

Self-gifting guilt: an examination of self-gifting motivations and post-purchase regret

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Abstract

Purpose – Self-gifting is a performative process in which consumers purchase products for themselves. The literature to date remains silent on a determination and connection between the extents of post-purchase regret resulting from self-gifting behavior. The purpose of this paper is to examine identification and connection of self-gifting antecedents, self-gifting and the effect on post purchase regret.

Design/methodology/approach – This study claims the two antecedents of hedonistic shopping and indulgence drive self-gifting behaviors and the attendant regret. A total of 307 shoppers responded to a series of statements concerning the relationships between antecedents of self-gifting behavior and the effect on post-purchase regret. Self-gifting is a multi-dimensional construct, consisting of therapeutic, celebratory, reward and hedonistic imports. Confirmatory factor analysis and AMOS path modeling enabled examination of relationships between the consumer traits of hedonistic shopping and indulgence and the four self-gifting concepts.

Findings – Hedonic and indulgent shoppers engage in self-gifting for different reasons. A strong and positive relationship was identified between hedonic shoppers and reward, hedonic, therapeutic and celebratory self-gift motivations. hedonic shoppers aligned with indulgent shoppers who also engaged the four self-gifting concepts. The only regret concerning purchase of self-gifts was evident in the therapeutic and celebratory self-gift motivations.

Research limitations/implications – A major limitation was the age range specification of 18 to 45 years which meant the omission of older generations of regular and experienced shoppers. This study emphasizes the importance of variations in self-gift behaviors and of post-purchase consumer regret.

Originality/value – This research is the first examination of an hedonic attitude to shopping and indulgent antecedents to self-gift purchasing, the concepts of self-gift motivations and their effect on post-purchase regret.

Keywords Consumer behaviour, Retailing, Post-purchase regret, Self-gifting

Paper type Research paper

An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.

Introduction

Gift giving motivations around ritual occasions, particularly Christmas giving, are a well-researched area (Clarke, 2006, 2008). However, self-gifting is a performative process because these actions relate to an individual's inner thoughts and comments which act as both predictors and outcomes for particular or potential purchase decisions. Hence, self-gifting differs from traditional gift purchases because the requirement of asking others about gift preferences is eliminated. Previous research has not examined the antecedents of self-gifting behavior and the effect on post purchase regret. Shoppers often face many purchase decisions during half yearly, Black Friday or post-Christmas clearance sales events. One such decision is to purchase items for themselves (Mukhopadhyay and Johar,

2009). These purchases are considered self-gifts and constitute a form of hedonic shopping and personal indulgence (Mick and DeMoss, 1990). In the context of shopping during sales periods, self-gift purchase decisions may emerge from hedonic shopping and indulgent behavior that contributes to self-gift behaviors and possibly regret. In the context of mid-year clearance sales in Australia, the purchasing motivations of consumers often move between buying for others, household requirements and purchasing gifts for themselves. Yet, little has been done to understand or draw linkages between the established antecedents of self-gifting shopping behaviors and the specific contexts of self-gifting motivations. The multi-dimensional conceptualization of self-gifting behavior (Mick and DeMoss, 1990) helps to examine the relationships between hedonic and indulgent trait shoppers, the types of self-gifting during these clearance sales and the extent of post-purchase regret. Thus, this research contributes to gifting behavior theory and literature.

This research makes four contributions. First, this is exploratory research that outlines the effects of hedonistic shopping and indulgence traits on self-gifting. While previous research of self-gifting behavior is conceptual or phenomenological, the study operationalises and presents a multidimensional construct of self-gifting behavior as the second aspect. Thirdly, the findings advance our understanding of post-purchase regret, which generally concerns negative emotions (Lin and Huang, 2006; Ali and

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Ramay, 2011; Bui *et al.*, 2011). The fourth aspect relates to the extent which post-purchase regret is dependent upon the dimensions of self-gifting. This paper addresses these questions concerning antecedents to self-gifting motivations and the relationship between self-gifting motivations and post-purchase regret:

RQ1. What shopping and consumption factors precede self-gifting motivations?

RQ2. What is the relationship between self-gifting motivations and post-purchase regret?

Sales events and gift shopping

Shopping is perceived as a recreational pursuit born of a consumer culture that maintains conspicuous consumption, frivolous spending and demands for instant gratification (Betts and McGoldrick, 1996). Our senses have a powerful effect on the physical, cognitive, social and emotional aspects of the shopping experience (Gentile *et al.*, 2007). The appropriate sensory stimuli can calm, relax, de-stress, energize, improve mood, influence decision making and hence control the propensity to spend (Soars, 2009). However, the atmosphere and general ambience generated by other shoppers creates an increased energy, enthusiasm and excitement about the sales event (Martin, 2012). There is a thrill, an excitement and the madness of a dream; a dog-eat-dog fear of missing out (Betts and McGoldrick, 1996). Therefore, the more sensory and exciting the experience, the more engaging it will be (Soars, 2009).

Retailers address the problem of slow selling stock through price markdowns and appropriately timed clearance sales which serve as economic motivations by creating higher value for customers (Walker, 1999; Merrilees and Miller, 1996). Apart from renowned sales events such as the Black Friday pre-Christmas sales (Thomas and Peters, 2011) and post-Christmas sale events, there are seasonal clearances, end of financial year sales or stocktake sales. Irrespective of the context, a retail sale is an integral part of the retail environment, is a promotional method in its own right and is the ultimate expression of the consumer culture phenomenon (Miller, 1998). Gift shopping represents a form of role enactment where consumers shop in fulfillment of certain life roles such as being a “good friend” or a “good spouse” (Wagner and Rudolph, 2010). Consequently, the gift-giving process is important in social integration (Davies *et al.*, 2010; Heath *et al.*, 2011), that holds the four functions of communication, social exchange, economic exchange and socialization (Belk, 1979). A gift mediates the relationship between the giver and the receiver where the giver makes an effort to select an appropriate gift that would symbolize the occasion, the relationship and the emotions (Pandya and Venkatesh, 1992). Generally, gift giving is a process initiated by an event, incurs considerable expense of time and money, but has expectations of giving of pleasure to another, or to oneself (Davies *et al.*, 2010).

Self-gifting (SG) is a process built around the purchase of services or goods where the consumption is internally attributed, exclusively personal, pleasure oriented and independent of an immediate need (Atalay and Meloy, 2011). Such gift purchases feature aspects of self-control and are rarely repetitive or financially onerous (Mick and DeMoss, 1990). Subsequently, self-gifts are purchased in situations, such as, to “be nice to oneself”, to “relieve stress” or to

“provide an incentive” in circumstances where the “attainment of a goal is desired” (Mick and DeMoss, 1990; Mick *et al.*, 1992). The main contexts for self-gift giving include reward gifts for accomplishment of a personal goal; hedonic gifts “because it feels good” (Rohatyn, 1990); a therapeutic gift to cheer up oneself, and celebratory gifts for ones’ birthday or Christmas (Mick and DeMoss, 1990). Self-gifts can be a product, service, or experience and ultimately, merges delight and fantasy with guilt (Mick and DeMoss, 1990).

Hence, a self-gift exhibits ego-style characteristics and decisions that tends to be a premeditated or highly context-bound personally symbolic self-communication (Mick and DeMoss, 1990).

Few empirical studies address the motivation for self-gift behavior or the types of consumer more likely to engage in self-gifting behavior (Sherry, 1983). Mick and DeMoss (1990) indicate self-gifts are products, services, or experiences that are partly differentiated from other personal acquisitions by their situational and motivational contexts while satisfying a variety of psychological needs and behavioral conditions such as reward and/or therapy. The characteristics of hedonistic and indulgent shopping are descriptive elements of shopping practices rather than elements of self-gifts (Sherry and McGrath, 1995).

Hedonistic shopping and indulgence

The hedonic shopping experience is personal, subjective and reflects an emotional or psychological worth of the purchase through values such as the joy from excitement of shopping, or the escape from everyday activities that the experience offers (Carpenter and Moore, 2009). Satisfaction-seeking fulfills a biological need whereas pleasure-seeking and hedonism co-exist in the mind of the consumer, and aims to increase the “quality” of the experience (Campbell, 1987). Shoppers anticipate the pleasure that sales generate; the novelty of a new product; the thrill of the chase and gaining a bargain. Thus, hedonic consumers shop because it “feels good” and make no attempt to consider the full consequences of action through regret or post purchase dissonance.

Hedonic consumption seeks novelty, variety and surprise (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) which are hallmarks of contemporary consumer society (Pandya and Venkatesh, 1992). Phrases such as “Shop ’til you drop” and “I shop therefore I am” go beyond basic need fulfillment and reflect the increasing importance that consumers attribute to personal acquisitions (Westphal *et al.*, 2002). Ethical hedonism claims it is fundamentally right, proper and just to seek pleasure and the pursuit of pleasure rationalises such “action” by making it “purposeful” to the extent that rationality and intentional action reflect a pleasure oriented foundation (O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy, 2002). Without considering the consequences of actions, hedonistic shoppers will continue to “buy” brands, expensive products, novel experiences and embrace the ideology of ceaseless consumption of material goods (Rohatyn, 1990). Such consequences lead to the realization that with every new acquisition comes disappointment, restlessness, post-purchase regret and subsequently leads to more conspicuous consumption.

Shoppers demonstrating indulgent traits or make indulgent product choices for themselves are often pleasure-seeking individuals (Mukhopadhyay and Johar, 2009; Louro *et al.*, 2007) who make self-indulgent decisions and are able to

justify such decision to themselves (Kivetz and Simonson, 2002). As Mick and DeMoss (1990) indicate, shoppers resort to indulgent self-gifting to reward themselves and justify subsequent purchases (Louro *et al.*, 2007).

Self-gifting motivations

Heath *et al.* (2011) indicates that the frequency and increased consumption during clearance sales, together with the shopping appeals and communication media, creates a shopping environment that encourages self-gifting behavior. Accordingly, most clearance sales present a valid context in which shoppers would expect to engage in extensive self-gifting. Self-gifts can be spontaneous or planned, cognitive or affective. However, self-gifts are controlled, connected mentally to an occasion or context and are particular or singularly relevant to the purchaser (Mick and DeMoss, 1990). Furthermore, the type of self-gift depends on an inspiring reward or a motivation because buying a self-gift is “a kind of self-love” (Heath *et al.*, 2011). Other categories include relaxing, therapeutic self-gifts and thoughtful birthday self-gifts. Such purchases reflect a variety of motivations that cover rewards, celebrations or simply being nice to oneself and fulfilling certain “felt” needs. Initially, Mick (1996) designated four categories of self-gift occasions. There was PuritanicSG that equates to SGReward; RomanticSG elements reflect the SGHedonic; HolidaySG now incorporates the SGCelebration category while therapeuticSG emerges unchanged. It is therefore evident that the motivations and the decision-making process to self-gift varies and consequently leads to cognitive fatigue and possible post-purchase regret.

Hedonic self-gifts ultimately represent inspiration by being memorable and lasting, express desires of being nice to oneself or providing an incentive in circumstances where the attainment of a goal is desired (Mick, 1996). While luxury brands often become the academic focus of hedonic consumption and self-gift practices (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009), consumers who engage in hedonistic self-gifting are more inclined to make purchases of everyday, image-related products, such as clothes, make-up, shoes or accessories (Heath *et al.*, 2011). Reward gifts have a strong effect on gift preference and choice (Mukhopadhyay and Johar, 2009) and deemed as earned because of previous sacrifices, personal efforts or goals attained (Kivetz and Simonson, 2002).

The deservedness that represents these self-gifts is often associated with marking the end to an endeavour or the completion of a demanding task (Heath *et al.*, 2011) and to become a reward for an accomplishment (Mick and DeMoss, 1990). Such self-gifts respond to the opportunity for something different as a symbolic reminder or a reward for constraint and sacrifice shown throughout everyday decisions and activities (Heath *et al.*, 2011). These gifts are more inspiring and relaxing, but less practical (Mick, 1996). Reward self-gifts items include clothing, restaurants, recreational items and travel which are essentially memorable and lasting. Self-gifts also contain elements of mood maintenance, repair or regulatory behavior (Luomala and Laaksonen, 1999). Mood management (Mick *et al.*, 1992) or mood-repair links clearly with compensatory or therapeutic consumption behavior (Woodruffe-Burton and Wakenshaw, 1997) because therapeutic self-gifting improves or reinforces self-esteem (Sherry, 1983; Mick and DeMoss, 1990; Howland, 2010; Heath *et al.*, 2011). Self-gifting is

comparable to compensatory consumption (Woodruffe-Burton and Wakenshaw, 1997) and a cheer up goal is well supported in literature. Shoppers engage in self-gifting to alleviate negative moods (Luomala and Laaksonen, 1999), deal with personal sadness (Sherry and McGrath, 1995) or a perceived or significant loss (Sayre and Horne, 1996). The categories of music, fast food, personal care services and entertainment are cheer-up or mood management self-gifts (Mick *et al.*, 1992; Atalay and Meloy, 2011) that deliver immediacy and short-term delight. Mick (1996) describes therapeutic gifts as inspiring and relaxing but less practical, functional and more durable than other forms of self-gifts. Celebratory self-gifts reflect self-purpose, individual uniqueness as well as personal heritage (Atalay and Meloy, 2011) that are an integral part of important milestones, such as birthdays, the festive season or holidays (Heath *et al.*, 2011). Consumers feel encouraged to purchase self-gifts in order to celebrate such events (McKeage and Richins, 1993) or gain a specific and desired anniversary or birthday gift that was not forthcoming.

Post purchase regret

There are two aspects of post purchase dissatisfaction. The first concerns post purchase dissonance and the second is post purchase regret. The seminal work of Festinger (1957) argues that cognitive dissonance refers to the pressures of non-fitting consumption relationships and ultimately requires changes in behavior, cognition and exposure to new information and new opinions. Reduction in post purchase dissonance occurs through actions of the provider or others where a more favorable attitude or evaluation from the customer is a goal (Hunt, 1970). Initial regret theory focused on irrational decision making (Loomes and Sugden, 1982), but developed as negative emotion theories where the present situation would be acceptable if different choice decisions prevailed (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2004). Also, Sweeney *et al.* (2000) refer to regret as an individual’s psychological discomfort subsequent to the purchase decision. Post purchase regret involves coping and risk minimization strategies that are more personal and generally involves self-judgment and feeling sorry (Watson and Spence, 2007). Consumer post purchase regret is a frequently felt emotion when a decision outcome compares unfavorably with other possibilities, but not the final choice (Inman and Dyer, 1997). Similarly, there is a state of feeling sorry due to the experience of misfortunes, limitations, losses, short comings, transgressions or mistakes (Landman, 1993). Previous research of antecedents of post-purchase regret have considered the effect of product type or demographic characteristics (Ali and Ramay, 2011), prior knowledge of consideration sets (Lin and Huang, 2006), influence on customer satisfaction (Inman and Dyer, 1997; Taylor and Schneider, 1998), repeat purchase intentions (Inman and Zeelenberg, 2002) and brand switching (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2004). According to Sugden (1985) regret not only involves the wish that one had chosen differently, it also involves the belief that the original decision was wrong at the time and includes the elements of self-recrimination or self-blame. The more negative the belief about the purchase, the greater the experience of regret because regret is the result of the comparison between “what is” and “what might have been” (Creyer and Ross, 1999).

Research hypotheses

Self-gifting purchase decisions stem from various sales shopping experiences and indulgent acquisitions that vary from “cheer up” oneself, to highly controlled, carefully considered self-gifts, intended to celebrate a singularly relevant event (Campbell, 1987; Mick and DeMoss, 1990; Rohatyn, 1990). Post purchase regret involves self-judgments of decision outcomes that result in feelings of sorrow due to the perceived misfortunes, short comings or mistakes, associated with the self-gifting decisions (Landman, 1993; Inman and Dyer, 1997; Watson and Spence, 2007). It is therefore evident the motivations and the decision-making process to self-gift varies, lead to cognitive fatigue and varying levels of post-purchase regret. Sales shopping experiences relate to practices and beliefs about shopping and associate with indulgent practices which appear closely linked to drive the purchase of merchandise in general, and self-gift shopping in particular (Figure 1). Consequently, the first hypotheses is:

H1. There is a strong, positive relationship between hedonic shopping traits and indulgent practices.

Purchases associated with sales shopping experiences seek novelty, variety and surprise that makes shoppers feel good about themselves. Hence, positive relationships will exist between hedonic shopping consumers and the dimensions of self-gifting. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are developed for testing:

H2a. There is a strong, positive relationship between consumers who report high levels of hedonic shopping traits and reward self-gifting.

H2b. There is a strong, positive relationship between consumers who report high levels of hedonic shopping traits and self-gifting – hedonism.

H2c. There is a strong, positive relationship between consumers who report high levels of hedonic shopping traits and self-gifting – therapeutic.

H2d. There is a strong, positive relationship between consumers who report high levels of hedonic shopping traits and self-gifting – celebratory.

Self-gifts are the purchases of services or goods for oneself where the consumption is internally attributed, exclusively personal, pleasure oriented and is independent of an immediate need. Shoppers, that demonstrate indulgent traits or make indulgent product choices for themselves are considered pleasure-seeking individuals (Mukhopadhyay and Johar, 2009; Louro *et al.*, 2007). Expectations are for a strong correlation between the construct of indulgence and the dimensions of self-gift. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are offered:

H3a. There is a strong, positive relationship between consumers who report high levels of indulgent shopping traits and self-gifting – reward.

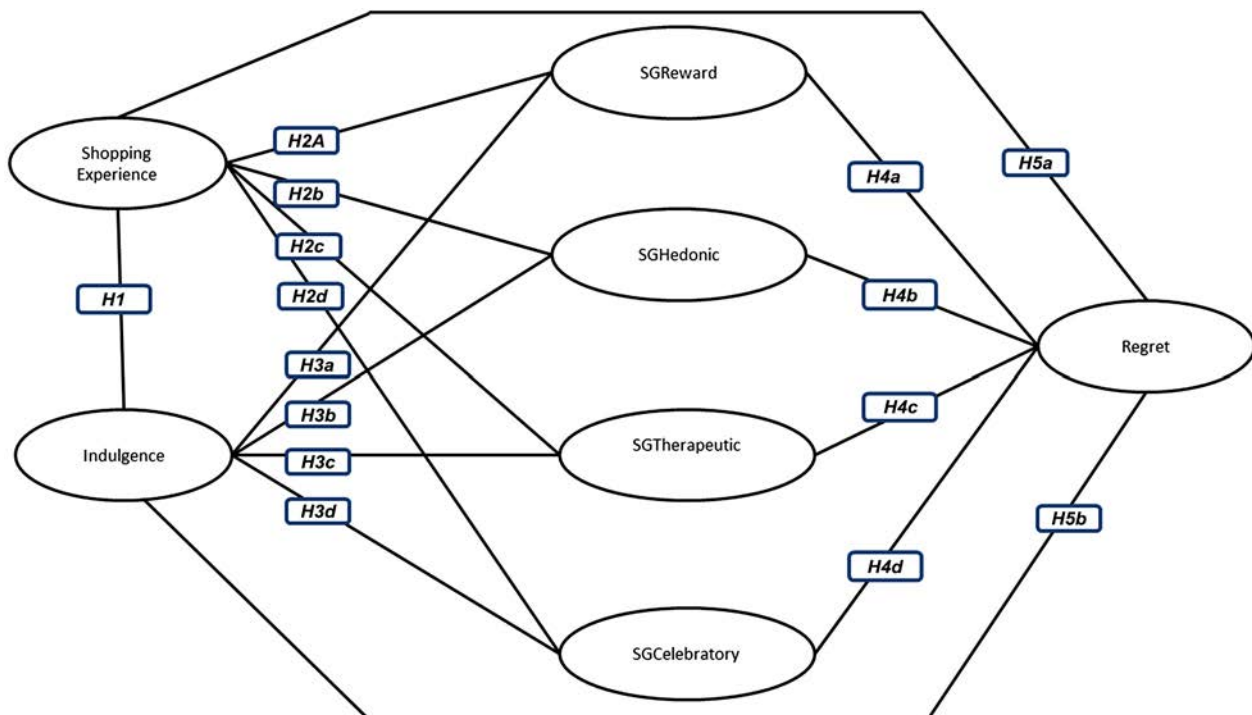
H3b. There is a strong, positive relationship between consumers who report high levels of indulgent shopping traits and self-gifting – hedonism.

H3c. There is a strong, positive relationship between consumers who report high levels of indulgent shopping traits and self-gifting – therapeutic.

H3d. There is a strong, positive relationship between consumers who report high levels of indulgent shopping traits and self-gifting – celebratory.

Hedonic self-gifters engage in shopping without making any real attempt to consider the full consequences of action because it “feels good” (Campbell, 1987; Rohatyn, 1990). Such consequences lead to the long-term recognition that each new purchase drives a need for more and more

Figure 1 Conceptual model



consumption. The failure to consider the consequences of such hedonic purchase behavior will increase the extent of reported post-purchase regret for hedonic shoppers and the following hypotheses are offered:

- H4a. There is a strong positive relationship between self-gifting reward trait shoppers and post purchase regret.
- H4b. There is a strong positive relationship between self-gifting hedonic trait shoppers and post purchase regret.
- H4c. There is a strong positive relationship between self-gifting therapeutic trait shoppers and post purchase regret.
- H4d. There is a strong positive relationship between self-gifting celebratory trait shoppers and post purchase regret.

People mostly shop for general groceries, merchandise and items that bring joy to the self or others. They enjoy both shopping and indulgent practices, yet regret some purchase decisions, therefore:

- H5a. There is a strong positive relationship between hedonic shopping traits and post purchase regret.
- H5b. There is a strong positive relationship between indulgent practices and post purchase regret.

Method

An initial pilot survey of 50 random participants clarified the content and structure of the indicative factors to formulate a series of ranking questions that offered a succinct survey. The final instrument was an online format that sought Likert-style responses within a 1 (disagree) though to a 5 (agree) ranking system. The timing of the main study was outside the typically heavy gift-giving periods observed in western societies. Irrespective of the timing, sales serve as an economic motivation by creating higher value for customers when shopping for family, friends and self. An Australian list supplier provided a rented list of potential respondents in order to generalize the study across Australia. The specified age range for participants was between 18 and 45. The list supplier made e-mail contact with the potential respondents and supplied a link to the university website and the questionnaire. Participation in the online survey was voluntary, anonymous and allowed four weeks for participation. After cleaning the data, 307 responses were acceptable. These participants were predominantly female (75 percent) and an overall average age of 38 years. Whilst the data represented a small response rate, the sample size is adequate for the selected analysis and outcomes determined through AMOS version 21.0.

The study drew from previous literature concerning hedonic attitudes/motives for shopping (Batra and Aholta, 1991; Babin *et al.*, 1994; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Hedonic shopping value is festive, playful, and fun that reflects the entertainment value and emotional worth derived from shopping as a pleasurable experience. This shopping style appears as enjoyable and an “escape” or adventure where the shopping experiences are often far more significant than the acquisition of products. The responses reflect the degree to which consumers derive hedonic value from a shopping trip. Goal pursuit is a key issue in indulgence (Louro *et al.*, 2007) and if positivity is a goal then being excited, relaxed, pleased, satisfied and happy are suitable hedonic items

(Ramanathan and Williams, 2007) and thus formed the basis for the five questions addressing indulgence.

Mick *et al.* (1992) provided many topics for consideration of the SG concepts. The items offered in the concept covered being nice to self, and thus provided direction and suitable questions for this study. The essence of enjoyment, adventure and excitement formed a basic structure to measure the SGHedonic contribution. SGReward drew from the personal accomplishment items concerning buying to reward, doing good work and just buying something. The main SGCelebration addresses the variations of buying gifts to celebrate and were appropriate for inclusion in the question bank. Additionally, the concept of personal disappointment (Mick *et al.*, 1992) contributed some items to SGTherapeutic such as buying when feeling down, emotional healing and having a bad week. The structure for the regret concept drew from Creyer and Ross (1999) and the regret experience measure (REM). Broadly, the measure’s intent centered on different or poor choices made.

Results

Byrne (2010) describes exploratory factor analysis (EFA) as being “designed for the situation where links between the observed and latent variables are unknown or uncertain”. The approach in this study covered a factor analysis, hypothesis test and describes a path analysis. The data were subject to a principal component analysis factor exploration using SPSS version 21. Table I presents the factor structures and associated Cronbach Alpha. Individual factor loadings are consistent and Alphas range from 0.872 to 0.965. These structures are acceptable for further development within an AMOS (v21) hypothesis analysis (Table II) and path model (Table III).

The data analysis incorporated a two-step process (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) by first examining the measurement model and then using the structural paths associated with the hypotheses of this study. The first step assessed the relationships between the independent variable of hedonic shopping and the dependent variable of indulgent behaviors together with the various associations with self-gift motivations and feelings of regret.

Standard β coefficients refer to how many standard deviations a dependent variable will change, per standard deviation increase in the predictor variable. Any statistically significant correlations between the dependent and predictor variables are demonstrated through analyses of critical ratio (CR) values. The critical ratio for a parameter is the ratio of its estimated value to its standard error, and thus similar to t -values that test the significance of individual regression coefficients and is appropriate for testing hypotheses. For variables with standard normal distributions, estimates with critical ratios more than 1.96 are significant at the 0.05 level (Byrne, 2010). Table II reports standardized b -coefficients of the paths, CRs, significance levels and the support attributed to each hypothesis. An examination of CRs and significance levels reveals that four of the 15 hypotheses are not significant.

The second step is the structural path model. Removing the non-significant items allowed development of an appropriate path model (Dwivedi and Merrilees, 2013). Factor loading estimates in the AMOS output are reported as regression weights or estimates and indicate the strength of association between variables while CR equates to the correlation

Table I Factor structure

Factor structure	Loading	Alpha
<i>Sales shopping experiences</i>	Var exp 73.64	0.907
I look forward to the mid-year sales	0.899	
I enjoy shopping in the mid-year sales	0.885	
I go shopping to make me feel better	0.846	
Shopping is a way to relieve stress	0.835	
I would be missing out if I did not go to the mid-year sales	0.823	
<i>Indulgent</i>	Var exp 66.78	0.872
I like to indulge myself	0.907	
I buy things for pleasure	0.885	
I enjoy spending money	0.845	
I buy things without thinking	0.718	
I like good things in life	0.711	
<i>SGReward</i>	Var exp 82.96	0.958
It's fair that I buy myself a treat at the mid-year sales because I have worked hard	0.941	
The sales are an opportunity to reward myself for the good work I've done	0.931	
I believe I have earned the opportunity to buy myself a little something at the sales	0.927	
I work hard, so I like to reward myself with gifts at the sales	0.914	
I believe I can reward myself for working hard	0.878	
I shop at the sales to reward myself	0.872	
<i>SGHedonic</i>	Var exp 82.91	0.929
I feel the "excitement of the hunt", when I am buying gifts for myself	0.926	
I enjoy the act of shopping for myself, not just for the items I may have purchased	0.915	
Compared to other things I could have done, the time spent shopping for myself was truly enjoyable	0.901	
While shopping for myself, I feel a sense of adventure	0.891	
<i>SGTherapeutic</i>	Var exp 85.29	0.957
When I am feeling down, I buy myself a little gift	0.956	
I find it emotionally healing to buy myself a present when I feel down	0.955	
When I am feeling sad, I will often buy myself a small present	0.952	
If I am having a bad week, buying something nice for myself makes me feel better	0.913	
I like to buy things for myself to cheer myself up	0.842	
<i>SGCelebratory</i>	Var exp 93.50	0.965
In order to celebrate, I often purchase a small gift for myself	0.970	
Buying myself a small present is my way to celebrate	0.967	
I will often buy a gift for myself to celebrate	0.964	
<i>Regret</i>	Var exp 77.94	0.937
I think I made some errors in judgment	0.913	
I really feel that I made errors in choices	0.899	
I should have chosen purchases differently	0.896	
I knew that I should have chosen differently	0.883	
I regret some of my choices	0.879	
I don't think I can really afford my purchases	0.766	

between the factors. All estimates, SE and CR in the final path model were positive. The results (Table III) reveal hedonic shopping predicts indulgent behaviors where a change of 1 (unit) of hedonic shopping accounts for a 0.581 change in indulgent behaviors, but has a strong correlation of 10.421. Although most hedonic shopping/SG motivation relationships showed near mid-point estimates, the hedonic shopping traits/SGTherapeutic motivations indicate a moderately low association of 0.370 and a CR of 6.284. The impact of indulgence on SGReward, SGHedonic and SGTherapeutic indicated associations ranging from 0.417 to 0.449 and similar correlations (5.798–5.995) while the

association with SGCelebratory associations were slightly higher at 0.495; and an average correlation (5.135). Only two self-gift motivations appear to influence regret. SGTherapeutic was a small predictor of regret with an estimate of 0.373 and a correlation of 5.418. Similarly, SGCelebratory demonstrated a low association of 0.212 with Regret and a correlation of 4.402.

Goodness of fit indicators includes a measure of incremental fit (IFI) which is a good fit if above 0.9; the normed fit index (NFI) and TLI (Tucker-Lewis coefficient is also a good fit if above 0.9). Similarly, the comparative fit index (CFI) is a goodness of fit measure based on predicted vs

Table II Hypothesis tests and support

	Hypothesis	Std β	CR	Sig. level	Hypothesis support
H1	Indulgence \leftarrow Hedonicshop	0.581	0.056	10.423	Supported
H2a	SGReward \leftarrow Hedonicshop	0.515	0.065	7.956	Supported
H2b	SGHedonic \leftarrow Hedonicshop	0.587	0.068	8.693	Supported
H2c	SGTherapeutic \leftarrow Hedonicshop	0.369	0.059	6.270	Supported
H2d	SGCelebrate \leftarrow Hedonicshop	0.542	0.082	6.608	Supported
H3a	SGReward \leftarrow Indulgence	0.425	0.073	5.805	Supported
H3b	SGHedonic \leftarrow Indulgence	0.450	0.075	6.008	Supported
H3c	SGTherapeutic \leftarrow Indulgence	0.418	0.070	5.971	Supported
H3d	SGCelebrate \leftarrow Indulgence	0.497	0.096	5.157	Supported
H4a	Regret \leftarrow SGReward	-0.017	0.072	-0.239	Not supported
H4b	Regret \leftarrow SGHedonic	0.006	0.069	0.091	Not supported
H4c	Regret \leftarrow SGTherapeutic	0.377	0.077	4.912	Supported
H4d	Regret \leftarrow SGCelebrate	0.184	0.052	3.523	Supported
H5a	Regret \leftarrow Hedonicshop	-0.109	0.117	-0.934	Not supported
H5b	Regret \leftarrow Indulgence	-0.270	0.117	-2.303	Not supported

Notes: Chi-square = 1659.991; Degrees of freedom = 514; Probability level = 0.000

Table III Path model structure

Hypothesis	Estimate	SE	CR	Sig. level
Indulgent \leftarrow Hedshop	0.581	0.056	10.423	***
SGReward \leftarrow Hed Shop	0.516	0.065	7.963	***
SGHedonic \leftarrow Hed Shop	0.588	0.068	8.700	***
SGCelebratory \leftarrow Hed Shop	0.544	0.082	6.623	***
SGTherapeutic \leftarrow HedShop	0.370	0.059	6.284	***
SGReward \leftarrow Indulgent	0.424	0.073	5.798	***
SGHedonic \leftarrow Indulgent	0.449	0.075	5.995	***
SGTherapeutic \leftarrow Indulgent	0.417	0.070	5.953	***
SGCelebratory \leftarrow Indulgent	0.495	0.096	5.135	***
Regret \leftarrow SGTherapeutic	0.373	0.069	5.418	***
Regret \leftarrow SGCelebratory	0.212	0.048	4.402	***

Notes: Chi-square = 1660.041; Degrees of freedom = 516; $p = 0.000$

observed covariance matrix and is a good fit above 0.9. However, NFI and CFI range from zero to 1.00 and provide either a marginal/good/excellent fit to the data (Byrne, 2010). Bentler (1990) recommends the use of CFI over NFI as a preferred fit indicator and RMSEA values of less than 0.05 indicate a good fit. However, values as high as 0.08 represent reasonable errors of approximation where values ranging from 0.08 to 0.10 are a mediocre fit, while those in excess of 0.10 are a poor fit (Byrne, 2010). A RMSEA measure in excess of 0.1 appears acceptable in marketing applications as reported in Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco (2005) with a RMSEA = 0.129 and values of 0.07 and 0.08 (Keh *et al.*, 2007) often appear. The self-gift/regret model used the comparative fit index (CFI) (Bentler, 1990), the Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Browne and Cudeck, 1993) to assess the connections within the model (Table IV).

Discussion

To date there is little understanding of linkages between the antecedents that lead to self-gifting (Davies *et al.*, 2010;

Table IV Model fit statistics and fit rating

Fit index	Fit score	Fit rating
TLI (Tucker-Lewis coefficient)	0.892	Good fit
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.901	Good fit
RMSEA	0.085	Mediocre fit

Heath *et al.*, 2011). Certainly, an area of interest is the interactions between shopping practices, self-gift motivations and regret. One important aspect of this study is the design and testing of the relevant concepts. All factors offer succinct content and exhibit strong Cronbach Alpha measures that define the concepts of hedonic shopping, indulgent views, self-gift concepts and regret. Consequently, the connections between these concepts allow insights into the relationships between the variables. The study qualifies the idea that the shopping motivations of hedonic shopping and indulgent actions make moderate contributions to the purchase of self-gifts across the four motives. The hypothesis testing showed shopping and indulgent views did not encourage regret nor did reward and hedonistic self-gifts. The only evidence of post purchase regret emerged from the concepts of SGTherapeutic and SGCelebratory.

The hedonic shopping experience is personal, an escape that relieves stress and an important, enjoyable activity. The concept is the cornerstone of this research as this hedonic shopping experience differs from the tedium of grocery or mundane shopping tasks. Similarly, being indulgent endorses seeking the good things in life and the enjoyment of spending money. Ultimately, hedonic shopping and indulgence are critical concepts because these are attitude-oriented views where hedonic shopping concerns anticipation and enjoyment whereas indulgence reflects buying for enjoyment and pleasure. Since shoppers exhibit hedonic shopping traits, expectations are that there are reasonable, positive changes in levels of indulgent behaviors depending on the shopping goals. Sales-shoppers believe the best reward comes from a self-treat during the sales period. It is therefore appropriate

that hedonic shopping and indulgent practices are strongly correlated and, maybe, nearly inseparable.

Each self-gift concept is readily identifiable because self-gifts are context bound, personally symbolic forms of communication that draw from shopping activities and special indulgences that are purposeful actions. The relationship between hedonic shopping and the four self-gift motivations showed average estimates; the relationship between hedonic shopping and SGHedonic was moderate. Hence, any hedonic gift described as enjoyable excitement seems of strong interest to someone who looks forward to sales and enjoys shopping. However, the relationship between hedonic shopping and SGTherapeutic was low. Hence, a therapeutic self-gift described as sad, stressed, healing and cheer-up seems of minor interest to someone who looks to sales for adventurous shopping. Self-gifts are personally symbolic, premeditated and highly context bound, therefore, being indulgent ensures seeking the good things in life and to enjoy spending money. Although indulgency held slightly lower relationships with self-gift concepts than hedonic shopping, SGCelebratory appeared as the prominent indulgent association. It is acceptable that hallmark occasions are happy and being indulgent relates to personal fulfillment because a celebratory self-gift is very personal acknowledgement of an individual's birthday or various anniversaries. There is also a low association between indulgency and SGTherapeutic because cheering up is a purpose and not necessarily an indulgent practice.

Regret incorporates errors in choice judgments or affordability and is an expected outcome of many shopping excursions. SGTherapeutic and SGCelebratory appear as inner-soul concepts and if the associated conditions are not remedied or recognized through the purchase, then moderate levels of regret occur because the gift "was not enough to gladden my heart." SGTherapeutic motivations appear as a slight, moderate effect on the level of regret. Understandably, therapeutic self-gifts expect to be emotionally healing as well as a feel better, cheer-up tonic. At the other end, SGCelebratory/regret relationship suggests a low level of regret concerning the purchase of celebratory self-gifts. The SGCelebratory questions in the survey referred to small gifts and thus imply a minimal outlay or the possibility of an inconsequential gift where the shopper does not regret the purchase – "It is just a little something I brought for myself on my birthday". One possible view is that a celebratory self-gift is highly valued and therefore, attracts minimal regret.

Marketing implications

Generally, consumers appear more self-oriented in their purchases and consumption behaviors. Understanding self-gifting behaviors holds important retail management implications and opportunities for self-gift promotional strategies through advertising or service encounters. This section illustrates the possible promotions representative of each shopping motivation, self-gift concepts and regret.

Pleasure-seeking individuals pursue and justify self-indulgent purchase decisions to themselves. A suitable theme suggests that if an indulgent purchase feels good then there is little regret because the purchase is terrific and just for you. Hedonic shoppers seek the experience, joy and excitement of shopping, thus, it is a perceived pursuit of purposeful pleasure and an escape from mundane, everyday

activities. Promotional messages relating to the classic "I shop therefore I am" links into self-gift motivations. Hedonic purchase themes go beyond basic need fulfillment to integrate with the four self-gift categories and promotional content. Reward is an important motive driving self-gifting. Accordingly retailers should link task completion and accomplishment with reward self-gifting messages. Such promotions could stress that since consumers work hard, they really deserve a self-gift, particularly, dining out, recreational items or travel which are memorable and lasting reward gifts. Often, the simple act of shopping may constitute effort and be worthy of a self-gift. Promotional campaigns around "one for them, one for you", or sales teams trained to incorporate self-gifts in purchases situations are possible. Consumers have no regret because the gift complements effort. Hence advertising themes may highlight the correctness of the Reward SG purchase decisions.

Hedonistic self-gifting expresses the desires of being nice to oneself and are generally every day, image-related products such as clothes, make-up, shoes or accessories. Hedonistic product and service offerings should be placed contiguously. As examples, the placement of perfumes or beauty products in day spas or hairdressers as product or service extensions, while costume jewelry or lingerie are nearby to cosmetic departments. Ultimately, any messages should accentuate self-satisfaction combined with no regret associated with the appropriateness of the gift type rather than just an acquisition of a high-status brand. The intention is to reinforce the reality that an Hedonic SG is pleasurable for you because it "feels good" and there is no regret because the gift is for pleasure. A therapeutic SG is personal and generally serviced based. While therapeutic self-gifting improves or reinforces self-esteem, a benign approach would focus on motivations built around the immediacy and short-term delight of a cheer up gift where music, fast food, personal care services or entertainment alleviates negative moods. One recommendation is to develop distinct messages recognizing personal well-being. Follow-up communications and offers through mail outs, SMS or e-mails would extend their shopping experience and the therapeutic merits of the gifts or services purchased during the shopping trip. This research identified that therapeutic motivations have a moderate effect on the level of regret, suggesting that purchases designed to alleviate sadness or disappointment may attract heightened levels of post-purchase regret. Thus, development of stronger consumer justification methods should limit regret, enhance the therapeutic post-purchase experience and increase shopper loyalty.

A Celebratory SG overcomes disappointments such as not receiving a promotion at work, or the desired anniversary, birthday or festive season gift. Consumption during the Christmas and stock-take sales periods also creates a shopping orientation that encourages self-gifting behavior. However, retailers normally direct their appeals to encourage shoppers to buy gifts for others, rather than themselves, resulting in a missed opportunity. During these celebratory periods, marketing messages should suggest a self-gift purchase is a personal celebration and service staff should ascertain if the purchase is for "a special occasion", such as a birthday or anniversary to encourage celebratory self-purchases. Generally self-recrimination or self-blame are associated with purchase regret. A key finding in this research revealed not all shoppers reported regret after purchasing self-gifts,

however, regret was evident for therapeutic self-gifting. Accordingly, retailers should develop specific strategies to prevent or reduce regret in the context of therapeutic shopping. When shoppers are engaged in a negative emotional state, salespeople should be trained and motivated to go “the extra mile” to help customers make trouble-free choices.

Conclusion, limitations and future research

Self-gift giving research continues to mature and develop both theoretically and empirically. While the established theory related to gift and self-gift giving covers a broad spectrum, the connections between purchase influencers and self-gift giving motivations holds minimal coverage. This is a special, self-directed, internalized purchase situation which differs from the buying of traditional gifts that fulfill various obligations, rituals and protocols. Contrary to earlier research, the results show various positive relationships because different shoppers engage in self-gifting for different reasons and not all self-gift motivations attract regret. The research attempts to remedy those shortcomings concerning the complex interrelated phenomenon of hedonistic shopping and indulgence that influence self-gifting behaviors and to gauge the incidence of post purchase regret associated with self-gifting during clearance sales.

A major limitation was the specification of 18 to 45 years old age range which means the omission of older generations of regular and experienced shoppers. Future research opportunities arise from this study in terms of gender, income and marital status. The respondents were a mix of 75 percent females and 25 percent males that represent an acceptable gender spread in an exploratory study. Generally, men appear to be more shopping oriented than in the past and thus gender motivations lay the basis for a future study. The sales period or event may hold different motivations or restrictions and thus offer variations from the research reported here because the sales timing has financial and ritual moderators.

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Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of the article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present.

Studies into the ritual of gift giving are plentiful. The process is accepted as being an important part of social integration as people act out roles such as spouse or friend. Gifts cement and strengthen relationships and symbolize the degree of connection, as well as the occasion of their giving. Gift giving is motivated by a desire to please another person, but the process often demands extensive investment in time and money on the giver's part.

In contrast, choosing a gift for oneself is considered internal and driven by a personal need to obtain pleasure. The absence of any instant need to fulfill is another common characteristic. Products, services or experiences can serve as self-gifts, which some scholars claim mix "delight and fantasy with guilt".

To date, however, only minimal research attention has been afforded into the antecedents and consequences of self-gifting behaviors. Investigations into which consumer types are most likely to buy gifts for themselves are likewise limited. Such gifts can have a therapeutic or celebratory function. In the first instance, they might be bought for various reasons such as helping to relieve anxiety or to be kind to oneself. Events like birthdays are examples of the more celebratory kind. Self-gifts have particular appropriateness to the buyer and can be intended or more impulsive.

Scholars also note the use of gifts as a reward, such as for personal achievements. In addition, the motive for self-gifting can be purely hedonic or indulgent reasons. When a shopping

experience is of this nature, it provides the individual with pleasure or a form of escapism. The intensity of these feelings can intensify further during sales periods. Excitement and anticipation can reach new heights as consumers seek out bargains in the quest for enjoyment. Genuine needs become subordinate to "novelty, variety and surprise" where hedonistic tendencies prevail. The shopping experience itself is frequently perceived as more important than any products which are purchased. Such individuals have a relentless desire to consume material goods, many of which might be expensive or unique brands. Self-awareness about any potential consequences of their behavior is rare.

The reward, hedonic, celebration and therapeutic categories of self-gifting have been acknowledged in the literature. It is mooted that the category is likely to influence the type of gift chosen. For instance, gifts purchased as a reward function as a "symbolic reminder" for the effort, sacrifice or achievement and are often "inspiring and relaxing". Being memorable and enduring are traits of these gifts which typically include restaurants, clothing and travel. Where the objective is to alleviate sadness, music, entertainment and personal care services are among self-gifts with restorative qualities. With gifts that are used for celebration purposes, the emphasis is on "individual uniqueness" and the "personal heritage" of occasions like birthdays.

Various scholars have explored post purchase dissatisfaction and have identified dissonance and regret as its two components. Regret is considered to reflect the "psychological discomfort" a person might experience when a purchase decision fails to meet prior expectations. It is claimed that regret incorporates both the wish that a different choice had been made and self-reproach for choosing the wrong option at the time. As negative belief about the purchase increases, the strength of the regret changes likewise.

The relationships between different shopping motivations, self-gifting categories and post-purchase regret are explored by Clarke and Mortimer in a study involving 307 Australian consumers. Females accounted for 75 percent of respondents who were aged between 18 and 45. The online format requested participants to respond to various statements relating to the issues under investigation.

Among key indications from the data is that:

- hedonic and indulgent shopping motivations moderately influence the purchase of self-gifts in the reward, hedonic, celebratory and therapeutic categories;
- post-purchase regret does not emerge when motivation for shopping is hedonic or indulgence;
- hedonistic and reward self-gifts do not instigate regret;
- regret is only apparent where celebratory and therapeutic self-gifting is concerned;
- of the self-gifting categories, celebratory enjoys the strongest relationship with indulgence;
- a possibility exists that links between hedonic shopping and indulgent behaviors are strong;
- there is moderate connection between hedonic shopping and hedonic self-gifts; and
- evidence suggests a weak association between therapeutic self-gifts and both hedonic shopping and indulgence.

According to the authors, the evident connection between hedonic shopping and indulgent traits can be attributed to their position as "attitude-oriented views". Hedonic reasons

are considered more exciting than other mundane shopping activities, such as purchasing groceries. Enjoyment and searching for the feel-good factor is equally salient for indulgent people.

Findings here intimate that people who enjoy shopping and look forward to sales periods will be attracted to hedonic gifts that they perceive as exciting. On the contrary, therapeutic gifts designed to raise spirits are less likely to be of interest when shopping is motivated by a need for adventure.

That cheering oneself up is a “purpose” more than an indulgent practice explains the low connection between indulgence and therapeutic self-gifts. But celebratory occasions and personal acknowledgement of their importance means that indulgence becomes more relevant.

As for post-purchase regret, Clarke and Mortimer purport that its occurrence might be attributed to therapeutic self-gifts failing to have the desired impact on mood or feelings. Comparable sentiments apply to celebratory self-gifts, although the high value attached to such a gift may help to minimize any regret that subsequently arises.

The authors point out the need for different promotional messages depending on the self-gift category and motivation for shopping. For hedonic shoppers, the core emphasis should be that self-gifting helps to attain the escape, pleasure and excitement such consumers desire. Promotions for reward self-gifts could prove most effective by pointing out that accomplishments are deserving of something in return.

Dining out, recreational products and travel are possibly most appropriate.

Image-related products such as clothing, jewelry and cosmetics are ideal hedonistic self-gifts and should be appropriately positioned alongside other related products and services. There is no need for messages to express regret as the aim is to spoil oneself. A quick boost to spirits needs to be at the core of therapeutic gift promotions, of which fast food, music, entertainment and personal care services are regarded as ideal. Messages need to acknowledge the importance of personal well-being. Marketers are encouraged to help consumers justify their decision as a means of minimizing any later regret. The authors additionally claim that follow up communications and offers using various channels can help reinforce the “therapeutic merits” of what the individual bought. For celebratory self-gifts, retail staff should highlight the specialness of the occasion as a means of encouraging purchase.

Researchers could in future explore the relevance of income, gender and marital status. Older generations of shoppers should also be considered. Clarke and Mortimer believe that these factors may lead to different perceptions of and motivations towards sales periods or events and indicate some variation to the findings reported here.

(A précis of the article “Self-gifting guilt: an examination of self-gifting motivations and post-purchase regret”. Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)