

Why shopaholics overspend? Poor credit management, buying to boost mood, study says

August 1 2013

Why do shopping addicts keep spending even in the face of harmful financial, emotional and social consequences? A new study suggests poor credit management and a belief that new purchases will create a happier life fuel compulsive buying.

Approximately 10 percent of adults in Western countries are believed to have a compulsive spending disorder that leads them to lose control over their buying behavior, and the trend is on the rise. These shopaholics are addicted to buying things, regardless of whether they want or need them.

In a new study due to be published in the *Journal of Economic Psychology*, San Francisco State University researchers have identified specific behaviors that lead to such compulsive buying.

"Compulsive shoppers tend to be people who bury their head in the sand and ignore the [credit card](#) bill," said Ryan Howell, associate professor of psychology at SF State. "We also found that these individuals keep on buying because they are looking for that 'buy high,' hoping their purchases will lift their mood and transform them as a person."

"A lot of research has shown that shopaholics tend to have materialistic values," Howell said. "Our results explain why [materialistic people](#) shop compulsively."

Howell and colleagues surveyed more than 1,600 participants who answered questions about their money management, shopping habits and how much they value [material possessions](#).

The researchers' analysis found that lack of money management predicted individuals' compulsive spending, regardless of their personality, gender, age and income. In particular, out-of-control-shopping was primarily driven by poor credit management, such as not paying attention to credit card statements, not paying [credit card bills](#) on time and exceeding credit limits.

The authors suggest that one possible reason why credit cards may facilitate compulsive shopping is because they allow consumers to separate the pleasure of buying from the pain of paying.

In the study, compulsive shoppers reported that they bought items to get a buzz or put themselves in a better mood. They also believed the purchases could change their life, for example by transforming their appearance, self-confidence, reputation and relationships.

"We know that a person's values impact their [shopping habits](#), but values aren't the easiest thing to change" Howell said. "Even if you are still materialistic and you have the desire to acquire more possessions, it's how you manage your behavior that counts. Our findings suggest that you can keep your shopping under control by paying attention to your credit card and checking in with yourself about whether you are shopping for emotional reasons."

Howell and his graduate students continue to study [compulsive buying](#) and other consumer habits through their Beyond the Purchase website at <http://www.beyondthepurchase.org>. On the site, members of the public can take free surveys to find out what kind of consumer they are and how their spending choices affect them.

More information: "Sadness, Identity, and Plastic in Over-shopping: The Interplay of Materialism, Poor Credit Management, and Emotional Buying Motives in Predicting Compulsive Buying," has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Economic Psychology*.

Provided by San Francisco State University

Citation: Why shopaholics overspend? Poor credit management, buying to boost mood, study says (2013, August 1) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-08-shopaholics-overspend-poor-credit-boost.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.