

Retail therapy for consumers of accessible luxury: A qualitative study from Poland and Turkey

平價奢華的消費者購物療癒：波蘭和土耳其的質化研究

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Abstract: The concept of retail therapy has been investigated mostly in the United States, with students accounting for a majority of the respondents. By contrast, this study contributes to the literature on consumer behaviour and retail therapy by exploring potential consumers of accessible luxury products in Europe, specifically the emerging economies of Poland and Turkey. With regard to high-end luxury products, most of the participants perceived themselves as ‘non-luxury purchasers’, which contradicts their shopping history of affordable luxury over the past 2–3 years. While some of the Turkish consumers claimed not to engage in retail therapy to alleviate their moods, others recognised their previous experiences in the description of retail therapy and mood-alleviating purchases. This study provides insight into the advantage to online retailers of delayed acquisition, which increases anticipation and leads to greater happiness. This phenomenon also holds true for consumers seeking therapy to alleviate their mood.

Keywords: Accessible luxury, consumer behaviour, emotion, retail therapy, stress.

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摘要：過往美國在購物療癒的相關研究為了獲得大量的受測者，大部份是以學生為對象。相較以往，本研究在消費者行為與購物療癒相關文獻之貢獻為以歐洲新興經濟國家波蘭和土耳其來調查平價奢華產品之潛在消費者。對於高端奢侈品，大部份受訪者認為自己是非奢侈品之購買者，但此點與受訪者過往兩至三年的奢侈品購買紀錄相矛盾。部份的土耳其消費者認為自己並不會用購物療癒來緩和情緒，其餘則認同購物療癒與情緒緩和的過往經驗。本研究提供線上零售商延遲取得商品的優勢，並提高期望與更高的歡樂，此一現象對於消費者尋求購物療癒來緩和情緒也有效果。

關鍵詞：平價奢華、消費者行為、情感、購物療癒、壓力

1. Introduction and objectives

Experiential value is crucial in luxury businesses, and the concepts of interactivity, connectivity and creativity are gaining much interest (Peshkova *et al.*, 2016). Shopping for exclusive items brings joy to some consumers and consequently has become part of the consumption process, yet terms with negative connotations, such as ‘shopping temples’, are also employed. Shopping in physical retail outlets provides consumers with numerous options, including solutions to customer needs and communication with store employees (Boza and Diamond, 1998; Haytko and Baker, 2004). The significance of emotions and perceptions is undeniable in shopping and the associated decision-making (Bagdare, 2013) and is more important for luxury products as emotion is one factor motivating purchases (McFerran *et al.*, 2014). However, while a brand may be considered luxurious, not all consumers perceive luxury equally. Human involvement, limited supply, values, recognition and timely related considerations, changes of meaning depending on the time concept, are essential in the concept of luxury (Ürkmez and Wagner, 2015; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). In addition to them, the impact of specific cultures on perceptions is important (Chen *et al.*, 2013; Timokhina *et al.*, 2018).

Consumers tend to extract meaning from products and apply them in their lives in terms of figurative, spiritual and physical spaces that provoke positive

feelings, such as pleasure, confidence, faith, affection and suitability. Therefore, a luxury product becomes an object that consumers seek for healing, affection or to gain respect. These emotions closely relate to culture; in addition to individuals' assumptions and aims, cultural differences are perceived through manners and thoughts.

At another level, luxurious items provide an escapist opportunity that is enjoyed on special occasions. These precious moments and luxury consumption experiences are related to the multisensory aspect of brand experiences (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Joy and Sherry, 2003); touching, tasting and feeling are multisensory experiences of excessive or sumptuous materialism (Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2007).

Kang and Johnson (2010) criticise previous studies of university students that link retail therapy to improvements in mood because of their inadequate sampling. It is noteworthy that the existing empirical evidence supporting the relevance of retail therapy is concentrated in the United States. However, the respondents are generally not provided with an explanation of retail therapy and thus do not reflect on their behaviours. Furthermore, studies fail to provide evidence that supports this behaviour or consider it a self-explanatory concept. This reflection is subject to the cultural norms in which luxury shoppers are embedded.

2. Research gaps and structure of the study

The key objective of this study is to explore retail therapy in the non-American contexts of Poland and Turkey. It examines the extent to which luxury consumers condone their behaviour and consider it a part of their personality. We attempt to answer the following research questions:

- (1) How do consumers in emerging markets experience retail therapy?
- (2) What types of negative mood trigger therapy shopping?
- (3) What do therapy shoppers experience after the purchase?
- (4) What are the managerial implications of the European conception of 'retail therapy' in relation to the accessible luxury segment?

The concept of accessible luxury relies on expanding product portfolios in a downward direction to reach more consumers and generate luxury brand-related profits from middle-class customers (Ürkmez and Wagner, 2015). Linking this perspective on luxury with the (prospective) consumers' perspective provides attention not only for the products but also for the consumers themselves because the luxury goods owned and the associated standard of living satisfy human psychology (Diener *et al.*, 2010). Hsee *et al.* (2009) claim that hedonic experiences lead to happiness and that these moments of happiness depend on conditions related to types of consumers and events. Notably, luxury goods are strong predictors of consumers' self-evaluations of their lives (Diener *et al.*, 2010). This study contributes to the consumer behaviour literature by examining the concept of retail therapy in the context of potential consumers of accessible luxury products. This study is significant in understanding the opinions of the interviewees regarding the definition of luxury. Neither the relativity of luxury nor the fact that there are different levels of luxury (such as accessible, intermediate and inaccessible luxury) is known by many consumers (Alleres, 1990; Vickers and Renand, 2003; Ürkmez and Wagner, 2015). Thus, many consumers consider themselves to be 'non-luxury purchasers.' According to Buettner *et al.* (2006), luxury is a subjective and relative concept. An item that is ordinary and easily acquired by one person may be rare and a real luxury to another. Ürkmez and Wagner (2015) state that whether product is perceived as a luxury or a non-luxury is closely related to six broad categories: regional, temporal, economic, cultural, situational and technological.

Furthermore, the interviewees conducted were asked to evaluate some goods and services on a scale from upscale to downscale. These assessments are crucial for researchers to understand the assessments of middle and upper-middle class society members in terms of their understanding of luxury with respect to cultural and social framing (Singh and Wagner, 2019). Notably, accessible luxury items comprise many goods and services, including fashion items and home furnishings, that need not be very expensive (Ürkmez and Wagner, 2015).

While the concept of retail therapy is popular among scholars investigating

the United States, limited attention has been given to it in emerging markets. Additionally, we assess the meanings that non-student respondents assign to luxury retail therapy by conducting in-depth interviews with adult professionals belonging to the middle and upper-middle class in Turkey and Poland. The findings of this study will clarify how middle-class consumers in developing economies behave when experiencing negative moods. Poland is one recent example of a country improving its economy, and it is expected to evolve from a developing to a developed country (Sharma, 2017; Yoo and Reimann, 2017).

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. First, the authors summarise the concept of retail therapy in psychology and marketing, clarify the relevance of this study and detail the research objectives. In the methodology section, the authors introduce the research hypotheses and outline the in-depth interviews that were conducted. The results of the narrative analysis are then presented. The final section describes the limitations, discusses the results and suggests implications.

3. Literature review

There is some truth to the saying ‘If you want to make a woman happy, take her shopping’. The healing effect of shopping, which involves browsing through various products, is particularly clear in women as shopping is generally considered a way to escape daily routines (Underhill, 2009). People use shopping as retail therapy as a ‘response to just about any mood state or psychological problem’ and ‘use consuming as a way to fight the blues, to savor a happy moment, to reward themselves, to enhance self-esteem, or to escape from boredom’ (Schor, 1999, p. 158). According to Morris and Reilly’s (1987) seminal work, managing moods and distractions are two ways to regulate negative moods. Managing negative moods can be further divided into four categories: self-reward, distraction, alcohol consumption and expressive behaviour. Self-reward and distractions are related to shopping because, when people do not feel positively, they tend to indulge in shopping as a form of therapy.

Shopping for oneself is a self-rewarding act and serves to distract one from

negative feelings (Kang and Johnson, 2011). Atalay and Meloy (2011) argued that unplanned purchases cause one to feel better and do not lead to regret, and the relationship between moods and shopping is explained as a retail therapy phenomenon (Atalay and Meloy, 2011; Rick *et al.*, 2012; Underhill, 2009). Consolidating these findings, we formulate two propositions:

P1. The process of retail therapy is triggered by consumers' situational negative moods.

P2. In contrast to other processes of emotional self-regulation (e.g., drinking alcohol or eating), unplanned purchases of affordable luxury items in the course of retail therapy do not inspire negative self-reflections due to a guilty conscience.

It is believed that luxury products have the power to transform individuals, who are positively stimulated by what they eat, drink, wear and even by what they drive. Kivetz and Simonson (2002) provide further evidence and claim that people enjoy rewarding themselves, especially with luxury goods, after completing a difficult task. However, guilt and regret are also common results of compulsive and addictive consumption. Compulsive consumption is driven by initiators such as anxiety and stress, lack of attention from a partner, perceiving oneself as unattractive, childhood-related issues and depression. Compulsive consumption leads to addictive consumption if not identified and treated in time (Elliot *et al.*, 1996), and researchers (e.g., Bridgforth, 2004) have equated retail therapy with addictive consumption. They define retail therapy purchasers as 'shopaholics' and claim that people purchase luxury items to alleviate depression and loneliness but are sometime confronted with financial difficulties.

Previous studies have examined retail therapy using two approaches, the first being the compensatory consumption approach (Grunert, 1993; Woodruffe, 1997; Yurchisin *et al.*, 2008). According to Grunert (1993), when people have psychological deficiencies, they try to fill the gap by consuming mass-produced items. The second approach is mood alleviation (Kacen, 1998; Kacen and Friese, 1999; Luomola, 2002; Luomola *et al.*, 2004). Kang *et al.* (2011) point out an interesting difference between compulsive buying and shopping therapy: while

the product itself plays no significant role in compulsive purchases, it has meaning for purchasers engaging in therapy shopping and plays a role in improving their mood. Individuals are aware of their moods and try to mitigate bad ones by engaging in various cheerful activities. The key objective is to keep oneself away from negative influences through distractions and not to think about the factors that lead to a bad mood (Isen, 2000; Larsen, 2000; Larsen and Prizmic, 2004; Morris and Reilly, 1987; Tice and Bratslavsky, 2000).

Hausman (2000) states that the attempt to cheer up is the key factor motivating impulsive buying, and Arnold and Reynolds (2003) define hedonic shoppers as individuals who get bored and buy enjoyable objects to 'lift' their spirit (p. 80). These phenomena are closely related to self-regulation theory, which suggests that, in pursuing good moods, people may change their priorities and focus on short-term gains, particularly when experiencing an emotional void, anger or the loss of a loved one. The theory is based on the notion of managing multiple (and frequently competing) goals and ideals that are usually in conflict to some extent. Individuals try to control their priorities and emotions (Baumeister *et al.*, 2000) and create a ranking of priorities that contributes to the self-regulation of their mood (Atalay and Meloy, 2011; Carver and Scheier, 2002).

Self-regulation is a solution for humans that fosters well-being and health-improving behaviours (Baumann *et al.*, 2005; Fuhrman and Kuhl, 1998). Some people are guided by their cognitive structure, which is closely related to the status of their social and emotional positions (Kuhl, 1986), and they usually give priority to tasks that improve their mood and conditions. Most consumers use various self-regulation processes to reach their aims (Chernev, 2004; Guidice *et al.*, 2016; Som and Lee, 2012), and the self-regulation process has two regulatory orientations: promotion focus and prevention focus. Consumers with a promotion focus seek their goals in an approach strategy and are sensitive to the presence or absence of a positive outcome. Promotion-focused people place a greater emphasis on ambitions, advancement, and gains and adopt eagerness-related means in pursuing their goals to achieve a match with a desired end-state. On the

contrary, people with a prevention focus follow their goals through an avoidance strategy and are sensitive to absence or presence of a negative outcome. Prevention-focused people place emphasis on duties, commitment, and non-losses and adopt a vigilance-related means in pursuing their goals to prevent a mismatch with a desired end state (Chernev, 2004; Higgins, 1997). Based on this, we formulate a third proposition:

P3. Retail therapy is adopted by individuals seeking promotion rather than prevention.

In a recent study, promotion-focused consumers described the frequency of their shopping and purchases of luxury items online; being rewarded with a luxurious item or acquiring luxury goods or services increased the consumers' pleasure and self-esteem (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Hence, 'positive outcomes in the purchase of luxury goods may act as an internal motivational force influencing promotion-focused consumers to spend significantly larger amounts than prevention-focused consumers in both an online and in-store setting' (Fazeli *et al.*, 2019, p. 16). This may include engaging in impulsive behaviours, making more unaccountable decisions or putting oneself at risk, which results in further indulgence and does not lead to pleasure (Atalay and Meloy, 2011; Tice *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, it is reasonable to say that activities regulating the emotions relate closely to self-control and have a unique place among other self-control behaviours. People may undermine self-control and allow emotional regulatory behaviours to dominate (Kang and Johnson, 2011). Another recent study (Ko *et al.*, 2015) supports the theoretical background by showing the positive correlation between emotional mood and shopping experiences by investigating social network services, such as Twitter.

Atalay and Meloy (2011) explain how people try to 'repair' a bad mood through retail therapy and discuss the factors that lead people to buy and consume various things as treats for themselves. The researchers show that, in people's self-treating activity, there are no planned purchases, and that mental accounting regulates spending. Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) claim that preferences can change owing to a lack of consistency in purchase decisions,

after which people may feel guilt or regret. By contrast, Dholakia (2000) suggests that self-treating does not cause regret or guilt after a purchase. Cheema and Soman (2006) explain the mental accounts that act as mediators to justify unplanned and unexpected expenses.

There is a general assumption that people are inclined to buy products that make them happy, especially when they are in a bad mood (e.g., Andrade, 2005; Kim *et al.*, 2010; Raghunattan and Pham, 1999). Babin and Darden (1995) document the interrelationship between self-regulation and shoppers' emotions and frequent shopping behaviours. Di Muro and Murray (2012) make similar propositions and introduce a relationship between people's moods and preferences, hypothesising that people are inclined to make different choices depending on the type of their mood (valence or arousal). Although all new products or services for sale are believed to be 'pleasant', the level of arousal caused by each tends to differ. Lying on the beach and surfing are both pleasant activities, but they cause different degrees of arousal and attraction in potential customers.

Bagozzi *et al.* (1992) state that self-regulation plays a remarkable role in decision-making in a retail atmosphere. In the human mind, self-regulation is the main moderator between consumer attitudes and behavioural intention. When consumers shop, their self-regulatory abilities may affect decision-making by determining the dominant goals in a given situation. Individuals tend to choose products in accordance with their affective states, and, when people are in a bad mood, they incline towards behaviours that mitigate their negative state. Manucia *et al.* (1984) found that sad subjects were willing to help other people improve their mood. The findings of Kim *et al.* (2010), in a study that was distinct from that of Raghunattan *et al.* (2006) but focused on related concepts, support the latter's findings. Raghunattan *et al.* (2006) examined the preferences of people in bad moods and found that the participants' main aim was to positively change their mood while Kim *et al.* (2010) found that people' preferences when in a pleasant affective state were aimed at prolonging their positive mood. People in a negative mood are more inclined towards self-reward than those demonstrating a

neutral mood (Chen *et al.*, 2017; Tice and Bratslavsky, 2000).

Other studies support the view that a negative mood causes people to reward themselves, mostly through small rewards (e.g., Wertheim and Schwartz, 1983). People in a bad mood give priority to cheering themselves and sacrifice long-term gains for short-term ones to regulate their emotions (Tice and Bratslavsky, 2000). According to research conducted by Ebates.com (Cooper, 2013), almost 52% of American adults use shopping as therapy. Kang and Johnson (2010) highlight stress, dejection and irritation as the leading negative moods and, interestingly, reveal that people shop not only for themselves but also for the people they care about. The subjects stated that giving gifts to people they liked or cared about made them happy and had the same therapeutic value as making purchases for themselves. Consolidating these findings, we formulate a fourth proposition.

P4. The in-store atmosphere and the process of shopping are more important than the results of owning a new item.

It is likely that, as retailers' awareness increases, so will their tendency to create opportunities for further proceedings. Before they can do so, however, retailers must know who their target shoppers are and understand the key components of therapy shopping.

4. Empirical investigation

4.1 Methodology

To explore people's understanding of luxury and perception of retail therapy, 15 in-depth interviews of at least 50–70 minutes were conducted in Turkey and Poland. This qualitative research methodology is well established at the intersection of the relevant disciplines, such as marketing, advertising and psychology (Shoham, 2004). Trustworthiness is ensured via triangulation. We followed purposive sampling in the data collection process as deliberately chosen participants were more suitable for the research topic. The two researchers have been trained in the interview process and the triangulation of sources, methods and researchers. Using this method, we attempt to understand the emerging-

markets perspective through triangulation by comparing various methodologies to explore the same phenomena and by combining sources, methods and researchers.

This study assumes that the limited number of respondents will not be representative of the general population in either country; they are valuable, however, as they help to create categories (Morrow, 2005). The researchers sought to maintain integrity and approach the respondents in a friendly manner in conducting the semi-structured interviews, which had an average duration of 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted by Skype with the Turkish participants and one Polish participant and in person with other the Polish participants.

4.2 Sample

The interviewees were mostly from the emerging upper-middle class, had at least a bachelor's degree, worked at a company or institution and had the purchasing power to buy most items they desired. The study employed purposive sampling to gather data in both countries. The respondents were reached through personal contacts, which saved time as the study focused on a specific level of society with educational and financial resources. The respondents were not located in the most populous city in either country, however, but in the metropolises of Izmir and Ankara in Turkey and Poznań and Lodz in Poland. The group included a remarkable number of potential customers given that luxury is not only for the affluent and that retail therapy is not restricted by income level, with everyone potentially rewarding himself or herself to increase positive moods.

The selected interviewees differed by age, gender and professional and educational background. Those aged from 26 to 50 years in our data collection belong to the most economically active group in most countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2018). Our selection provided us with the maximum possible variation. Most of our informants had a master's or higher degree. We solicited information from seven Turkish respondents (five females and two males) and eight Polish

respondents (four females and four males). The number of respondents was sufficient to provide an understanding of luxury among the upper-middle class in both countries and was decided in line with Kvale's (1996) suggestion of the 'point of saturation' in an interview process.

The informants were selected from Turkey and Poland due to the increasing importance of emerging and developing markets to the luxury industry. In addition, both countries have demonstrated a similar economic and political structure over the past decade. Poland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased each year since 2000 with the highest rate of increase of any European country. Furthermore, consumers in such emerging markets recognise the demands of status and try to follow a Western lifestyle, which is characterised by increased social media usage and the influence of films (Shukla, 2012). However, the cultural embedding of consumers in these two nations differs substantially. We recruited both male and female informants to observe luxury consumers' moods.

4.3 Data analysis

First, the interviews were transcribed and coded using thematic analysis. Next, the parts of the text with similar theoretical ideas were distinguished. We then applied a line-by-line approach to identify the details in each sentence. After compiling a list of codes, we grouped them into categories, some of which were merged and refined using axial coding (Gibbs, 2007). Finally, the codes were classified to assess the reliability of the qualitative data (McCracken, 1988).

Table 1 presents the participant profiles for both countries. The participants were frequent shoppers (a minimum of once a week), and most stated that they shopped two to three times weekly. The approximate amount of money spent per week was over €70 for the Turkish interviewees and €100 for the Poles. The participants used all types of shopping channel, including window shopping and online shopping. Food and grocery shopping was excluded from the study.

The interview questionnaires were formulated to provide a detailed understanding of retail therapy experiences and the participants' background

Table 1
Respondents' profiles

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
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	

information. Following Kang *et al.* (2011), we aimed to gain insight into the frequency of shopping to improve mood, the various negative moods leading to shopping, consumers' justifications for shopping, the key elements of therapy shopping, the shoppers' profiles, their experiences after retail therapy and the meaning and functions of purchases. The questions focused on the pre-shopping, shopping and post-shopping phases. The pre-shopping phase addressed the types of negative mood and the reasons underlying consumers' desire to shop, the shopping phase discussed improvements in negative moods and the post-shopping phase revealed whether the process resulted in satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

4.4 Results

The participants were eliminated from proceeding further in the study if their answers to the first questions did not establish that they had bought luxury items in the past three years. These filter questions supported the selection of qualified respondents in accordance with the targeted profiles in the research. Interestingly, most of the participants perceived themselves as 'non-luxury

purchasers', which conflicted with their shopping histories of the past 2–3 years. Because of their social peers' jealousy towards people from the middle class, they may have found it difficult to admit that they consumed luxury items. This may lead to a kind of self-denial or to post-hoc explanations or rationales that their purchases are not luxuries but necessities. The Turkish respondents stated that they did not engage in retail therapy simply to alleviate their moods, although some recognised their previous experiences in the description of retail therapy and mood-alleviating purchases.

4.4.1 Relationship between negative mood and retail therapy

Half of the Polish interviewees rarely experienced negative moods while the other half did so 'sometimes'. Three Turkish participants reported being in a negative mood '1–2 times per month', another three respondents said 'sometimes' and one Turkish interviewee responded with 'quite often'. The all-Polish participants admitted to going shopping to alleviate their mood between one-tenth and one-third of the time. However, three of the eight participants said that they did not use shopping as a form of therapy, and the remainder indicated that they did so at a rate ranging from very rarely to more than half the time. We found no linear relationship between the frequency of shopping and a negative mood. For example, the Polish participants who rarely experienced a negative mood reported shopping frequencies between one-tenth to one-third of the time when they experienced a negative mood whereas, for the Turkish participants, it was between 'never' and one-fifth.

Among the Polish participants, a mood of irritation stemmed from arguments, work stress, tiredness because of work, loneliness because of poor work relations and nervousness owing to their work routine. The Turkish participants experienced as the causes of irritation work-, career-, family- and health-related problems; socioeconomic problems; melancholy caused by loneliness; dejection due to boredom; and nervousness. Although the participants described their moods independently, some of the words used were synonyms. Irritation has a gentler connotation than anger, annoyance, agitation or frustration.

Stress was an indirect reflection of fear and was used synonymously with anxiety, nervousness, uneasiness, worry and restlessness. Dejection describes having a low spirit due to grief or misfortune and was used synonymously with depression, the blues, gloominess, sadness, unhappiness and woes. The typical sources of dejection were feelings of disappointment, heartbreak, harsh criticism and loneliness (Luomala, 2002). In the United States, stress is a major source of negative moods, followed by irritation (Kang and Johnson, 2011), while dejection was the most cited cause (followed by irritation) in Turkey. In Poland, the most cited cause was dejection, followed by stress.

As a group, the Polish interviewees used shopping to alleviate all three negative moods. Individually, however, most of them differentiated between particular types of negative moods, and, for moods other than those three, they stated that they would not go shopping to overcome their negative feelings. These findings differed from those of the Turkish respondents, of whom two emphasised certain moods that led them to shop to be happy, one made no differentiation and the others mostly preferred not shopping when experiencing negative moods or found no logical connection between negative moods and shopping. However, it is noteworthy that, although one interviewee stated that he did not use shopping to alleviate his mood, he shopped often while living in the United States as he had no friends and nothing to do. Considering boredom as a category of dejection, it is reasonable to say that people may be unaware of their psychological state and of the actions they take to feel better, such as shopping or eating.

Slywia: I use shopping not in all types of negative moods, just certain type: arguing with somebody triggers shopping.

Ezel: In such moods, I do not shop much. However, I browse windows of different stores to feel good, and sometimes I try some products. But in those times it is easy to be persuaded by sales staff; that's why I try not to in.

All the explanations from both from Turkish and Polish interviewees support the first proposition that they all had negative moods for various reasons, and more than half of them used retail therapy to try to change their current

mood. Sometimes, some of the respondents (either Polish or Turkish) did not acknowledge their purchases as a way to lift their spirits, but they revealed in their interviews that they frequently used window shopping to cheer up.

4.4.2 Reasons underlying the use of shopping as a therapy

From the survey responses, we created the categories in Table 2.

Each category comprises themes that justify the participants' need to shop to alleviate negative moods. Because more themes were derived from the Turkish interviewees, we derived more categories from their comments. The first three categories are the same for both groups. The fourth category is unique to the Polish respondents. The categories are important to understand the differences between the two consumer groups.

4.4.2.1 Socialisation/communication

The participants used shopping as a way to meet their friends and loved ones. Most of the respondents took their friends or close family members shopping when they were in a bad mood, which allowed them to talk about various things and forget or share their problems. They also socialised by talking to the sales personnel or people in stores.

Damian: I like going ... shopping when I feel bad because I spend time with loved ones thanks to shopping.

Osman: Being in communication with people and being in crowded places while shopping brings a momentary relief.

4.4.2.2 Distraction

Most of the participants articulated the theme of distraction. For them, shopping was a tool to distract themselves from negative moods. Most of the participants said that shopping—that is, trying on new items, browsing or talking to friends—helped take their mind off negative thoughts. Shopping was chosen as a therapy to alleviate negative moods mostly because it required concentration, so people were easily drawn away from their thoughts and anxieties (Kang and Johnson, 2011). In the current study, distraction represents a characteristic in common with that identified in the study of Kang *et al.* in the United States.

Table 2
Categorisation derived from the interviews

<i>Polish</i>	<i>Turkish</i>	<i>Unites States (Kang/ Johnson 2011)</i>
Socialization/ Communication	Socialization/ Communication	Social Connection Positive Distraction
Distraction	Distraction	Escape
Relaxation	Relaxation	Indulgence
Solution-Oriented Approach	Rewarding/Gifting Oneself Acquisition/Happiness Conspicuousness	Elevation of Self-Esteem Activation Sense of Control

Ozkan: Shopping distracts one's mind, and one becomes [distant] from major problems, and you feel better for the moment.

Deniz: You focus on the item you buy instead of thinking of the problem. It is like watching TV. The only difference is you spend money. While watching film, you spend time. You occupy your mind by doing something else to distract your mind.

Joanna: I focus my mind on shopping so I don't think about stress.

Marcin: Because we focus on shopping and forget the things [that] make people sad.

The shopping phase helped our respondents feel better, especially the communication and distraction effects. While shopping, the respondents were distracted, changed their focus and felt better. Consumers prefer shopping with acquaintances or relatives or at least communicating with store staff instead of being alone, and these are the main moments when they feel better. These results support the fourth proposition.

4.4.2.3 Relaxation

Responses about relieving one's spirit or the calming effect of shopping were associated with relaxation. The participants responded to the question by emphasising the relief provided by shopping. When people shop, they find themselves in a different setting; for example, the retail store environment includes scents and background music, which may calm consumers. Previous studies have examined the relationship between music, scent and moods and

shopping behaviour (Mattila and Wirtz, 2001; Rajnish and Shilpa, 2011). Furthermore, shopping therapy can redirect negative moods or irritation, allowing relaxation.

Kader: Shopping brings a new motivation for oneself. By spending money, you [diffuse] your anger [by] shopping. For example, when I buy [clothes] for myself and when I wear [them], it gives a kind of relief to my soul.

Ezel: If you try new clothes [while] shopping, you feel yourself better. Buying new things for your home makes you feel good while buying new household items. While purchasing electronics, you [consider the] positive sides of the product and [the] benefits for yourself. Also, it is important to have such products that others do not have. This makes you happy while talking with other people. Buying new home furniture relieves me. In my opinion, whatever you buy, it makes you relieved.

Patrcyja: Because shopping helps me to think about problems and our quarrels. When I am back at home, I become calm.

4.4.2.4 Solution-oriented approach

Some Polish respondents mentioned that shopping gives one the opportunity to think about the negativity, for example, a quarrel with a partner. Others discussed the positive effect of meeting with friends who offer suggestions and rational evaluations of a problem, which helps the respondents revisit the issue more calmly. This, however, was not found among the Turkish respondents, and, therefore, we argue that the Polish respondents are more likely to compromise the conflict they had than the Turkish ones.

Patrcyja: Because shopping helps me to think about problems and our quarrels. When I am back at home, I become calm and talk with my partner.

Irmina: Because I usually do this with my best friends. They always advise me something good as a solution, [and] I appreciate it later on. It is also an opportunity to talk with my friends and solve all the problems [that] I seem to have.

4.4.2.5 Acquisition/happiness

Some Turkish respondents referred to the relationship between acquiring something new and the feeling of happiness. In addition, even though they spent money, they still felt happy, especially when they purchased something for themselves or their home.

Ezel: If you try new clothes [when] shopping, you feel yourself better. Buying new things for your home makes you feel good while buying new household items. While purchasing electronics, you [consider the] positive sides of the product and [the] benefits for yourself. Also, it is important to have such products that others do not have. This makes you happy while talking with other people. Buying new home furniture relieves me. In my opinion, whatever you buy, it makes you relieved.

Fisun: In fact, one loses money [in] the end, but maybe acquiring something is effective in that. You use money as a means and buy something you need, which makes one happy.

4.4.2.6 Rewarding/gifting

A few respondents talked about shopping as a feeling of being rewarded after experiencing a negative mood. One respondent engaged in shopping to recover from a heartbreak or quarrel. Another enjoyed having the items gift-wrapped by vendor staff, even though they were for herself, as it gave her the happiness of receiving a gift.

Derya: This is something like rewarding yourself. You buy something for yourself like a gift. In a way, you care [for] yourself. You try to satisfy the missing feeling due to the problem faced, and you focus on the item you buy instead of thinking of the problem, sometimes even asking for a gift packaging even though the items are bought for yourself. And the moment you start using the items you have bought. If it is [clothing], the moment you wear it.

Yesim: I do not use shopping to alleviate my own moods, [but] I assume people might be doing it because of the feeling or the pleasure they get

when they buy something for themselves. It is like rewarding yourself.

Kader: I prefer shopping especially after something I have deserved to get rewarded. For example, if I have struggled with diseases, then it is time to reward me, or if I have dealt with [the] problems of my old mom and dad, then I have deserved to get rewarded.

4.4.2.7 Conspicuousness

One of the participants liked to be flattered by sales personnel and preferred not to purchase products owned by her acquaintances. This shows that colleagues' or friends' opinions about purchases also played a role.

Ezel: Sometimes, there are moments [when] I renew my household items as I will have [to] welcome guests at home. This is something intended for others outside. As a matter of fact, these kinds of things are not really important, but we all have such desires to show yourself nicely to others, and we do such shopping.

Also, it is important to have such products that others do not have. This makes you happy [when] talking with other people.

Irmina: When I know I have something [that] my colleagues will be jealous of.

4.4.3 Key components of shopping therapy

When asked about the factors that alleviated their negative moods and led them to use shopping as a therapy, participants from both groups mentioned several themes, which we grouped into the following categories: shopping process, communication, purchasing and product use.

4.4.3.1 Shopping process

The process of shopping is in itself a vast topic that includes window shopping, trying on products, searching for a specific product and finding the right product. Most participants mentioned this theme several times, and the responses in this category were related to direct involvement in shopping activities. The respondents enjoyed shopping and effectively used it as a distraction from negativity. This category accords with the US-based study by

Kang *et al.* (2011).

Kader: *[While] shopping, looking at shop front windows and browsing different products make me relieved. Even walking around [the] shopping mall relieves me. Especially, coming across a product [that] I really like makes me happy. From the moment I find the product, I become happy. Also, it is ... effective in my becoming happy to see that [the] price of the product is not over my budget. If the product is on sale, this makes me happy as well.*

Ezel: *Definitely not [the] payment phase. Finding a product, you have been looking for and ... [the] product you have tried on [being a good fit] make [you] happy after finding the product and being sent off from [the] store with packages in my hand.*

Damian: *Even before going out, I start feeling better because I know that I will go out for shopping.*

4.4.3.2 Communication

Communicating with people was another factor motivating the desire to shop. Some respondents considered shopping and meeting with friends to be a combined activity. Those experiencing negative moods communicated with not only friends but also sales personnel and other customers in the stores. People tend to have a pleasant chat or exchange flattering words when talking to customers or others for the first time. Some studies have shown that people with negative moods visit various stores and communicate with as many sales associates as possible to escape loneliness.

Ezel: *Also, communicating with sales personnel [puts me in a good mood].*

Deniz: *Also, communicating with the people, maybe with sales personnel. If you are with a friend [while] shopping, then you communicate with him/her and comment on the product you have bought.*

Michal: *Sharing time with my friends [while] shopping is the best part of shopping and staying away from the thoughts.*

4.4.3.3 Purchasing

Although the shopping process was the most frequently mentioned category,

some respondents indicated that it was also crucial to spend money to acquire something. Without purchasing and acquiring something, they felt dissatisfied or unhappy.

Marcin: Spending money makes me happy.

Irmina: The conviction that earned money [is] spent also for enjoyments.

Osman: I feel better, especially after I find the product I have been looking for, when you make its payment and leave the store with the packages in your hand.

Deniz: After the moment you find something you have liked; you want to buy. As a matter of fact, if you look at the stores, and if you can't find [something], your discomfort will not go away. That means your feeling of deprivation is not [overcome]. It is still there as you could not shop and you could not spend money. Sometimes, it might be at the moment you make a decision to buy. Because you like something, but it is overpriced, and you can't buy, so it brings you nothing.

4.4.3.4 Product use

Some respondents talked about the importance of product use and how they felt better using or wearing the product after purchasing it.

Ozkan: Using the product that I bought might increase my spirits.

Irmina: I usually buy fashionable clothes, jewellery, cosmetics and different things [for my] flat (antique furniture, paintings, sculptures) I like changes—that's why I also change my and my flat's appearance very often. Having fashionable clothes, having [a good-looking] flat, the conviction that earned money [is] spent also for enjoyments enable[s] me [to be] happy.

4.4.3.5 Post-retail therapy experiences

We asked the respondents how they felt immediately after shopping—whether they regretted their purchases and what they did in such cases. Their responses indicate that, irrespective of where they lived, all the participants felt happy after shopping. More specifically, they felt relaxed, happy and even

distracted and had forgotten their problems. One respondent even noted that going shopping helped him feel much better even if he did not make a purchase.

However, most of the participants stated that the positive effect was short lived, and some even commented that the feeling lasted only to the end of the day. Others mentioned that the positive effect lasted until a new problem arose. Moreover, in a subsequent bad mood, the previously bought item no longer had an effect, leading people to engage in therapy shopping again. Nevertheless, two respondents in the Polish group and one in the Turkish group confirmed the long-lasting therapeutic effect of the goods purchased.

When the participants were asked whether they felt any regret, half of both groups denied having such a feeling. They attributed this to their strong characteristics, their detailed and thorough search for the products and the fact that they made only planned purchases.

Any regret stemmed from overspending, realising that they already owned the same kind of item or changing their views about the purchased products. In such cases, most of the participants returned the items, although they agreed that doing so entailed more work and time. Some respondents also considered throwing away the items, provided they were not too expensive. In the Turkish group, one of the respondents said she would console herself and try to use the product, and two others considered giving the item to a friend.

These findings do not completely support our second proposition, but a few respondents felt no regret after purchases, which may partially support our proposition. This finding of having no regret after purchases conflicts with the US-based research, meriting further investigation.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Addressing the three research gaps outlined in the introduction, we summarise the results of this study as follows:

5.1 How do consumers in emerging markets experience retail therapy?

Retail therapy has been a quite popular topic of US-based studies, but this study attempted to shed new light on the topic by examining the concept in the

context of Europe. The study's results, which often do not accord with those found in the US, are as follows. First, some consumers in both countries did not consider themselves luxury consumers or beneficiaries of retail therapy. They were unaware, however, that they engaged in retail therapy after experiencing negative feelings and shopped to alleviate their moods. Most of the participants preferred window shopping or trying on products without making a purchase. Therapy shopping is commonly assumed to involve spending money to buy something.

5.2 What types of negative mood trigger therapy shopping?

The major factors leading to negative moods reflected those defined by Luomala (2002): irritation, dejection and stress. While the leading factors were stress and irritation in the US, dejection and irritation predominated in Turkey and dejection followed by stress in Poland. It is noteworthy that daily routines cause excessive stress, especially for those living in large cities. In Poland and Turkey, the dejection rates are higher, which relates to the prosperity index of the countries: the US ranks 18th whereas Turkey and Poland are 91st and 36th, respectively (Legatum, 2019). The rankings change, however, with regard to living conditions, with the US 29th, Poland 31st and Turkey 54th. In Turkey, stress is the third-ranked negative mood whereas it is second in the US and Poland. Possibly, Turkey is a more relaxed environment because of its Mediterranean influence.

5.3 What do therapy shoppers experience after the purchase?

It appears that the Polish respondents are more willing to compromise when they have a conflict with family members and colleagues. They use shopping therapy to find solutions for their problems. The Turkish participants, by contrast, showed characteristics of conspicuousness and liked the feeling of rewarding themselves. The feelings of acquisition and satisfaction are the other themes represented by the Turkish respondents. Nevertheless, there are characteristics common to both groups, including the preference to shop with friends and family members, making planned rather than impulsive purchases and brand or store

loyalty.

Regarding post-retail experiences, we can say that retail therapy works well in Europe. However, the duration for which it alleviates one's mood merits further study. According to previous research, retail therapy does not cause feelings of regret at least in the case of Europe. Nevertheless, half of the respondents in both countries described feeling some form of regret in their previous shopping experiences.

5.4 What are the managerial implications of the European conception of 'retail therapy' in relation to the accessible luxury segment?

The findings of this study have implications for the notion of 'retail therapy' in relation to consumers in the accessible luxury segment, particularly for online retailers. Although consumers look forward to acquiring items physically, a delay in acquisition provides an advantage as it increases anticipation and leads to greater happiness. Promoting the idea that online purchases lead to greater happiness can create new opportunities to reach a wider range of customers who seek therapy from their purchases to dispel negative feelings. In addition, new projects could deliver online purchases more quickly, or headquarters could cooperate with local stores to hasten delivery. Furthermore, an email or SMS to inform consumers of the status of their orders could increase positive feelings. When consumers shop for fun rather than to meet a specific need, they usually prefer 'deal hunting' online, which leads them to spend more time on the computer (Scarpi *et al.*, 2014). Previous studies (Scarpi *et al.*, 2014; Slatten *et al.*, 2009) support the idea that an increase in excitement, especially during hedonic shopping online, can positively relate to online shopping websites. Managers need to be aware of this phenomenon and provide online channels. Managers can adopt advertising strategies pertinent to the notion of 'retail therapy', especially in online channels. This addresses the third proposition, which claims that individuals using retail therapy to alleviate their moods seek promotion rather than prevention of losses. Notably, none of our respondents claimed to be motivated by loss prevention when engaging in retail therapy.

In retail settings, it is important to train sales personnel, especially in the fashion and luxury sectors. Companies could also cooperate with psychologists to identify customers in negative moods and thus establish strategies to target such consumers. In addition, placing greater emphasis on scent and music preferences in stores remains a valid method of putting customers at ease.

Companies should also consider their online stores, making them simpler so as to please customers in case of returns. In addition, charging consumers for shipping online purchases should be reconsidered, as it is a major cause of consumers' not buying a product or buying it with a negative emotion. Innovative applications in the online context may help brands improve customer relationships. Specifically, digital ways of implementing creative ideas in an online context support customers' experiential and perceived values (Chang *et al.*, 2016; Chen *et al.*, 2017; Chou and Chen, 2016; Chou *et al.*, 2016; Liou and Tsai, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2016).

Moods are a key factor influencing consumer behaviours and the amount of money spent on shopping. This study is one of the few to examine retail therapy in Europe generally and the first focused on Poland and Turkey specifically. However, further research is needed that examines the theory in various European countries to provide a broader understanding of retail therapy. In addition, studies on cultural influences in Asia in general, and specifically India, offer a promising research context (Singh and Wagner, 2019). Such research should aim to clarify the relevance of brands, brand attachment and brand love (e.g., Schlobohm *et al.*, 2016) in retail therapy. Some respondents have even mentioned conspicuous consumption (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004) when using shopping as therapy. This motivation appears to be a suitable candidate to enrich our framework of explanation.

Regarding the luxury buyer segment, studies examining high-end consumers with high incomes can elucidate how consumers of 'inaccessible' luxury products and services engage in retail therapy and determine their shopping habits when experiencing negative emotions.

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Appendix A: Outline of interview

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire composed of two parts:

1- Questions concerning luxury consumption

These were eliminatory questions to find out suitability of the respondents whether they fit in our target group or not. If they did not answer some of the questions, it would not possible to categorize them as luxury consumers (Dubois and Duquesne, 1993).

For the purpose of our research some minor adjustments were implemented in the questionnaire related to the country the study was planned to be conducted. The currency of Poland and the power of purchase there were taken into consideration to help to understand the idea of luxury consumption.

- 2- The first set of questions after elimination questions is about some general shopping questions and the reasons behind your use of shopping as therapy.
- 3- The second set of questions is about the therapeutic values and process of your shopping.
- 4- The third set of questions is about your post therapy shopping experiences.
- 5- The fourth part is about product evaluation. Respondents need to rate the given 12 products and services according to what meaning is conveyed to them (upscale or low scale)?
- 6- The final part is demographic questions about the respondent's background.

**1- Have you ever bought or received over the course of the last two years:
(Circle the product and state the number of purchased units)**

- | | | | |
|--|---------|--------|--------------|
| A bottle of champagne worth more than 300 PLN | YES ___ | NO ___ | NUMBER _____ |
| A bottle of perfume worth more than 300 PLN | YES ___ | NO ___ | NUMBER _____ |
| A scarf or tie worth more than 160 PLN | YES ___ | NO ___ | NUMBER _____ |
| A pen or lighter worth more than 300 PLN | YES ___ | NO ___ | NUMBER _____ |
| A piece of jewellery worth between 800-1999 PLN | YES ___ | NO ___ | NUMBER _____ |
| Leather goods worth more than 1250 PLN | YES ___ | NO ___ | NUMBER _____ |
| A watch worth more than 1750 PLN | YES ___ | NO ___ | NUMBER _____ |
| None of the above products | YES ___ | | |

**2- Have you bought or received over the course of the last three years:
(Circle the product and state the number of purchased units)**

- | | | | |
|--|---------|--------|--------------|
| A piece of gold jewellery worth more than 1750 PLN | YES ___ | NO ___ | NUMBER _____ |
| A piece of diamond jewellery worth more than 2000 PLN | YES ___ | NO ___ | NUMBER _____ |

A fur coat worth more than 8000 PLN	YES ___ NO ___ NUMBER _____
An article of clothing worth more than 2000 PLN	YES ___ NO ___ NUMBER _____
Silverware worth more than 2500 PLN	YES ___ NO ___ NUMBER _____
An antique worth more than 3000 PLN	YES ___ NO ___ NUMBER _____
A sound or video equipment worth more than 4200 PLN	YES ___ NO ___ NUMBER _____
None of the above products	YES ___

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Pre-Shopping and general questions

The first set of questions is about some general shopping questions and the reasons behind your use of shopping as therapy.

- 1- On average, how many times per week do you go shopping, excluding shopping for food?
- 2- On average, how much money do you spend per week for shopping, excluding shopping for food?
- 3- Think about a typical month. On average, how often do you experience a negative mood?

(Please clarify the frequency that you experience.)

- 4- When you experience a negative mood, what percentage of time do you go shopping to alleviate it?
- 5- Do you generally shop alone or with others to relieve your negative mood? If you shop with others, who do you shop with?
- 6- What different types of negative moods do you usually experience? And what causes those negative moods?
- 7- Do you shop to alleviate all types of negative moods or just certain types? Which ones?
- 8- The next question is about your personal characteristics. There are many activities that people could use to relieve their negative moods such as watching TV, sleeping, listening to music, or talking to friends. What are your **leading** activities? Do you use **shopping** as a way of alleviating your negative moods?

- 9- Why does shopping work to alleviate your negative mood?
- 10- Could you describe your earliest experience where shopping was used as a therapy?
- 11- How did you learn to use shopping as a therapy?
- 12- Which products are luxurious for you? What makes a product luxurious in your understanding?

During shopping

The second set of questions is about the therapeutic values and process of your shopping.

- 13- What aspect of therapy shopping alleviates your negative mood?
- 14- At what point do you begin to feel better during your therapy shopping trips?
- 15- Do you typically purchase a product during therapy shopping?
What types of products do you usually purchase? Why?
- 16- How much money do you usually spend during therapy shopping?
- 17- Do you classify your therapy purchase as an impulse purchase (i.e., totally unplanned purchase)?
- 18- Do you generally purchase for yourself or for others during therapy shopping trips? If you generally purchase for others, who are those people?
- 19- On average, how much time do you usually spend for therapy shopping per shopping trip?
- 20- At which types of retailers do you typically shop to alleviate you negative mood= (e.g., discount store, specialty store, department store)
- 21- Do you usually shop at the same retailer when you go shopping for therapy?
- 22- Which retail channels do you typically use when you shop to alleviate a negative mood? (e.g., brick and mortar store, internet, catalog, TV home shopping, mobile shopping)
- 23- How is your therapeutic shopping behaviour different from your regular shopping behaviour when you are not in a negative mood?
- 24- Do you buy any items that you have been planning to buy for a while when your mood is bad?

Post shopping

The third set of questions is about your post therapy shopping experiences.

Works of Art										
Silk Carpets										
Antiques										

Demographic Questions

The next set of questions deals with your background information. Please indicate your:

1- Gender: ___ Female ___ Male

2- Age: _____ years old.

3- Annual Household Income (Netto):

___ Under 20.000 Euro ___ 60.000- 79.999 Euro

___ 20.000- 39.999 Euro ___ 80.000- 99.999 Euro

___ 40.000- 59.999 Euro ___ 100.000 Euro or over

4- Highest level of education completed:

___ High School or less ___ Bachelor Degree (B.A./B.S.)

___ Vocational/Technical School ___ Master's Degree

(M.A./M.B.A./M.S.)

___ Some university but NOT completed

___ Professional Degree (M.D./ V.M.D.)

___ Doctoral Degree (PhD)

5- Marital Status:

___ Never Married ___ Divorced/Separated

___ Married/Living with a partner ___ Widowed

In order to verify that this is your information, I will be e mailing few of the participants to ensure that you completed the questionnaire.

This information will remain confidential and will NOT be included in the database. After verification of a sample of participants, this information will be destroyed.

Your Name: _____

Your E-mail: _____

Your Phone: _____

Thank you very much for your participation!