

ANTECEDENTS OF CONSUMER MISBEHAVIOR AND MOTIVATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This research builds a structural model that considers the underlying dimensions that lead to consumer misbehavior and seeks to fill some of the gaps in the literature. The study is based on a survey of 481 consumers in the Northeastern United States, using an online instrument with 58 questions. Results showed that Pressure to buy, which often results from peer or social pressure or both, Consumer norms and beliefs (or lack thereof), and consumer motivation all lead to consumer misbehavior engagement. This study was conducted empirically using the seven causes identified by Fullerton & Punj (2004) to form the consumer misbehavior framework, in which misbehavior is influenced by multiple motivations. Retail and trade organizations need to educate misbehaving consumers and employees about the consequences of consumer misbehavior because ultimately, consumers and providers end up paying a high price for such behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

As early as 1993, Fullerton & Punj (1993) identified deviant consumer behavior as vandalism, abuse, threats, physical, or psychological unfairness toward other customers and workers. They later referred to consumer misbehavior as a pervasive issue directly resulting from the culture of consumption (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). Over the last two decades, there has been growing research interest in consumer misbehavior, as explained in recent articles by Nowak et al. (2023) and Wright & Larsen (2023). Firms driven by profit maximization hire marketers who employ tools and strategies to encourage customers to buy more. The macro-effect of profit-maximizing related to marketing activities directly results in consumer misbehavior in the consumption culture. Outcomes of consumer misbehavior can be both positive and negative, including helping or hurting firms through consumer revenge and retaliation to cause damage (Aron & Kultgen, 2019). Korgaonkar et al. (2020) argue that although shoplifting in the U.S. retail industry costs almost \$50 billion, it has not received sufficient attention. This number has increased significantly in recent years. According to CapitalOne Shopping Research (2025), retail stores lost \$121.6 billion to retail theft in 2023, and it is projected that shoplifting will increase to over \$150 billion in 2026.

According to the 35th annual retail survey conducted by Jack L. Hayes International, Inc., 295,654 shoplifters were apprehended in 2022, up 50.9%, and over \$237 million was recovered from them, up 90.5% (Daugherty, 2023). Organized shoplifting or organized retail crime has been in the news recently. Multiple individuals steal products from several stores and then sell them on the black market or even on eBay, Facebook Marketplace or other online sites later. According to a recent article in the New York Times, nearly half of the industry's \$94.5 billion in missing merchandise in 2021 was due to organized theft (Medina, 2023). The claims have been

promoted by videos of masked groups smashing windows and grabbing highly valued merchandise. A Wall Street Journal article on the subject matter claims America's craving for spending has resulted in the creation of organized shoplifting rings and cosmetics and alcohol are among the top 10 most shoplifted goods in America (Wall Street Journal 2023). However, shoplifting is not unique to the United States. A study published by the British Retail Consortium this year, covering one year, reported that customer theft was higher than pre-COVID levels, amounting to about £953 million in England (Healy, 2023).

Previous research found that occasional consumer misbehavior is widespread, particularly among younger consumers (Hagan et al., 1985; Harris & Dumas, 2009). More recent studies also deal with some form of consumer misbehavior (e.g., Bharatkumar 2024; Boo et al., 2013; Hu et al., 2017; Korgaonkar et al., 2020; Pieper & Woisetschläger, 2024; Wright & Larsen, 2023). Occasional consumer misbehavior was found to be more common than typically thought, and instances of misbehavior have been under-reported in official crime statistics and business sources. According to Smyczek et al. (2020), the most common consumer misbehaviors are unpleasant, aggressive, and vulgar behavior towards store employees. Continuous consumer misbehavior was typical, while some consumers never misbehave at all. Misbehaving consumers are diverse and challenging to categorize based on demographic and socioeconomic factors (Daunt & Harris, 2012). Consumer misbehavior occurs across classes, despite the commonly held belief that it is more common among low-income and less educated individuals (Fullerton & Punj, 1993; Fullerton & Punj, 2004). However, in another study, Daunt and Harris (2011) examined the relationship between the following four demographic variables: gender, income, age, education, and consumer misbehavior, and found that only income was not related to consumer misbehavior. Interestingly, a study by Scarpi (2023) indicates that when consumers are aware that their misbehavior will have negative consequences, they might embrace socially responsible behavior.

To understand consumer misbehavior, Fullerton & Punj (2004) proposed three theoretical approaches. The first approach emphasized the norms and expectations of conduct in an exchange setting. Norms depend on impersonal trust in the exchange setting (i.e., trusting others you do not know), and behavior that violates that trust infringes on the norms. Expectations of conduct extend from the marketer to the consumer, from the consumer to other consumers, and from consumers to the firm and its employees. Norms and expectations are bound together through the social contract (Steiner et al., 1976). The second approach involved labeling consumer misbehavior as deviant behavior. Labeling is a subjective interpretation and definition of other people's actions. Some instances of consumer misbehavior may be overlooked (i.e., not labeled negatively) based on an individual's gender, age, race, and other socioeconomic factors (Hindelang, 1974). The third approach uses behavioral intent to predict consumer misbehavior. Intention can be challenging to determine and may not be readily apparent. The misbehaving consumer may even have difficulty pinpointing his/her own intention. A single misbehaving consumer may also have multiple intentions (Russell, 1973).

To systematically explain the various forms of consumer misbehavior, Fullerton & Punj (2004) developed a typology of five categories. The first category is the marketer's employees. The second category is the consumers in the exchange setting. The third category is the marketer's merchandise and services. The fourth category is the marketer's financial assets. The fifth category is the marketer's physical or electronic premises. Each category of consumer misbehavior is considered across three conceptual dimensions: the nature of the act, the type and degree of the disruption, and the reactions by marketers and other consumers.

The typology showed that financial costs of consumer misbehavior directed at marketing products, financial assets, and physical premises are significantly greater than expected and marketers and companies underestimate them as unavoidable costs of business (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). Marketers tend to tolerate consumer misbehavior. Eventually, the costs of misbehavior are borne by consumers through higher prices, but consumers are generally found to be indifferent or ignorant of misbehavior when assets are illegally appropriated (Sheley & Bailey, 1985; Wilkes, 1978). The accumulation of these costs is more of a deadweight loss in market economies (Larsen & Thota, 2014). Marketers' unwavering indifference reinforces attitudes that treat consumer misbehavior as a regular part of consumption culture. Furthermore, marketers and consumers often do not react to consumer misbehavior, and their reactions are not necessarily correlated with the degree of disruption or the material and monetary impact caused by the misbehavior. Instead, marketers and consumers are more affected by disruptions to consumption harmony.

Fullerton & Punj (2004) posited that consumer misbehavior should be studied from a macro perspective to gain a holistic understanding. Coupled with the typology, they developed a micro-perspective of the contributors, manifestations, and effects of consumer misbehavior. Fullerton & Punj (2004) identified seven motives for consumer misbehavior, established through studies in the following domains: the sociology of deviance, criminology, abnormal psychology, and other studies of consumer misbehavior (Brain & Benton, 1981; Terry & Steffensmeier, 1988; Vold & Bernard, 1986). Each of the seven motives is intrinsic to the modern culture of consumption. They are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive in addressing micro-level consumer misbehavior. Instances of consumer misbehavior may be affected by multiple motivations. The seven causes form the framework for this study.

The first cause is unfulfilled aspirations. Merton (1968) affirmed that a discrepancy exists between widely held consumption goals and the availability of legitimate resources to reach them. Consumers unable to satisfy their consumption goals may resort to illicit means like fraud or theft. This theory was reinforced by Durkheim's (1952) theory of anomie (Cameron, 1964; Brokaw, 1993).

The second cause of consumer misbehavior is deviant thrill-seeking. Lofland (1969) and Katz (1988a) both found that misbehavior may be motivated by thrill-seeking and adventure, and the risk of being caught amplifies the rush one gets from misbehaving. In fact, lonely consumers were found to misbehave solely to add excitement to their lives (Moore, 1984). Hedonistic consumption may also lead to consumer misbehavior (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

The third cause of consumer misbehavior is the absence of moral constraints (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). If a consumer does not feel internal inhibitions against misbehaving in a consumption setting, then perceived norms and expectations do not deter them from misbehaving. Misbehaving consumers do not see their actions as immoral from a general perspective or in relation to their situation (Kallis & Vanier, 1985), and, as determined by Apoorva et al. (2022), consumer misbehavior was, in some cases, motivated by personal benefits. However, consumers who perceive misbehavior as immoral are more likely to restrain themselves.

The fourth cause of consumer misbehavior is differential association. Sutherland (1947) and Cohen (1966) described the sociology of deviance, where a group in a society has norms that are deviant from those of the larger society. Misbehavior may be promoted within the group's norms as members interact. Sykes & Matza (1957) found that the group may even guide individuals to rationalize a negative opinion towards the morality of their misbehavior. Furthermore, differential association has been found among teenagers who misbehave in consumption settings, potentially indicating a broader issue of deviant consumer socialization.

The fifth cause of consumer misbehavior is pathological socialization. It was found that consumers often exhibit more negative behavior towards larger companies than towards smaller companies (Smigel, 1956; Baron & Fisher, 1984). Large businesses that are perceived as impersonal are more vulnerable to consumer misbehavior. The theory of social distance supports this finding, which posits that the social distance between buyer and seller increases the likelihood of misbehavior (Houston & Gassenheimer, 1987; Spilski et al., 2017). Misbehavior may result from revenge, real negative situations, or imagined negative situations (Fullerton & Punj, 2004).

The sixth cause of consumer misbehavior is provocative situational factors. In physical spaces, consumers may misbehave toward marketers and/or other consumers when harmony is reduced (Katz, 1988b). Examples of reductions in harmony may include excessive noise, heat, or crowding, as shown by passengers on crowded, delayed flights. Attractive merchandise displays may provoke customers to shoplift. Deterrence theory (Tittle, 1980) encourages further misbehavior when customers do not perceive that misbehavior is discouraged.

Finally, consumers may feel comfortable engaging in misbehavior, especially when there is no deterrent, by conducting a cost-benefit analysis. Crime theories offered by Becker (1968) and Wilson and Herrnstein (1985) state that misbehavior results from a calculation of expected costs and benefits. Consumer decision-making is found to have an identical rational process to misbehaving, barring that misbehavior is unbounded by ethical concerns (Kraut, 1976). Often, opportunities with a minimized risk of being caught are pursued. This is the most important reason for consumer misbehavior (Fullerton & Punj, 2004; Bernstein, 1985). Lack of employee guardianship or deterrence can also be added to this cause. Organizational commitment, resulting from employees' perceptions of justice and fairness in the workplace, influences employees' attitudes and behaviors, which ultimately affect their tendency to engage in shoplifting prevention behavior (Potdar et al., 2020).

Since Fullerton & Punj's (2004) research, consumer misbehavior has become pervasive in online consumption exchanges. For example, one individual may buy an e-book and then make copies for all friends (Gratz, 2010). Online consumer behavior is markedly different from in-person consumer behavior due to anonymity and interactivity. In fact, consumer misbehavior is hidden and often disconnected from their real lives, allowing abuse that is destructive to companies and other customers (Chen et al., 2014). Toward the end of the 1990s, as the Internet became more user-friendly and widely available, more consumers began using peer-to-peer networks to share digital media, including software, music, video games, and movies. This consumer misbehavior continues today despite ethical and legal ramifications. Furthermore, the Internet has made consumer misbehavior anonymous and more challenging to identify unethical activities (Harris & Dumas, 2009). This is mainly because consumers justify digital piracy by using the techniques of neutralization, as researched by Harris & Dumas (2009). Furthermore, consumers' motivation for convenience increases their perceived benefits of misbehavior and their intention of misbehavior in the sharing economy (Teng et al., 2023). Research about the sharing economy by Culiberg et al. (2023) showed that the formation of an ethical climate is important in influencing the providers of the sharing economy and their evaluations, while ethical climate, trust in consumers, and trust in the platform explain the firmness of providers' ethical judgments of consumers' misbehavior.

More than 20 years ago, Freestone & Mitchell (2004) listed five different types of online misbehavior including: 1) illegal activities (e.g., use of credit cards illegally, spreading viruses, downloading child pornography, etc.,); 2) questionable activities (e.g., online gambling); 3) illegal hacking related activities (e.g., changing hardware or software products); 4) human internet trading activities (e.g., purchasing human organs), and 5) digital piracy including downloading of movies,

music, games or software from the internet for free. Research conducted by Spilski et al. (2017) showed that the probability of unethical product returns is higher when products are purchased online than when they are purchased in a face-to-face store.

In recent years, many businesses have begun using artificial intelligence (AI) for personalization and real-time customer service. AI is not new, and there had been discussion about the use of AI as expert systems as early as 1984, when there was much confusion about what AI really was (Gillin, 1984). A recent research study shows that there is a positive relationship between the use of AI and enhanced customer experience, with the benefits of personalized and better after-sales support (Bharatkumar, 2024). However, consumers are likely to start using readily available free AI software (e.g., ChatGPT) online. This widespread use may involve consumer misuse of AI, including trolling. Previous research shows that replacing human service agents with service robots does not deter customers from committing crimes but instead creates perceptions that allow the performance of more consumer misbehavior (Dootson et al., 2022). In addition, Online trolling has become very common in recent years, with people leaving reviews of products or companies. In doing so, sometimes, people post or comment online to deliberately hurt companies or individuals. Interestingly, research shows that bystanders who read negative comments are more likely to post positive word-of-mouth (WOM, also known as eWOM online) comments to support a service organization that is receiving vicious trolling (Mulcahy et al., 2023). It is well known that consumers provide positive or negative reviews of products and services, and that high negative WOM intensity can act as a barrier to customer loyalty (Zhu et al., 2023). Research shows that these reviews have become important in choosing product brands and companies (Karakaya & Barnes, 2010), and that it may be necessary for provider firms to offer compensation to dissatisfied consumers to mitigate the damaging effects (Zinko et al., 2023). Another study (Sweiss et al., 2022) also found that other customers' online actions and misbehavior negatively affect other customers' attitudes and commitment towards service providers. According to research by Demesar et al. (2021), many incidents of trolling are rooted in aggressive social practices, and brand trolling involves using malicious, attacking, insulting, or hostile tactics to prompt reactions from brands and bystander consumers.

In a global market where physical distance separates sellers and consumers, information asymmetry tends to favor the seller. Therefore, the consumer may perceive their disadvantage as a reason to misbehave. Conversely, the Internet provides consumers with their own advantages, such as the ability to decide among multiple sellers of the same item as well as information-rich reviews on sellers and products that can be used to make better purchasing decisions. Consumers have access to new online routes for opportunism. Consumers can much more easily learn about businesses than businesses can learn about consumers. With this concept in mind, this research aims to fill some gaps in the literature and develop a structural model that considers the underlying dimensions that lead to consumer misbehavior.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

As shown earlier, a variety of factors influence consumers to misbehave. While peer pressure is a significant factor affecting consumer buying behavior, it is also a growing factor in consumer misbehavior. Situational factors affect the youth's openness to peer pressure. According to Brown et al. (2008), consumers under high peer pressure tend to conform to peer norms because they wish to be accepted and liked by peers. Of course, the pressure is likely to vary depending on the type of product and its perceived importance to consumers. In addition, peer pressure will have

varying impacts across consumer types, as materialistic consumers are more sensitive to external situations (Chan & Prendergast, 2007). Indeed, Babin & Griffin (1995) also show an association between past consumer observations and learning from peers, as well as with consumer misbehavior, such as shoplifting. Similarly, Akbari et al. (2016), in a study conducted in Iran, found that other customers' effects are the principal factors on consumer misbehavior. In fact, peer pressure is often so intense among teenagers that they shoplift to earn the respect of their peers (Grybś-Kabocik, 2016). More research by Cox et al. (1990, 1993) also includes social/group pressure as a factor for consumer misbehavior. More recent research by Jacobsen & Barnes (2020) showed that the greatest pressure on Generation Z consumers comes from social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Snapchat. With the earlier research conducted and the discussion presented, we put forward the following hypothesis:

H1. Pressure felt by consumers to buy merchandise impacts their motivation to engage in consumer misbehavior.

Earlier research has determined the relationship between customer dissatisfaction and consumer misbehavior (Daunt & Harris, 2011). In fact, when customers are dissatisfied with merchants, they often take action to address their dissatisfaction by contacting marketers, writing reviews, or simply returning the unsatisfactory product for a refund or exchange. Some customers go so far as to take revenge on merchants (Aron, 2016). When customers are dissatisfied with companies or products, they may seek revenge, often in the form of covert retaliation and sometimes as retaliation fantasies or desires shared with others (Bunker & Bradley, 2007). Furthermore, earlier research has shown that consumers who are bothered by other consumers are likely to seek revenge to feel better (Spector & Fox, 2002). Indeed, revenge motivation has been proposed by other researchers earlier (see, for example, Fullerton & Punj, 1997; Reynolds & Harris, 2005, 2009; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008) and tested by Akbari et al (2016) in a chain store environment. Therefore, we test the following hypothesis:

H2. Dissatisfaction with merchant behavior and merchandise impacts consumer motivation to engage in consumer misbehavior.

Consumer norms and beliefs shape their behaviors, which reflect their values and determine what is acceptable or unacceptable. Perceived benefits from misbehavior and the moral definition of misbehavior play important roles in consumer misbehavior (Jin et al., 2022). Previous research shows that consumers who have high levels of universalism, benevolence, or conservatism develop a negative attitude toward misbehavior (Smyczek, 2020). Tonglet (2006) shows that, according to the Theory of Planned Behavior, intention to shoplift can be predicted by subjective norms or feelings of social pressure. The Theory of Planned Behavior is also used to explain people's intention to fare evade on public transportation as a function of norms (Currie & Delbosc, 2017). Interestingly, consumer behavior literature has tried to explain this behavior of manipulating others and a general lack of concern for morality, norms, rules, and regulations as "Machiavellianism" (Daunt & Harris, 2011). Researchers have shown a strong relationship between Machiavellianism and unethical behaviors such as stealing, lying, and cheating (Al-Rafee & Cronan, 2006; Jones & Kavanagh, 1996; Wirtz & Kum, 2004). Therefore, we put forth the following hypotheses about consumer motivation and consumer engagement:

H3. Consumer norms and beliefs impact consumer motivation.

H4. Consumer norms and beliefs impact consumer engagement to misbehave.

Among the factors that motivate consumers to misbehave, some are innate consumer characteristics, while others are external factors such as social pressure. Even store atmospherics, such as heat, noise, or overcrowding, may trigger consumer misbehavior (Fullerton & Punj, 2004), while some consumers aim to punish firms that mistreat customers or refuse to deal with unsatisfactory situations (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2010). When examining illegitimate customer complaints, Reynolds & Harris (2005) named six motivations, including “freeloaders”, “fraudulent returners”, “fault transferors”, “solitary ego gains”, “peer-induced esteem seekers”, and “disruptive gains”. Interestingly, in more severe cases of consumer misbehavior, the absence of security guards in retail stores motivates shoplifting intentions among potential consumer offenders (Korgaonkar et al., 2020). Earlier research has also shown that factors such as the absence of moral constraints, thrill-seeking, unfulfilled aspirations, and negative attitudes towards selling companies lead to consumer misbehavior (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). Korgaonkar et al. (2020) found that offender motivation and the absence of capable barriers affect potential shoplifters' attitudes, subjective norms, and confidence in their ability to shoplift, which then influence consumer intention to shoplift. Based on this discussion, we present the following hypothesis:

H5. Consumer motivation impacts consumer engagement to misbehave.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data

This study was conducted at a mid-sized public university in the Northeastern United States. The university has about 8,500 students, of which 1,700 are graduate students. Only undergraduates were studied, since graduate students are typically millennials and are not the subject of this investigation. The survey was implemented via campus email to undergraduate students, and students volunteered their responses. The email had a brief background on the study and a direct link to the survey. Five hundred sixty-seven surveys were completed within six days. Of those completed, 481 were usable surveys.

Measurement

Using the theoretical work of Fullerton & Punj (2004), five major areas of consumer misbehavior were identified. A survey was then constructed on these five areas of consumer misconduct, including consumer dissatisfaction, pressure to buy, consumer motivation to engage in misbehavior, consumer engagement in misbehavior, and norms & beliefs, or lack thereof. This is the first attempt to operationalize Fullerton & Punj's (2004) theory of consumer misbehavior. The final survey had fifty-eight questions and was administered online. In addition, four questions capturing individual characteristics (gender, age, academic level, and college) of the respondents were added to the questionnaire. The measurement scale for most questions ranges from 1 (often) to 4 (never), and many other questions provide response options on a nominal scale of 1 (yes) and 2 (no). The survey was approved by the IRB and pretested on the target population.

Sample Profile

Of the 481 respondents in the sample, 63% are female, 35% are male, and 2% identify as other. 10% are eighteen years of age, 24% are nineteen, 23% are twenty, 23% are twenty-one, 15% are twenty-two, and 5% are twenty-three. 25% are first-year students, 25% are sophomores, 24% are juniors, and 26% are seniors. 40% of the respondents are enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences, 16% are enrolled in the College of Business, 11% are enrolled in the College of Nursing, 10% are enrolled in College of Visual and Performing Arts, and 23% are enrolled in the College of Science and Engineering.

Reliability and Validity

In assessing the reliability and unidimensionality of the constructs shown, we followed the procedures recommended by Anderson & Gerbing (1988). As shown in Table 1, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using SPSS-AMOS indicated that all items loaded on their corresponding constructs and were statistically significant. The measurement properties of the variables were also checked by comparing the baseline model with eight alternative models (Table 2). The comparison of these models with the baseline model resulted in the following goodness of fit statistics: $\chi^2 = 389.23$ with d.f. = 157; $\chi^2 / \text{d.f.} = 2.479$; GFI = 0.93; CFI = 0.95; IFI = .95; TLI = .94 RMSEA = 0.056, low = 0.049, and high = 0.062. Although two of the three factor models had high fit indices (89-91), the RMSEA was the lowest for the four-factor model, showing the best fit. Overall, these results suggest that the four-factor model provides evidence of construct distinctiveness for pressure to buy, motivation to misbehave, norms and beliefs (or lack thereof), and consumer misbehavior. The four constructs had *composite reliability* (CR) scores ranging from .73 to .90, exceeding the required minimum of .60 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, two of the *average variances extracted* (AVEs) are 0.50 and 0.57, while the other two are 0.42 and 0.48, which are below the threshold of 0.50 as recommended by Fornell & Larcker (1981). However, when CR exceeds 0.60, lower AVEs can be acceptable, and the construct's convergent validity remains adequate (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, all estimated standardized loadings were highly significant ($p < 0.01$), and CR scores were well above the 0.60 threshold. In comparison, Cronbach's alphas ranged from 0.73 to 0.90 (see Table 1), well above the 0.70 threshold, suggesting good convergent validity based on previous research (Hair et al., 2006).

We obtained additional support for discriminant validity following the procedure suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981). The AVE estimates were compared with the squares of the correlation between constructs. The AVE's (0.50, 0.42, 0.48, and 0.57) are all greater than the corresponding squared correlations, thus, indicating adequate discriminant validity (see Table 3).

RESULTS

Model Assessment

In examining the possible causal relationships of the factors proposed and their relationships to consumer misbehavior engagement, we utilized confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) maximum likelihood approach in SPSS AMOS. As indicated earlier, we also calculated the CR coefficients and the AVE's for the latent constructs. The *pressure to buy* construct had a CR coefficient of .83 and AVE of .50, the *norms and belief* construct had a CR coefficient of .74 and AVE of .42, the *motivation* construct had a CR coefficient of .79 and AVE of .48, and the fourth construct, *consumer misbehavior* had a CR coefficient of .90

Table 1
Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Measurement Properties

Factors / Variables	Composite Reliability	Standardized Loadings (λ_{yi})	Reliability (λ^2_{yi})	Variance ($Var(\epsilon_i)$)	Average Variance-Extracted (AVE) Estimate $= \Sigma(\lambda^2_{yi}) / ((\lambda^2_{yi}) + Var(\epsilon_i))$
PRESSURE TO BUY (alpha=.81)	.83				.50
<i>How pressured do you feel to buy the following?</i>					
Latest clothing (pclth)	.85		.72	.28	
Latest beauty products (pbty)	.55		.30	.70	
Latest accessories (bags, jewelry, etc.) (paccs)	.78		.61	.39	
Latest footwear (pfoot)	.75		.56	.44	
Latest Technology (ptech)	.55		.30	.70	
MOTIVATIONS (M) (alpha=.79)	.79				.48
<i>How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</i>					
Getting away with theft or fraud can be a thrilling experience (thrill)	.65		.43	.57	
Getting away with theft or fraud is just a way to get even with big business (even)	.65		.42	.58	
Friends would support, if I do something that may be unacceptable like cheat or steal (frnspt)	.70		.48	.52	
If I really wanted something and couldn't afford it, I might engage in unacceptable behavior to get it (naford)	.77		.59	.41	
CONSUMER NORMS/BELEIFS (alpha=.72)	.73				.41

Do you find these behaviors acceptable?

Switch sale price tags to regular priced items (swchtg)	.75	.57	.43
Take items without paying for them (steal)	.70	.49	.51
Create or use counterfeit coupons (cftcpn)	.58	.34	.76
Try to convince employees that items that are not on sale were on sale rack (nosale)	.51	.26	.74

CONSUMER MISBEHAVIOR (alpha=.90) .90 .57

*How often have you engaged in the following
behaviors?*

Create or use counterfeit coupons (cftcpn)	.82	.66	.34
Cut other shoppers in line at checkout (cutline)	.77	.60	.40
Take merchandise from other shoppers' carts. (tkmosp)	.73	.53	.47
Try to convince employees that items that are not on sale were on sale rack (nsale)	.79	.62	.38
Switch sale price tags on to regular priced items (swchtg)	.75	.56	.44
Take items without paying for them (steal)	.73	.53	.47
Purchase a product online and returned it in a different store for more money (rstore)	.70	.49	.51

Table 2: Comparison of Measurement Models

Model	Factors*	χ^2	d.f.	$\Delta\chi^2$	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	GFI
Null		4571	190					
Baseline Model	Four factors.	389	157		.056	.95	.95	.93
Model 1	Three factor model: PB and M were combined into one factor, NB into second factor, CMB into third factor.	1004	160	615.56**	.105	.81	.81	.79
Model 2	Three factor model: PB and M were combined into one factor, NM into second factor, CMB into third factor.	726	160	337.47**	.086	.87	.87	.86
Model 3	Three factor model: PB and CBM were combined into one factor, M into second factor, NB into third factor.	1176	160	787.06**	.115	.77	.77	.77
Model 4	Three factor model: M and NB were combined into one factor, M into second factor, CMB into third factor.	554	160	164.87**	.072	.91	.91	.90
Model 5	Three factor model: M and CMB were combined into one factor, PB into second factor, NB into third factor.	812	160	422.92**	.092	.85	.85	.83
Model 6	Three factor model: NB and CMB were combined into one factor, M into second factor and CMB into third factor.	614	160	225.25**	.077	.90	.90	.89
Model 7	Two factor models: PB and CMB were combined into one factor, M and NB into second factor.	1131	162	742.02**	.112	.78	.78	.78
Model 8	Two factor models: PB and MB were combined into one factor, M and NB into second factor.	1336	162	946.81**	.123	.73	.73	.75

*Factors are defined in Table 1; ** p < .01 PB: Pressure to buy; M: Motivation; NB: Consumer Norms/Beliefs; CMB: Consumer Misbehavior

and AVE of .57. The CR coefficients for the constructs are based on standardized factor loadings and measurement errors and exceed the recommended level of .70 (Shook et al., 2004).

Table 3
Discriminant Validity Test
Average Variance Extracted and Squared Correlations

Variables	AVE's	1	2	3	4
1. Pressure to Buy	0.50	1			
2. Norms/Beliefs	0.42	0.00	1		
3. Motivation	0.48	0.04	0.22**	1	
4. Consumer Misbehavior	0.57	0.07	0.19**	0.25**	1

**p<0.01

The lower AVE scores are due to several indicators being correlated and cross-loading to other constructs as well as the presence of shared variances. This was expected because some indicator variables were measured on the same scale and had been similarly worded. Therefore, the analysis could produce redundant results. In such cases, respecification of the model is suggested when there are correlations among indicator error variances, and when there is theoretical evidence for specifying these correlations (Byrne, 2001). In the subsequent analyses, using the modification indices, the parameters for eight indicator error variances were specified as correlated one at a time. However, the CFA analysis showed that the variables loading to the consumer dissatisfaction construct had low standardized regression weights and were removed from further analysis. Similarly, some variables within the motivation and norms/beliefs construct had high-standardized residual covariance paths with other indicator variables and low standardized regression weights and were removed from the model. However, the model fit indices appeared adequate. Therefore, no further action was taken other than freeing some parameters. The fit of the model is as follows: ($\chi^2_{(159)} = 404.97$, $p < .01$; $\chi^2/d.f. = 2.55$; CFI = .94; IFI = .94; TLI = .93 and RMSEA = .057 Lo = .050 and Hi = .064). The χ^2 model was significant, indicating that the model does not represent the sample covariance matrix. However, the χ^2 statistics is sensitive to sample size. Therefore, the other widely used model fit statistics were applied and $\chi^2/d.f.$, CFI, IFI, TLI, and RMSEA fit indices all met the accepted benchmarks for statistical significance (see Hair et al. 2006). Table 4 shows the structural equation modeling results and Figure 1 diagrammatically depicts the relationship among the constructs as specified in the hypotheses.

To ensure validity, the final model after removing the statistically non-significant parameters were cross validated as recommended by Byrne (2001). Using a systematic selection process of every other case in the data, the sample was divided into two sub-groups. Therefore, each sub-group consisted of 240 cases. The constrained full model consisted of four regression parameters, which were set as equal across the two samples. The comparison of the constrained model ($\chi^2 = 1054.54$; d.f. = 327) and the base model ($\chi^2 = 1044$; d.f. = 323) shows that the $\Delta\chi^2$ calculated is not statistically significant at $p < .05$ $\Delta\chi^2_{(4)} = 9.54$). Therefore, the two sub samples generate comparable results indicating *validity*. Since we have support for reliability and validity, we now consider the hypotheses tests results.

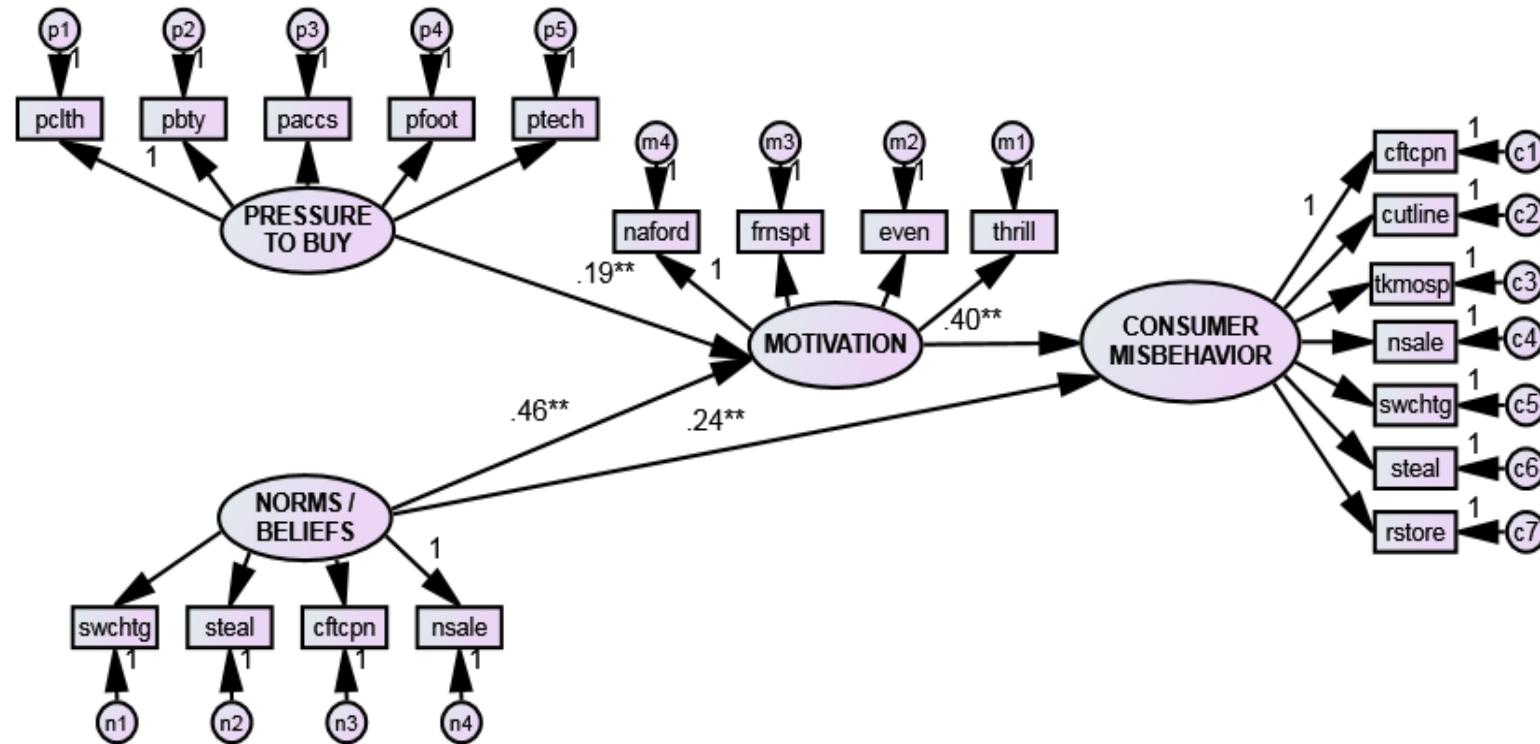
Table 4
Results of Structural Equation Modelling Analysis and Measurement Properties

Factors / Variables	Composite Reliability	Standardized Loadings (λ_{yi})	Reliability (λ^2_{yi})	Variance (Var(ε_i))	Average Variance- Extracted (AVE) Estimate $= \sum(\lambda^2_{yi}) / (\lambda^2_{yi} + \text{Var}(\varepsilon_i))$
PRESSURE TO BUY→MOTIVATION			.19**		
NORMS/BELIEFS→MOTIVATION			.46**		
MOTIVATION→CONSUMER MISBEHAVIOR			.40**		
NORMS/BELIEFS→CONSUMER MISBEHAVIOR			.24**		
PRESSURE TO BUY (PB)	.83				.50
<i>How pressured do you feel to buy the following?</i>					
Latest clothing (pclth)		.86	.74	.26	
Latest beauty products (pbty)		.55	.30	.70	
Latest accessories (bags, jewelry, etc.) (paccs)		.78	.61	.39	
Latest footwear (pfoot)		.75	.56	.44	
Latest Technology (ptech)		.55	.30	.70	
MOTIVATIONS (M)	.79				.48
<i>How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</i>					
Getting away with theft or fraud can be a thrilling experience (thrill)		.65	.43	.57	
Getting away with theft or fraud is just a way to get even with big business (even)		.65	.42	.58	

Friends would support if I did something that may be unacceptable like cheat or steal	.69	.48	.52
If I really wanted something and couldn't afford it, I might engage in unacceptable behavior to get it	.77	.59	.41
CONSUMER NORMS/BELEIFS (NB)	.74		.42
<i>Do you find these behaviors acceptable?</i>			
Switch sale price tags to regular priced items (swchtg)	.76	.57	.43
Take items without paying for them (steal)	.70	.49	.51
Create or use counterfeit coupons (cfcpn)	.58	.34	.76
Try to convince employees that items that are not on sale were on sale rack (nosale)	.51	.26	.74
CONSUMER MISBEHAVIOR (CMB)	.90		.57
<i>How often have you engaged in the following behaviors?</i>			
Create or use counterfeit coupons (Cftcpn)	.82	.66	.34
Cut other shoppers in line at checkout (cutln)	.77	.60	.40
Take merchandise from other shoppers' carts. (Tkmosp)	.73	.53	.47
Try to convince employees that items that are not on sale were on sale rack (Nsale)	.79	.62	.38
Switch sale price tags on to regular priced items (Swchtgb)	.75	.56	.44
Take items without paying for them (steal)	.73	.53	.47
Purchase a product online and returned it in a different store for more money (Rstore)	.70	.49	.51

** p < .01

Figure 1
Structural Equation Model: Showing Factors Leading to Consumer Misbehavior



**Numbers on the paths (on arrows) are standardized regression weights, and they are significant at $p = 0.01$

Hypotheses Tests Results

H1. The structural equation modeling analysis shows that the *pressure to buy* construct affects the consumer motivation ($= 0.19$, $p = .001$). As the *pressure to buy* increases, so does the motivation for consumer misbehavior. Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted. This construct consisted of five indicator variables (clothing, footwear, accessories, beauty products, and latest technology). Interestingly, feeling pressure to buy the latest accessories had the highest mean score (3.59), followed by the latest footwear (3.39), and the latest beauty products (3.29).

H2. An attempt was made to evaluate the relationship between consumer dissatisfaction with merchant behavior and merchandise, and consumer motivation to engage in consumer misbehavior. However, as indicated earlier, the indicator variables did not load well on this construct, had low standardized loadings, and were eliminated from further analysis. Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected with caution because the variables were dichotomous (yes-no).

H3. An attempt was made to test the impact of consumer norms and beliefs on consumer motivation. The results showed consumer norms and beliefs have a positive impact on consumer motivation ($= 0.49$, $p = .001$). Therefore, this hypothesis is accepted. As the lack of respect for consumer norms and beliefs increases so does consumer misbehavior motivation.

H4. Testing the relationship between consumer norms and beliefs and consumer engagement to misbehave showed that consumers are affected by their norms and beliefs positively ($\lambda = 0.24$, $p = .001$). Additional analysis showed that this construct has an indirect effect on consumer engagement to misbehave. The indirect standardized regression weight is 0.184, resulting in a total effect of 0.42 ($0.24 + 0.18$). Bartol (1983) and Pedhazur (1982) both suggest that an indirect effect higher than 0.05 is significant and meaningful. Therefore, there is support for this hypothesis.

H5. This final hypothesis assessed the impact of consumer motivation on consumer engagement to misbehave. The results show that consumer motivation positively impacts consumer engagement in misbehavior ($= 0.40$, $p = .001$). As consumer motivation increases, so does consumer engagement to misbehave. Therefore, this hypothesis is also accepted.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Most of the hypotheses tested were accepted with high reliability and validity. The only hypothesis rejected and excluded from the structural model development was hypothesis two. As shown earlier, the consumer dissatisfaction construct had dichotomous variables and did not load well on the construct, resulting in low standardized loadings. The other constructs had high reliabilities and are related to consumer misbehavior, as shown in Figure 1. The first construct examined, pressure to buy, often results from peer or social pressure or both. The finding in this study confirms the earlier works (Akbari et al., 2016; Babin & Griffin, 1995; Chan & Prendergast, 2007) that peer pressure leads to consumer misbehavior.

Consumer norms and beliefs or thinking that consumer misbehavior is acceptable directly impact consumer motivation and consumer misbehavior. One may interpret norms and beliefs as consumer values and attitudes. In fact, this general lack of concern for morality, norms, rules, and regulations was explained as “Machiavellianism” by Daunt and Harris (2011). Our finding supports earlier claims and research (Al-Rafee & Cronan, 2006; Jones & Kavanagh, 1996; Wirtz & Kum, 2004) that there is a strong relationship between Machiavellianism and unethical consumer behavior. Interestingly, the impact on motivation, which underpins consumer misbehavior, is even stronger than the direct impact on consumer misbehavior. Therefore, one

could conclude that the norms-and-beliefs construct has a strong indirect impact on consumer misbehavior.

There is a strong relationship between consumer motivation and consumer engagement to misbehave. Behaviors such as seeking thrill, revenge, peer support, or approval of misbehavior are part of the motivation to misbehave. Our study empirically confirms the presence of a strong relationship between motivation and consumer misbehavior engagement as suggested earlier by Fullerton and Punj (2004). Advances in technology have limited or minimized consumer misbehavior. For example, price tag switching is minimized by barcode readers or scanners. Indeed, research by Dootson et al (2022) shows that replacing human service agents with service robots reduces deviant consumer behavior. Having security cameras in retail stores has also reduced or minimized many types of consumer misbehavior. Indeed, a recent study found that using a camera-based security system significantly reduced expected misbehavior (Pieper & Woietschläger, 2024). In addition, databases and data mining software have recently been used to identify potential consumer offenders. However, the use of high technology comes at a price, including equipment, software, and highly skilled personnel. Therefore, companies need to perform a cost-benefit analysis. High initial costs are likely to result in low long-term savings for both companies and innocent consumers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Having used a student sample is a significant limitation of this study. Limitations of using student samples in business research are well documented in extant literature (see, for example, Gupta et al., 2023; Ford, 2016; Peterson, 2001, and others). The primary concern in utilizing student samples is the lack of external validity. Ford (2016) cautions business researchers about using student samples in scale development and cross-cultural research, primarily due to issues with external validity. Similarly, in earlier research, Peterson (2001) found that using student samples can be challenging because students' responses are similar to those of the general adult population. This may be because of the homogeneity of the student population. However, the findings of a recent study by De Lurgio et al. (2023) indicate that online crowdsourcing market (OCM) samples do not differ much from student samples in terms of validity and reliability but do differ substantially in demographics. Furthermore, these researchers indicate that studying student samples is appropriate for examining consumer behavior and technology use, since differences between students and the general population are unlikely to be significant. Similarly, an earlier study by Steelman et al. (2014) found that OCM samples from the United States yielded statistical findings similar to those from both US students and US consumer panels at a much lower cost.

Despite the significant issues involved in using student samples in business research, the findings of this research support or confirm earlier literature on consumer misbehavior. In addition, these findings are used to build a model that more thoroughly explains consumer misbehavior. Although the model is very robust, this type of convenience sample may limit generalizability due to its unique demographics, such as age, socioeconomic status, and education level. Therefore, interpretation and conclusions to be drawn from this study must be done with caution.

Given that this sample was drawn from a large, public university in the northeast, its composition is relatively diverse. We do recognize, however, that in terms of age and life experiences, this type of sample can limit the applicability of research findings to the broader community. Therefore, we would suggest replicating this study on a broader population, which would also help clarify any significant differences by the demographics discussed. In addition,

several indicators were correlated and cross-loaded onto other constructs, indicating shared variance due to their similar wording and use of the same measurement scale. Therefore, some indicator error variances were specified as correlated, and some variables with high standardized residual covariance paths and low standardized regression weights were removed from the model.

To date, no studies have examined the varied consumer environments or cultural factors related to consumer misbehavior. While there is no conclusive research on variations in consumer misbehavior across cultures, studies have shown that misbehaving consumers are diverse and challenging to categorize by demographic and socioeconomic factors (Daunt & Harris, 2012). This provides a possible avenue for future research. Furthermore, new studies could provide valuable insight given current debates about law and order, the use of security, and crime rates across the US. There is anecdotal evidence that consumer misbehavior may be more prevalent in areas where there is a high crime. It may be that the perception of “misbehavior” varies contextually.

In addition, the positive and negative impacts of technology must be examined in relation to consumer misbehavior and growing concerns about organized shoplifting. As explained earlier, there is very little research on online consumer misbehavior, which is widespread among both technologically savvy and not-so-technologically savvy consumers. Possible misuse of AI and trolling by consumers and companies are also areas for future research to consider. Interestingly, examining the misbehavior issue from a different angle suggests that firms facing uncertainty are likely to follow or imitate the unethical behaviors of larger firms (Bryant et al., 2023). Another study found that irresponsible behavior by companies can increase consumer outrage, create negative attitudes, and spread negative comments about their products and services (Zasuwa, 2024). Indeed, Allen et al., (2020) found that good performance in corporate social responsibility serves as a protection for consumer misbehavior and lower negative word of mouth. Therefore, the impact of firms’ ethical/unethical behaviors and consumer reactions can undoubtedly be an important area of future research. Consumer perception of AI use and AI detection tools are also new research avenues to pursue.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Consumer misbehavior is a reality and manifests itself in our marketplace in a variety of ways. These behaviors include but are not limited to consumer-to-consumer misbehavior (Black Friday aggression), consumer-to-firm misbehavior (negative reviews), and consumer-to-employee misbehavior (arguing with salespeople).

Regardless of the individual motivation, characteristics, or the target of their misbehavior, it is in the interest of all parties that deterrents are introduced that are affordable and effective. Given the pervasive nature of consumer misbehavior, the establishment of deterrents might help to mitigate the problem. Amelia and Ronald (2017) suggest that past consumer misbehavior influences future intentions and that improving consumer self-esteem is important for controlling consumer misbehavior. In fact, consumer norms/beliefs construct, or lack thereof, found in this study, confirms this.

Studies have examined deterrents to consumer misbehavior (Cole, 1989; Dootson et al., 2018, 2022), among others. At this point, practical implications point toward visible deterrents. These might include signage informing consumers of possible prosecution, easily seen cameras with signs announcing their presence, security guards, electronic merchandise tag detectors at exit doors, and other measures that clearly demonstrate monitoring is active and in place. Nonvisible

deterrents, such as hidden cameras or plainclothes security, do not have the same impact, although they may be helpful for prosecution or documentation of the misbehavior.

In addition, employee training is imperative. Employees are often the target of consumer misbehavior. This training must go beyond the usual consumer relations training typically offered. Training should include de-escalation techniques, negotiation strategy, and information on how to move a problem to the next level to help those perceived to be aggrieved.

Finally, all firms must monitor their social media accounts and develop a social media strategy that explicitly addresses consumer misbehavior. Firms must consider establishing a dedicated social media crisis team to address consumer misbehavior before it escalates into a crisis. When a negative review or “attack” appears online, a firm’s social media team should immediately take the discussion offline via direct messaging or another more private channel. That strategy will not only help to appease the aggrieved consumer but will also remove the potential for the negative/attacking post to incite others.

As pointed out throughout this study, consumer misbehavior is real, manifests itself in many ways, and is a problem for consumers and firms. Visible and active monitoring of consumers and employees, along with targeted consumer education and employee training, will deter some of the negative impact on both consumers and companies.

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