

Online shopping in treatment-seeking patients with buying-shopping disorder

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A new study in *Comprehensive Psychiatry* found that one-third of a group of patients seeking treatment for buying-shopping disorder (BSD) also reported symptoms of addictive online shopping. These patients

tended to be younger than the others in the study sample, experienced greater levels of anxiety and depression, and were likely to exhibit a higher severity of BSD symptoms.

"It really is time to recognize BSD as separate mental health condition and to accumulate further knowledge about BSD on the internet," explained lead investigator Astrid Müller, MD, Ph.D., Department of Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy, Hannover Medical School, Hannover, Germany. At present, BSD is not categorized as a separate mental health condition; it is characterized as "other specified impulse control disorder" in the recently released 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases.

BSD is a cross-national problem that afflicts an estimated 5 percent of the population. It is characterized by extreme preoccupation with and craving for buying and/or shopping, as well as irresistible and identity-seeking urges to possess [consumer goods](#). Patients with BSD buy more consumer goods than they can afford, need, or use. Their excessive purchasing serves to regulate emotions, e.g., to get pleasure, relief from negative feelings or cope with self-discrepancy. In the long run, the recurrent breakdown in self-control leads to extreme distress, psychiatric comorbidity, familial discord, clutter due to pathological hoarding of goods, and indebtedness and/or deception and embezzlement to enable continued spending despite insufficient finances.

As [e-commerce](#) has gained increasing popularity as a primary method for buying and shopping for goods over the past decade, a need has developed for mental health experts to explore whether traditional BSD manifests differently in the online retail market. The internet offers a vast variety of shopping information and simultaneous access to many online stores, thereby meeting expectations for immediate reward, emotional enhancement, and identity gain.

Previous studies showed that certain internet-specific aspects of buying and shopping, such as availability, anonymity, accessibility and affordability, contribute to the development of an online subtype of BSD. However, there is a paucity of studies investigating addictive [online shopping](#) as a phenotype of BSD related to the problematic use of the internet. This study, which analyzed data from earlier studies reporting on 122 treatment-seeking patients, is among the first to quantify and explore the phenomenon of online shopping in BSD diagnosed-patients.

Dr. Müller added, "We hope that our results showing that the prevalence of addictive online [shopping](#) among treatment-seeking patients with BSD will encourage future research addressing the distinct phenomenological characteristics, underlying features, associated comorbidity, and specific treatment concepts."

More information: Astrid Müller et al. Online shopping in treatment-seeking patients with buying-shopping disorder, *Comprehensive Psychiatry* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.comppsy.2019.152120](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comppsy.2019.152120)

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