



NAVIGATING DIGITAL MARKETING: EXAMINING SELF-ESCAPISM ATTITUDES AND ONLINE BUYING INTENTIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract:

Online shopping is a widely acknowledged phenomenon in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), with platforms like Noon and Amazon.sa serving as prominent destinations for millions of users. Driven by both utilitarian and hedonic motives, users in KSA actively engage in online shopping activities. While existing literature highlights the significance of self-escapism as a fundamental hedonic motivation, users' attitude towards online buying and purchasing behavior remain understudied. This study explores dimensions of users' self-escapism which includes self-suppression and self-expansion motivation in the context of online shopping in KSA and its direct and mediated effects on their attitude and buying behavior. The research is based on the collection of data from 219 users of noon.com and amazon.sa in KSA through an online survey. The findings of this study reveal that users' self-escapism motivation in online shopping engagement is a two-dimensional construct, encompassing self-suppression and self-expansion factors. This motivation directly influences customers' engagement with online shopping. The study identifies mediating roles of attitude toward online shopping intention during users' online buying experiences. This research provides valuable insights into the motivations of users who turn to online shopping as a means of self-regulation in the KSA context. Sellers can leverage these perceptions to create online shopping environments that cater to the self-escapism needs of users, thereby influencing and encouraging them to make online purchases.

Keywords: self-escapism, self-suppression, self-expansion attitude, purchase behavior, online buying intention

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1. Introduction

E-commerce, defined as a virtual platform where sellers conduct transactions and communicate with buyers over the Internet, has undergone a significant transformation due to extensive adoption and remunerations of information technology (Agag & El-Masry, 2016; Sullivan & Kim, 2018; Yoon & Occeña, 2015). Global e-commerce market by the end of 2021 reached transactions around \$ 4.89 trillion USD, constituting 19.5% of total retail sales, with projections estimating an increase to \$ 6.39 trillion USD, accounting for 21.8% of total retail sales by 2024 (eMarketer, 2021).

In the context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), which is experiencing a digital revolution in e-commerce, platforms such as Noon and Amazon.sa play pivotal roles. The KSA market has witnessed a surge in internet accessibility, with a growing population of tech-savvy users engaging in online activities (Saheb *et al.*, 2021; Verma *et al.*, 2021). This aligns with the global trend of increasing e-commerce transactions, and KSA is no exception.

The decision to focus on KSA for this study is strategic, considering the country's significant population, where 54.9% of people who are not working or studying are reported to be computer users (ITU, 2017). In the e-commerce landscape, trust emerges as a critical factor influencing consumer behavior. Studies in web-based shopping settings emphasize the power of online trust in reducing perceived risk and fostering intention to buy over online marketplaces (Hsu & Hsu, 2014; Kim, 2016; Kitsios *et al.*, 2022; Wu, 2013; Dennis *et al.*, 2010; Ha & Janda, 2014; Shi *et al.*, 2013; Weisberg *et al.*, 2011). As KSA strives in order to enhance its online shopping ecosystem, understanding and addressing trust-related concerns among users on platforms like Noon and Amazon.sa become crucial for sustained growth and customer satisfaction. Marketing literature depicts diverse conceptualizations of user involvement, with the current study adopting the framework proposed by Van Doorn *et al.* (2010) in order to identify users' engagement beyond mere buying behavior (Islam *et al.*, 2020; Ng, Sweeney, and Plewa 2020). As per Van Doorn *et al.*, motivations serve as the driving force behind user engagement, extending into various activities. Eigenraam *et al.* (2018) characterize user engagement as an indicator of their own motivational state, emphasizing that hedonic as well as useful motivations influence customers' activities, such as online buying (Thakur 2018). In this study, a specific focus is placed on self-distraction which is known as self-escapism motivation, recognized as a pivotal hedonic driver for users' engagement in online purchasing activities (Dey and Srivastava, 2017; Kirezli and Arslan, 2019; Yu, Zhang, and Liu, 2018).

Despite its significance, self-escapism is under-theorized in marketing literature, particularly in the perspective of online buying engagement (Cova, Caru, and Cayla, 2018; Kuo, Lutz, and Hiler, 2016). While several studies have explored the influence of hedonic motivations on online shopping engagement, the conceptualization of self-escapism as a central driver remains largely unexplored. Previous research has often theorized self-escapism motivation as a dimension of entertainment motivation or value,

defining it shift of mind from problems as well to social reality (Bui and Kemp, 2013; Close and Kukar-Kinney, 2010; Dharmesti *et al.*, 2021; Kim and Eastin, 2011; Kirezli and Arslan, 2019).

However, the current study seeks to advance understanding by conceptualizing users' self-escapism motivation as a two-dimensional construct that includes self-suppression and self-expansion of online shopping engagement. Drawing from activity engagement research, which shows that self-escapism motivation is a multifaceted concept involving both escape and self-expansion, this study introduces dimensions of self-suppression and self-expansion from the perspective of online shopping (Stenseng, Rise, and Kraft, 2012). Exploration of users' self-escapism motivation in online purchases as a two-dimensional construct signifies a novel impact on existing literature. Existing literature suggests a close relationship between self-escapism motivation and the concept of attitude in various activities, particularly in online shopping engagement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 1998; Lee and Jeong, 2012).

However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the mediating role of attitude among users' self-escapism motivation and online shopping. Additionally, attitudinal mediation between self-escapism and online shopping intention has not been adequately addressed.

In this study, we aim to fill existing research gaps by delineating dual dimensions of self-escapism motivation within the realm of online shopping involvement. We intend to examine both the direct and mediated impacts of self-escapism motivation on users' attitudes toward online shopping and their intentions for purchasing. Our research seeks to offer a nuanced perspective on intricate relationships among self-escapism, attitude formation, and online shopping behavior. Specifically, our investigation is focused on platforms such as Noon and Amazon.sa within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The conventional understanding of self-escapism motivation, which predominantly revolves around users participating in activities to suppress or escape from negative perceptions (Baumeister, 1991), presents limitations. To overcome these constraints, there is a necessity to re-conceptualize self-escapism motivation, taking into account the evolving nature of user engagement in contemporary activities like online shopping.

Recent literature, as exemplified by studies such as Stenseng, Falch-Madsen, and Hygen (2021), suggests that beyond merely escaping or running from negative self, customers mostly involved in activities, such as online shopping, to derive optimistic outcomes, such as personal growth. This shift in perspective highlights the multifaceted nature of self-escapism motivation, indicating that various underlying dimensions influence users' engagement behaviors (Aron and Aron, 1996; Stenseng, Rise, and Kraft, 2012). Recognizing these diverse dimensions and their impact on customers' online shopping engagement behavior is essential.

Re-conceptualizing self-escapism motivation as a multidimensional perception contributes significantly to works on hedonic motivations which are related to customers' virtual shopping intentions. By acknowledging the different nature of these fundamental

dimensions, re-conceptualization broadens choices and applicability of self-escapism theory. This nuanced understanding of self-escapism motivations becomes valuable for online retailers, as motivations are known to trigger online activity engagement (Thakur, 2018). Exploring various facets of self-escapism motives enables online stores to line up their website content and atmosphere with miscellaneous motives of escapist shoppers, enhancing the overall online shopping experience for a broader range of users.

The literature, as highlighted by Chauhan *et al.* (2021), underscores the significance of congruity between users' online shopping intentions and the environment of the website, emphasizing its positive impact on impulse buying behavior. Moreover, the interrelation between flow and self-escapism motivation has been noted, establishing a connection between these two concepts (Lee and Jeong, 2012). Given that online shopping cart use serves as a primary analyst of customers' online buying actions (Close and Kukar-Kinney, 2010; Tang *et al.*, 2017), understanding intricate relationships between these factors becomes pivotal.

In the current study, Higgins' regulatory focus theory (1997, 1998) serves as a conceptual framework to elucidate dimensions of self-escapism intention in virtual shopping involvement. This theory is applied to theorize both direct and mediated influences of self-escapism intention on customers' online spending attitude and subsequent buying behavior. Regulatory focus theory, previously employed in various marketing domains to understand user engagement behavior (Das, 2015; Higgins, Nakkawita, and Cornwell, 2020), provides a robust framework for examining how users' regulatory focus influences their online shopping activities.

By integrating regulatory focus theory, the current study aims to contribute valuable insights into the dynamics of self-escapism intention, attitude towards online purchases, and buying intention. This theoretical approach enhances our understanding of how users navigate online shopping environments, providing a foundation for future research and practical applications in the realm of e-commerce.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Escapism

The word "**escapism**" has been debated in terms of its exact origins, but it traditionally stems from "escape," signifying the physical act of eliminating oneself from tension and problems (Heilman, 1975). In literature, Eliot (1921/1982) saw poetry can be a means to move into a more pleasant realm through imagination, while Ransom (1930) viewed escapism as separating oneself from reality by attracting towards fantasy. These early views emphasize oneself mentally removing from daily challenges given by life through getting into a more pleasant world, conceptualizing escapism as "reality detachment."

Psychological research, primarily viewing escapism as a managing mechanism, defines it as a sub-dimension of coping, exploring how consumers handle negative cognitions and emotions. Duhachek (2005) categorizes escapism as a type of avoidant coping, where consumers attempt to distract themselves from problems by engaging in

other activities (p. 46). However, avoidant coping is seen as ineffective because it only distances the individual from the stressor without addressing its source (Duhachek, 2005; Rohde *et al.*, 1990). In psychological literature, escapism is predominantly seen as an act of "cognitive distraction."

In the marketing domain, consumers who seek an escape through consumption play a crucial role in compensatory consumption behavioral theory (Mandel *et al.*, 2017). This theory posits that when individuals perceive a disparity between their present and ideal selves, it elicits adverse reactions at affective, cognitive, and physiological levels. These negative states serve as a motivator for consumers to engage in consumption behaviors aimed at compensating for the self-discrepancy or the initial cause of distress. Within the framework of this theory, escapism is identified as one of the five compensatory consumption strategies where individuals opt for distraction rather than addressing the root cause (Mandel *et al.*, 2017). For instance, this may manifest in behaviors such as binge eating (Mandel & Smeesters, 2008) or listening to music (Kim & Rucker, 2012). From a marketing perspective, this conceptualization of escapism corresponds with avoidant coping (Duhachek, 2005), highlighting an aspect of cognitive distraction.

Table 1: Escapism definitions and contributions

Authors	Definition	Function
Hirschman (1983)	"Escapism offers the individual an avenue to a more desirable state of being than the one presently experienced. Hence, an activity may be undertaken not for its intrinsic qualities, but rather for its utility as an anxiety reduction mechanism"	Seeking refuge from problems and pressures
Kubey (1986)	Escapism refers to the recurring tendency of individuals, driven by unsatisfactory life circumstances, to mentally and emotionally 'depart' from their current reality.	This departure is a form of reality detachment and serves as compensation for feelings of self-alienation, and discontent resulting from deficits in work-related experiences
Duhachek (2005)	Ineffective escapism is characterized by avoidant, helpless, passive, and reckless coping behaviors" (Rohde <i>et al.</i> , 1990)	This form of escapism involves avoidant coping, which drives passive or reckless avoidance of stressors
Mandel <i>et al.</i> (2017)	"Escapism entails intentionally diverting one's thoughts away from a self-discrepancy by shifting attention elsewhere; realm of consumer behavior, escapism may manifest in concentrating one's attention towards shopping"	This serves as a motivator for compensatory consumption behaviors aimed at distracting from the source of self-discrepancy.

While escaping is commonly perceived as insufficient in addressing the root cause of distress, it does offer a temporary sense of relief (Lisjak *et al.*, 2015). The notion that escapism entails disengaging from an unsatisfactory reality and suppressing negative thoughts to experience a moment of reprieve and rejuvenation is additionally explored by Cova and collaborators (2018). They highlight holidays abroad and immersion in nature as instances of restorative escape, emphasizing escapes as a form of anticipated relief. Synthesizing insights from various scholarly contributions, we define consumer

escapism as an individual's aim to participate in consumption actions. In this conceptualization, escapism provides individuals with a pathway to a more desirable state of being compared to their current experience. In Table 1, escapism definitions and contributions are given.

A. Regulatory Focus Theory and Online Shopping Motivations

To delve deeper into regulatory aspects of self-suppression and self-expansion, Higgins' RFT (Higgins, 1997, 1998) can be applied. This theory suggests that individuals have a promotion or a deterrence focus, influencing their goals and behaviors. Self-suppression may align with a deterrence focus, determined by the desire to avoid negative outcomes, while self-expansion may align with an elevation focus, driven by a desire to excel and positive outcomes. Applying this theory can provide a theoretical framework for understanding the regulatory aspects of these motivations in online shopping.

B. Self-suppression and Self-expansion

Hedonic motivations significantly influence customers' participation in online shopping events (Anand *et al.*, 2019; Aydın, 2019; Koch, Frommeyer, and Schewe, 2020). One particularly crucial hedonic motivation is self-escapism, driving workers to partake in online purchased experiences (Dey and Srivastava, 2017; Kirezli and Arslan, 2019; Yu, Zhang, and Liu, 2018). Conventionally, self-escapism motivation has been defined as a run away from extremely painful social reality (Mir, 2017) or as a means of diverting attention from problems as well as social issues (Hastall, 2017; Vander Schee, Peltier, and Dahl, 2020).

C. Self-suppression in Online Shopping Attitude

The idea of self-suppression in online purchased can be linked to the concept of escapism and avoidance behavior. Users may engage in online shopping as a means of escaping negative aspects of the self or seeking relief from stress and problems. This aligns with traditional views of escapism in psychology (Baumeister, 1991). While not specific to online shopping, literature on consumer escapism (e.g., Cova, Caru, and Cayla, 2018) and avoidance coping behaviors (Tice and Bratslavsky, 2000) may provide a foundational understanding.

Self-suppression refers to consumers' motivation to deliberately distract themselves from an area where a stressor invents, echoing sentiments of "I don't need to be here or part." This inclination involves temporarily withdrawing from reality that is unpleasant, seeking solace in a new desirable one through avenues of fancy and engagement (Eliot, 1921/1982; Kubey, 1986). At its essential, realism detachment revolves around the concept of separating and distracting from stressors, extending across various domains, including oneself, social connections, and work-related engagements (Kubey, 1986). Immersion, such as engaging with music, can embody this detachment, while literal escapades into fantasy worlds through mediums like novels, movies, and video games serve as portals to forget the real world temporarily (Ransom, 1930; Orazi & van

Laer, 2022). The physical act of removing oneself, exemplified by holidaying abroad, also aligns with the desire to detach from everyday stressors (Cova *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, self-suppression encompasses consumers' inclination to redirect their thoughts away from undesirable or unpleasant stressors, expressing sentiments akin to "I don't want to think about this problem." This tendency involves the need to avoid dwelling on stressors by diverting attention somewhere (Mandel *et al.*, 2017; Stenseng *et al.*, 2012). Essentially, mental disruption aligns with principles of avoidant coping (Duhachek, 2005), wherein individuals primarily gauge the necessity to shift their focus away from problems. At its core, cognitive distraction signifies a desire to direct attention away from stressors, engaging with alternative products or activities to prevent rumination (Lisjak *et al.*, 2015). Involvement in cognitively demanding activities like Sudoku or other games offers a focal point away from stressors, limiting the scope for dwelling on aversive views. This research concentrates on users' affective attitudes toward online shopping, posited to be associated with self-escapism motivation. Users perceive hedonic motivations, including self-suppression, as drivers for participating in virtual shopping as an enjoyable action rather than a mere task (Overby and Lee, 2006; Close and Kukar-Kinney, 2010). In this study, affective attitude pertains to users' overall sensations and emotions concerning online shopping. Expanding upon prior research (e.g., Ragheb and Beard, 1982; Spears and Singh, 2004), our study defines affective attitude as the emotional reactions of users such as finding online shopping pleasing and attractive. Stemming from prevention focus, self-suppression motivation is characterized by a desire to evade critical self-evaluation through engagement in activities.

Users engaging in online shopping under self-suppression are motivated by the neutralization of negative emotions triggered by adverse circumstances. On the other hand, self-expansion motivation, stemming from promotion focus, revolves around an individual's desire to engage in an activity for the sake of positive consequences, irrespective of adverse life situations. Self-expansion motivation is driven by aspirations for personal growth, self-development, and self-expansion.

Based on the above literature, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Self-suppression has a significant positive impact on attitude.

D. Self-expansion in Online Shopping Attitude

On the other hand, self-expansion in online shopping can be associated with positive motivations, such as personal growth and exploration. This concept aligns with the idea that individuals engage in activities, including virtual buying, not just to escape but to expand their identities (Stenseng, Rise, and Kraft, 2012). The literature on self-expansion theory (Aron and Aron, 1996) and experiential consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982) could be relevant in understanding the positive dimensions of self-expansion. Within the realm of self-expansion in virtual shopping, anticipated relief signifies consumers' motivation to seek an instant respite from existing stressors, encapsulating sentiments of "I need a break." This inclination revolves around the expectation that the consumption of certain products and engagement in specific activities can provide a

reprieve from stressors (Lisjak *et al.*, 2015; Rohde *et al.*, 1990). The essence of predicted relief lies in knowing that escapism, is not only an adoptive plan but holds the potential to offer a brief hiatus from stressors without resolving their underlying sources (Duhachek, 2005; Rohde *et al.*, 1990).

As Cova and colleagues (2018) expound on the restorative impacts of escapism within the consumer domain, various practices contribute to carving out moments of rest and recovery. Activities such as breaks, engagement in natural environments, and meditation are acknowledged for their capacity to create fleeting breathing from self-distress or stressors (Baumeister *et al.*, 2008). In the context of virtual shopping, the anticipation of relief becomes intertwined with the notion that engaging in this hedonic activity provides a break from stressors, aligning with the broader concept of escapism.

Life challenges, issues, and difficult moments can cause psychological and emotional distress, prompting individuals to seek an escape. When faced with self-awareness of personal shortcomings or unmet expectations, individuals may engage in self-blame, leading to lower self-respect and painful awareness of self (Baumeister, 1990; Chatard and Selimbegovic, 2011). To cope with the negative self, individuals are often involved in perceptive shifts, directing their attention toward activities perceived as helpful in regulating negative self-perceptions (Baumeister, 1992). This regulation process may involve either self-destructive activity, like drug addiction, such as sports (Longeway, 1999).

Previous research has identified self-escapism as a significant hedonic motivator for customers' engagement in online shopping. However, this focus has been primarily on the traditional concept, limiting its scope to users seeking to escape the negative self. Recent studies on users' activity engagement introduce a more nuanced understanding, presenting the self-escapism intention construct with two dimensions (Hussain *et al.*, 2021; Stenseng and Phelps, 2016; Stenseng, Falch-Madsen, and Hygen, 2021; Stenseng, Rise, and Kraft, 2012). Drawing from Higgins' regulatory focus theory (1997, 1998), customers' suppression and customers' expansion emerge as essential scopes of self-escapism motivation in activity involvement. RFT (regulatory focus theory) delineates two self-regulation strategies firstly prevention focus which aims to lessen negative consequences, and elevation of focus, looking for positive outcomes (Higgins, 2000; Higgins *et al.*, 1994). Furthermore, the utilization of self-expansion motivation in prompting users' engagement with online shopping attitudes holds the potential to positively influence their subsequent online buying behavior. Users motivated by hedonic factors, such as self-escapism, often exhibit what is commonly known as impulse buying actions an instantaneous and unplanned reaction to a particular product or offering (Madhavaram and Laverie, 2004). Past research, as evident in studies like Widagdo and Roz (2021), consistently highlights the substantial impact of hedonic motivations on users' inclinations toward online impulse buying behavior.

Based on the above literature following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Self-expansion has a significant positive impact on attitude.

In essence, the current study adopts dual dimensional perspective on customers' self-escapism motivation in online shopping, encompassing both self-suppression and self-expansion motivations. This implies that customer turn to virtual shopping not merely to evade themselves but also to expand and enrich their personal experiences.

C. Attitude

The attitude consumers harbor towards online shopping is a crucial determinant that significantly shapes their actual purchasing behavior (Jarvenpaa and Todd, 1997). Research, exemplified by the model proposed by Jarvenpaa and Todd (1997), delves into key indicators spanning the value of a product, shopping experience, quality of service as well as risk perceptions, elucidating these factors as pivotal in influencing users' attitudes and intentions in realm of internet shopping. Vellido *et al.* (2000) further underline the significance of factors like risk perception, control, convenience, affordability, customer service, and ease of use in distinguishing online buyers from non-buyers.

Moreover, trust emerges as an intrinsic aspect closely intertwined with risk perception (McAllister, 1995). The deficiency of trust frequently stands as a barrier, dissuading consumers from engaging in online purchases, especially in uncertain and risky online environments. Specific trust-associated concerns that were identified by Kim and Benbasat (2003), such as personal information, product quality, price, customer service, and store ambiance, are revealed as critical determinants in either fostering or eroding trust in the perspective of online shopping.

Consumer belief in an internet store hinges on factors like aptitude, kindness, and honesty, as outlined by Mayer *et al.* (1995). Sellers must effectively convey their competence, goodwill, and adherence to acceptable principles to instill trust, subsequently fostering positive attitudes and behaviors among buyers (Schurr and Ozanne, 1985; Anderson and Narus, 1990). While trust remains pivotal, Hoffman *et al.* (1999) argue that third-party trust which means instead of buying directly from manufacturers we purchase from middlemen known as certification bodies, and encryption infrastructure are pivotal elements that ensure financial security and cultivate consumer trust in internet shopping.

In addition to trust and perceived risks, the enjoyment derived from the online shopping experience holds significant sway over online shopper retention (Rice, 1997). Distinctive elements of online shopping, including store atmospherics, set it apart from physical retail store experiences (Engel *et al.*, 1990). Understanding and addressing these factors collectively contribute to a comprehensive comprehension of consumers' attitudes and deeds in the realm of virtual shopping.

Transitioning in the context of user attitudes, Ko (2020) emphasizes the importance of comprehending these attitudes, as they mediate the association between customer motivations and online shopping intention behaviors like surfing. Consumer attitudes manifest in cognitive or affective dimensions (McGuire, 1969; Zajonc and Markus, 1982), with cognitive attitudes encompassing assessments or opinions about a thing and

affective attitudes involving specific thing-related feelings or energies (McGuire, 1969). Distinguishing between these dimensions is crucial (Abelson *et al.*, 1982).

Based on the above literature following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Attitude has a significant positive impact on online buying intention.

D. Online Buying Intention

In online shopping, the last step before making a purchase is to use a website and buy a product or take a service, as explained by Pavlou (2003). This intention is crucial in understanding how consumers behave online. Purchase intention, according to Raza *et al.* (2014), refers to the enthusiasm of a customer to make a deal through a seller. The purchase intention process begins with evaluating the product, in which people use their existing information, involvement, and external data, as highlighted by Bukhari (2013). External factors, like information from websites, also significantly influence consumers' attitudes during this process.

Various factors impact purchase intention. As per Cronin *et al.* (2000), the model's structure affects mutual purchase intention and search for information which includes both internal and external factors. Internal factors are familiarity with brand and experience reviews whereas external factors, like information from the website, can enhance customers' intention to buy or again purchase a product from internet (Blackwell, Hayward, & Crimmins, 2001). Additionally, Kiel and Layton (1981) highlighted that customers' gratification and fulfillment with previous products or services determine their faith in seeking information. Lastly, attitudinal beliefs, such as trust, are crucial in online purchase intention. Studies by Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub (2003) and Chen & Barnes (2007) confirm that trust is a significant factor influencing customers' decision to make a purchase online.

Shopping intention, as discussed by Blackwell *et al.* (2001), is a crucial factor influencing consumer behavior. It serves as an indicator for evaluating the likelihood of future actions, emphasizing the significance of intention in motivating individuals to engage in a specific behavior, as noted by Ajzen (1991). Akbar *et al.* (2014) further elaborate that purpose represents a consumer's specific tenacity when undertaking a sequence of actions.

Consumers harbor various intentions, and shopping purpose, according to Blackwell *et al.* (2001), involves a strategy guiding consumers in selecting where to make their purchases. Delafrooz *et al.* (2011) specifically address online shopping intention as a strength of a consumer's determination to execute a particular buying activity through the internet.

Ajzen's (1991) theory asserts that buying behavior is directly impacted by attitude which includes subjective norms and perceived behavior. Here, attitude is defined as one's favorable and non-favourable intention to buy (Ajzen, 1991). In the realm of virtual shopping, Lin (2007) clarifies that attitude pertains to consumers' overall feelings of favorableness or unfavorable Ness concerning using the internet to buy products from retail websites. This alignment between consumer attitude and intention is supported by

research indicating there is a positive significant behavior of attitude and buying intention with reference to online shopping (Ha, 2020; Ha *et al.*, 2019; Yoh *et al.*, 2003). This correlation finds backing in many empirical studies as well (Ha, 2020; Ha *et al.*, 2019; Lin, 2007; Pavlou & Fygenon, 2006).

E. Mediating Role of Attitude

The essential role of attitude as a mediator in shaping users' online engagement behavior has been consistently underscored in previous scholarly work (Bailey, Carolyn, and Elhai, 2021). It serves as a vital link between customers' underlying intention and their active involvement in virtual shopping actions, as highlighted by Ko (2020). In the present study, our focus is directed toward elucidating the intricate affective-attitudinal mediation dynamics inherent in users' self-escapism tendencies, encompassing both self-suppression and self-expansion motivations within the realm of online shopping intention.

Affective attitude, in this context, encapsulates users' holistic emotional responses and sensations towards an activity, modulated by their intrinsic motivations (Abelson *et al.*, 1982). Diverging from prior conceptualizations that perceived self-escapism motivation as a singular dimension, our study advances a more nuanced perspective, treating it as a multidimensional construct (Dey and Srivastava, 2017; Kirezli and Arslan, 2019; Yu, Zhang, and Liu, 2018). While conventionally construed as an escape from the negative self or a means to alleviate ill-being, the contemporary understanding of shopping engagement extends beyond mere palliation to include the pursuit of overall well-being enhancement (Lee, 2015).

Recent research endeavors (Hussain *et al.*, 2021; Stenseng and Phelps, 2016; Stenseng, Falch-Madsen, and Hygen, 2021) on self-escapism impulse advocate for a more nuanced, two-dimensional framework, introducing self-suppression and self-expansion using integral dimensions. Customer suppression motivation involves a compelling need to diminish the influence of negative self and minimize not feeling good, propelling users towards online shopping activities as a form of self-escape (Close and Kukar-Kinney, 2010; Close, Kukar-Kinney, and Benusa, 2012; Dharmesti *et al.*, 2021; Kirezli and Arslan, 2019). Conversely, self-expansion intention motivates customers to engage in activities aimed at securing positive outcomes and maximizing overall welfare (Stenseng, Falch-Madsen, and Hygen, 2021).

Existing literature (Hedhli, Zourrig, and Chebat, 2016; Yu, Zhang, and Liu, 2018) suggests a positive correlation between consumers' hedonic motivations, including self-escapism, in addition to their attitudinal inclinations toward online shopping. In essence, customers' impetus to escape and enhance themselves through online shopping contributes significantly to their positive attitude towards the activity (Kim and Kim, 2005; Kou and Powpaka, 2017). Consequently, a nuanced understanding emerges wherein customers' affective attitude operates as a crucial mediator between self-escapism motivations, encompassing both customers' self-suppression and customers' self-expansion and subsequent formation of online buying intentions (Ko, 2020).

H4: Attitude mediated the relationship between suppression and online buying intention.

H5: Attitude mediates the relationship between expansion and online buying intention.

The research model is given in Figure 1.

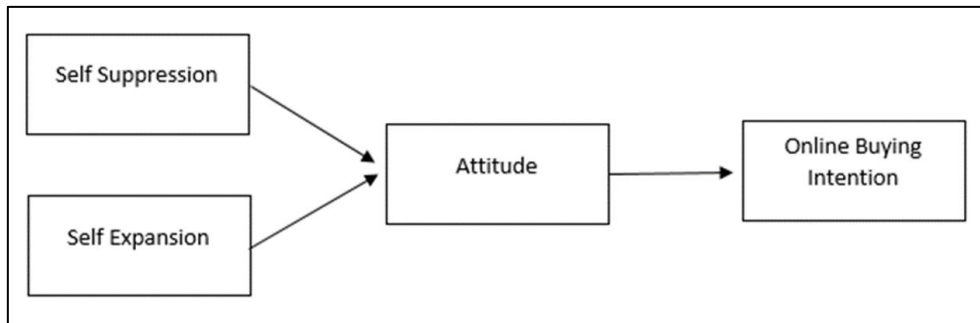


Figure 1: Research model

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Research design is characterized as an important component of study as it provides a framework for collecting and analysing data, according to Bryman and Bell (2015). Walliman (2017) presented a variety of research designs within the context of quantitative techniques, depending on the goals and research topic. These included historical, correlation, comparative, experimental, and descriptive research designs. The best method to use for this research is a descriptive research design, which draws on the research problem.

3.2 Population and Sampling

Young consumers of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia between the ages of 18 and 50 were included in this survey. Data for this research were gathered in time period of one month. By applying the rule of thumb (10*16) ten items per observation a total of 160 sample size is considered appropriate (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Non-probability sampling, further precisely purposive sampling method, was the technique employed. Data for this were collected through the online survey and the response rate was 67%.

3.3 Scale and Its Measurement

To measure the construct of this study scale was adopted from the previous study. Escapism was measured with two dimensions (self-suspension motivation and self-expansion motivation). Each dimension was measured with a four-item scale adopted from (Mir, 2023). Further attitude towards online shopping was also determined by using a four-item scale adopted from (Mir, 2023). Online buying intention was also measured by 6 6-item scale and adopted from (Mir, 2023). To analyse the data Smartpls3 was used and the SEM technique was employed.

A total of 219 responses were gathered, with 55.2% attributed to women and 44.8% to men. The purposive sampling technique facilitated data collection. Those under 25 constituted 42% of respondents, while 29% fell between 26 and 30 years old; 13% were aged 31 to 35; 11% were between 36 and 40, and 4% were over 40. In the target demographic, 58.3% were single.

In Table 2, a thorough illustration is given.

Table 2: Sample Demographics

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	116	55.2
Male	94	44.8
Age		
Below 25	89	42.4
26-30	61	28.0
31-35	29	13.8
36-40	23	11.0
Above 40	8	3.8
Marital Status		
Married	89	42.4
Unmarried	121	57.6

3.4 Procedure

Data collection involved the administration of a questionnaire through an online survey to gauge participants' intention to buy online. To ensure data accuracy and uphold ethical standards, researcher adhered to all ethical guidelines and secured informed consent from participants. Participants had the flexibility to complete the survey at their convenience, emphasizing confidentiality and eliminating any requirement for a specific date or time. Participants were free to withdraw from the survey at any point, ensuring their autonomy and comfort. This study conveyed the importance of research, clarified the absence of threats, and emphasized the absence of any coercion.

Smart PLS 3.0 was used for the investigation of data, following the variance-based SEM-VB approach as outlined by Ringle *et al.* (2015) and Hair *et al.* (2011). Two two-stage systematic methods, recommended by Hair *et al.* (2011), involved preliminary descriptive statistics, including an assessment of existing measurement models and structural frameworks. This approach is considered preferable to a one-step evaluation, aligning with the methodology proposed by Hair *et al.* (2011).

Smart PLS 3.0 facilitated a simultaneous analysis of both structural as well as measurement models, consistent with the recommendations of Barclay *et al.* (1995). The two-step technique allowed for a comprehensive evaluation, distinguishing between the measurement model, which assesses the construct itself, and the structural model, which measures relationships between constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2016). The use of Smart PLS 3.0 in this research reflects its suitability for concurrent analysis of both models, contributing to the robustness of the research methodology.

3.5 Measurement Model

The reliability test showed Cronbach's alpha values 0.906 for attitude, 0.724 for intention to adopt, 0.876 for Self-Expansion Motivation, and 0.915 for Self-Suppression Motivation. These values, falling within the range of 0.7 to 1, indicate that the data is reliable, rendering the questionnaire suitable for future studies.

High loadings on variables, as evidenced by factor loadings, further demonstrate indicator reliability. According to Kannan and Tan (2005), factor loadings exceeding 0.70 indicate high reliability, a criterion met by all items in the study, as presented in Table 3.

Convergent validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE), which indicates the extent of the relationship between measured items and alternative sets of identical measurement items. All AVE values surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.5, confirming the validity of measurement items. Table 3 illustrates that the AVE values meet the requirements for convergent validity.

Furthermore, this study revealed that composite reliability for each variable exceeded 0.5, affirming the reliability of measurement items. Overall, the convergence of these findings supports the validity and reliability of the measurement model employed in this study.

Table 3: Measurement Model

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
ATD	0.906	0.934	0.78
EXPANSION_	0.915	0.94	0.797
OBI	0.876	0.908	0.664
SUPPRESSION	0.9	0.93	0.769

The discriminant validity of constructs was assessed using Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) correlation relationship. This approach examines the correlation between variables to evaluate the HTMT of the correlations. HTMT is considered a valuable criterion as it consistently achieves the lowest specificity rates across various simulated circumstances. Results close to 1 in the HTMT suggest a lack of discriminant validity. HTMT standard is employed, comparing results to a predetermined threshold of 0.85. A higher HTMT value indicates insufficient discriminant validity. In Table 4, all Heterotrait-Monotrait correlation ratio test values demonstrate discriminant validity, as they are below the suggested threshold of 0.85.

Table 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait correlation ratio test values

	ATD	EXPANSION_	OBI	SUPPRESSION
ATD				
EXPANSION_	0.716			
OBI	0.175	0.207		
SUPPRESSION	0.609	0.444	0.104	

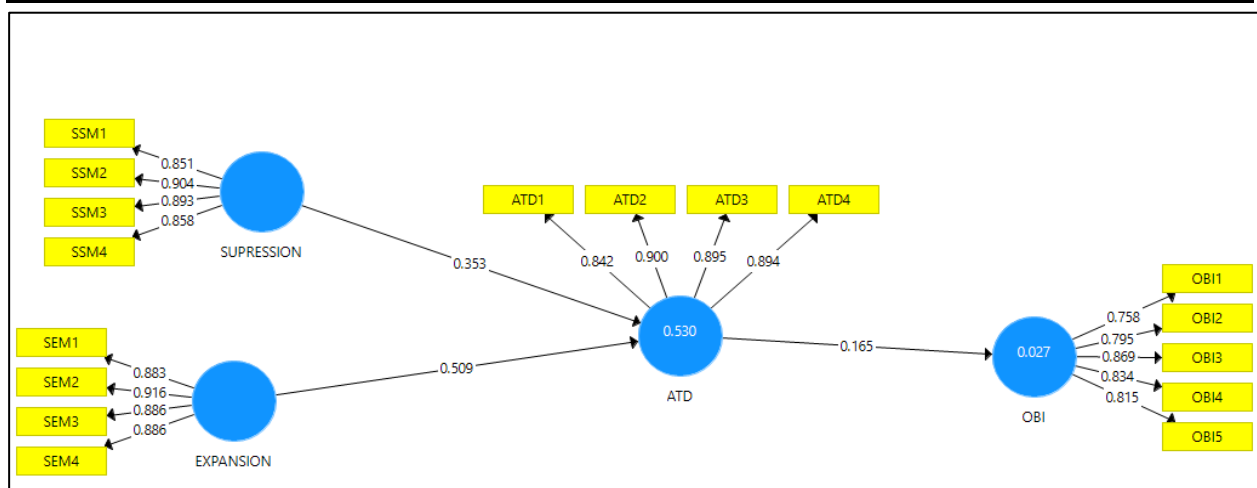


Figure 2: SmartPLS Output for Validity Test

3.6 Structural Model

The second stage of Smart PLS is the structural model is evaluated by means of beta (β), R^2 , and t-values from 5,000 samples using the bootstrapping technique (Hair *et al.*, 2016); They emphasized the significance of the total effect size (F^2) as, dissimilar p-value, which merely approves occurrence of an impact deprived of specifying its size, F^2 also specifies the size of the effect. Both substantive significance (impact size) and statistical importance (p-value) are significant in reporting and understanding results. Using Cohen's 1998 recommendations of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, which correspond to small, medium, and high effect sizes, correspondingly. Table 5 shows the existence of substantial significance.

As shown in Figures 2 and 3, PLS (partial least square) was used to test model hypothesis Smart PLS, and outcomes were analysed using the path model. Results show a significant association between Self-suppression Motivation and attitude ($\beta=0.353$, $t=5.234$, $p=0.000$), indicating that H1 is supported. The relationship between Self-expansion Motivation and attitude was initiated to be significant, with values of $\beta=0.509$, $t=8.714$, and $p=0.000$; this result supports H2. Attitude has a significant positive impact on online buying intention as proposed by H3, i.e., $\beta= 0.165$, $t= 2.691$, $p= 0.007$. Further, results depict that attitude mediates the relationship between self-expression motivation and online buying intention ($\beta=0.084$, $t=2.396$, $p=0.017$), leading to acceptance of hypothesis four H4. Finally, the results show that attitude mediates the relationship between self-suppression motivation and OBI ($\beta=0.058$, $t=2.490$, $p=0.013$), leading to acceptance of H5.

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path coefficient	F^2	T-value	P-value	Hypothesis Testing	VIF
H1	SUPRESSION -> ATD	0.353	0.221	5.234	0.000	Supported	2.370
H2	Expansion -> ATD	0.509	0.459	8.714	0.000	Supported	3.504
H3	ATD -> OBI	0.165	0.028	2.691	0.007	Supported	2.534
H4	EXPANSION_ -> ATD -> OBI	0.084	-----	2.396	0.017	Supported	1.106
H5	SUPRESSION -> ATD -> OBI	0.058	-----	2.49	0.013	Supported	1.000

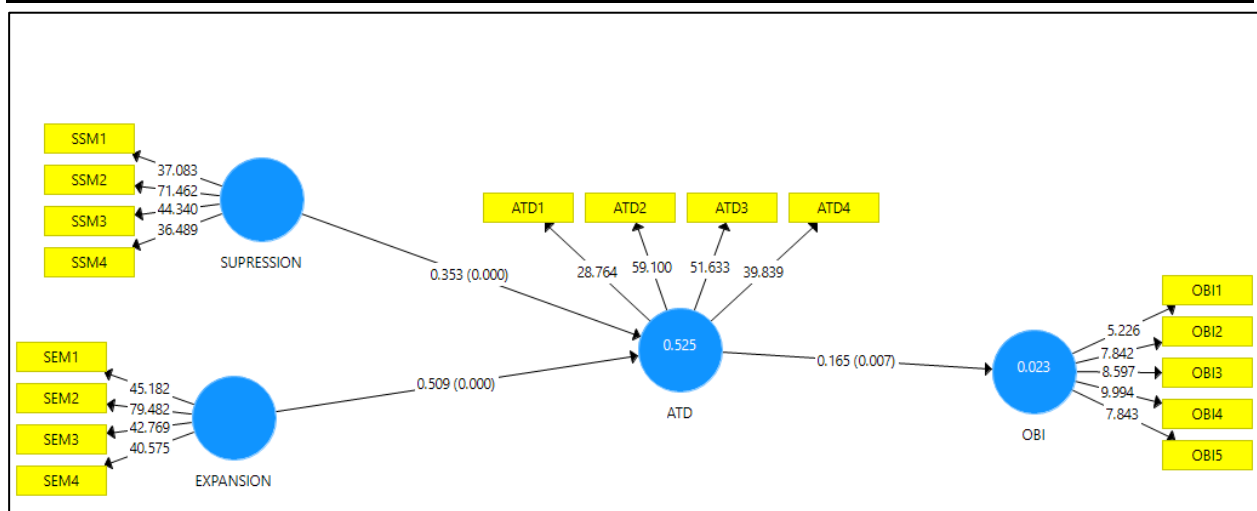


Figure 3: SmartPLS Output

4. Discussion

The Internet, considered as the greatest invention of the 21st century, has revolutionized our lives, laying the groundwork for various online activities (Yamin 2019). One significant online activity is shopping on Internet (Rahman *et al.* 2018). Inspired by practical as well as enjoyable reasons, a large number of customers regularly visit online websites (Bradley, 2021; Chaffey, 2021).

Customers are involved in online buying for both practical as well as enjoyable reasons. Hedonic motivations, particularly self-escapism, play a key role in customer online buying behavior (Close and Kukar-Kinney, 2010; Dey and Srivastava, 2017; Kirezli and Arslan, 2019; Yu, Zhang, and Liu, 2018). This study explores both self-suppression as well as self-expansion of self-escapism motivation dimensions in virtual purchasing and virtual buying intention, mediated by affective attitude.

Results show that customers are involved in online purchasing to escape from their thoughts and sentiments that are negative but they likewise expand their positive selves. This study identifies self-escapism have two dimensions namely suppression and expansion in online purchasing intention which supports two dimensional viewpoints of Stenseng, Rise, and Kraft's (2012).

Affective attitude be found to mediate the relationship between customers' self-escapism intentions and online shopping. This positive mediation reflects the interrelated states of self-escapism and attitude when customers are involved in online buying for hedonic reasons.

Attitude in the direction of online shopping mediates the relationship among customer' self-escapism intention and online purchased intention. While it does not mediate self-suppression, it does for self-expansion, aligning with the belief that positive outcomes drive customers to be involved in virtual shopping. Furthermore, users' self-escapism intention, positively impacts their virtual shopping behavior. That aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of hedonic motivations, such as self-escapism, such as dynamic interpreters of virtual buying intention.

One important aspect of online behavior is attitude, which acts as a mediator between users' motivations and what they do online (Bailey, Carolyn, and Elhai, 2021; Ko, 2020). Concerning earlier researches, this study discovered that emotional attitude towards online shopping plays a mediating role among customer' self-suppression and self-expansion motivation in virtual buying intention.

However, it's essential to note that this mediation of emotional attitude. This differs from earlier studies (Dey and Srivastava, 2017; Kirezli and Arslan, 2019; Yu, Zhang, and Liu, 2018), as our study considers customers' self-escapism motivation in virtual buying as a concept of dual dimension which involves both customers' suppression and customers' expansion motivations.

Contrary to previous findings (Kou and Powpaka, 2017) suggesting customer expansion through buying fosters a positive attitude leading to online spending, this study aligns with that notion. Additionally, it establishes that consumers' self-escapism intention, prompting the use of online purchasing, positively impacts virtual buying intention.

The above results that the positive impact is stable with earlier research (Bui and Kemp, 2013; Kim and Eastin, 2011; Widagdo and Roz, 2021), emphasizing the significance of hedonic motivations, like self-escapism, as key interpreters of customers' virtual buying intention. Users perceive acquiring products as a means to ease emotions that are negative and enjoy positive ones (Iyer *et al.* 2020), contributing to the favorable impact of self-escapism motivation-driven on customers' online buying behavior.

4.1 Implications

Online shopping has emerged as a significant user activity globally, including in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), where a large number of customers visit online stores regularly (Bradley, 2021; Chaffey, 2021). Understanding the hedonic motivations of users, particularly the self-escapism factor, is crucial for shaping a successful online shopping environment in KSA.

Current research, when applied to the context of KSA, reveals that customers' self-escapism intention in online shopping is a dual-dimensional concept, encompassing both self-suppression and self-expansion factors. This suggests customer of KSA aren't just involved in online buying intentions to escape negativity but also to enhance their well-being.

For KSA retailers, creating an engaging and immersive online shopping environment becomes paramount. Incorporating novel and innovative items into the online store can appeal to users seeking to escape negativity or expand themselves. The study suggests that an engaging website can help users regulate their emotional states, encouraging repeated visits to the online store and prompting unplanned purchases.

Specifically, this study finds that users' self-suppression motivation directly impacts customer online shopping. In the context of KSA, this implies that optimizing the design and appeal of online shopping carts can directly impact users who turn to

online shopping as a means of escaping negativity. Ensuring that online shopping carts are captivating and stimulating may enhance the overall user experience.

Furthermore, this study underscores the role of attitude in mediating the relationship between users' self-escapism motivation and users' attitudes toward online buying. A positive attitude ultimately affects users' online buying behavior. For KSA retailers, this suggests a need to prioritize the positioning of elements on their websites, emphasizing visual appeal and interactivity to enhance users' experience and, consequently, drive online buying behavior.

In practical terms, KSA retailers can enhance their online platforms by incorporating visually appealing designs, interactive features, and a diverse array of innovative products. By understanding and addressing users' motivations for online shopping, particularly in the context of self-escapism, retailers can contribute to the economic development of KSA by fostering a thriving online commerce ecosystem.

4.2 Limitations

This study, while shedding light on online shopping motivations, presents certain limitations that merit consideration. Firstly, findings might not remain entirely generalizable to cultural nuances of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), as this study takes a broader perspective. Future research would endeavor to conduct more region-specific investigations to enhance the relevance of insights within the unique cultural context of KSA. Additionally, the study lacks an in-depth exploration of cultural factors that could significantly influence online shopping motivations in KSA. The cultural sensitivity inherent in consumer behavior necessitates further research dedicated to understanding how specific cultural aspects in KSA might shape online shopping motivations.

Furthermore, the study's limited demographic representation raises concerns about overlooking variations in online shopping motivations across diverse groups within KSA. The absence of comprehensive coverage across different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and other relevant demographics may constrain the study's applicability. Additionally, the cross-sectional design provides a static snapshot of user behaviors, prompting a call for longitudinal studies to capture the dynamic nature of online shopping motivations over time in the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Finally, while the study emphasizes the role of affective attitude, it may have missed exploring other psychological and socio-economic factors that could influence online shopping motivations in the KSA context.

4.3 Future Research Directions

In future investigations, a culture-centric approach tailored to KSA is recommended to gain a profound understanding of how cultural values and traditions impact online shopping motivations. This could provide valuable insights for retailers aiming to align their strategies with the cultural context. Embracing developing technologies as augmented reality and virtual reality, in research would also contribute to understanding their influence on online shopping motivations in KSA. Exploring the motivations and

behaviors associated with mobile commerce, given the widespread use of smartphones in KSA, presents another avenue for future research. Additionally, adopting dynamic and longitudinal research designs will enable a broader understanding of evolving trends and long-term impacts on consumer behavior in the context of online purchasing in KSA. Such nuanced insights will be instrumental for both academic understanding and practical applications in the ever-changing digital countryside.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study navigated the intricate landscape of online shopping motivations, uncovering the pivotal role of self-escapism, as a dual-dimensional concept comprising self-suppression and self-expansion factors. Findings underscore the importance for online retailers in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to tailor their platforms to accommodate these nuanced motivations. Crafting engaging and immersive online environments, coupled with a diverse array of novel products, can cater to users seeking both escapism and self-expansion. The study's implications highlight the significance of understanding these motivations for retailers aiming to optimize user experience and drive online buying behavior in the dynamic market of KSA. However, this study has few limitations.

The generalizability of results to the diverse cultural landscape of KSA may be constrained, urging the need for more region-specific investigations. The study's static snapshot of user behaviors and the limited demographic representation emphasize the necessity for future research to adopt longitudinal and more inclusive approaches. As technology continues to evolve, embracing innovative research methodologies and exploring the impact of emerging technologies on online shopping motivations will be crucial for staying attuned to the dynamic consumer landscape in KSA. In essence, while this study provides valuable insights, there remains a rich tapestry of avenues for future exploration to comprehensively decipher the intricacies of online shopping motivations in the specific context of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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