

Retail Therapy: A Qualitative Investigation of Therapeutic Role of Shopping in Negative Affect

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Abstract

This paper focuses on producing a holistic understanding of Retail Therapy and systematically reviewing the existing literature in the field of retail therapy and negative affect. Previously, there was a dearth of direct investigation on retail therapy. This paper synthesizes the different sources of knowledge on retail therapy published between 1988 to 2018 and provides an integrative and comprehensive understanding of the therapeutic role of shopping in emotional regulation. The study used only secondary data collected from different scientific journals, books, and, websites. The finding of the paper is consistent with previous studies on retail therapy that, shopping is therapeutic but not always. It has a healing power but also can make a person addicted to compulsive buying.

Keywords: Retail Therapy, Therapeutic Shopping, Negative Affect, Qualitative Investigation

Introduction

Shopping is an unavoidable activity in a person's daily life and, in today's world consumers use it as a means to alleviate their negative affect like bad mood, stress, anger, sadness, guilt, shame, anxiety, irritability, etc. Several factors can be attributed to the negative Affect, further negative Affect is associated with the feeling of helplessness, shopping on the other hand comes with a feeling of personal control and autonomy and these features of shopping make it a source of happiness (Lee,2017), hence shopping is therapeutic, it can cure a bad mood, make a person instant happier and fights lingering sadness (Atalay, 2011) means it has a healing power like therapy.

As the activities of shopping started alleviating negative emotions, the concept received notable attention from both scholars and marketers and the term retail therapy emerged in the literature ((Lonsdale, 1994) Put simply, Retail therapy refers to an act of using shopping and buying as a therapeutic instrument by a buyer to get rid of negative feelings, emotions, and moods. The therapeutic effect of shopping can be summarized by pre- shopping experience, ongoing shopping experience, and post-purchase experiences. Retail therapy is driven by several factors, the most prominent is to alleviate bad mood (K. Sasi Kumar, 2017).

Shopping activities often act as a healing system that reduces the negative affect on a short-term basis (Kang, 2009) and adds to subjective well-being in the long run (Lee, 2015).

As per the existing literature of retail therapy, it has been mainly studied applying two different approaches: compensatory consumption (Eccles, 2000; Yurchisin, J., Yan, 2008; Kacen, 1998) and mood- alleviative consumption (Luomala, 2002; Kacen, 1999). As per the compensatory approach of retail therapy, shopping is used as a tool to compensate for some kind of perceived deficiency in personal

control over one’s environment, shopping makes a person feel in control and this is based on the theory that sadness is related with feeling of helplessness, shopping on the hand provides a sense of personal control and autonomy, hence a better substitute of lack of control over environment (Yurchisin, 2006). From the mood- alleviating point of view shopping is used as a tool to alleviate or improve negative mood. As per this approach, shopping is therapeutic because it can cure a bad mood, help in feel relax and make a person instant happier. Reason behind retail therapy is a chemical called dopamine, it is a fill- good chemical. It is released every time when a person goes shopping or start shopping or just scroll through shopping sites. Retail therapy is about the whole experience starting from visiting the store to browsing through the collection, taking a trial, and, then making a final purchase.

Put together these two approaches, shopping has therapeutic utility like a distraction from stress, sensory stimulation to the bored shopper, social connection to lonely, relief, escape from a bad mood, etc.

The objective

The purpose of the paper is to understand the holistic concept of retail therapy and its role in negative affect by reviewing the existing relevant literature.

Methodology

The key point of the methodology is to investigate and systematically analyse the existing literature related to retail therapy and negative affect. For this purpose, both national and international research papers and articles published between 1988 to 2018 were reviewed. Researchers used the terms retail therapy, therapeutic shopping, and, negative affect in the various scientific electronic databases such as SAGE publication, emerald, web of science, etc.

Table 1: Description of existing relevant literature on Retail Therapy and Negative Affect

S. No.	Author	Year	Methodology	Key Findings
1.	A. Selin Atalay	2011	Survey Sample size- 195 Average age-34 years	Retail therapy is positively associated with positive affect and can repair bad mood.
2.	Mick, D. G., & DeMoss, M.	1990	Content Analysis Sample size- 287	Overall shopping for self, represents a variety of personal acquisitions like feeling of cheering up, renewed, relaxed, and refreshed, etc.
3.	Beyza Gültekin Leyla Özer	2012	Structured Questionnaire Regression analysis Sample size- 420	Results of the study suggest that hedonic motives and their components like adventure, gratification, and idea have a positive impact on impulse buying

4.	Luomala, H. T., & Laaksonen, M.	1999	Thematic interviews Sample size-28	The finding of the study indicated that people engage in shopping to alleviate or repair negative emotions when they have stress or are in a bad mood.
5.	Minjeong Kang	2012	Structured interview Sample size- 93	As per the finding of the paper, when respondents are experiencing a bad mood, most of them went shopping to alleviate them more than half of the time.
6	Shahnaz Nayebzadeh	2014	Questionnaire	A positive relationship exists between positive emotions and impulse buying tendencies.
7	Valence, G., d'Astous, A., & Fortier, L	1988		The study suggested that shopping to alleviate a negative mood was a motivating factor for compulsive buying
8	Clark, M., & Calleja, K.	2008	Depth interview Sample size- 400	Researchers found that persons having compulsive buying behavior often use shopping as a mood-alleviating tool. Positive feelings associated with shopping can decrease the level of negative affect instantly.
9	Pieters, R.	2013	Longitudinal data over 6 years Sample size- 2789	The finding of the study revealed that there is a bidirectional relationship between materialism through shopping and bad mood.
10	López López, I., & Ruiz de Maya, S	2012	Lab Experiment	Participants experiencing negative emotions were engaged in purchasing positive hedonic products as compared to negative hedonic products.
11.	Verplanken, B., & Herabadi, A.	2001	Interview	Finding suggested that impulse buying is associated with positive feelings like enthusiasm, love excitement, relaxation, refresher, etc.
12.	Faber, R. J., & Christenson, G. A.	1996	Questionnaire Sample size-24	The finding indicated that compulsive buyers experience more bad moods before shopping and go shopping to get rid of these negative emotions.

13	Courtney Irwin	2018		The finding of the study suggested that shopping can be used as a tool to gain personal control and autonomy and through which a person can escape from a negative environment.
14	K. Sasi Kumar ¹ and Dr.M.Sadika Sultana ²	2017		Researchers recommended that shopping is stress- a relief activity and can strengthen a positive mood.
15	Junghwa Son	2016	Qualtrics survey	The result showed that impulse buying and self-gift motivation greatly influenced retail therapy.
16	Kemp, E., & Kopp, S. W.	2011	Lab experiment Sample size- 96	The result indicated that participants having feelings of fear, and anxiety are more likely to engage in impulse buying.
17	H. M. Rakib ul Hasan	2017	Questionnaire Sample size- 354	The study concluded that there is a connection between impulse buying and therapeutic shopping.
18	Michael Plastow	2012		Researchers recommended that shopping has a holistic impact on a person's overall life and on the society in which we live.
19	Scott I. Rick	2013	experiments	Experiments showed that shopping is a leading factor in life control restoration.
20	David Clarke, P., & Mortimer, G	2013		Participants who have engaged in impulse buying experienced post-purchase regret.

Conclusion

The paper aims at reviewing the existing literature in the field of retail therapy and understanding the several factors that can lead to emotional regulation at three stages: pre- shopping stage, shopping stage, post- shopping stage. Researchers have observed the lack of direct investigation in the field of retail therapy. Previous studies have given much attention to related topics such as compensatory consumption, emotional regulation, and affective component in the buying process which are the strong indicator of retail therapy. By combining the different sources of knowledge related to retail therapy, we have developed an integrative and holistic understanding of therapeutic shopping and negative affect.

This paper support and largely extend the finding of existing works in the field of retail therapy by providing sufficient backing in the form of existing relevant literature to our view on the topic of retail therapy. We have also noted four therapeutic properties of shopping such as social integration, the feeling of control and autonomy, and escape. To conclude, our finding is consistent with previous studies on retail

therapy that, shopping is therapeutic but not always. When people spent more than they can afford, retail therapy becomes temporary. Just like habit-forming medicines, retail therapy can be addictive. There is a thin line between retail therapy and compulsive shopping, it does not take too long to cross that line. Shopping goes from therapeutic to addiction when it becomes the only way for dealing with negative affect on the other hand retail therapy is when people have control over their buying activities.

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