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Retail Therapy: A European Perspective on Buying Luxury Items

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Abstract

Regardless of their cultural embedding most consumers enjoy shopping for fashion items, luxury goods, or items related to their passions. This is valid phenomenon whether they are aiming to buy something for themselves or to gift to their loved ones. When some people feel depressed or disappointed, they go shopping. Consumer do this intuitively, expecting that shopping will help them feeling better. Retail therapy is the action of cheering oneself up by shopping for oneself or for others. We approach this phenomenon, which is explained by Self Regulation Theory and Mood Management Theory. Empirical evidence is mainly limited to Anglo-Saxon studies. By drawing upon indepth interviews we add insights from middle and upper class members of the Turkish and Polish societies. Results show that retail therapy unconsciously exist in consumers' behaviours and they use this to overcome some specific negative moods. However, although regret felt after purchases, which is not felt by Americans, has substantial impact in European contexts.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour, Emotions, Accessible luxury consumers, Retail therapy, Stress

Introduction and Objectives

Experiential value is more important in luxury businesses, and concepts of interactivity, connectivity and creativity are gaining power (Atwal & Williams, 2009). Shopping for exclusive items is joyful for some consumers. Consequently, shopping is already part of the consumption process for these products and services. In a negative context, the term “shopping temples” is common language. Shopping in physical retail outlets provides consumers with a bundle of options, from offering solutions to customer needs to communication with store employees (Boza & Diamond, 1998; Haytko & Baker, 2004). The significance of emotions and perceptions are undeniable during the shopping and decision making processes (Bagdare, 2013). This is more important for luxury products, as emotions play an important role in the motivation for purchases (McFerran, Aquino, & Tracy, 2014). A brand might be luxurious; however, that does not mean that all consumers perceive it equally. Human involvement, limited supply, values, and recognition are essential in a luxury concept (Vigneron & Johnson, 2004; Ürkmez & Wagner, 2015).

Consumers tend to extract meaning from the products and apply them in their life, they occupy figurative, spiritual and physical spaces (Bauer, van Wallpach, & Hemetsberger, 2011). These spaces provoke positive feelings like pleasure, confidence, faith, affection and suitability. Therefore, a luxury product becomes an object consumers seek for healing, or affection, or to receive respect. These emotions closely relate to culture. Cultural differences are perceived through the manners and thoughts of people.

The luxurious items provide an escapist opportunity at another level and are enjoyed during special moments. According to Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) and Joy and Sherry (2003) these precious moments and the luxury consumption experience are related to the multisensory aspect of brand experience. Touching, tasting, and feeling are multisensory experiences of excessive materialism (Belk & Coon, 1993; Pichler & Hemetsberger, 2007).

Kang and Johnson (2010) criticize previous university student studies linking retail therapy to improve bad moods. Such sampling is inadequate for luxury products. Noticeably, the empirical evidence supporting the relevance of retail therapy is mainly US-American. Usually, the respondents are not confronted with an explanation of the retail therapy concept. Thus, the respondents neither reflect on their behavior nor do the studies provide evidence about agreeing to this behavior or considering it as part ones self-concept. This reflection is subject to the cultural norm the luxury shoppers are embedded in.

Research Gap and Structure of the Study

The principal goal of this study was to validate previous results on retail therapy in a European context. Moreover, we challenge the extent to which luxury consumers agree with their behavior and consider it as being part of their personality. We try to find answers for following questions:

- How do consumers in Europe experience “Retail therapy”?

- What are the types of negative moods triggering to therapy shopping?
- How do therapy shoppers face the post purchase phase?

This study contributes to the consumer behaviour literature by prospecting retail therapy concept on potential accessible luxury consumers. The concept by itself has been popular among US studies however, not that much attention has been given in European context. This study is a valuable contribution to understand how European consumers feel and behave in their negative moods.

We assess the meanings non-student respondents assign to luxury retail therapy by conducting in-depth interviews with middle and upper middle class adult professionals in Turkey and Poland as dynamic representative countries of Europe. This article is organized as follows: First, we summarize the retail therapy concept in psychology and marketing. We then clarify the relevance of this study and describe the research objectives in detail. In the methodology section, we introduce the research hypotheses and outline our in-depth interviews. Then we describe the data analysis results. The final section is a discussion of the results and an outline of implications and limitations.

Literature Review

There is a saying, “if you want to make a woman happy, take her shopping”. The healing effect of shopping is especially clear on women, since women enjoy shopping and looking at different products. This pleasurable activity is a way to escape from daily routine and thoughts (Underhill, 2009). According to seminal contributions from Morris and Reilly (1987) and Morris (1989), there are two strategies connected to behaviours and actions regulating negative moods: managing the mood and distraction. Managing the negative mood is divided into four categories: self-reward, distraction, using alcohol, and expressive behaviour. Self-reward and distraction are related with shopping. When people feel bad, they want to indulge as a therapy. Shopping for oneself is a self-rewarding act. Shopping serves as a way of distracting oneself from current negative feelings (Kang, 2009). Atalay and Meloy (2011) proved that unplanned purchases to feel better do not lead to regret. The connection between moods and shopping is explained as a “retail therapy” phenomenon (Gardner & Rook, 1988; Atalay & Meloy, 2011; Rick, Pereira, & Burson, 2012; Underhill, 2009).

Luxury products are thought to have the power to transform individuals into someone else, a better character or an ideal person hidden in oneself. Individuals are positively stimulated by what they eat, drink or carry, or by what they drive. However, guilt and regret are common after compulsive and addictive consumption. Compulsive consumption is driven by initiators like anxiety and stress, lack of attention from a partner, being unattractive, problems related to childhood, or depression. Addictive consumption follows compulsive consumption if not identified and amended in time (Elliot, Eccles, & Gournay, 1996). On the other hand, other researchers (e.g., Bridgforth, 2004; Chatzky, 2004) equate retail therapy with addictive consumption. Bridgforth (2004) defined retail therapy purchasers almost as “shopaholics”. He claimed that their simple thought was to alleviate depression and loneliness, and to do so, people purchase luxury items but face financial difficulties.

Previous literature deals with retail therapy from two different approaches. The compensatory consumption approach (Grunert, 1993; Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe - Burton, 1998; Yurchisin, Yan, Watchravesringkan, & Chen, 2008). Grunert (1993) explained that

when people have psychological deficiencies, they try to fill the gap by consuming mass-produced items. The second is the mood alleviating approach (Kacen, 1998; Kacen & Friese, 1999; Luomola, 2002; Luomola, Kumar, Worm & Singh, 2004). Kang (2009) pointed out an interesting difference between compulsive buying and shopping therapy. While the product itself plays no significant role for the compulsive purchaser, it has meaning for the purchaser in therapy shopping and it plays a role in improving mood. Individuals are self-aware of their moods and need to mitigate bad moods by engaging in different cheerful activities. The main aim is to keep oneself away from negative factors through distraction, keeping the mind busy not to think about the negative factor causing the bad mood (Morris & Reilly, 1987; Isen, 2000; Larsen, 2000; Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000; Larsen & Prizmic, 2004).

Unlike compulsive shopping researchers, the researchers studying impulse shopping behavior (Gardner & Rook, 1988; Rook & Gardner, 1993) have concurred that impulse buying is a way to escape from negative moods. Hausman (2000) stated that trying to cheer up is the main motivator for impulse buying. Arnold and Reynolds (2003) also defined hedonic shoppers as bored individuals who tried to buy something enjoyable to lift their emotions. These phenomena are closely related with self-regulation theory. Self-regulation theory suggests that while pursuing good moods, people may change priorities and focus on short term gains during feelings of emotional void, anger or the loss of a loved one to avoid the distressing factor. That may include engaging in impulsive behaviours or making more unaccountable decisions or putting oneself at risk. This results in more indulgence and achieves goals besides pleasure (Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001; Atalay & Meloy, 2011). Therefore, it would not be wrong to say activities that regulate emotion are closely related with self-control and have a unique place among all other self-control behaviours. Mostly, people undermine self-control and allow emotion regulation behaviours to dominate (Kang, 2009). A good example of this phenomenon might be a recent story on CNN's website about a business woman in charge of a global technology company's marketing department who considers her job stressful. She has used shoe shopping online as a way to escape from her daily stress and it worked to relieve her stress. She compared waiting for the shoe delivery the next day to the feeling kids have on Christmas morning (Drexler, 2013).

Atalay and Meloy (2011) explain how people try to "repair" their bad mood through retail therapy and what leads them to buy and consume different things as self-treats. In their self-treat activity, there are no planned purchases. Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) claimed that preferences might change because there is no consistency in these purchase decisions. Afterwards people may feel guilt or regret. On the other hand, Dholakia (2000) suggested that self-treats will not cause any regret or guilt following the purchase. There is a mental accounting to regulate the spending for oneself (e.g., Atalay & Meloy, 2011). Cheema and Soman (2006) explained the mental accounts as mediators that justify unplanned and unexpected expenses.

There is a general assumption that people are inclined to buy products that make them feel happy, especially when they are in bad mood. Several researchers (e.g., Raghunattan & Pham, 1999; Andrade, 2005; Kim, Park, & Schwarz, 2010) mentioned this in their works. The study by Di Muro and Murray (2012) also supported the statements in previous literature and introduced a connection between people's moods and preferences. Di Muro and Murray claimed that people are inclined to make different choices depending upon the type of mood (valence or arousal). Although all new products or services for sale are thought to be pleasant, the levels of arousal caused by each is different. Lying on the beach and surfing are both pleasant activities. However, they cause different levels of arousal and different degrees of attraction to potential customers. Although tea and energy drinks are pleasant, they cause

different levels of arousal to drinkers. People choose different products in accordance with their affective states (Di Muro & Murray, 2012).

In contrast, when people are in bad mood they are inclined to behaviours that reduce their negative states (Di Muro & Murray, 2012). Manucia, Baumann and Cialdini (1984) examined subjects and found that sad subjects were willing to help other people to improve their own mood. Results of Kim et al. (2010) supported the findings of Raghunattan et al. (2006); however, there was a distinction between the two although their concepts were related. Raghunattan, Pham, and Corfman (2006) focused on people in a bad mood and their preferences and their main aim was to change their moods positively. On the other hand, Kim et al. (2010) found that preferences of the people in a pleasant affective state were aimed at prolonging their positive mood. People in a negative mood were more inclined to self-reward than the people in a neutral mood (Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000). Other studies have also supported the view that negative mood causes people to reward themselves, mostly through small rewards (e.g., Wertheim & Schwartz, 1983). People in a bad mood give priority to cheering themselves, and they sacrifice their long-term gains for short-term gains to regulate their emotions (Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000). Kang and Johnson (2010) highlight stress, dejection and irritation as leading negative moods. This study revealed an interesting point, people shopped not only for themselves but also for the people they cared about. They stated that giving gifts to people they like and care about makes them happy and has the same kind of therapeutic value as when they purchase for themselves.

The awareness of retailers will increase and they will create more strategies for this group. However, before being able to do that, retailers need to know retail therapy shoppers and have an idea about key components of therapy shopping better. Kang (2009) interviewed 43 mostly non-students and found a few key components. The interviewees stated that retail environments are important for their moods.

Empirical Investigation

Methodology

To extract the meaning of luxury for people and their thoughts about “retail therapy”, we conducted fifteen interviews in Turkey and Poland. The assumptions reached in this study do not lead to general perceptions of the entire populations in both countries; however, it is valuable to build categories (Morrow, 2005). The interviews lasted 50-70 minutes with an average duration of 60 minutes. Skype interviews were used for Turkish participants, the Polish participants were mostly face to face, with only 1 interview on Skype.

This method is an initial step for us to understand European perspective through applying triangularization by comparing different methodologies to validate the same phenomena. Since Campbell and Fiske (1959) developed the concept and Denzin (1978) labelled it, triangulation has been used as a method to cross validate the existing results from the same phenomena.

Sample

The interviewees were mostly from the emerging upper middle class, educated at least with a bachelor degree and working at a company or institution, with the purchasing power to buy most items they wanted. Luxury is not only for the affluent, this group includes a remarkable number of potential customers, and retail therapy is a concept regardless of income level, everybody potentially rewards himself or herself to increase positive moods.

The selected interviewees had different ages, professional and educational backgrounds and genders. This gave us a maximum possible variation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Most of our informants had obtained a master's degree or more. The number of Turkish respondents was seven (five females and two males) along with eight Polish respondents (four females and four males). The numbers were enough to reveal the understanding of luxury among the upper middle class in both countries and the decision about the number of interviewees was in accordance with what Kvale (1996) suggested as "a point of saturation" for the researcher during the interview process.

We selected informants from Turkey and Poland because the importance of developing markets has been increasing in the luxury industry and Turkey and Poland have been quite similar in their economic and political structure in the last decade. They made impressive improvements in economic growth rates and been 'emerging points of gravity' in economical and political aspects (Swieboda & Zerka, 2013). However, the cultural embedding of consumer in these two nations differs substantially. Additionally, we recruited both male and female informants to observe luxury consumers moods.

Data Analysis

Transcribing the interviews was the first step. Then we coded the content with the help of a thematic analysis method. We tried to distinguish the parts of the text with similar theoretical ideas (Gibbs, 2007). We got help identifying detail in each sentence by using the line by line approach (Van Manen, 1990). After compiling a list of codes, we grouped them into categories. Some of the categories were merged and refined by axial coding (Gibbs, 2007). Lastly, we classified the codes. This analysis process helped us to assess the reliability of the qualitative data (McCracken, 1988).

Table 1 shows respondent profiles from both countries. Participants were frequent shoppers, minimum was once a week but most of them stated they shopped two to three times a week. The approximate amount of money spent per week for most of them was over 70 Euro for Turkish interviewees and 100 Euro for Polish participants.

Table 1 Respondents' profiles

Turkish Respondents								
Name	Deniz	Ezel	Yesim	Kader	Fisun	Osman	Ozkan	
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	
Age	45	42	32	50	26	37	42	
Education	PhD	Phd	PhD	MSc	B.A	M.A	PhD	
Marital Status	Single	Divorced	Married	Married	Married	Married	Divorced	
Income (Euro)	20.000-39.999	Under 20.000	Under 20.000	40.000-59.999	Under 20.000	20.000-39.999	20.000-39.999	
Polish Respondents								
Name	Slywia	Damian	Kamil	Marcin	Patrycja	Michal	Irmina	Joanna
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female
Age	31	29	40	32	36	28	42	33
Education	Some univ.	M.A	M.A.	MSc	M.A.	M.A	M.A.	M.A.
Marital Status	Single	Single	Married	Single	Married	Single	Divorced	Single
Income (Euro)	Under 20000	20000-39999	20000-39999	60000-79999	20000-39999	Under 20000	60000-79999	20000-39999

Before starting our interviews, the interviewees were eliminated if they were not able to buy luxury items. It was explained that “shopping” here meant shopping by using all kinds of shopping channels and even window shopping without purchasing anything was considered as shopping. Food and grocery shopping was excluded for our study.

Interview questionnaires were formulated to reach the roots of the retail therapy experience and to acquire background information about participants. Following Kang (2009), we aimed to find answers for the frequency shopping as a method to improve mood, the varieties of negative moods leading to shopping, the reasons consumers used to justify shopping, key elements of therapy shopping, shopper profiles, post retail therapy experiences, the meaning and function of the purchases. The interview questions consisted of “Pre-shopping”, “During shopping” and “Post-shopping”. In “Pre-shopping phase” different negative moods and the reasons leading consumers to shop were mentioned. In the “During shopping” phase when the negative moods were improved and in “Post-shopping” phase the process leading to satisfaction or dissatisfaction was revealed.

Results

It was interesting to see that most of the participants perceive themselves as a “non-luxury purchaser”, conflicting with their shopping history in the last two to three years. In the screening of respondents, it turned out that they were spending some money on luxury purchases. The Turkish subjects said they did not do “retail therapy” just to alleviate their moods. Nevertheless, some of them recognized their own previous experiences in our description of retail therapy and mood alleviating purchases.

Negative mood and retail therapy connection: Half of the Polish interviewees indicated they rarely experience negative mood and the other half reported the frequency of negative moods as “Sometimes.” Three Turkish participants answered the question as “varying from 1-2 times per month” and the other three participants told “sometimes”. The last interviewee responded with “quite often”.

When negative moods were experienced, the Polish participants indicated they went shopping to alleviate the mood from ten to forty percent of the time. The responses for the same questions was a little different for Turkish participants. Three of the seven participants indicated that they did not use therapy shopping and the remaining four participants’ percentages varied between five to sixty.

We could not identify any linear relation between the frequency of shopping and a negative mood. For example, the Polish participants rarely experiencing negative mood expressed shopping frequencies between ten to forty percent. However, the Turkish respondents with the same response indicated the frequency of therapy shopping between zero to twenty percent.

The negative moods experienced by the Polish participants varied, as irritation stemmed from: arguments, tiredness from work, work stress, loneliness because of poor relations at work, nervousness because of work routine.

The moods experienced by Turkish participants were: irritation because of work related problems, melancholy because of feeling lonely, socio-economical problems and career related problems, dejection because of boredom, health related problems and family related problems besides quarrels with colleagues, nervousness because of similar reasons.

Although each person expressed their moods in their own words, some words are synonyms. Irritation is gentler than anger or annoyance, agitation, frustration. Stress is an indirect reflection of fear and has synonyms of anxiety, nervousness, uneasiness, worry and restlessness. Dejection is lowness of spirit caused by grief or misfortune and its synonyms include depression, blues, gloominess, sadness, unhappiness and woe. The typical sources of dejection are feelings of disappointment, broken hearts, harsh criticisms and loneliness (Luomala, 2002). While the major negative moods started with stress in the first place and the irritation in the second place in the study in the USA (Kang, 2009), dejection and irritation were the first two moods shared by the Turkish. However, negative moods were dejection and stress, respectively, for Polish respondents. When the Polish interviewees were thought of as a group, shopping was used as a means to alleviate all three negative moods. However, individually most of them differentiated between certain types of negative moods that they used shopping to alleviate. In other types of moods, they said they would not go shopping to forget about the negative feelings.

The Turkish respondents were different from the Polish ones. Two respondents emphasized certain types of moods where they used shopping to relieve negative moods, one interviewee did not make any differentiation and used shopping in all types of negative moods. The others mostly indicated either they preferred not to shop at such times or they found no logical connection between negative moods and shopping. However, it is important to note that although one interviewee said that he did not use shopping in such times, he said he had shopped a lot when he had lived in USA because he had no friends and nothing to do. When we consider boredom in the category of dejection, it would not be wrong to say that people might be not aware of the psychological state they were in and the actions they would take to make them feel better, such as shopping or eating.

Reasons underlying the use of shopping as a therapy: The respondents gave various answers to the question asking the possible reasons for shopping alleviating the negative moods. From the interview data we categorised the following categories shown in table 2.

Table 2 Categorisation of Interviews

<i>Categories for Polish interviews</i>	<i>Categories for Turkish interviews</i>	<i>Categories for US interviews (Kang, 2009)</i>
Socialization/ Communication	Socialization/ Communication	Social Connection
Distraction	Distraction	Positive distraction
Relaxation	Relaxation	Escape
Solution oriented approach	Rewarding/Gifting yourself	Indulgence
	Acquisition/Happiness	Elevation of self-esteem
	Conspicuousness	Activation
		Sense of control

Under these categories, there are topics used by the participants to justify using shopping to alleviate negative moods. There are more topics for Turkish interviewees, so we derived more categories from their comments. The first four categories are the same for both

groups. The fourth category in the Polish group is unique to the Polish respondents. These different categories might be important to understand the differences between both consumer groups.

Socialization / Communication

Through shopping, participants were able to gather with their friends and loved ones. Most of the respondents would take their friends or close family members shopping when they felt bad. They could talk about different things and forget or share their problems. Another way of socializing is talking to sales personnel or people in the stores to communicate with others.

Distraction

Distraction was the theme articulated by the most participants. For almost everybody, shopping is a tool to distract attention in a positive way, especially during negative moods. Most participants said shopping helped keep the mind away from negative thoughts, keeping it busy while trying new items on, or browsing, or talking to your friends.

Shopping was mostly chosen as a way of therapy to alleviate the negative moods because it required much concentration, and people were easily drawn away from their thoughts and anxieties (Kang, 2009). Distraction is a common characteristic in the current study and the US study by Kang.

Relaxation

Relaxation contained responses about relieving one's soul or shopping's calming characteristic. The participants responded to the question by emphasizing the relief of shopping. When people are shopping, they find themselves in a different setting and the atmosphere of the retail stores, the scents and music in the background might be effective in relieving the consumers. There are many studies trying to research the connection between music, scent and moods, and shopping behaviour (Petty, Schumann, David, Richman, Strathman, 1993; Mattila, & Wirtz, 2001; Rajnish & Shilpa, 2011). Furthermore, by using shopping therapy you may redirect your negative mood or your irritation on something else, in this case on shopping, so you may feel more relaxed.

Solution Oriented Approach

Some respondents in the Polish group mentioned another positive effect of shopping, as it gives one a chance to think about negativity, like quarrelling with a partner or similar problems. Other answers were about the positive effect of meeting with friends during shopping. When a person shared problems, the friends came up with suggestions or a more rational evaluation of the problem, the respondents were able to go back home and calmly talk with the partner to solve the problem. This characteristic was not available in the interviews of Turkish people. Therefore, we argue the Polish respondents as more likely to compromise than Turkish respondents.

Acquisition/ Happiness

Some Turkish respondents referred to the relationship between acquiring something and being happy. According to them, when they try something on they become happy. Moreover, although they are spending money they still feel happy, especially when they purchase something for themselves or their home.

Rewarding / Gifting

A few respondents talked about using shopping therapy for their moods as the feeling of getting rewarded after experiencing negative moods. They claim that one wants to reward himself/herself after such bad moments, and this is very effective. One respondent liked rewarding one to repair one's broken heart after a quarrel. Another one talked about asking for gift wrapping even though the items were for her. She wanted to feel the happiness of receiving a gift.

Conspicuousness

A respondent noted that when purchasing items during therapy shopping she liked to be pampered by sales personnel. Furthermore, she liked purchasing products not owned by her acquaintances. So hearing nice words from her colleagues or friends about her purchases were important.

Key components of therapy shopping activity: When participants were asked what it was that alleviated the negative moods and led them to use shopping as a therapy, the participants mentioned several different themes. We grouped these themes and categorised them:

- The shopping process
- The communication
- Purchasing
- Using the product

These themes were expressed by the interviewees in both groups.

The shopping process

The shopping process by itself is a large topic, which includes window shopping, trying products on, searching for a specific product, and finding the right product. This theme was mentioned by most participants several times. The responses gathered under this category were related with the direct involvement in the shopping activity. These respondents were enjoying the shopping itself and used distraction effectively to stay away from their negativity. This category is in accordance with the study (Kang, 2009) conducted in the USA.

The Communication

Being in communication with people was another motivation for going shopping. Some respondents consider shopping and meeting with friends together. Not only friends, but sales personnel and other customers in the stores are the communication partners for people suffering from negative moods. Loneliness is a source of dejection (Luomala, 2002), people use nice discourses, and pampering words when they talk to customers or to people they contact for the first time. Some studies show people with negative moods visit different stores and communicate with as many sales associates as possible to get rid of loneliness.

Purchasing

Although the shopping process was the most frequently mentioned category by the respondents, for some respondents it was also crucial to spend money and acquire something

in return. These people said that without purchasing, their satisfaction, their happiness at acquiring something was not fulfilled.

Using the product

Some respondents talked about the importance of using the product they bought. They said that they felt better after the moment they used the product or wore it.

Post-retail therapy experiences

During the interviews, we asked questions about post-retail therapy shopping. Among these questions there were how they felt right after the shopping, whether they regretted their purchases and what they did in such cases. From the responses, we can say that regardless of where the participants live, all of them felt happy right after the therapy shopping. They commented on their feelings, they felt relaxed, became happy, their minds were distracted, they had forgotten their problems, they felt much better. One respondent even noted that going shopping helped a lot in feeling much better if he bought something or not.

However, feeling good for most participants did not last long and some commented that the feeling only lasted until the end of day, the next day a new cycle started. Some mentioned the validity of the positive effect until a new problem arose. When people had another bad mood, the previously bought item was not as popular, that is why people were inclined to go for therapy shopping again. However, two respondents in the Polish group and one respondent in the Turkish group confirmed the long lasting therapeutic effect of goods purchased.

When the participants were asked whether they felt any kind of regret, half of the respondents in both countries responded as definitely having no regret. The other half mentioned previous cases when they felt regret. The ones having no regret explain this by their strong characteristic, their detailed search about the products beforehand and making only planned purchases. When they had any kind of regret, it stemmed from either spending too much money or realizing that they already owned the same kind of items and that changed their views about the purchased products. In such cases, most were for returning the items. However, respondents agreed that it would mean more work and waste time. That is why some respondents said that if the items were not so expensive then throwing them away might be an option. In the Turkish group, three respondents responded differently, one said that she would console herself and try to use the product and the other two talked about giving the item to a friend.

Discussion and Conclusions

The concept of retail therapy has been quite popular in US studies and this study has tried to understand retail therapy concepts through the eyes of Europeans to bring new depth to the topic. The results were sometimes in accordance with the results gathered in the USA and in some points, the responses differed from the ones given by US citizens. First, some of the consumers in both countries did not consider themselves either luxury consumers or retail therapy beneficiaries. They were not aware of the fact that they were using retail therapy after they felt bad and went shopping to relieve their moods. Most of them did not consider going to a shopping centre and looking at shop windows or trying some products on without any final purchase as shopping, the common assumption for a shopping was spending money and buying something.

The major negative moods were in accordance with the common negative moods defined by Luomala (2002)—irritation, dejection and stress. While the major negative moods were stress and irritation in the USA, the stress was replaced dejection in Turkey. In Poland the stress became the second mood after the leading feeling dejection. We might comment on this by saying that the daily routine causes too much stress, especially for people living in big cities. In Poland and Turkey, the dejection rates are higher, which might be explained with the prosperity index of the countries, the USA is in 10th place but Turkey is in 77th and Poland is the 34th (Legatum, 2014). Turkey had stress as the third negative mood, whereas the others had this mood in the top two. Turkey might be more relaxed due to its Mediterranean influence.

From the categorisation list of the interviews, we can comment that Polish people seem to have more compromising willingness when they have a conflict with family members and colleagues. They use shopping therapy as a way to find solutions for their problems. The Turkish participants showed characteristics of conspicuousness and they liked the feeling of rewarding themselves. The feelings of acquisition and satisfaction are the other themes for Turkish respondents. We have also seen that some shopping habits of Polish and Turkish resemble each other, such as preferences to shop with friends or family members, mostly making planned purchases rather than impulse purchases, and the loyalty concept with the stores.

Regarding their post-retail experiences, we might operate on the assumption that retail therapy works for Europeans, too. However, it is still possible to debate further on how long it alleviates negative moods. The results from the previous research say that the retail therapy causes no regret at the end is not an issue fully agreed on, at least for Europeans. Still, half of the respondents in both countries described a kind of regret in their previous shopping experiences.

Managerial Implications

For online retailers there is a great advantage. Although the consumer looks forward to acquiring the items bought, and touching the objects as soon as possible, there is an advantage to delaying the acquisition because it increases the anticipation leading to greater happiness. Promoting the idea that there might be more happiness in online purchasing might create new opportunities to reach more customers seeking therapy from their purchases to get rid of their negative moods. In addition, new projects could speed up the delivery of the items bought from online stores, or headquarters might cooperate with a store if items are available in the same city, to deliver from their own stock. Furthermore, an e-mail or sms to consumers' phone numbers about status of their order or any message to inform them about their purchased items' having been packed and sent might increase the positive feelings.

In retail settings, more emphasis should be given to training sales personnel, as they are more important than ever before. Companies might cooperate with psychologists to identify customers in negative moods. Additionally, more importance might be given to the retail-setting atmosphere, including scent and music preferences used in the stores to make the customer feel relieved.

In the travel industry, there is the “roulette system” marketing strategy. Here, the travelers just decide on a holiday but they do not know where they will go until the travel company informs them about the destination and facility. This kind of approach, based on ambiguity, might be extended to the retail industry to increase anticipation and to give

happiness and pleasure longer. Because consumers like the idea of being rewarded, it might be wise to provide them with small rewards or other similar attractive or pleasing incentives.

For the online shopper, companies better not neglect their online stores, more simplicity might work to please the customer in case of returns. Charging consumers for shipping the items bought online should be reconsidered, as it is a major reason for consumers to leave without buying or buying but in a negative emotional status.

Research Implications

Moods are always important when influencing consumer behaviours and the amount of money spent on shopping. The study has been crucial to extend the retail therapy concept to Europe and we have made the initial step with Poland and Turkey. However, it might be a good idea to extend the same study within Europe in different countries. This way, we could reach a wider understanding of the concept of retail therapy. Further research needs to clarify the relevance of brands, brand attachment and brand love (e.g., Schlobohm, Wagner, & Zulauf, 2014) in the retail therapy process. Some respondents gave clues of conspicuous consumption (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004) while using shopping as a therapy. This motivation appears to be a suitable candidate to enrich our framework of explanation.

Considering the luxury buyer segment, another study challenging the high-end consumers with high income might help us to understand how consumers of “inaccessible” luxury use retail therapy and what their shopping habits are during negative moods.

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