

*Understanding Students Compulsive Buying of Apparel: An Empirical Study*  
(Memahami Tingkah Laku Pembelian Pakaian Secara Kompulsif di Kalangan Pelajar: Satu Kajian Empirikal)

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*ABSTRACT*

*Most compulsive buyers tend to be highly interested in fashion as well as their physical appearance and attractiveness. This study aims to investigate the impact of depression, materialism, excessive internet usage on compulsive buying behaviour among university students in buying apparels. A total of 177 questionnaires were collected via convenience sampling from university students located at Klang Valley. It is found that, depression and materialism are having a significant impact to compulsive buying behaviour. These findings will appeal to those interested in consumer behaviour in buying apparel.*

*Keywords: Apparel, depression, materialism, internet, compulsive buying.*

ABSTRAK

Kebanyakan pembeli kompulsif cenderung dan sangat berminat dalam fesyen kerana mereka member penekanan kepada penampilan fizikal dan daya tarikan mereka. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat kesan kemurungan, materialisme, dan penggunaan internet berlebihan terhadap tabiat membeli pakaian secara kompulsif di kalangan pelajar universiti. Sebanyak 177 soal selidik telah dikumpulkan melalui persampelan mudah daripada pelajar universiti di Lembah Klang. Hasil kajian didapati bahawa, kemurungan dan materialisme mempunyai kesan yang signifikan terhadap tingkahlaku pembelian pakaian secara kompulsif. Penemuan ini memberikan sumbangan dan implikasi besar kepada industri pakaian yang berminat untuk mengetahui tabiat membeli di kalangan pengguna dalam membeli pakaian.

Kata kunci: Pakaian, kemurungan, materialisme, internet, membeli kompulsif.

## INTRODUCTION

Apparel manufacturing included manufacturing clothing and clothing accessories. It has become one of the most lucrative markets in US with total sales \$164 billion in 2003 but it is also highly competitive (Lu & Rucker 2006). Almost two decades ago, many apparel retailers (especially department stores) are expanding the percentage of store brands that they carry ([Morganosky 1990](#)). This trend, however, has changed as most store brands have almost disappeared in favor of retailer named brands (Burt 2000). Nowadays, fashion market place may be particularly interested by compulsive buyer (Johnson & Attmann 2009). Compulsive buyers tend to be highly interested in fashion as well as their physical appearance and attractiveness (Park & Burns 2005; Christenson et al. 1994). Compulsive buyers frequently purchase clothing as well as other products such as jewellery, shoes, and cosmetics (Christenson et al. 1994; McElroy et al. 1995; Schlosser et al. 1994). In the United Kingdom, surprisingly the majority of the younger generation would not reduce their spending on clothing even if they had to reduce their overall spending (DailyMail.com 2015; Schor 1998). Similarly, most American female adolescents' shopping behaviour was influenced by fashion orientation (Darley & Johnson 1993). Clothing products are categorized as symbols of self-completion because a fashionable cloth can communicate an ideal self-image and increase self-confident (Yurchisin & Johnson 2004).

In Malaysia, most teenagers start working doing part-time jobs and/or receiving significantly higher allowances from their parents, therefore they have the spending power and purchase decision making. Teenagers in Malaysia are expected to remain the most important trend-setting consumer segment over the forecast period because they have influences on consumer demand in a wide range of sectors, ranging from clothing and footwear to packaged food and beverages. Besides that, they become the most impressionable consumers, and brands have opportunity to build lasting relationships with teenage consumers in order to lay foundations of brand loyalty and it will extend well into adulthood. In terms of buying decision, past studies indicated that a majority of the Malaysia' respondents ranked buying fashion clothing as their most important purchase decision, followed by personal computer, branded perfume, instant noodle, and instant coffee (Akir & Othman 2010).

Report by Euromonitor International (2011) indicated that, Malaysian consumers become more fashion-conscious and more attentive to their personal

appearances that resulted in the increasing numbers of international fashion houses and luxurious brands. Clothing and footwear are commonly sold through store-based retailers in Malaysia, with supermarkets/hypermarkets, department stores and independent specialist retailers such as boutiques and fashion houses are being the main distribution channels (Euromonitor International 2011). According to National Statistical Offices, OECD, Euromonitor International, Malaysian consumer expenditure on clothing and footwear are increasingly 19.7% from 2006 to 2010, which represent, RM 8,145 million during 2006 to RM 9,750 million during 2010.

Besides that, the e-commerce transition has also brought great opportunity for Malaysian especially among young customer (Sin et al. 2012). The expansion of mobile broadband is expected not only drive increased demand for smartphones, but also facilitate growth of e-commerce and m-commerce (Euromonitor International 2011). Results showed that, most of products purchased through social media website such as Facebook, Blogger and YouTube are clothing and accessories which are 52.5%, and it followed by travels and hotel arrangement (37.7%) (Sin et al. 2012).

Past studies suggested that compulsive buying typically begins in late adolescence (between 17 – 22 years old) or early adulthood (20 – 24 years old) (O'Guinn & Faber 1989; Christenson et al. 1994; Schlosser et al. 1994). Research has also shown that the majority of compulsive buyers are women wherein they indulge themselves in clothing, shoes, and accessories (O'guinn & Faber 1989; Scherhorn et al. 1990; McElroy et al. 1995). Many factors are identified to influence compulsive behaviour such as demographics, psychological, familiar, sociological, culture and environment (Roberts 1998; Manolis et al. 2008), materialism, social influence, status, emotions (Saraneva and Sääksjärvi 2008; Manolis et al. 2008), retail environment setting, and internet shopping (Kukar-Kinney et al. 2009). Moreover, young consumers within the range of 12 - 13 year old are inclined to become compulsive buyer in attempt to cope with heightened levels of academic stress (Roberts & Roberts 2012).

Müllera et al. (2011) has done a research on relationship between depression, materialism and excessive internet use to compulsive buying. In this study, Mueller et al. (2011) had made a conclusion that materialism and depression jointly influence compulsive buying, whereas excessive internet use was not related to compulsive buying. Johnson and Attmann (2008) had revealed significant relationships between neuroticism and fashion interest with compulsive

clothing buying, but the path between materialism and compulsive clothing buying was not significant. Several researchers found that there is a direct effect between materialism and compulsive buying (Eren, Eroglu, & Hacıoglu 2012). Due to the mixed result hence, the aim of this study is to investigate if depression, materialism, and excessive of internet use are related to compulsive buying behaviour among university students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Depression

Depression is a common psychiatric disorder in children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly (Sharp & Lipsky 2002). Based on the Medicine Net. Com, depression can be defined as an illness that involves the body, mood, and thoughts and that affects the way a person eats, sleeps, feels about himself or herself, thinks about things and it is not the same as a passing blue mood or a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be wished away. Previous study had showed that compulsive buying behaviour seemed to be motivated by depression or sad feelings (Müllera et al. 2012). Participants with compulsive buying reported higher depression scores than respondents without compulsive buying (Müllera et al. 2010). Therefore, a direct and positive link between depression and compulsive buying behaviour is proposed; H1: There is positive relationship between feeling of depression and compulsive buying behaviour among university students in buying apparel.

### Materialism

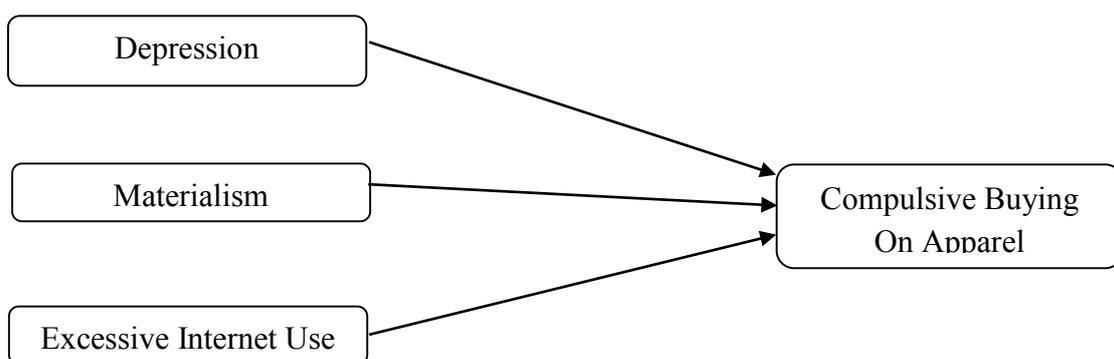
Materialism has been defined as “the importance a

person places on possessions and their acquisition as a necessary or desirable form of conduct to reach desired end states, including happiness” (Richins & Dawson 1992). Most materialistic individuals see the acquisition of material goods as the primary way of attaining success, happiness, and a sense of identity (Richins & Rudmin 1994; Richins 2004). Several researchers suggested that materialistic presents a strong predictor on individuals' compulsive buying (Dittmar 2005; Müllera et al. 2010). Thus, the following hypothesis is developed; H2: There is positive relationship between materialism and compulsive buying behaviour among university students in buying apparel.

### Excessive Internet Usage

Excessive use of internet can lead to the development of some symptoms of internet addiction. Past studies noted that people who had addictive behaviours, begun to neglect their work and social life, to lose their self-control and to substitute the real world with the online space and believe that their life outside the net is empty and joyless (Vanea 2011). Excessive internet use is not an official ‘illness’, but it as high lighting problems around children’s ability to control their online activities and, in particular, the negative consequences that can result from their lack of control (Smahel et al. 2012). Findings in consumer research suggested that Internet use possesses characteristics that seem to encourage compulsive buying (Lejoyeux et al. 2007; Kukar-Kinney et al. 2009; Müllera et al. 2011). The preceding discussion suggests that excessive internet usage is likely to influence compulsive buying behaviour. This leads to the following hypotheses; H3: There is positive relationship between excessive internet usage and compulsive buying behaviour among university students in buying apparel.

FIGURE 1. Research model



## Sampling Design, Subjects and Procedures

This study focuses upon the undergraduate students who have purchased apparels from retailers located within Klang Valley, Malaysia. Klang Valley is where the capital of Malaysia is situated. It was reported that most of the modern retail establishments in Malaysia are located in the Klang Valley (Euro monitor International 2011). A convenience sampling method was used in this study. The data for this study was collected by using self-administered questionnaires distributed. Of the 200 questionnaires that were distributed, 177 participants completed the questionnaires, representing a response rate of 89 per cent.

All of the constructs used in the proposed model were measured using multi-item scales, adapted from previous studies that reported high statistical reliability and validity. The items for the depression are adapted from Patient Health Questionnaire Depression Scale (PHQ-9; Pfizer, (Pfizer Inc., New York, NY 2001), the items for materialism was measured using scales developed from the study by Richins (2004), and items for excessive internet usages is derived from the study by Müllera et al. (2001), items for compulsive buying behaviour was adapted from the research by Faber and O'guinn (1992). All items in this study were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Demographic information of the respondents is demonstrated in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Respondents' profile

Demographic variables		Research samples (n = 150 )	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	58	33
	Female	119	67
Ethnicity	Malay	90	51
	Indian	15	9
	Chinese	66	37
	Others	6	3
Faculty	Social Sciences	96	54
	Sciences	81	46
Employment Status	Not Working	168	95
	Work Part-time	9	5
Allowance per month	Below – RM250	67	38
	RM 251 – RM350	73	46
	Above RM350	28	16

Among the samples collected, female respondents (67 per cent) were the majority. In terms of ethnicity, 51 per cent of the respondents are Malay, 37 per cent are Chinese and 9 per cent are Indian. The majorities (54 per cent) of the respondents belonged to the social sciences fields, while 46 per cent related to sciences programs. A total 168 respondents (95%) were not working, only 9 respondents (5%) have part-time job. In terms of monthly allowance, 38 per cent of the respondents received monthly allowance of below RM250, 46% between RM251-RM350; and 16%

received monthly allowance of above RM350. Several university students were involved in this study. They are students from The National University of Malaysia (UKM), University of Malaya (UM), Tunku Abdul Rahman College (TARC), Segi College, and University Putra Malaysia (UPM).

Majority of the respondents spend about range RM 51 – RM 100 on the apparel that they did not plan to buy. This group consisted of 102 respondents, which accounted for 58% of the respondents. 55 respondents or 31% of respondents were spending is less than RM

50 on the apparel that they did not plan to buy. 14 respondents (8%) were spending between RM 101 – RM 150 on the apparel that they did not plan to buy. While, 6 respondents (3%) were spending around RM151 and above for the apparel that they did not plan to buy.

RESULTS

The internal reliability of the items was verified by computing the Cronbach’s alpha (see Table 2. The Cronbach’s alpha for depression was .85, materialism was .83, excessive of internet usage was .83 and compulsive buying was .81. Reliability statistics for all the factors passed the excellent benchmark suggested by Nunnally (1978).

TABLE 2. Construct reliability

Variables	Cronbach’s Alpha Value	Number Of Items
Depression	0.847	9
Materialism	0.834	9
Excessive of Internet Use	0.825	8
Compulsive Buying Scale	0.810	7

Multiple Regression Analysis

- *Depression, materialism, excessive internet usage and compulsive buying behaviour*

Table 3 presents results of a multiple regression analysis used to evaluate the strength of the proposed relationship. Three hypotheses were formulated and all the variables were retained after testing their reliability and validity. Multiple regression analysis is following the guidelines by Hair et al. (2009) to test the impact

of depression, materialism, excessive internet usage on compulsive buying behaviour. The generic model, without controlling for personal and demographic characteristics, is significant at 1% level (F value = 12.90). Table 3 shows the multiple regression results obtained revealed that out of three hypotheses (H1-H3), two hypotheses were found to be significant. The results shows the supported hypotheses are the relationship between depression ( $\beta = .329$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), and excessive internet usage ( $\beta = .180$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

TABLE 3. Multiple Regression Analysis

Factors/determinants	Standardized		
	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)		3.365	.001
Depression	.329	3.876	.000
Materialism	.039	.485	.629
Internet Excessive Usage	.176	2.00	.048

*F*<sub>(3,173)</sub>=12.90, *R*<sup>2</sup> = 0.210, *Adj. R*<sup>2</sup>=0.193  
*Dependent Variable: Compulsive Buying Behaviour*

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

According to the results, depression has the strong and significant positive relationship with compulsive buying apparel. This is in line with past studies that shown that depression has a significant and positive influence on compulsive buying behaviour (Mueller et al. 2010). Buyers that are motivated by internal feelings such as low self-esteem and having a short-term sense of power or control are more likely to have depression. Several studies noted that, those with mood and anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, compulsive hoarding, personality disorder, and disorders of impulse control, particularly intermittent explosive disorder, occur most often in conjunction with compulsive buying (Frost et al. 2009; Mitchell et al. 2002; Schlosser et al. 1994).

This study also showed excessive internet usage as the second important factor. The finding suggests that, the more excessive internet usage, the more likely students will involve in compulsive buying apparel (Lejoyeux et al. 2007; Mueller et al. 2011). But, the finding of this study show materialism is not related to compulsive buying apparel. This result was in line with Johnson and Attmann (2009) study that showed the path between materialism and compulsive clothing buying was not significant. Similarly, early studies also dismissed the impact of materialism towards compulsive buying (Scherhorn et al. 1990).

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