

## **Shop Till You Drop**

Lydia J. Langley<sup>4</sup>

*Social influences on human behavior can impact individuals' choices, leading to decisions that would not otherwise be made. Making purchases is a personal decision, but at times this can also involve others in the process prior to, during, and after the purchase. The purpose of this study was to explore ideas regarding individuals' purchasing choices, their opinions of their own shopping behavior and that of others. Research questions for this study included: what do men and women think about their personal shopping behaviors and choices, do participants believe that others influence their shopping choices, and do participants attempt to influence the shopping behaviors of others. A survey was used to gather information from participants concerning their opinions of purchasing and shopping behavior and the data was analyzed and a description was developed including the comments of those who participated. The results showed that participants believed that their shopping behavior differs greatly according to different circumstances and that what might be applicable at one point in time might not be at another. Potential benefits from this study include ideas for future, more expansive research regarding purchasing behaviors.*

Perception of the influence of others on human behavior has been illustrated as being of great importance to the choices made by individuals, supported by research in the social sciences. The purpose of this study is to explore how individuals perceive themselves as being influenced or not influenced by others when making purchasing decisions. This study is important regarding the research of social influences on human behavior with respect to learning the ways that individuals believe they change or do not change their behavior according to the

---

<sup>4</sup> Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Lydia J. Langley, 209 S. Kingshighway, St. Charles, MO 63301, (816) 223-3241, ll010@lionmail.lindenwood.edu.

ideas, input, and influence of others. Conspicuous consumption, groupthink, and social influences on human behavior as well as information regarding debt as a social problem and the social dynamics of shopping behavior are topics which provide a background for the concept of individuals being influenced by others in their purchasing choices.

While individuals often prefer to believe that the choices they make, including purchasing decisions, are thoroughly their own decisions, this often is not truly the case (Cowen, 2009). Individuals do not live in a world by themselves and one of the typical elements of human behavior is for one to compare his or her life to that of others. Importance should be placed on the choices, behaviors, and purchases of others, even if one is not consciously aware of that behavior (Cowen, 2009). Americans have made purchasing choices based upon what others were doing and have ended up in great debt across the nation in relation to the economic recession of 2009 (Cowen, 2009). This economic downturn has resulted in a change in consumer behavior, as individuals now consider it unnecessary and even unpopular to make extravagant purchases simply because someone else has influenced them to do so (Cowen, 2009).

Groupthink, the process by which individuals make decisions based upon the notion that others are exhibiting the same behavior, is a vital concept in the choices made by young adults to engage or not engage in risky behavior (Hickey & Fitzclarence, 2004). The socialization process is highly important in the decision-making process of individuals and many base their choices upon what everyone else in a group believes and illustrates as normal and acceptable (Hickey & Fitzclarence, 2004). While the risks involved in that study of socialization are not the same as those posed by debt and poverty, the notion of individuals being led to engage in harmful behavior based on groupthink and social influence are the same.

Social influence upon the consumer behavior of individuals is important in some situations even when the “social presence” does not directly interact with the individual (Argo & Dahl, 2005). Research of retail purchasing locations and social presence indicate that behavior is influenced in some, but not all, circumstances (Argo & Dahl, 2005).

Debt as a social problem in the United States is highly prevalent but even though individuals have personal debt they sometimes continue to make purchases which without the availability of credit cards they would not be able to pay for. One of the key methods to assist individuals who have accumulated debt is to discontinue making purchases (Quinn & Ehrenfeld, 2001). Reducing the number of purchases made under social influences would also be beneficial to those who are in debt (Quinn & Ehrenfeld, 2001).

A similar inquiry to this study, is Luo’s (2005) research of the social influences upon the impulsive buying decisions of individuals, in which the author suggests that the presence of others while someone is shopping can impact the impulsive purchasing choices he or she makes. Of significant importance is the idea presented that the influence of others on individual impulsive purchasing behavior has to do with the closeness and importance of the relationship between the individuals in that particular shopping group (Luo, 2005). A difference also exists in how individuals make impulsive purchasing decisions influenced by others and purchasing decisions influenced by marketing promotions since different priorities are important to different individuals (Luo, 2005).

This study explores such research ideas as: what do men and women think about their personal shopping behaviors and choices, do participants believe that others influence their shopping choices, and do participants attempt to influence the shopping behaviors of others.

Surveys were used to compile information from participants and descriptive methodology was utilized in order to examine the comments provided.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were recruited from the Lindenwood Participant Pool (LPP), which includes undergraduate college students from the following entry level social sciences courses taught at Lindenwood University: ANT 112, PSY 100, PSY 101, SOC 102, and SOC 214, as well as some athletic training courses. Twenty individuals participated in this study, including 15 females and 5 males, and almost half of the participants were in their sophomore year in college. The age range of participants included the youngest individual at age 18 and the oldest at age 26. The 20 participants were male and female, over the age of 18, and all received extra credit in their respective courses through the LPP for participation in this study.

### **Materials**

Materials for this study included: a description of the study (see Appendix A) for LPP recruitment and sign-up sheet purposes that was posted on a bulletin board in order to recruit participants through the LPP. Informed consent forms (see Appendix B) were used that gave information regarding their involvement in the study and their ability to quit the study at any time without consequence. Participant receipts were used to provide participants with proof of their participation in the study in order to get the extra credit for their class through the LPP office. Surveys (see Appendix C) regarding participants' opinions of their shopping behaviors were developed by the researcher, including ten questions and an extra page giving participants the opportunity to provide more information regarding the subject matter if they desired. Questions on the survey were written by the researcher, including: Question 4 "How often do

you make purchases (paying money for any item) that you had not planned for?”, Question 5 “How often do you feel pressured by another person to purchase something?”, Question 6 “Do you feel that it is important to purchase items that will demonstrate that they were expensive (such as expensive brand names printed on products)?”, Question 7 “Do you ever attempt to influence others to make purchases?”, Question 8 “Do you prefer to make purchases quickly or slowly?”, Question 9 “Are you generally satisfied or unsatisfied with the purchases you make?”, and question 10, had 3 parts in answer to the question, “Do you prefer (please circle answers)” including 10A “Shopping at a mall,” 10B “Shopping at a grocery store,” and 10C “Shopping at a discount store (Walmart, etc.).” Follow-up letters (see Appendix D) were used including the researcher’s contact information to be given to participants. The study took place in classrooms, a library group study room, and in a small psychology lab room as well, and all participants were provided with a desk or a seat at a large table and, if necessary, a pen to complete the paperwork and survey.

### **Procedure**

Using sign-up sheet B allowed some individuals to be tested individually and some to be tested in small groups of 2 or 3. Participants in this study were greeted by the researcher and given an informed consent form to complete. The researcher provided participants with a participant receipt for the study and informed them of the location to redeem the receipt for extra credit in their courses.

Participants were verbally informed that they could choose to quit the study at any time without consequence, that the information obtained from the participants would remain completely anonymous since the resulting report would contain information about the group of participants as a whole rather than individual responses, and that they should feel free to ask the

researcher any question at any time. Participants were asked to fill out a survey containing demographic questions as well as questions regarding opinions of how others influence or do not influence their shopping habits. Participants were provided with a verbal debriefing with additional information about the purpose of the study. A follow-up letter thanking participants for taking part in the study was distributed, including the contact information of the researcher so that participants would be able to inquire about the results of the study at a later date if desired.

### **Results**

Because the vast majority of participants were women, the research question “what do men and women think about their personal shopping behaviors and choices,” cannot be analyzed but the choice of women to participate in the study may indicate that perhaps they prefer to shop more than men which led them to choose to participate in the study. The research question, “do participants believe that others influence their shopping choices,” appears to have been answered by the study, with most participants indicating that they do not believe others influence their shopping choices. Additionally, the research question, “do participants attempt to influence the shopping behaviors of others,” might also have been answered with a number of participants commenting that they do attempt to influence the shopping behavior of others.

While the majority of participants indicated for Questions 10A, 10B, and 10C, that they prefer shopping with others rather than shopping alone at a mall, grocery store, or discount store (Walmart, etc.), comments show that people make different choices depending upon what they are shopping for. Responding to Question 5, “How often do you feel pressured by another person to purchase something,” most participants answered “rarely” or “sometimes,” and most believed it was “not important,” “slightly important,” or “somewhat important,” to “purchase items that

will demonstrate that they were expensive (such as expensive brand names printed on products)” regarding Question 6.

It appears that the cost of the item being purchased plays a significant role in whether an individual chooses to buy it or not, and some items are purchased (such as food) more than others because they are considered as more of a necessity than a luxury. Also, in response to Question 4, “How often do you make purchases (paying money for any item) that you had not planned for?” most participants indicated that they “sometimes” or “often” did so. The majority of participants answered that they were “satisfied” or “moderately satisfied” with their purchases in response to Question 9, “Are you generally satisfied or unsatisfied with the purchases you make?” and most answered that they either preferred to make purchases “moderately quick” or “moderately slow.”

### **Discussion**

One of the most interesting aspects of the information collected from this survey was in the form of comments that some individuals provided on their surveys in addition to the standard set of questions. One participant indicated that for Question 8 (“Do you prefer to make purchases quickly or slowly?”), that “it depends on how expensive the item is,” for 10 A-C (Do you prefer shopping alone or with others at a mall, grocery store, or discount store) that “it depends on what I’m buying,” whether or not the individual would prefer shopping alone or with others, and that both answers would be considered appropriate. This individual also commented, “Any purchase I make depends on the price and quantity (quantity) as well as quality.” Another participant indicated, “I sometimes make fast shopping decisions but I often regret it afterwards so now a lot of research goes into what I buy unless its clothes.” A comment left by another participant included, “I like shopping, but if I can afford it, and when I can’t then I don’t shop at

all. Most of my money is spent on food.” Also, one participant commented “Concerning Question 8,” (“Do you prefer to make purchases quickly or slowly?”) “I often buy ‘big’ things that cost more money slower than if it’s small things like just a t-shirt or something like that. So it’s a bit of both.” These comments indicate that many individuals tend to make different choices in making purchases and alter their shopping behaviors according to different situations.

Question 7 asked participants, “Do you ever attempt to influence others to make purchases?” The data showed that 8 of the participants believe that they attempt to influence others to make purchases but 16 of the participants answered that either rarely or sometimes they feel pressured by another person to purchase something. A number of possibilities exist, such as that perhaps people attempt to influence others to make purchases but those efforts are not successful. Another possibility is that individuals are influenced by others to make purchases but often do not even recognize that they are being pressured by others to do so. This also suggests that individuals realize that they attempt to change the decisions of others and influence them to make purchasing choices, but that they do not believe that the same process happens to them.

Further research regarding this topic could include such questions as, are people influenced to make purchases without them being able to recognize that this is occurring? Why do individuals purposely attempt to influence the purchasing choices made by others? How expensive must an item be in order for an individual to feel that more consideration must be done before purchasing it, as opposed to spontaneous purchases that are made without much concern for the cost? Further research would also be helpful regarding what it is that participants prefer to shop for the most and if they are more likely to be influenced by others to buy something if it is a product they are already more likely to buy because of personal preference rather than a product that is of neutral interest to begin with. The findings of this study indicate that individuals have

varying opinions regarding their shopping choices and behavior according to differing circumstances, and pursuing more qualitative research in the future, such as interviews and participant observation would explore these ideas in more descriptive detail.

This could be accomplished by interviewing participants with open-ended questions, such as asking them to tell the researcher about shopping in general or about any experiences they have had while shopping that they consider interesting or important. Participant observation could be accomplished by following participants as they shop, and asking questions concerning the purchasing choices they make throughout the experience. Additional observational research could also be accomplished by observing shopping taking place in a store, or observing individuals in a shopping mall, and additional work could be done when analyzing the data by checking sales records of stores that were observed (with permission of the respective stores to complete such research). Conducting further research using qualitative methodology would be helpful in gaining a better understanding of what impacts individuals' purchasing choices and shopping behavior.

#### References

- Argo, J., & Dahl, D. (2005). The influence of a mere social presence in a retail context. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(2), 207-212.
- Cowen, T. (2009). The life cycle of conspicuous consumption. *Money*, 38(4).
- Hickey, C., & Fitzclarence, L. (2004). Regimes of risk: The need for a pedagogy for peer groups. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(1), 49-63.
- Luo, X. (2005). How does shopping with others influence impulsive purchasing? *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(4), 288-294.
- Quinn, J. B., & Ehrenfeld, T. (2001). Don't lose it: Seven tips. *Newsweek*, 138(9).

**Percentages Table**

Question 4	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	0%	25%	40%	30%	5%
Question 5	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	15%	40%	40%	5%	0%
Question 6	Not Important	Slightly Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
	35%	25%	25%	10%	5%
Question 7	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	15%	30%	40%	15%	0%
Question 8	Very Quick	Moderately Quick	Neither	Moderately Slow	Very Slow
	5%	45%	10%	30%	5%
Question 9	Unsatisfied	Moderately Unsatisfied	Neutral	Moderately Satisfied	Satisfied
	0%	0%	15%	25%	60%
Question 10A	Alone	With Others			
	25%	70%			
Question 10B	Alone	With Others			
	40%	55%			
Question 10C	Alone	With Others			
	35%	55%			

Appendix A

**EXPERIMENT DESCRIPTION**

**Project #:** 11-27

**Experimenter's name(s):** Lydia Langley

---

**Experimenter's contact information:** (816) 223-3241 ll010@lionmail.lindenwood.edu

**Approximate amount of time experiment will take:** no more than 10 minutes

**Type of experiment (survey, interactive, etc.):** survey

**Experiment name:** Shop Till You Drop

**Description of the experiment:** Participants will be asked to complete a survey regarding their opinions of their personal shopping habits and choices.

## Appendix B

## “Shop Till You Drop” Informed Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name), understand that I will be participating in a research study that will ask me to complete one survey regarding my purchasing decision and other related information. I understand that I should be able to complete the study within 15 minutes. I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence and will be given a participant receipt for extra credit in my course whether I complete the study or not. I understand that the information I provide will not be able to be matched with my personal identifying information. I understand that the results of the study will be compiled in a report that will explain the results of the group of participants in this study as a whole, not the individual results of any participant in the study. I realize that the data will be kept confidential and unidentifiable by the researcher, and is to be used for educational purposes. I understand that any questions I have regarding the project will be answered by the researcher during the study and that the researcher can be contacted to answer any questions regarding the study or results of the study following the conclusion of the project. I also verify that I am at least 18 years of age and am legally able to give consent or that I am under the age of 18 but have on file with the LPP office, a completed parental consent form that allows me to give consent as a minor.

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of researcher obtaining consent)

Principal Researcher: Lydia J. Langley

(816) 223-3241

[ll010@lionmail.lindenwood.edu](mailto:ll010@lionmail.lindenwood.edu)

Supervisor: Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair

Course Instructor

(636) 949-4371

[mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu](mailto:mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu)

## Appendix C

## Shop Till You Drop Survey

Please circle the letter next to the answers that most closely fit your opinion or circle the best answer for you, and please fill in blanks. Additional paper is provided at the end of the survey for any additional comments you might wish to provide regarding this questionnaire or the topics it concerns.

1. Are you:

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Do not wish to specify

2. What is your current age? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What year are you in college?

- a. Freshman
- b. Sophomore
- c. Junior
- d. Senior
- e. "Super Senior" (5+ years)
- f. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. How often do you make purchases (paying money for any item) that you had not planned for?

Never-----Rarely-----Sometimes-----Often-----Very Often

5. How often do you feel pressured by another person to purchase something?

Never -----Rarely-----Sometimes-----Often-----Very Often



## Appendix D

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN “SHOP TILL YOU DROP”!!!**

**Thank you for participating in this study. The study is exploring the opinions of individuals regarding their personal shopping behaviors as well as their perceptions of social influences on their shopping behavior and their perceived influence over the shopping behaviors of others. If you would like information regarding the outcome of this study, or have any questions, please feel free to contact the researcher at any time. Thank you again for your time and input!**

**Lydia Langley – Principal Researcher**

**(816) 223-3241**

**[ll010@lionmail.lindenwood.edu](mailto:ll010@lionmail.lindenwood.edu)**

**Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair – Supervisor and Course Instructor**

**(636) 949-4371**

**[mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu](mailto:mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu)**