders. The structural equation model was used to how explain age, a diagnosed mental health disorder, having COVID-19 symptomatology and strength of social network impacted working from home and compulsive buying, through the mediators of political trust, fear of COVID-19 and length of self-isolation.

The results demonstrated that some groups may be vulnerable to maladaptive behaviours and poor social, psychological, and physical health outcomes and may require special support to cope effectively with the effects of COVID-19.

In another study by Lopes, B. et.al. (2020) on a sample of 361 people in the United Kingdom an attempt was made to examine the impact of COVID-19 on symptoms of psychosis, namely paranoia and hallucinations. The study involved participation in a 2 (self-isolation vs. no self-isolation) x 2 (perceived COVID-19 symptomatology vs. no perceived COVID-19 symptomatology) x 2 (exposure to COVID-19 news vs. control) experiment online where participants completed measures of political trust, social network, fear of COVID-19, current paranoid thoughts, hallucinatory experiences and compulsive buying. Findings revealed employed people and students were more vulnerable to paranoia. News increased the impact of fear of COVID-19 on paranoia, hallucinations and compulsive buying behaviour. News also enhanced the impact of political trust on paranoia and hallucinations. CBT was suggested to address COVID-19 paranoia, hallucinations and compulsive buying.

Summing up, compulsive buying or shopping addiction is a mental and behavioural health condition characterized by persistent, excessive, impulsive and uncontrollable desire to shop and spend in spite of severe psychological, social, occupational and financial consequences. Their entire pattern of living surrounds this behaviour and caters to this need. It has an effect on mood, anger, stress, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, adjustment issues, eating and sleeping patterns. Persons suffering from the disorder tend to understand and evaluate their feelings poorly and have low tolerance for unpleasant psychological states such as negative moods. Engaging in such behaviour for long can lead to feelings of regret, remorse, shame, guilt and even depression in some. Purchases are made in order to improve mood, cope with stress, gain social approval, recognition and improve self-image etc.

In accordance, the present study has been undertaken with a perspective based on previous research and data available that onset of the disorder occurs in the late teens and gradually turns chronic, as such this particular vulnerable stratum of society needs to be understood better.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic period witnessed unprecedented restrictions imposed on all aspects of life including the desire to compulsively buy. This led to further complicating the 'desire to buy urge' and consequent mental health challenges.

The present study, gives important insights into the studies undertaken till date and the socio economic demography covered. Though comprehensive, there exists scope to still explore more literature for future studies to be undertaken globally and in India on these maladaptive behaviours in context of the pandemic. Despite these limitations, the present study was undertaken with a perspective on the relevance of such psychological behaviours and their impact on lifestyle and the economy in the long run.

An attempt was made here to review and compile the available literature from various sources on studies undertaken during and after the pandemic on this behaviour thus having heuristic and reference value for studies to be undertaken on this issue in the near future.

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