



## Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics

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# Effect of family environment on adolescent compulsive buying: mediating role of self-esteem

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Received 18 May 2015  
Revised 28 July 2015  
4 October 2015  
Accepted 5 October 2015

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between parent-adolescent relationship and adolescent compulsive buying behaviour. Using a sample of 300 adolescents (15-18 years) in India and the structural equation modelling technique, the findings reveal that self-esteem mediates the relationship between parent-adolescent relationship and adolescent compulsive buying behaviour.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The present study is the first to experimentally manipulate important parent-adolescent relationship and measures its impact on compulsive buying among a sample of 15-18-year old adolescents. Next, the authors investigate the mediating role of self-esteem for the above relationship. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling have been used in the study.

**Findings** – The study also establishes that familial conflict and cohesion acts as major sources of adolescent compulsivity. The authors have also examined the mediating role of self-esteem on the above relationships and found that adolescents' compulsivity varies with the level of self-esteem (i.e. higher level of self-esteem leads to lower levels of adolescents' compulsivity). The practical and theoretical implications are discussed within the context of adolescents' compulsivity.

**Originality/value** – The study makes some inimitable and significant contributions to the literature. It portrays one of few studies to investigate compulsive buying during adolescence period – a hard to reach population. Here authors experimentally manipulate parent-adolescent relationship to investigate its impact on compulsive buying. The study's findings in regard to mediating effect of self-esteem on the parent-adolescent relationship and adolescents' compulsive buying behaviour suggest that compulsive buying begins during adolescence period and is a common coping strategy for both boys and girls.

**Keywords** Satisfaction, Advertising

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Increasing compulsivity among adolescents has raised cogitation and anxiety among parents, mentors and promoters. Most of the adolescents agree that, “when you grow up, the more money you have, the happier you are”, and “the only kind of job I want when I grow up is one that gets me a lot of money” (Goldberg *et al.*, 2003). Thus, the social scientists Schor (2004) concluded that adolescents are mostly “brand-oriented, consumer-involved, and compulsive generation in history”.

Consumer culture, people has been assumed to experience after 1980's is defined as a culture in which the large majority of consumers desire, buy and consume goods and services to become a good member of this society. As an outcome of this, particularly in affluent nations, individual expenditure has already exceeded disposable income (Roberts and Jones, 2001), because compulsive shopping has caused individuals life to go out of control (Ureta, 2007). Consequently, it becomes a serious issue that approximately billions of individuals' from all over the world suffering from. Most research and



academicians believe that excessive shopping is defined as an individual spends more than he/she afford or beyond his/her needs. The results of this excruciating issue for individuals, families, as well as nations and the business environment are all unfavourable. For this retraction, this behaviour has been of theoretical and practical importance to psychologists, psychiatrists, economists, sociologists and marketing academicians and practitioners (Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Openshaw *et al.*, 1984). Marketing academicians generally called this individual behaviour as “compulsive buying behaviour”; “addictive buying”; “excessive buying” and also they used “consumption”, “spending” and “shopping” instead of buying regarding identical properties. One characteristic of an individual is “an irresistible urge to buy” and the other is “severe financial and societal consequences”. Although there are slight differences between the above terms, scholars generally tend to use these terms interchangeably. This study uses “compulsive buying” instead of “addictive buying”, because authors aimed to investigate adolescents’ irresistible extrinsic urge to buy instead of an intrinsic urge like “drug addiction” or “alcoholism”, etc.

Exploring adolescents compulsive buying behaviour is of vital importance as they begins to grow up there will be psychological and physiological changes to occur, they begin towards new carrier, they earn money and wealth and hence they will designate a new shopping behaviour. Estimating adolescents’ compulsivity is important because they are considered as important consumers in todays and future markets. Thus, this study will shed light on their future buying tendencies.

In India, there is scarce literature regarding adolescent consumer compulsive buying behaviour. This study is to understand the impact of parent-adolescent relationship on adolescents’ compulsivity with the mediating role of self-esteem.

The study uses family system theory and ecological framework to define the proposed theoretical framework. Family is a place where adolescent grow with consistent interaction with family members and learn social values. Family system theory defines the patterns of interaction among the family members. While, the ecological framework provides the association of parent-adolescent relationship with adolescent perceived stress, type of communication in different social context. Here we have taken different approaches in terms of parental cohesion and parental conflicts. Both parental cohesion and conflicts acts as important sources of emotional support and psychological well-being which led to the foundation of adolescents’ self-esteem.

In this context, we begin with a literature review on compulsive buying; self-esteem and parent-adolescent relationship, then hypothesis are developed. After that methodology and analysis will take place and at last results of the analysis will be discussed. Besides limitations, directions for future research will be discussed. This study fills a gap in related marketing literature on adolescents’ compulsivity in India as well as provides valuable insights to the marketers as well as academicians.

## Literature review

### *Family environment and parent-adolescents relationship*

An impressive body of research existed which reveals the effect of parental behaviour on adolescent cognitive and social development (Baumrind, 1978; Berman, 1997). During childhood days parents provide overall support (e.g. autonomy, love, care, time, money, encourage them to communicate feelings, etc.) (Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Openshaw *et al.*, 1984). Thus the parent-adolescent relationship is positively associated with adolescent development of self-esteem and creativity (Chaplin and John, 2010). It encourages adolescents to siphon parental attitudes, values. Parent-adolescent

relationship also encourages adolescents to develop a secure base to meet challenges, self-identity thereby enhancing their self-esteem. The quality of parent-adolescent relationship is a great deal of importance during an adolescence period. The development of child's autonomy is a central task during adolescence (Holmbeck, 1996). Researchers has been interested in determining whether such tasks accomplished by contexts of conflicts, disruptions or family cohesions.

An imperative, but indispensable significance of this study is to simplify the intricacy of parent-adolescent relationships so as to focus on those features deemed pertinent and significant from a theoretical perspective. Because we are mainly concerned with exploring different levels of adolescents' compulsivity that may be linked to adolescents' perceptions of the relationship with their parents, in doing so, we will focus on two particular parents-adolescents relationship scales, namely, cohesion and conflict.

In this section, we will develop a comprehensive model sequentially by reviewing literatures relevant to the specific variables under study.

Repetti *et al.* (2002) revealed that family environment plays a very important role in adolescents' emotional and behavioural development. A positive family environment (open communication, high support) resulted into youths healthy adjustment (Conger and Conger, 2002; Grant *et al.*, 2006). However, little research has examined the association among family environment and youth's behavioural development. This study has evaluated the role of family environment on the adolescent compulsive buying behaviour. Most of the studies done previously mainly focused on family environment and adolescent mental health outcomes. Negative family environment (e.g. higher family conflict, lower support, etc.) is associated with adolescent emotional problem such as anxiety and depression (Auerbach and Ho, 2012; Knappe *et al.*, 2009) and conduct problems (Karriker-Jaffe *et al.*, 2012; Schofield *et al.*, 2012). Further, negative family environment may affect youth mental health. Overall, family environment (and family affective involvement in particular) may play an important role in children's stress response and mental health (Yap *et al.*, 2007).

#### *Parent-adolescent cohesion*

The family environment is defined by the method in which the parent and adolescent interact within the family. The tone of family environment set the tone for parent-adolescent cohesion. It is a kind of togetherness and emotional bonding (Vandeleur *et al.*, 2009). It is a kind of intergenerational relationship between the family members, i.e. a kind of emotional support and warmth. According to Green and Werner (1996), highly cohesive families mainly includes "nurturance", "warmth", "time spent together", "consistency and physical intimacy". High cohesive families have high frequency of contact, highly emotional and hence create a long loving environment. Roming and Bakken (1992) reveal that family is a safe place for the individuals to develop emotional and physical closeness with each other.

According to Moore and Moschis (1974), "family cohesion is defined as the degree of commitment, help, and support family members provide for one another". For instance, if the familial environment is low supportive, high in conflicts and arguments, parent-adolescent communication becomes high in conflict and low in conflict resolution. Thus, in order to better specify parent-adolescent cohesion dimension, it is important to look at the family cohesive environment. It has been seen that in highly cohesive families, adolescents possess greater self-confidence and low levels of psychological distress and problem behaviour. While low level of family cohesion resulted into higher

level of internalizing behaviour (e.g. High levels of depression and lower self-concept scores) and internalizing problem (high level of conduct disorder). It is now important to turn our discussion on literature that examines parent-adolescent cohesion. From our perspective, family cohesion is a group-level concept; it is measured in terms of parent-adolescent interaction. The interaction among them is designed to accomplish different goals and is classified as social, emotional and material. Particularly, cohesion is characterized by mutual trust, social support, and a kind of close knit ties among community members (Sampson *et al.*, 1997). Empirical researches revealed that cohesion is more or less concerned with antisocial and delinquent behaviour, better physical health as well as higher social achievement among adolescent (Abada *et al.*, 2007; Odgers *et al.*, 2009).

#### *Parent-adolescent conflict*

Parent-child relationship is a subject of great challenge once the children reach to an adolescence age. Larson and Almeida examined that parent-adolescent relationship is central to development and stresses in adolescents' life. Conflicts originate due to developmental changes among adolescents seeking autonomy, privileges and expectations (Eisenberg *et al.*, 2008; Renk *et al.*, 2005). The more frequent and intense conflicts that escalates during adolescence may lead to negative parent-adolescent relationship (Eisenberg *et al.*, 2008). Thus, conflicts play a pivotal role in adolescents' psychological development (Holmbeck *et al.*, 1995; Gunlicks-Stoessel and Powers, 2008). Although, serious conflicts are rare, but have a high probability of occurrence, as each member in the family have their own individual preference which lead to disagreement or conflict. Parent-adolescent conflict has been linked with adolescent mental health and compulsive behaviour (Burt *et al.*, 2003; Repetti *et al.*, 2002; Sheeber *et al.*, 1997).

The conflicts that may arise during adolescence are caused as parents and adolescents both have different perceptions with regard to various domains of life. Adolescents' tension is caused when they tried to have autonomy, while parents are struggling with renouncing their authority. Thus, both parent and adolescent experiences stress during this time and often results in a conflict. Higher level of familial conflicts is resulted into higher level of internalizing problem (depressive symptoms, emotional detachment from others, etc.) among adolescents (Shelton and Harold, 2008; Bámaca-Colbert *et al.*, 2012; Gonzales *et al.*, 2006; Hill *et al.*, 2003; Smokowski and Bacallao, 2007; Smokowski *et al.*, 2010; Zeiders *et al.*, 2011). Apart from internalizing problem adolescent faces some externalizing problems also (Gonzales *et al.*, 2006; Marsiglia *et al.*, 2009; Pasch *et al.*, 2006; Samaniego and Gonzales, 1999; Smokowski and Bacallao, 2006; Zeiders *et al.*, 2011). Meanwhile, higher familial conflicts negatively affect adolescents externalizing behaviours such as association with deviant peers, conduct problems, etc. (Gonzales and Aiken, 2000).

#### *Self-esteem*

Self-esteem is a huge component of adolescents' self-consideration (Räty *et al.*, 2005). Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as: "An individual set of thoughts and feelings about his or her own worth and importance". This definition exhibits the concept of "global" or "general" self-esteem or self-image. In short it is the individuals feeling towards him/her and their positivity towards life. According to Pettit and Sivanathan (2011) individual with lower level of self-esteem generally indulge in purchasing of

luxury goods, i.e. individuals connect their material wealth with social power. Individuals lower level of self-esteem also encourage them to behave compulsively, higher stimulus for shopping (D'Astous, 1990). Individuals compulsive buying provides temporarily relieve from the feeling of low self-esteem and anxiety (Jacobs, 1986). The direction of above relationship is still a debate among researchers which lead to an interesting area of research. Compulsive buyers feel a sense of pleasure by portraying a sense of social acceptability. Thus, the buying process boosted individual self-esteem and gets relief from anxiety and stress.

The significance of self-esteem for the happiness/interest of adolescents is emphasized by decades of theory and research supporting its association with emotional/mental well-being and health during adolescence (Trzesniewski *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, the several biological, psychological and cognitive transformations that take place during adolescence emphasize the significance of examining self-esteem during this stage (Boden *et al.*, 2008).

### *Compulsive buying*

In a recent consumer culture compulsive buying is considered as one of the “new normal” shopping behaviour. Kraepelin (1915) has defined compulsive buying as “onimania”; while Bleuler (1924) defined it as “buying mania”. According to Palan *et al.* (2011), compulsive buying is defined as “an impulse control dysfunction, a mental disorder characterized by irresistible impulses to engage in harmful or senseless behaviours”. As “compulsivity” has been a topic of interest to the psychiatrists and psychologists in “obsessive-compulsive disorder” for years, now it becomes a crucial issue for the marketers and marketing researchers and scholars. It has been a common belief that compulsive buyers have large debts (O'Guinn and Faber, 1989) but they may not be recognizing the long-term painful outcomes (Roberts and Jones, 2001; Khare *et al.*, 2012). Because of its addictive nature some researchers have named this phenomenon as “addictive buying” by underlying the difference between compulsion and addiction (Ureta, 2007). In regard to this (Scherhorn *et al.*, 1990) expressed that the term addiction means “an individual experiences an irresistible urge to do something which his/her want/need”, while compulsivity is “a feeling of pressed to do something repeatedly”. Compulsive buyer is likely to have “comorbidity” which means the coexistence of multiple compulsive behaviours, e.g. gambling, alcoholic, etc. According to O'Guinn and Faber (1989), compulsive buyers generally have two criteria: their behaviour must be “repetitive”; “Problematic for the individual”.

Compulsive behaviour may be acting as a coping response rooted in adolescents' early life experience. Compulsive buying is considered as a maladaptive behaviour and is considered as a maladaptive phenomenon (Simmons *et al.*, 2002). It is deep rooted in individuals' early life experiences (Rindfleisch *et al.*, 1997). Compulsive buyers have different attitudes towards money and credit uses (Phau, 2008). Very little research is being done that links earlier life experiences and individuals indulgence in compulsivity (Dittmar, 2005; Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Openshaw *et al.*, 1984).

### **Hypothesis development**

#### *Parent-adolescent cohesion and adolescent compulsive buying behaviour*

Family is considered as a primary socializing agent and hence it is considered as an important agent in the child development process (Ozcinar, 2006). Earlier, we have already discussed about the association between parenting and adolescents

externalizing and internalizing behaviour. Previous researches reveal that family environment plays an important role in adolescent psychological development (Jarvis and Lohman, 2000; Jewell and Stark, 2003). According to Herman *et al.* (2007) family cohesiveness and positive family environment among the family members resulted into adolescent lower depression and psychological adjustment. Palan and Wilkes (2005) revealed that more cohesive family has more desire to avoid conflicts and they generally use egalitarian and compromising type strategies and are less likely to rely on the use of authority, playing on emotions, etc. Following this logic, it is conceivable that in more cohesive families adolescents are more concerned about the family members feeling as well as less self-centred towards the decision process as compared in less cohesive families. According to Hirshci's (1969) Social Control Theory, "the closer that the child's relations with his parents, the more he is attached to and identified with them, the lower his chances for delinquency", i.e. cohesive parent-adolescent relationship generally increases the probability of adolescents internal conventional values and expectations and conform to normative standards. The theory suggested that when the adolescents' level of satisfaction is high, they are more likely to share their views and have greater dependence over parents. Family structure defines the adolescents' compulsive behaviour (Moschis *et al.*, 2013).

Thus, based on the above discussion, adolescents who live in highly cohesive families behave more conservatively than those who feel distanced from their parents. In less cohesive families, adolescents experience a certain loss of control, a lessening of optimism and a stronger sense of personal agency. Thus, we hypothesize that:

- H1.* In less cohesive families, adolescents generally have higher levels of compulsive buying tendencies than in high cohesive families.

#### *Parent-adolescent cohesion and adolescents' self-esteem*

In socialization research the most reliable and consistent research findings is the positive relationship between the parental supportive behaviour and adolescent development of "self-identity" (Baumrind, 1978). Parental supportive behaviour makes the adolescent to feel comfortable in the presence of parents, which attributes values and worth to the adolescent. According to Thomas *et al.* (1974), "parental support is behaviour manifest by a parent towards a child that makes the child feel comfortable in the presence of the parent and confirms in the child's mind that he is basically accepted and approved as a person by the parent". Thus it logically follows that cohesiveness makes adolescent to feel comfortable and react effectively with the intermediate environment. Parent-adolescent cohesion helps to develop self-confidence and an ability to set clear goals (Strage, 1998). Several studies conducted on adolescent revealed that parental support strongly related to dimensions of self-esteem (Gecas, 1971). An impressive body of research supports the effect of parental style on the child's social and cognitive functioning (Baumrind, 1978, cited by Chaplin and John, 2010). It has been seen that the overall parental support (both tangible and intangible) is positively related with all aspects of development like self-esteem, moral, cognitive development and creativity (Openshaw *et al.*, 1984). Family cohesion provides a secure base to develop a positive self-expression and to meet challenges away from the family (Peterson and Zill, 1986), and hence it enhances adolescents' self-esteem. Due to familial conflict in intact families, the adolescents get tangible resources (e.g. money) from their parents, but are not able to get emotional support, time and attention from their parents, which results in anxiety among the adolescence and which is the major source of stress during an adolescence period.

Thus, from the above discussion, we hypothesize that:

- H2. There is positive relationship between parent-adolescent cohesion and adolescents' level of self-esteem.

*Parent-adolescent conflict and compulsive buying*

The "family interactional theory" explains the role of intergenerational conflict in adolescents' life. According to this theory, intergenerational conflict is the causal factor of adolescents stress and tension. Buehler and Gerard (2002) revealed that greater parent-adolescent conflict has been associated with increased adolescents externalizing and internalizing problems. The internalizing problem is mainly concerned with adolescent depression and anxiety, while externalizing problem aggression and delinquency. Previous literature reviews revealed that adolescents having more conflicts with their parents generally have lower levels of self-esteem and develops some risky behaviour (Tucker *et al.*, 2003). It is relatively less known about the effects of family conflict on the adolescent compulsivity and the development of consumption-related thoughts and habits (Hill *et al.*, 2001; Uhlenberg and Mueller, 2003; Singh and Nayak, 2015a, b). Family conflicts affect the adolescents' socialization practices. Specifically, decreased control over adolescents' activities due to family disruptive events and conflicts places a greater emphasis on adolescent behaviour (Conger *et al.*, 1994; Amato and Juliana, 2001).

Thus, as a whole, it has been seen from the above discussion that conflict in a family environment is resulting in stress and depressive symptoms among the adolescents. Of all the life stages, it has been seen that adolescence is a period in which large number of transitions are there, including biological, social and psychological changes (Byrne *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, it can be postulated that interpersonal conflict has a positive relationship with the adolescent compulsive behaviour:

- H3. There is a positive relationship between parent-adolescent conflict and adolescent compulsive buying behaviour.

*Parent-adolescent conflict and self-esteem*

During an adolescence period, it has been seen that adolescents have increased the desire for autonomy and self-independence. Adolescents' demands for autonomy and independence resulted in stress and tension among the family members (Roberts and Pirog, 2004; Laursen and Collins, 1994). Such stress and tension are not treated well in a family environment and hence resulted in unresolved parent-adolescent conflict, which resulted into the lower level of adolescents' development of self-esteem. Park and Tansuhaj (1991) stated that "Degree of conflict is negatively related to love and empathy and is positively related to guilt and shame", i.e. adolescents generally feel shame and embarrassment as well as they loss respect in their parents.

Amato (1993) identifies that low self-esteem is one of the outcomes of the family disruption events. As per the family researchers adolescents' self-esteem are one of the major distinction between the conflicted and non-conflicted families. In disrupted families like divorce or separation it has been seen that the children are living with their mothers resulted in fall in family income, which is not a surprising issue. On an average, it has been seen that on marital break-up or separation women experiences fall in annual family income (Cherlin, 1999). Apart from tangible resources, there is also loss of intangible resources like reduction in parental support, emotional support, Love,

care, etc. (Amato, 1993; Cherlin, 1999). It has been seen that in many disrupted or separated families significantly reduces the amount of parental contact, parents spending less time with their child. The above mentioned studies are being done on disrupting families, but the main focus of this study is not on the disrupted or separated families. We proposed that in the case of intact families also, where there is daily marital, parent-child conflict on different issues resulted in lower level of self-esteem. It has been perceived that negative feelings that come from parent-adolescent conflict are accumulated and reduces the adolescents' level of self-esteem. Thus we hypothesize that:

- H4.* Adolescents who are showing more conflicts with their parents generally have lower levels of self-esteem than those having less conflict.

#### *Adolescents' self-esteem and compulsive buying behaviour*

Now here we will link the adolescents' level of self-esteem with their consumptive behaviour, i.e. with their compulsive buying behaviour. Larson and Richards (1994) reported that adolescents have a feeling of self-conscious and embraced about five times more than their parents. Adolescents have high self-consciousness and social anxiety which makes them more receptive about the advertisement and different brands. (Masten, 2004) reported that "the goal of most image advertising is to suggest that the featured brands help a person look better, feel better, attract sexual interest, and impress friends". Pettit and Sivanathan (2011) revealed that the persons with low self-esteem generally purchase luxury goods on credit to repair their self-worth. We propose here that the parent-adolescent relationship may have an indirect impact on adolescent compulsive behaviour through their influence on their adolescents' self-esteem. Specifically, we argued that the parent-adolescents, relationships influence the degree to which adolescents develop their self-esteem, which in turn have an impact on adolescent compulsive buying behaviour. For instance an adolescent who is very close to their parents and has an intimate relationship with their parents reported a greater sense of control over themselves, highly optimistic and personal satisfaction (Moore and Elizabeth, 1996). Thus, the adolescents who feel distanced from their parents would experience a certain loss of control, less optimism and lower level of self-esteem. Mowen and Spears (1999) revealed that most of the compulsive buyers who are highly materialistic usually have low self-esteem (Elliott, 1994). The causes of compulsivity have not be fully explained yet, but higher level of materialism and low level of self-esteem are some of the factors clearly mentioned in the literature (Dittmar, 2000; O'Guinn and Faber, 1989). However, further research is required to confirm these findings on compulsivity (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). Literature have considerable empirical evidence for the relationship between materialism and compulsive buying (Roberts, 1998), but to date, there is no research investigating the role of self-esteem as a possible mediator between family environment and shopping addiction. Thus, on the basis of above literatize we hypothesize that:

- H5.* Adolescents with lower levels of self-esteem has a higher incidence for the adolescent compulsive buying behaviour.

#### *Mediating role of self-esteem*

There is evidence to suggest that the relationship between parent-adolescent cohesion and compulsivity may be explained, in terms of self-esteem. Self-esteem is considered as a

buffer against depressive symptoms, and those individuals having low self-esteem are supposed to be under the higher level of risk (Brissette *et al.*, 2002; Sowislo and Orth, 2013). Both family cohesion and family conflict are associated with self-esteem in adolescents (Farrell and Barnes, 1993; Lee *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, family cohesion and family conflict predicts changes in self-esteem during adolescence (Baldwin and Hoffmann, 2002) and the relationship between family environment and adolescent compulsive buying behaviour is mediated by self-esteem (Kenny and Sirin, 2006). Richins and Dawson (1992) suggest that the association between family environment and compulsive buying behaviour could lead through the notion of self-esteem, where individual perceive that shopping make them feel more confident. It has been found that individuals having high compulsivity buy more to improve their mood, which could be associated with the desire to boost their self-esteem (Dittmar *et al.*, 1996). Individuals generally develop a coherent picture of their self-esteem which is not based on their self-worthiness but on other factors such as compulsivity (Kasser and Kanner, 2005).

We propose here that two specific parent-adolescent relationships may have an indirect influence on the adolescents' level of compulsivity through the influence of adolescents' self-identity. Specifically, we proposed that parent-adolescents, relationships define the adolescents' development of self-esteem, which in turn influences the degree of their compulsivity. For example, adolescents who are more close to their parents reported a greater sense of general control over their lives, greater optimism and personal satisfaction (Moore and Elizabeth, 1996). Adolescents who feel distanced from their parents would experience a certain loss of control, lessening of optimism and lower self-esteem. And adolescents' compulsive behaviour and material possession of goods is generally associated with their level of self-esteem (Khare *et al.*, 2012; Dittmar, 2005).

In accordance with the same mechanism on parent-adolescent cohesion, we hypothesize the mediating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between parent-adolescent conflict and adolescent compulsive buying behaviour. In other words, the expected effects of two (i.e. parent-adolescent cohesion and conflict) would have a lesser impact on adolescents compulsivity if adolescents possess a higher level of self-esteem. Thus we hypothesize that:

*H6a.* Parent-adolescent cohesion and adolescents compulsive buying behaviour is fully mediated by the adolescents' level of self-esteem.

*H6b.* Parent-adolescent conflict and adolescents compulsive buying behaviour is fully mediated by the adolescents' level of self-esteem.

## Research methodology

### *Measures*

This research model employed 23 items as multiple indicators for four constructs. Throughout these constructs, five-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 ("do not agree at all") to 5 ("totally agree") with the midpoint three being neutral being employed.

Compulsive buying was measured by Roberts *et al.* (2003) 11-item compulsive buying scales. It is used because of its shortness and convenience. Most of the items were reworded to enhance its suitability to the adolescents. Few items of this scale were deleted because of their irrelevance to the adolescents. The deleted items include the questions about writing cheques, payday and credit cards. The internal consistency of the scale was checked by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . In this study  $\alpha = 0.89$ . Parent-adolescent

relationship scale: it is section of two questionnaires designed to test parent-adolescent relationship dimensions. This section contains a total of 13 items covering the two underlying dimensions: parent-adolescent cohesion and parent-adolescent conflict. The parent-adolescent cohesion was measured by Olson *et al.* (1983). It consists of ten items, but only six items has been used here. The reliability and validity of the scale were demonstrated by Lim *et al.* (1990). The internal consistency was measured by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , which deemed acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ). Again the parent-adolescent conflict reflects the amount of openly expressed anger, aggression and conflict between parent and adolescent. The items were taken from the Wang. The reliability of the scale was checked by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , which deemed acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ). Self-esteem: Rosenberg (1965) self-report instrument is used for evaluating individuals' self-esteem. This section contains a total of six items. The internal consistency was measured by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , which deemed acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ).

#### *Pilot testing*

In order to check the feasibility and to reveal any potential deficiencies in the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted on the sample of 25 adolescents. There were no concerns with the question format, wordings based on the results of a pilot study. Thus, all the questions were retained.

#### *Sample*

In total, 300 Indian adolescents (15-18) years completed the self-report questionnaire for this study. Surveys were completed at different secondary schools from different regions in India. The final sample consisted of 197 males (65.66 per cent) and 103 females (34.33 per cent). The average age of respondents was 16.66 years. Totally, 78 respondents were from dual earner families, representing 26 per cent of the sample. Initially we contacted principals and teachers for approval and then the survey questionnaires were given to the students. The respondents were informed that their participation would be confidential and would be maintained for research purpose only. The data were collected during school hours because few students feel difficulty in understanding the questions. Some sample characteristics can be found in Table I.

	%
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	65.66
Female	34.33
<i>Family income (Rs)</i>	
Under 10,000	17
10,001-20,000	24
20,001-30,000	14
More than 30,000	45
<i>Family structure</i>	
Dual earner	26
Single earner	74
<b>Note:</b> $n = 300$	

**Table I.**  
Sample  
characteristics

**Data analysis**

*Measurement model*

AMOS 20 was used for all analysis. We first assessed the measurement model followed by a structural model for hypothesis testing following the guidelines of Anderson and Gerbing (1988). We first report the results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). As per our CFA results, the goodness-of-fit measures for the data are ( $\chi^2 = 290.01$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , CFI = 0.921, NNFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.04). Factor loadings of each item and composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) are shown in Table II. *t*-Value exceeds the 1.96 value (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988).

From the above table, we found that factors loadings are high and significant, thus it confirms the convergent validity of the constructs. Here we have also calculated

Construct	Description	Loadings	Composite reliability	Cronbach's $\alpha$	AVE
<i>Compulsive buying</i>					
CB1	When I go shopping, I buy things I had not intended to purchase	0.838	0.843	0.89	0.56
CB2	It is fun to buy spontaneously	0.834			
CB3	When I see something that really interests me, I buy it without considering the consequences	0.76			
CB4	I am a person who makes lots of unplanned purchases	0.864			
<i>Parent-adolescent cohesion</i>					
PAC1	I can count on my parents to help me out if I have a problem	0.784	0.89	0.85	0.59
PAC2	My parents and I do fun things together	0.88			
PAC3	Our family eats dinners together	0.69			
PAC4	Members' of my family are very close and get along well	0.85			
PAC5	Our family enjoy doing things together	0.88			
PAC6	Family members are supportive of one another during difficult times	0.79			
<i>Parent-adolescent conflict</i>					
PA1	My parents punish me by sending me out of the room	0.77	0.833	0.81	0.59
PA2	My parents will not talk to me when I have displeased them	0.87			
PA3	My parents avoid looking at me when I have disappointed them	0.66			
PA4	My parents discipline me a lot	0.866			
PA5	My parents get angry and yell at me	0.78			
PA6	My parents hit me or threaten to do so	0.74			
PA7	My parents find fault with me	0.67			
<i>Self-esteem</i>					
SE1	In general, I like the way I am	0.828	0.76	0.77	0.58
SE2	Overall I have a lot to be proud of	0.616			
SE3	At times I think I am no good at all	0.682			
SE4	I feel that I have a number of good quality	0.79			
SE5	In general, I feel satisfied with myself	0.779			
SE6	I am not good at making other people like me	0.61			

**Table II.**  
Table for composite reliability and factor loadings

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and the composite reliability. The value of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ranged from 0.77 (self-esteem) to 0.89 (compulsive buying) whereas, composite reliability ranged from 0.76 (self-esteem) to 0.89 (parent-adolescent cohesion) (shown in Table II). In order to test the discriminant validity (Table III) AVE for each pair of construct and comparing this to the squared correlation between the two construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

*Structural model*

The results of the measurement model provide a valid and reliable measurement items which was further used to evaluate the structural model of this section. The fit indices of the hypothesized structural model were as follows:  $\chi^2/df = 1.17, p < 0.05$ ; GFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.923, NFI = 0.901, RMSEA = 0.039.

*Hypothesis testing*

Estimated path coefficients based on the Model 1 are summarized in Table IV. As shown, both parents-adolescent cohesion and conflict are found to significantly influence the adolescents' level of self-esteem, evidenced by the significant direct impacts between parent-adolescent cohesion and self-esteem, and that between parent-adolescent conflict and adolescents' self-esteem. Such direct impacts are supported consistently by our data. In other words, H2 and H4 are supported in this study. On the contrary, the estimates of both paths (a) and (b) is found to be statistically insignificant ( $p < 0.01$ ), which implies

	CB	PAC	PA	SE
CB	0.556			
PAC	0.24	0.597		
PA	0.34	0.371	0.598	
SE	0.25	0.178	0.102	0.58

**Table III.**  
Table for discriminant validity

**Notes:** CB, compulsive buying; PAC, parent-adolescent cohesion; PA, parent-adolescent conflict; SE, self-esteem

Path	Path estimates1 based on full model
PAC → SE	0.79 (0.90)**
PA → SE	0.48 (0.52)**
PAC → CB	1.27 (0.69)
<i>Path (a)</i>	
PA → CB	1.1 (0.52)
<i>Path (b)</i>	
SE → CB	1.07 (-0.54)
<i>Fit indices</i>	
$\chi^2/df$	1.17
GFI	0.94
CFI	0.923
NFI	0.901
RMSEA	0.039

**Table IV.**  
Path estimates goodness-of-fit indices (partial mediation model)

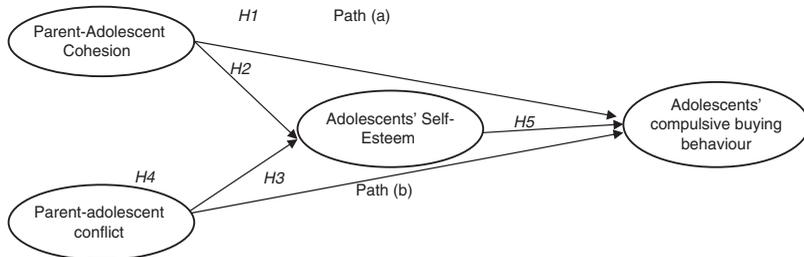
**Notes:** Unstandardized (standardized) path estimates. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

that neither parent-adolescent cohesion nor parent-adolescent conflict has a direct influence on adolescents compulsive buying behaviour. Thus, *H1* and *H3* are not supported. However, it may be too early to make any claim about the mediation role of self-esteem at the moment.

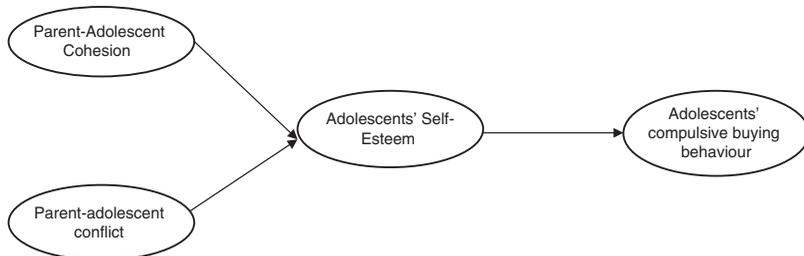
As suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986), self-esteem may be said to function as a mediator when: first, variations in levels of parent-adolescent cohesion and conflict significantly account for variations in self-esteem; and second, variations in self-esteem significantly account for variations in adolescents compulsive buying. The current results based on Figure 1 fail to show a significant effect between self-esteem and compulsive buying. Thus, further analysis is needed before the hypothesis that “self-esteem fully mediates the relationships between parent-adolescent cohesion, conflict and compulsive buying behaviour” (i.e. *H6*) can be verified.

The insignificance of paths (a) and (b) as reported in Table IV suggest that the two paths should be fixed to 0 – which conforms to the hypothesized structure of a full mediation model depicted in Figure 2. Thus, a second estimation is carried out based on Figure 2, which postulates that self-esteem fully mediates the influences of parent-adolescent cohesion and conflict on adolescent compulsive buying behaviour. The estimation results based on Figure 2 are reported in Table V. As evidenced by the fit indices, Figure 2 is also an adequate model in fitting the data. The  $\chi^2/df$  indices based on the dataset, are consistently less than 2. GFI, CFI and NFI are all greater than 0.90, and RMSEA is between 0.03 and 0.05. As a matter of fact, Figure 2 does not differ from Figure 1 in terms of data fit. The insignificant  $\chi^2$  difference indicates that the two models fit the data equivalently well.

As shown in Table V, the paths between parent-adolescent conflict and self-esteem, and those between parent-adolescent cohesion and self-esteem are positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, the notion is supported that both parents-adolescent cohesion and conflict have a direct impact on self-esteem. Regarding the path between self-esteem and adolescents’ compulsive buying, dataset support a



**Figure 1.**  
Partial mediation  
(Model 1)



**Figure 2.**  
A full mediation  
model (Model 2)

positive and statistically significant relationship ( $p < 0.01$ ) between the two variables, see Table V. This, together with what has been found regarding the non-existence of a paths (a) and (b) in Model 1, suggests that both parents-adolescent conflict and cohesion influence adolescents' compulsive buying through self-esteem. In other words, self-esteem is found to fully mediate the said relationships with adolescents' compulsive buying. Thus, it can be argued that, the families having ineffective parenting practices and negative family environment during adolescence period resulted into behaviourally difficult adolescent who may be intentionally or unintentionally become proactive with his/her parents.

The problematic behaviour of adolescent invokes the necessity of considering the role of adolescent self-esteem to a greater extent. The parent-adolescent relationship is mainly coincides with adolescent years. Previous studies have documented the parent-child conflict during this developmental period (Lerner and Galambos, 1998; Roberts and Pirog, 2004) and the findings of this study conclude that the adolescent compulsive behaviour is the result of such conflicts. Adolescent problematic behaviour, emotions can influence their surroundings and can be the sources of tension and stress among the family members.

### Discussion

The main objective of the study was to investigate the adolescent compulsive buying behaviour which would be affected by the parent-adolescent relationships through the adolescents' level of self-esteem. Results reveal that parent-adolescent cohesion and conflict has an indirect impact on adolescent' compulsivity. Lower level of self-esteem and high compulsivity prospectively predicted decreases in family cohesion and increases in family conflict. The findings of the study reveal a theoretical framework which focuses on parents' effect on adolescents' behaviour. This is congruous with the conclusions of the previous researches which imply that adolescent behaviour is the powerful predictor of parent-adolescent relationship and negative family environment is the main cause of adolescent problem behaviour (Hafen and Laursen, 2009). We have hypothesized that parent-adolescent cohesion as well as conflict determines the level of self-esteem. Results revealed that more parent-adolescent cohesion implies a higher level of self-esteem among adolescents. While, higher intergenerational conflict in families resulted into the lower level of self-esteem. Again, it was hypothesized that the adolescents' level of self-esteem has a negative relationship with adolescents' compulsivity. Thus, it supports the findings that adolescents with lower levels of

Path	Path estimates <sup>2</sup> based on full model
PAC → SE	0.50 (0.48)**
PA → SE	0.49 (0.53)**
SE → CB	1.29 (0.65)**
<i>Fit indices</i>	
$\chi^2/df$	1.25
GFI	0.96
CFI	0.97
NFI	0.96
RMSEA	0.025

**Note:** \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table V.**  
Path estimates and  
goodness-of-fit  
indices (full  
mediation model)

self-esteem have a high tendency of the compulsive possession of the material goods, i.e. self-esteem has a direct influence on the adolescents psychological health (Roberts and Pirog, 2004).

The current study, utilizing substantive data from adolescents, provides a good opportunity to re-examine the said relationship in the adolescent compulsivity context. It contributes to the existing literature in the following three ways: first, it confirms that a higher parent-adolescent conflict and lower parent-adolescent cohesion contributes to a lower level of adolescent self-esteem, which in turn increases adolescent compulsive buying behaviour. Second, though parent-adolescent conflict and cohesion are well-known causes of compulsive buying, direct links between these two variables and compulsive buying are not supported in the current study. Instead, the indirect links via self-esteem are found to be significant, which is supported by our dataset. Findings from this research indicate that adolescents' self-esteem is a closer measure in forming adolescents' compulsivity. A few important managerial implications are readily available for the current study. First, parent-adolescent cohesion is the key to retain adolescents' self-esteem. Depicted in the verified full mediation model (Figure 2), Parent-adolescent cohesion and conflict are the exogenous (independent) variables in the structural model. In particular, parent-adolescent cohesion explains on average 73 per cent of variations in adolescents' self-esteem.

Previous literatures to date specifically investigated the incidence of adolescents compulsive buying could be affected the relationship with their parents (Roberts and Pirog, 2004). The evidence presented here is that adolescents' relationships with parents play an important role in adolescents' compulsivity. In addition, the main effects of parent-adolescent relationships (i.e. cohesion as well as conflict) appear to be on the adolescents' level of self-esteem rather than directly on their compulsive buying behaviour. This study revealed that the quality of intergenerational relationships in adolescent developmental period plays a vital role in the construction and evaluation of adolescents "self-identity" and self-esteem.

### **Practical and theoretical implications**

The study findings are mainly concerned with the association between family environment and the emotional problem associated with cognitive restructuring. The findings of the study revealed that the cognitive restructuring mitigate the effects of family-related stress (e.g. family conflict), thereby promoting their own mental health. Given the increasing conflicts in parent-adolescent, it is imperative for practitioners to understand what factors influence the formation of adolescents' self-esteem and compulsive buying behaviour. Though there has been ample evidence in the literature that parent-adolescent cohesion, conflict and self-esteem all play a role in determining adolescents compulsivity, self-esteem remains as which is the most salient interim factor that influences adolescents' compulsivity.

The findings of the present study have important implications for marketers, academicians, consumers and social policy makers. The study about this particular group of people is important as this behaviour of people have given out different consequences for both the compulsive and non-compulsive individuals. As per the economic and social issues are concerned the amount of unmanageable debts have influenced both the buyer itself and their families. Thus, sometimes it acts as negative aspects of consumer behaviour and hence it is necessary to

study about the field's further development. Nancy has given an extended conceptualization and the new way for measuring compulsive buying. But, whatever studies on compulsive buying were done based on bricks and mortar environment. Hence a new conceptualization is still needed to be further explored. Moschis *et al.* has developed a theoretical framework and studied about the adolescents' compulsive buying behaviour, it was basically a life course study in France. Moschis *et al.* reported the role of self-esteem in individuals' compulsive behaviour, but not examined this relationship in their framework.

This study has important public policy implications. Ridgway *et al.* research findings revealed that larger percentage of consumers are affected by compulsive buying tendencies than what has been previously documented in previous studies (Roberts and Pirog, 2004). Moreover, the number of compulsive buyers are spreading and increasing from USA to Europe and then to Asian countries. Thus, globally most of the people are either affected or at a risk of becoming so and may subsequently undergo negative emotional, social, economic or even legal consequences because of their compulsive buying tendencies. The public policy spokesperson should work on determining the possible step to stem this increasing trend as well as develop effective policies and programmes for the affected consumers. Concerted efforts can be done like citation of websites that could provide links to compulsive buyers, providing different services, self-help books and free online contents.

In public domain, compulsive buying have a negative influence on the natural environment as we quickly destroying earth's resources during starvation for more. Furthermore, the other possible negative outcomes of compulsive buying are personal bankruptcies and other credit card debts. It is requisite and of vital importance to understand about the specific aspects of this compulsivity and how it is cultivated among the individuals during the adolescence period, because it is the age during which different psychological changes and individuals consumption-related values and behaviour are formed. In the marketing era of social responsibility, if marketers either knowingly or unknowingly encourage compulsive buyers about the purchases, who cannot pay for their purchases which have a potential impact on the individuals' personal psychological and financial conditions. If compulsive buyers, who are not able to pay for their purchases, are encouraged by marketers to increase their consumption results into negative outcomes which affects individuals personal, psychological and financial situations. According to Bragg "Financial institutions providing retailer and customer credit, retail institutions, all other consumers, as well as nations economy can become subject to the increasing costs realized by compulsive buyers' mounting non-collectable debts". Apart from emphasizing on negative aspects of compulsive buying it has been necessitated to make some theoretical contribution in the emerging markets. Here we believe that we have supplemented just a bit in this direction.

In the end, we would like to add few more points that individuals' compulsive behaviour has increased the attention of the marketers especially in last decades. If we use trend analysis for the research publications we can surely get good number of researches in this field in the coming future.

### **Limitations and future research**

Here we acknowledge certain limitations of the present study. First, we use convenience sampling for selection of data. The samples are under very narrow age

group (15-18) years. Thus, it provides a useful starting point to think about the hypothesis testing in a more diverse sample.

Second, to what extent we generalize our findings to other countries? As India is a developing country with comparably well-developed mixed economy and cultural diversity. Here our study mainly focused on adolescent psychological behavioural development in family context. As discussed earlier in different sections that, there are many other contexts such as peer relationship, school environment, etc., this may influence adolescent psychological development. Our study findings were based on only the adolescents' perception of self-reports and their perception about parental conflict or cohesion. It is argued that more confidence could be obtained if the analysis were done with the parental report of adolescent behaviour and family environment. Since the study is not of longitudinal in nature so it raises the question about the temporal precedence of the behaviour. Thus, in future a longitudinal study needed to be done to eliminate different prospective effects.

The findings of the study could be generalized to some extent to other nations having similar culture and economy structure. Further research in other countries such as Canada, where exists a noticeable difference in market environment, culture, economic conditions would increase the confidence of the generalizability of the findings. Here in present model authors have taken only the parent-adolescent relationships, but the study could be refined further through incorporating peer-influence impacts. Peer communication has an influence on both adolescents' decision making (Singh and Nayak, 2014) as well as adolescents' development of self-esteem. According to family systems theory, "the parental relationship should not be ignored when studying parent-adolescent relationships". One direction in future study should be to scrutinize how the interpersonal conflict (i.e. marital conflict) has an influence on the adolescent's psychological functioning.

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Mediating role  
of self-esteem

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