How Unconscious Is a Compulsive Buyer?
A Case Study

Kompülsif Tüketici Ne Kadar Bilinçsiz? Bir Örnek Olay Çalışması

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study
Compulsive buying has received widespread attention in psychiatry and psychology, along with marketing (O’Guinn and Faber, 1989; Kearney and Stevens, 2012; Granero et al., 2016). Though the underlying causes of this behavioral disorder have often been investigated, much is not known whether the consumer behaves consciously, to what extent they control themselves in their buying behaviour. Public consciousness is found to be related to compulsive buying (Xu, 2008). However, it is not clear whether this motivation is distinguished from conspicuous consumption and they also disregard inner self and self-recrimination. In this study, the purchase behavior of an individual exhibiting compulsive buying behavior has been examined closely in terms of these characteristics and relevant findings are presented.

Literature Review (Conceptual / Theoretical Framework)
Compulsive Buying Behavior (CBB), also known as shopping addiction, pathological purchasing or compulsive purchasing disorder, is characterized by the purchase of continuous, excessive, impulsive and uncontrollable products despite serious psychological, social, professional, financial consequences and defined as a mental health condition (Müller et al., 2015). Although compulsive buying behavior can be used interchangeably with concepts such as shopping addiction and compulsive spending (Dittmar et al., 1996), shopping addiction is a milder version of compulsive buying disorder in terms of effective treatment and intervention methods, and shopping addicts are aware of this addiction and avoid shopping. Consumers with compulsive purchasing disorder, on the other hand, deny it while they cannot hold back (Bas, 2016).

Self-consciousness, is defined as directing the individual's attention to himself / herself (Fenigstein et al., 1975: 522) and also a tendency to direct attention to inside or outside of oneself (López-Bonilla et al., 2018). Self-Consciousness Scale developed by Fenigstein et al. (1975) stated that there are three aspects of self-consciousness in order to evaluate individual differences in self-consciousness: namely Private Self-Consciousness, Public Self-Consciousness and Social Anxiety. Private self-consciousness is concerned with the tendency to be introverted about one's thoughts and feelings. Public self-consciousness refers to looking at yourself as a social object in relation to how others see the self and the impression it creates on others. Social anxiety refers to the discomfort caused by being in the same place with other people.

Method
In this study, the case study design, one of the qualitative research methods, was adopted. When asking how and why questions about an issue, case studies are considered to be suitable for seeking answer for such issues (Yin, 2003). The researcher, I, have been working as a lecturer in marketing for

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ten years. While my primary field of study is consumer behavior, I also do research on marketing communications and marketing research. The site of the study is a tiny town that is located in the inner western part of Turkey. In this city there is only one shopping mall but many little stores in the city center. For this study, a compulsive buyer was the case as compulsive buying is a significant issue both in consumer behaviour and psychiatry and it is not clear whether compulsive buying is a disease or just a temporary buying disorder. Therefore, it is expected that this case would contribute to the field by delving into a compulsive buyer’s buying behaviour. When choosing the participant, I first shared a compulsive buyer screening questionnaire on my social media account. I received responses in a while and decided on the one getting the highest score. She is a working woman at her 30’s, married, born and raised in the site of the study.

Case study is a type of qualitative research that allows the use of more than one data collection technique. In this study, data sources such as interviews, direct observation, receipt, invoice, etc. regarding the shopping history, and images of purchased products were used to contribute to the understanding and examination of the research subject. I conducted the interviews face-to-face with a semi-structured interview form, and in the unstructured interviews by phone. I made my observations by going with her while she was shopping, upon the participant’s approval. As documentary evidence, I examined photos from her house, wardrobe, etc., and shopping receipts. I tried to provide a set of criteria to ensure validity and reliability in the data I collected. In this case study, I provided triangulation, member checking, thick description in order to assess internal validity and considered the position of the researcher and the audit trail along with triangulation to ensure reliability.

In this study I analyzed the data following Strauss and Gorbin’s (1998) grounded theory procedure. Doing constant comparative analysis, I related data collection and data analysis as the method requires. I reviewed, evaluated, and organized interview transcripts, observations and documentary evidences including shopping receipts, purchase orders, store subscriptions, mobile applications of the stores she keeps on her mobile phone.

**Findings and Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to identify the motivations that makes compulsive buyer purchase, what and how often and why and how she buys; to reveal the consciousness and the extent to which out of control she acts during her purchases. Following the data analysis I developed the themes and relevant sub-themes below.

**Theme One:** Excessive buying motivations

*related sub-themes:* leisure activity, mood, sales promotions, brand fondness, social comparison, altruism

**Theme Two:** Excessive buying conditions

*related sub-themes:* product category, social criticism exposure, after-shop feeling (regret, judgement)

**Theme Three:** Conscious consumption and buying process

*related sub-themes:* unnecessary product purchase awareness, seeking social approval, sales promotions

**Theme Four:** Buying consciousness

*related sub-themes:* conscious consumption awareness, social image, external attribution, tradeoff

**Conclusion, Recommendations and Limitations**

Compulsive buying has often been associated with depression (Claes et al., 2016; Villardefrancos and Otero-López, 2016; Lawrence et al., 2014). Hirschman (1992) found that while associating
compulsive buying behavior with the feeling of inadequacy, individuals display excessive buying behavior as a way of getting away from negative feelings and stress; In this study, the participant also stated that her excessive buying has become a way of dealing with negative feelings and thoughts. She stated that her mood is extremely distinctive in her desire to shop, and when she is depressed, she often tends to shopping in order to feel good.

Studies show that compulsive buyers are self-controlling but differ from cautious buyers in how they implement self-control measures (Horváth et al., 2015). In this study, the participant’s self-assessment of excessive consumption behavior and the effort to control excessive consumption and watching herself with a third eye show that she also has a private self-consciousness.

In this study, another factor that the participant particularly emphasizes and prepares the ground for excessive consumption is shopping as a leisure activity. Baudrillard's (2010) "shopping malls that bring together the scattered functions of social life and togetherness (work, leisure time, nutrition, health, transportation, media, culture) under a single homogeneous roof (time / space)" has become the venue.

Considering the common critiques related to case study, future researches might be designed as multiple cases recruiting more participants from diverse demographics and the role of self under different features.