

# DOES TREATING THE SELF WITH SHOPPING ACT AS A MOOD LIFTER? AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON RETAIL THERAPY IN MUMBAI AND CHENNAI

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## Abstract:

*It is generally observed that people often shop when their moods need a lift. It is a question whether their unpleasant moods undergo a positive change while shopping for the goods of their choice. Some do have a specific brand to purchase when in bad mental disposition which termed as retail therapy in the Marketing parlance. This study is a humble attempt to find out the relevance of such retail therapy purchase in Chennai and Mumbai. The researchers set a few hypotheses to add value to the study and the findings provided sufficient support to the hypotheses regarding the role of retail therapy in alleviating bad moods. The study involved 97 samples who belonged to different age groups and both the genders. The findings proved that the concept of retail therapy is profoundly found among the people basically because of a few reasons like pressure and stress. Such purchases were found to come out of bad moods caused by stressful happenings and sedentary lifestyles. The study was conducted between July 2017 and January 2018*

**Keywords:** retail therapy, hedonism, personality-based shopping, mood-lifting shopping behaviour, gender-based retail therapy

## Introduction:

In the contemporary marketing spectrum, consumers follow different consumption patterns due to the critical impact of numerous factors like pricing, product benefits, promotion or ultimate value. When an individual realizes an inexplicable void, or desire he displays a purchasing behaviour which can be distinguished from his normal buying intentions. He also understands that his inclination towards a product or brand based on his lifestyle and personality, which in many cases, he only comprehends. Such purchases, which are called hedonic purchases, give the consumer delight and ecstasy which make him focus on the functional benefits of the products during periods of negative emotional state. This study focuses on throwing light upon the shopping behaviour of people based on their personality types and the role of retail therapy in generating delight within oneself. The study was done in the Mumbai, a hub for shopping for various product categories.

## Literature review

### Shopping as a mood-changing agent

Behavioral economists of the past and the present have been consistently trying to find out if there is any connect between happiness and purchase behaviour. Consumer behaviour has always been a complex phenomenon which could be equated to a 'blackbox' according to many traditional text books. As per many psychologists like Thomas Gilovich and Van Boven <sup>(1)</sup>, experiences have been a better way to alleviate stress than investments in products. Some studies have displayed that people go for a few products based on their utilitarian and functional benefits to enjoy an inexplicable pleasure without much purchase planning and

budgeting. Retail therapy shopping indicates the delight a consumer anticipates from his shopping behaviour especially when he is in an unpleasant mood. As each consumer is unique in his expectation and consumption pattern, the experience he derives out of the purchase is also distinct. The major factors that drive an individual to go for such retail purchases could be socializing compulsion, attempt to be a part of a social group, adventure seeking etc. according to Arnolds and Reynolds<sup>(2)</sup>

Thayer et al.<sup>(3)</sup> expressed that individuals generally try to extend their positive mood or bring the unpleasant mood to an end and thus the question of self-regulation in moods comes to discussion. Shopping has always been looked at by a section of consumers as negative mood alleviator and this was taken into analysis by Karoly and Kanfer<sup>(4)</sup> who tried to explain the concept of internal and transactional self-regulation method as a strategy adopted by a few to improve their mood whenever they feel a little down. It is observed from the literature that retail therapy has been analysed from two perspectives; as a mood repair tool and as compensatory consumption angle. In both the conditions, the consumers experience negative moods and need a way out. As a mood-corrective tool, retail therapy acts as a strategy for self-regulation under negative mental state and when a consumer experiences psychological deficiency retail therapy helps him find a temporary solution and solace according to the version by Kang and Johnson<sup>(5)</sup>. Some subject experts have observed that mere browsing of products while in the store was sufficient mood-booster for a few consumers who needed retail therapy thus making actual purchases not a necessity to lift shifting moods.

Hopkinson and Pujari<sup>(6)</sup> reflected the view of Babin et. al<sup>(7)</sup> and Cinjarevic et. al<sup>(8)</sup> when they explained hedonism as a philosophy of acknowledging the happiness and they further elucidated that it was a theory that said anything that gave joy was good and anything resulting pain was bad. Atalay and Meloy<sup>(9)</sup>, in their work 'Retail therapy: A strategic effort to improve mood' opined that retail therapy is an attempt to make oneself happy through self-treats or purchases for one's own happiness. They further elaborated on the concept saying such purchases would be based on impulses rather than controlled behaviour. In their study, they tried to document evidences where a bad mood led to consumption of unplanned purchases which could have been motivated either by the marketers strategically or by the consumer's own choices. Some consumers were also observed to contain their unplanned purchases if such self-imposed restraint led to similar happiness and satisfaction as a retail therapy purchase would give

### **Hedonic purchasing behaviour**

Holbrook and Hirschman<sup>(10)</sup> were of the view that they may be many factors that led to the hedonic or mindless purchasing behaviour of the consumers. These factors according to them could be protection, comfort, efficiency, health, prestige, trends, additional information and ease in maintenance among many others. In the view of Kaul<sup>(11)</sup> these hedonic factors bear a profound influence on the younger generation partly because the choices it has are more than what the earlier generations used to have and a seemingly low control over impulses among the consumers of the new generation. She further says If products are varying in the extent of inherent symbolism, then the hedonic value would vary across the different product categories

**Focus of the study:** The study titled 'Retail therapy – a personality-based purchase behaviour to recuperate from bad mood – an empirical study done in Navi Mumbai and Chennai' attempts to throw light upon a few factors responsible for making consumers in unpleasant moods go for an unplanned purchases that give happiness to their inner selves and to analyse the effectiveness of such retail therapy buying behaviour in helping consumers recover from unhappiness. An additional focus of the study would be to identify the product categories which such consumers prefer to buy while in bad mood.

**Gaps of the study** could be its inability to cover the subject of hedonic shopping and retail therapy completely. It also cannot bring to light, the time spent on pleasure seeking behaviour of the consumers and the extent of happiness gained through the consumption of certain food. The questionnaire in the google doc format and the printed format could not help them express how they felt exactly while buying a specific product category

while in bad mood

### Objectives of the study

1. To know if personality-based retail therapy shopping differs between the two genders
2. To assess the effectiveness of retail therapy in alleviating unpleasant moods of consumers leading to stress relief
3. To identify the major product categories preferred by the consumers to improve their mental disposition

### Research Methodology followed in the study

**Research design:** Descriptive research is followed as it helps provide answers to a few questions like what people in bad moods like to shop and how does it help them in recovering from their mental stress

**Sample size:** 97 males and females from below 20 years to above 50 years of age

**Sampling method** – simple random sampling

#### Data collection through

- a. Primary data – Questionnaires, interviews
- b. Secondary data – Published literature

**Data collection tool:** Structured questionnaires with close ended questions focused to elicit responses about their shopping behaviour during bad moods.

**Data handling tools:** Descriptive statistics, Cross tabulation, regression analysis, independent t test, cluster analysis

### Data analysis

#### Table 1 - Demographics of the respondents

97 samples responded with complete answers to all the questions with their original views and ideas out of which 50 were females and the rest, males. The age group with the maximum number of respondents was 21 to 30 which constituted 56% of the total respondents. The number of respondents of both the genders put together in the above 50 category and below 20 year category is 6 which is quite less compared to significantly contribute to the areas of the current research

#### 1.1 Gender \* Age group Crosstabulation

		Age group					Total	
		21-30	31-40	41-50	Above 50	Below 20		
Gender	Female	Count	23	11	9	3	4	50
		% within Gender	46.0%	22.0%	18.0%	6.0%	8.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	23.7%	11.3%	9.3%	3.1%	4.1%	51.5%
Male	Count	33	6	3	3	2	47	
		% within Gender	70.2%	12.8%	6.4%	6.4%	4.3%	100.0%
		% of Total	34.0%	6.2%	3.1%	3.1%	2.1%	48.5%
Total	Count	56	17	12	6	6	97	

% within Gender	57.7%	17.5%	12.4%	6.2%	6.2%	100.0%
% of Total	57.7%	17.5%	12.4%	6.2%	6.2%	100.0%

### Objective #1

To know if personality-based retail therapy shopping differs between the two genders

### Table 2 – Role of genders in mood-lifting shopping behavior

**H0** – There is no significant difference between the genders when they shop to overcome stress and unpleasant moods

**H1** - There is significant difference between the genders when they shop to overcome stress and unpleasant moods

With a few questions about personality-based shopping behaviour, the study tried to throw light upon the disparity that arose between the male and the female genders. The respondents were asked to answer about how they would go about their shopping intentions when in bad mood and if they felt that such purchases really contributed to a positive shift in their mental disposition

### 2.1 Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total personal needs	male	47	4.2085	.59703	.08709
	female	50	4.2240	.65358	.09243

### 2.2 The gender-based shopping behaviour

#### Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total personal needs	Equal variances assumed	.208	.648	-.122	96	.903	-.01549	.12736	-.26832	.23734
	Equal variances not assumed			-.122	94.926	.903	-.01549	.12698	-.26761	.23663

**Inference:** The result of the independent T test table shows that a sig. value 0.648 has been arrived at. When

the probability value is greater than 0.05, we can understand that there is no sig. difference between male and female shopping behaviours when they are in unpleasant and stressful mood. Hence H<sub>0</sub> is accepted.

### Objective # 2

To assess the effectiveness of retail therapy in alleviating unpleasant moods of consumers leading to stress relief.

#### Table 3 - Effectiveness of retail therapy in alleviating unpleasant moods of consumers

H<sub>0</sub> – There is no significant correlation between the purchase and stress relief experienced by the consumers

H<sub>1</sub> - There is significant correlation between the purchase and stress relief experienced by the consumers

#### 3.1 ANOVA<sup>b</sup>

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.122	1	.122	.186	.667 <sup>a</sup>
Residual	62.185	95	.655		
Total	62.307	96			

a. Predictors: (Constant), 4D

b. Dependent Variable: Average 5

#### 3.2 Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	3.874	.286		13.566	.000
4D	.033	.077	.044	.431	.667

a. Dependent Variable: Average 5

**Inference:** It could be found that the regression table used to find the correlation between the purchase and alleviation of bad mood has helped us to know about the moderate correlation ( $r=0.44$ ) between the two. It becomes clear that if the bad mood changes to the extent of .033, then the shopping intention changes by 3.874. It could be noted that even when there is no shift in the bad mood experienced by the consumers, the shopping intention does not change from 3.874. Whenever the bad mood, which is a qualitative trait, increases, the shopping intention too rises with the same intensity.

### Objective # 3

To identify the major product categories preferred by the consumers to improve their mental disposition.

#### Table 4 - Product categories preferred by the consumers along with frequency to improve their mental disposition

H<sub>0</sub> – There is no significant difference between specific product categories and improvement in the mental

disposition of the consumers.

**H1** – There is significant difference between specific product categories and improvement in the mental disposition of the consumers.

#### 4.1 consolidated responses for preferred product categories while in bad mood

Electro nic			Clothing		Food & Grocer ies		services				
	CL-2	CI-4	CI-2	CI-1	CI-3	CI-4	CI-3	CI-4			
Gender	0-36	1-31	Gender	0-33	1-31	Gender	0- 39	0- 35	Gender	0-24	1-36
3E	5	4	3E	4	4	3E	4	5	3E	4	5
4E	5	4	4E	5	4	4E	5	4	4E	5	5
5B	4	4	5B	4	3	5C	4	4	5B	4	4
5C	4	4	5C	4	3	5D	4	4	5C	4	4
6A	5	3	7B	2	4	6C	5	4	6D	4	4
7A	2	4	6B	5	4	7E	2	4	7C, 7D,7E, &7F	5,4	3,2

#### 4.2 Electronic products category as mood changers Final Cluster Centers

	Cluster			
	1	2	3	4
Gender	1	0	1	1
3E	4	5	3	4
4E	4	5	3	4
5B	3	4	3	4
5C	3	4	4	4
6A	2	5	4	3
7A	4	2	3	4

**4.3 Number of Cases in each cluster**

Cluster 1	21.000
2	36.000
3	9.000
4	31.000
Valid	97.000
Missing	100.000

**4.4 Clothing category as mood lifters Final Cluster Centers**

	Cluster			
	1	2	3	4
Gender	1	0	0	0
3E	4	4	2	4
4E	4	5	5	4
5B	3	4	2	4
5C	3	4	1	4
5D	4	5	2	4
7B	4	2	4	4
6B	4	5	4	4

**4.5 Number of Cases in each Cluster**

Cluster 1	31.000
2	33.000
3	2.000
4	31.000
Valid	97.000
Missing	.000

#### 4.6 Food and groceries category and its effectiveness in boosting mood Final Cluster Centers

	Cluster			
	1	2	3	4
Gender	1	0	0	1
3E	3	3	4	5
4E	4	3	5	4
5C	2	4	4	4
5D	4	5	4	4
6C	4	3	5	4
7E	4	4	4	4

#### 4.7 Number of Cases in each Cluster

Cluster 1	7.000
2	16.000
3	39.000
4	35.000
Valid	97.000
Missing	.000

#### 4.8 Short trips, beauty services, Investment options as mood changers Final Cluster Centers

	Cluster			
	1	2	3	4
Gender	1	1	0	1
3E	4	3	4	5
4E	4	4	5	5
5B	3	3	4	4
5C	3	3	4	4
6D	4	3	4	4
7C	3	5	5	3
7D	3	5	4	2
7F	3	5	4	2
7G	3	5	5	2



#### 4.9 Number of Cases in each Cluster

Cluster 1	19.000
2	18.000
3	24.000
4	36.000
Valid	97.000
Missing	.000

**Inference:** Tables 4.1 to 4.9 reflect the preferences of various product categories expressed those customers in bad mood. When it came to electronic goods 36 male respondents voiced their preference which they had bought around 7 to 10 times in the last 2 years whereas 31 males have expressed to have bought the electronic products 1 to 3 times in the last 24 months as an external support to bring internal well-being or comfort. In the clothing category, more interest was shown by females as 30 of them had responded to have shopped for clothing for 7 to 10 times in the last 2 years to recover from bad mood whereas 29 males had done that for 1 to 3 times in the same period for the same reason. Food and grocery substantially occupied the attention of the males as they had expressed to have purchased food stuff or admitted having visited expensive restaurants roughly for about 7 to 10 times in the last 24 months as a mood lifting attempt. Services given by beauty parlours and salon, investment options, short and long road trips etc have also played a significant role in boosting unpleasant moods experienced by the male and the female respondents. While it was found the 24 males had chosen to avail these services for 1 to 3 times 36 females had chosen to utilize these services for 7 to 10 times in the last 2 years.

#### Major findings and conclusion of the study about retail therapy as a mood changing agent

1. The research could throw light upon the fact that there is no noticeable disparity between males and females when it comes to mood-changing shopping behaviour. Though both the genders undergo such negative mental disposition often or occasionally, they feel in general, that purchasing a few brands of their choice or from their favourite e commerce sites gives them inexplicable solace and helps them gain a level of satisfaction and happiness
2. It is also found that though there exists some happiness in such purchases during unpleasant moods, it is not as immense as sufficient to bring them completely out of their negative mental state. There is a moderate correlation between bad moods and the purchase intention of the people. It is also obvious that even in the absence of a bad mood, the shopping behaviour is stable at a level
3. Unpleasant mood according to the respondents was due to many reasons from personal to career. Unhappy circumstances prompt people to go for the products of their choice. 36 females opted to utilize beauty services as they expressed their opinion about the direct relationship between looking good and feeling good. Many also said road trips were selected to alleviate troubled mood and the expenses attached did not matter much to them.
4. 31 out of 50 females and 36 out of 47 males preferred electronic goods as technology fascinated them. Some even said that the gadgets were not actually needed or used on a later date. It was just to pull them out of the repulsive mood that they were caught in. On further investigation over telephone on a personal basis which did not feature in the data collected, some males were induced to buy a gadget as expensive as Rs.5000/- just for the solace it could give by drawing them out of a distressing mental condition.
5. Majority of the respondents opined that their life should be pleasurable, and happiness- seeking can be a

major purpose of the surplus money that is flowing into their lives as many happened to be from multiple income families. The respondents displayed some uniformity while expressing about comfort retail therapy gave them when in disagreeable moods

6. Samples who bought clothes and accessories felt quite attached with the happiness of the memories which could be equated with the cheer which an old photograph could bring

We could find that when hedonism gives rise to unnecessary and over consumption, there are consumers who prefer such excessive purchases in pursuit of sensory pleasures and some get addicted to the product categories which display the capability to boost their bad moods a little up. Such overt consumption may lead to increasing levels of stimulation with related risk factors like inappropriate association and self-destruction. It cannot be ascertained as to how long would the effect of such hedonic purchases in the form of solace, last.

The attitude and perception about shopping are experiencing a tilt towards the therapeutic effects it gives from the conventional point of view of shopping being a purely functional activity. The retailing world has a huge opportunity of adapting itself to the new consumer who desires for more than mere fulfilment of basic needs and necessities. To stay competitive in the industry, the retailer must have a noble vision of giving superior customer experience without fixing any selfish motive.

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