

Addicted to shopping?

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

A group of researchers at the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Bergen have developed a new and unique method to measure shopping addiction: The Bergen Shopping Addiction Scale. The scale is based on core addiction elements recognized as diagnostic criteria for other addictions, and is the first of its kind worldwide.

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When shopping goes into overdrive

"Modern technology has made shopping extremely accessible and convenient, with the potential of sending problematic shopping into overdrive - especially along with sociocultural factors such as social media, credit cards, and advanced marketing," says Doctor of Psychology and Clinical Psychologist Specialist, Cecilie Schou Andreassen.

She is affiliated with Department of Psychosocial Science at UiB, and is currently a visiting scholar at Yale University, School of Medicine, USA.

Doctor Andreassen heads the research project Shopping Addiction at the University of Bergen (UiB). An article about the results has just been published in the renowned open-access journal *Frontiers in Psychology* - co-authored by American and British researchers from Stanford University, UCLA, and Nottingham Trent University. Doctor Andreassen is first author of the paper.

More predominant in women

According to Doctor Andreassen, the large study shows some clear tendencies as to which people develop a shopping dependency.

"Addictive shopping clearly occurs more regularly amongst certain demographic groups. It is more predominant in women, and is typically initiated in late adolescence and emerging adulthood, and it appears to decrease with age," Doctor Andreassen says.

Doctor Andreassen's research also shows that shopping addiction is related to key personality traits.

"Our research indicates that people who score high on extroversion and neuroticism are more at risk of developing shopping addiction. Extroverts, typically being social and sensation seeking, may be using shopping to express their individuality or enhance their social status and personal attractiveness. Neurotic people, who typically are anxious, depressive, and self-conscious, may use shopping as a means of reducing their negative feelings," Doctor Andreassen says.

Anxious people most at risk

People who are conscientious, agreeable, and who like new and intellectual stimuli are less at risk from shopping addiction. These typically have good self-control, avoid the kind of conflicts that problematic shopping often result in, and may regard shopping as a conventional activity at odds with their often unconventional values.

"We have also found that shopping addiction is related to symptoms of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, and shopping may function as an escape mechanism for, or coping with, unpleasant feelings - although shopping addiction may also lead to such symptoms," Doctor Andreassen says.

The Seven Warning Signs

Doctor Andreassen's study shows that the symptoms of shopping addiction are closely related to the symptoms of drug addiction, alcoholism, and other substance addictions.

The Bergen Shopping Addiction Scale uses seven basic criteria to

identify shopping addiction, where all items are scored on the following scale: (0) Completely disagree, (1) Disagree, (2) Neither disagree nor agree, (3) Agree, and (4) Completely agree:

- You think about shopping/buying things all the time.
- You shop/buy things in order to change your mood.
- You shop/buy so much that it negatively affects your daily obligations (e.g., school and work).
- You feel you have to shop/buy more and more to obtain the same satisfaction as before.
- You have decided to shop/buy less, but have not been able to do so.
- You feel bad if you for some reason are prevented from shopping/buying things.
- You shop/buy so much that it has impaired your well-being.

Doctor Andreassen's study shows that scoring of "agree" or "completely agree" on at least four of the seven items may suggest that you are a shopping addict.

More information: Andreassen, C. S., Griffiths, M. D., Pallesen, S., Bilder, R. M., Torsheim, T., & Aboujaoude, E.: The Bergen Shopping Addiction Scale: reliability and validity of a brief screening test. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2015. [journal.frontiersin.org/article2015.01374/abstract](https://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01374/abstract)

Provided by University of Bergen

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