



The Social Influence–Compulsive Buying Link: A Mediated-Moderated Model of Social Comparison and Consumer Resilience

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ABSTRACT

With the popularity of social media, consumer behaviour has undergone a significant transformation, particularly in the fashion apparel industry. This study examines the impact of susceptibility to social influence on compulsive buying behaviour (CBB), focusing on SNS-mediated social comparison as a mediator and consumer resilience as a moderator. Utilising social comparison theory, the study posits that individuals engaging in social comparisons through SNSs develop increased desires for material possessions, fuelling compulsive buying tendencies. A quantitative approach, based on survey responses from Pakistani consumers aged 18–40, was utilised to test the hypothesis using PLS-SEM. The results reveal that while normative and informational social influences do not directly affect CBB, their effects are fully mediated by SNS-mediated social comparison. Contrary to expectations, consumer resilience does not significantly moderate the association between SNS-mediated social comparison and CBB. These findings add to the understanding of consumer behaviour of SNS users, offering theoretical and practical implications for marketers, policymakers, and mental health professionals aiming to eliminate the adverse impact of SNS-mediated social comparison on consumers' CBB.

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INTRODUCTION

Consumers now days have become more indulgent than cautious ones. Shopping in modern era is treated as the means of self-fulfilment this is the reason shoppers opt for those products or brands which fulfil their desire and wants rather their needs. Such increment in over spending on unnecessary products can be witnessed around the globe (Kshatriya & Shah, 2023). One of the significant reasons is the emergence of internet that has made the digital presence of the brands inevitable. It has radically

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transformed the market space, given consumers accessibility to goods and easy and secure payment options (Pradhan et al., 2018). Social commerce has become evident because of the wider acceptability of social networking sites (SNSs) resulted in the formation of online global consumers segment (Aljukhadar & Senecal, 2011; Hajli, 2015).

In recent years, SNSs usage has also surged among Pakistani consumers because of widespread smartphone connectivity and decreased internet prices. According to Kemp (2023), Pakistan had 111 million internet users out of which 71.7 million have social media accounts. This popularity of SNSs has also influenced Pakistani consumer specifically in the context of fashion apparel buying. Platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram have become key spaces where users discover latest trends, engage with influencers, observe peer-brand interactions, and stay updated on industry innovations (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencers on SNSs are playing significant role in setting shopping trends, especially in sectors such as fashion and lifestyle thus changing the outlook of marketing communication.

Pakistani consumers are also exposed to environments saturated with glamorous lifestyle and fashion imagery on social media. The rapid growth of Pakistan's fashion industry underscores this trend. By 2024, the revenue of Pakistan's apparel market is projected to reach USD 5.81 billion (Alda, 2023). Fashion adoption and the rise of brand-conscious consumers have been pivotal in shaping Pakistani market. However, while SNSs offer unprecedented exposure to fashion trends among Pakistani consumers, they also contribute to behavioural challenges such as CBB. Compulsive consumers easily get influenced by marketing stimuli, as a result they lack control over impulse and excessive buying (Japutra & Song, 2020; Sun & Bao, 2023). Marsha Richins, a marketing professor specializing in consumer research at the University of Missouri, defines compulsive buying as a chronic tendency to buy items one cannot afford or does not need, often accompanied by emotional distress and financial difficulty (Dittmar et al., 2007; Ridgway et al., 2008). Hence, CBB, traditionally linked to offline contexts, has now migrated online in the social media times. Pakistan is no exception to this trend (Malik et al., 2021).

Researchers have tried to look for the reason behind consumers CBB through envy (Ling et al., 2023), materialism (Islam et al., 2018; Pradhan et al., 2018), anxiety (Darrat et al., 2016), self-esteem (Biolcati, 2017) and personality disorder (Maraz et al., 2016). Even in recent past, researcher have also studied this construct with the role of gratification seeking (Japutra & Song, 2020). However, there are several unidentified determinants of CBB exists and this study tries to fill this gap. Thus, a theory-based framework was developed to identify the factors that directly or indirectly influences an individual to do CBB. This study leverages social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) which explains an individual will evaluate their personal and social worth by comparing their qualities, abilities or possessions to those of others, often engaging in upward comparisons. Feeling of insecurity develops from social comparisons with friends and celebrities who upload photographs and stories on SNSs. Thus, viewing unrealistic depictions of wealth, beauty, and success on SNSs (Jin & Ryu, 2020) can evoke dissatisfaction, frequently leading to compensatory consumption such as CBB.

Theoretically and from the marketing perspective, this study is important as it contribute to three aspects. First, the current study will shed light on the role of susceptibility to social influences in digital spaces that has increased consumers involvement with latest trends, celebrities' endorsements and brand promotion. Because of highly curated content on SNS platforms consumers set materialistic and behavioural bench marks which influences in purchase decisions (Pahlevan Sharif et al., 2022). Secondly, exploring the role of SNS-mediated social comparison as a mediating between susceptibility to social influence and CBB needs to receive more attentions from the academia in this area. SNS-mediated social comparison is one of the key elements in CBB which provide platforms to individual to compare themselves with peers, celebrities and influencers (Moon & Attiq, 2018). According to Hussain and Griffiths (2018), algorithm-driven recommendations and endorsements by influencers further reinforce social comparison and susceptibility to social influence fuelling compulsive buying tendencies.

Third, this study tries to present consumer resilience as a moderator, proposing that the consumer resilience can weaken the impact of SNS-mediated social comparison on CBB providing possible protection against adverse outcomes of this phenomenon. Thus, understanding these differences is significant for identifying the implications of SNSs consumer culture. Moon and Attiq (2018) have witnessed an increase in CBB, particularly among young consumers of Pakistan who are active SNS users. Given the economic challenges and shifting digital consumer trends, understanding the impact of SNS-driven influence

on consumer behaviour provides valuable insights for businesses, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Addressing these concerns can help develop strategies to promote responsible consumer behaviour and financial well-being (Mundel et al., 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Compulsive Buying Behaviour

Compulsive Buying Behaviour (CBB) is a phenomenon which can be defined as a buying behaviour that is continuous and repetitive and it is stimulated in result of some negative feelings or events. CBB is a decision which is not based on rationality because these decisions are combined with feeling, thoughts and sentiments. The emotions involved in CBB do not allow the customers to stop or control their buying at any moment and make them buy products which are either not required or afforded by them (Tokgoz, 2020). CBB is also a reaction towards the void created in the life of an individual which is filled by them through purchase of materials (Moon et al., 2017). According to Xu (2008), CBB is the result of individual's biological and psychosocial influences and acts as a tool to overcome their psychological insecurities. However, past researches confirm that this buying pattern originates from excessive usage of social media (Kshatriya & Shah, 2023; She et al., 2021).

SNS-Mediated Social Comparison

SNS-mediated social comparison is an intermediate step between heavy social media networking and CBB. Social comparison is the collective dilemma of human society (Coyne et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2017). In multiple disciplines, researcher and practitioners have admitted that social comparison is a natural phenomenon in which people compare themselves with others (Chan, 2008; Islam et al., 2018). Social comparison can be explained as an extent to which a person indulges in comparison with others in the society (Moon et al., 2017). Social comparison theory supports that individual compare their own materials belongings with media celebrities and peers (Festinger, 1954; Islam et al., 2018). Individuals now a days have this habit of self-evaluating themselves within their social groups. Therefore, according to Festinger, (1954), social comparisons can influence ones thinking, emotions and behaviours in the social context. People inclined towards social comparison are likely to form more social connections and subsequently get influenced through them (Moon et al., 2017). Thus, high socialization results into social comparison among individuals.

Susceptibility to Social Influence

Susceptibility to social influence, rooted in the human desire to conform to others' behaviours or norms, is amplified in digital environments where peer and influencer behaviours are more visible (Khare et al., 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019). This can be defined as vulnerability or defencelessness of a person to his/her interpersonal influences. This concept is introduced to measure the influence of reference group on a consumer (Bearden et al., 1989). It has two dimensions i.e., informative and normative (Moon et al., 2017). The habit of believing on the information gathered from others as precise reality is considered as informative social influence (ISI). Informative social influence does not need the person to be part of the reference group. However, normative social influence (NSI) is considered as a wish of a person to make their buying decisions consistent with others. Literature associates several consumption related behaviours with this concept such as increased shopping frequency (Huang et al., 2012), Group buying (Kuan et al., 2014) and purchase of those products which are recommended by friends. Thus, these findings from literature make it an effective construct which needs to be studied.

Consumer Resilience

The concept of resilience is the boundary object which is open for interpretation within their relevant research fields (Brand & Jax, 2007). Literature suggests that there exists the difference between system resilience and individual resilience. Like disturbance and stressful events can be restored in a resilient system, the same concept can be applied keeping in mind the complexity of an individual behaviour. Consumer resilience can be regarded as individuals' ability to withstand, recover and reorganize after stressful event (Budak et al., 2021). The importance of this construct lies in the fact that it protects the person, and helps him and her to recover from stressful situation (Malik et al., 2020). Initially this

construct was studied on young people and adults facing stress and anxiety in the field of psychology (Cheng et al., 2020). Subsequently, this construct was studied in other field where stress persist and an individual has to overcome it like health care (Tansey et al., 2017), military (Russell et al., 2021), academia (Moke et al., 2018), entrepreneurship (Renko et al., 2020), workplace (Charoensukmongkol & Suthatorn, 2018). However, the concept of consumer resilience is still in its infancy stage.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Susceptibility to Social Influence and Compulsive Buying Behaviour

CBB is an irresistible urge to purchase products, leading to distress and financial issues (Black, 2007). A significant factor influencing CBB is susceptibility to social influence, describes a tendency to adopt the opinions, behaviours or expectations of others. Bearden et al., (1989) proposed two dimensions of susceptibility i.e. normative social influence and informative social influence. The growing use of SNSs promotes research on these dimensions as how SNSs can enhance social cues alongside curated content which makes people more susceptible to external influences (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Those with high social influence become more prone to CBB. Thus, individuals buy compulsively to achieve social approval and maintain alignment with group norms. Furthermore, the combination of media and advertising exposure increases materialistic values which subsequently drives CBB (Dittmar, 2005). Thus, the advent of SNSs have increased this phenomenon by strengthening social influence on CBB specifically in fashion apparel consumption.

H_{1a} : Informative social influence has a positive influence on CBB in fashion apparel consumption

H_{1b} : Normative social influence has a positive influence on CBB in fashion apparel consumption

Mediating Role of SNS-Mediated Social Comparison

Research shows that mediating social comparison activities on social networks act as an important factor in explaining the association between social influence and CBB. SNSs increase social comparison effects because they enable endless peer-based content sharing and network interaction (Lou & Yuan, 2019). SNSs display perfected lifestyles to encourage upward social comparisons which trigger feelings of inadequacy that leads users to make compensatory shopping purchases (Dittmar, 2005; Jin & Ryu, 2020; Verduyn et al., 2020). The materialistic inclinations of users grow stronger through SNS features that allow users to interact with likes and comments (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Through their appealing content presentation of aspirational lifestyles influencers drive customers toward purchasing their recommended products. According to Ruan et al., (2023), individuals who are highly susceptible to social influence tend to perform social comparison behaviours. Through algorithmic personalization features on SNSs users receive more preferred content which intensifies these materialistic desires (Jin & Ryu, 2020).

Social cultural aspects influence the connections between these variables. Social comparison sensitivity reaches its peak in collectivist societies like Pakistan because members place high importance on group norms (Triandis, 2018). Through SNS-mediated social comparison individuals become more prone to develop CBB since they seek to imitate desirable lifestyles that exist online (Black, 2007). The complete understanding of this mediation process serves as the foundation to create interventions that will reduce negative consumer behaviours. This literature supports the following hypothesis:

H_{2a} : SNS-mediated social comparison mediates the association between informative social influence and CBB in fashion apparel consumption.

H_{2b} : SNS-mediated social comparison mediates the association between normative social influence and CBB in fashion apparel consumption.

Moderating Role of Consumer Resilience

Consumer resilience describes the capacity to deal with adverse experiences in consumption contexts (Ball & Lambertson, 2015). Resilience also involves personal capacities, such as emotion regulation, optimism, and impulse control, that help individuals regulate buying impulses and cope with stress (Budak et al., 2021). High-resilience consumers are better equipped to resist pressures like envy or SNS-based social comparison that often drive CBB (Ling et al., 2023). Studies find consumer resilience is negatively associated with CBB (Hegner et al., 2024). In other words, resilient consumers recover quickly

from stressors and maintain self-control, leading to more controlled spending and fewer compulsive purchases (Hegner et al., 2024). Therefore, keeping in view the previous research studies consumer resilience buffers the SNS-mediated social comparison against CBB, fostering more controlled spending. This literature supports the following hypothesis:

H₃: Consumer resilience weakens the association between SNS-mediated social comparison and CBB in fashion apparel consumption

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study has used quantitative research design to test the hypothesis, which is being done through survey. The survey includes items on the normative social influence, informative social influence, SNS-mediated social comparison, consumer resilience and CBB. It also has questions to evaluate the demographics of the respondents. The study in hand was conducted in non-contrived setting means research done in naturalistic setting or real-world settings with no artificial manipulation of the environment.

Sample and Data Collection Procedure

These participants of this exploratory study are individuals aged between 18 and 40 years residing in Pakistan who actively use Instagram, TikTok and Facebook to interact with fashion related content. This age group was targeted because they were the most active members of SNSs, with their high interaction with influencers and brands, making them prone to social influence and social comparison (Phua et al., 2017; Wang & Lee, 2020). However, overall, young consumers, regardless of gender, exhibit strong fashion involvement (Khare et al., 2011). Past studies have demonstrated younger demographics are extremely prone to experiencing the psychological and social consequences of social comparison which makes them the perfect sample group to examine the connection between SNS mediated behaviours and CBB (Chae, 2018). The participants of the current study are both men and women. Men were chosen as part of research because they are becoming more involved in fashion consumption according to shifts in social norms, as well as influencer driven marketing strategies (Jin & Ryu, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

A purposive sampling approach was used to recruit participants, specifically targeting individuals who are social media users and actively follow fashion influencers, engage with posts related to fashion apparel products, or purchase such items. This sampling approach is common in behavioural research to take the sample directly interested in the phenomenon at study (Etikan, 2016). A sample size of 300 was considered (in line with the guidelines for PLS-SEM). In this case, according to research about PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017), at least 10 times the biggest number of indicators in a model is needed for reliable results. The sample size also allows for very robust statistical analysis and improves the generalizability of the results.

Measures

Measurement items of this research study were adapted from the past research to confirm the validity of the constructs. All the responses of the survey were recorded on a 5-point Likert Scale. Specifically, compulsive buying behaviour was assessed using the items adopted from study of Tarka et al., (2022). The items forming the SNS-mediated social comparison were adapted from Dávila and Casabayó (2024). Measurement items of normative social influence and informative social influence were altered from the research done by Sun and Bao (2023). However, consumer resilience items were chosen and modified from the research conducted by Hegner et al., (2024).

Statistical Analysis

This research has used PLS-SEM to validate the constructs and their items and to prove the hypothesis. PLS SEM is the powerful tool which aids researcher to evaluate complex models with relatively smaller samples (Ringle et al., 2012). PLS-SEM has few limitations on normality of data and sample size, comparatively to covariance-based SEM (Chin & Newsted, 1999). Thus, PLS-SEM is more appropriate for the present exploratory study. Smart PLS software assist the researchers to check the model in two steps, firstly, with measurement model and then structure model respectively (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Demographics

Table 1 reflects the demographics of the respondents revealing a predominantly young and well-educated population, with 73% of respondents aged 18-24, while smaller proportions fall into the 25-34 (14%) and 34-40 (13%) age brackets. The gender distribution is nearly equal, with 52% female and 48% male participants. Majority of respondents (79%) hold at least a bachelor's degree, with 21% having only an intermediate qualification and another 21% possessing a master's degree. Marital status data indicates that 81% of participants are single, while only 19% are married, which aligns with the youthful age distribution. Social media usage patterns suggest that a substantial proportion (49.7%) spend more than 3 hours daily on social platforms, while only 4.7% limit their usage to less than an hour. Additionally, 24.7% engage for 2-3 hours, and 21% use social media for 1-2 hours daily. These findings highlight a digitally active, young, and well-educated population, which could have implications for their social behaviours, technological engagement, and lifestyle choices.

Table 1

Descriptives

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Age	18-24	219	73.0	73.0
	25-34	42	14.0	87.0
	34-40	39	13.0	100.0
Gender	Female	156	52.0	52.0
	Male	144	48.0	100.0
Qualification	Intermediate	63	21.0	80.7
	Bachelor's degree	174	58.0	58.0
	Master's degree	63	21.0	100.0
Marital Status	Married	57	19.0	19.0
	Single	243	81.0	100.0
Daily duration of social media usage	1-2 hours	63	21.0	21.0
	2-3 hours	74	24.7	45.7
	Less than 1 hour	14	4.7	49.3
	More than 3 hours	149	49.7	99.0

Common Method Biasness

To avoid systematic bias affecting the data collection, common method biasness approached was used (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The present study has used one-factor test using SPSS Software to make sure common method biasness is not a problem (Harman, 1976). The extraction method within which principal component by fixing it to one factor along with non-rotation method was used. Results confirmed only one factor which accounts for less than 50% of the variance (34.45 %). Hence, it was evident that there is no systematic biasness in the data.

Measurement Model

The measurement Model was used to evaluate the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the variables using confirmatory factor analysis through Smart PLS. To test the reliability of the variables, Cronbach's alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) were used. Table. 2, shows the CA ranging from 0.804 to 0.864 and CR Values ranging from 0.852 to 0.898. Thus, both variables CA and CR ranges exceed the suggested value of 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) reflecting the measurement items of each variable have good reliability. The Average Variance extracted (AVE) for all variables range from 0.539 to 0.733 which is also surpassing the threshold of 0.50. Therefore, it was concluded that convergent validity of each variable was sufficient (Hair et al., 2011).

Table 2
Cronbach’s Alpha, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted

Construct	CA	CR	AVE
CBB	0.864	0.898	0.595
CR	0.804	0.852	0.539
ISI	0.821	0.881	0.650
NSI	0.817	0.892	0.733
SC	0.831	0.888	0.664

ISI=Informative Social Influence; NSI=Normative Social Influence; CBB=Compulsive Buying; SC=SNS Mediated Social Comparison; CR= Consumer Resilience

For discriminant Validity Fornell-Larcker criterion test was conducted. This test represented that square root of the AVE of each variable in Table 2 (the diagonal elements) should be larger than the correlation values (off-diagonal elements) involving that construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Thus, Table. 3 shows diagonal values (Square root of AVE) which are greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations of that variable indicating that discriminant validity is acceptable (Chin, 1998).

Structure Model

The path coefficients along with their significance level were evaluated through 5000 bootstrapping on PLS-SEM. Figure 1 shows visual demonstration of the hypothetical paths between constructs and their explained variances (R²). The R² (coefficient of determination) is used to check the predictive accuracy of the SNS-mediated social comparison and CBB, respectively. Overall, the conceptual model reflects 51.2% of the variance in SNS-mediated social comparison, and 27.5% of the variance in CBB. The R² value of 0.512 for SNS-mediated social comparison and 0.275 of CBB was above the threshold of 0.13 (Cohen, 2013), which is considered as a moderate predictive power. Thus, the R² value of both constructs represents substantial predictive power.

Table 3
Fornell Larcker Test

Constructs	CB	CR	ISI	NSI	SC
CBB	0.771				
CR	0.277	0.734			
ISI	0.246	0.364	0.806		
NSI	0.418	0.273	0.447	0.856	
SC	0.504	0.376	0.452	0.698	0.815

ISI=Informative Social Influence; NSI=Normative Social Influence; CBB=Compulsive Buying Behaviour; SC=SNS Mediated Social Comparison; CR= Consumer resilience

Table. 4, reflects that both ISI ($\beta = -0.023$; $p < 0.721$) and NSI ($\beta = 0.137$; $p < 0.057$) were not statistically significant, not supporting H1a and H1b respectively. The results conclude that neither normative social influence nor informative social influence has a significant direct impact on CBB. This contradicts the initial hypotheses H1(a) and H1(b). One possible explanation is that the direct effects of normative social influence and informative social influence on CBB are overshadowed by the mediating role of SNS-mediated social comparison. Alternatively, the constructs may not have a strong standalone influence on CBB in the context of this study. This finding aligns with previous research by Hair et al., (2017), who argued that direct effects in complex models are often mediated by other variables.

Table 4
Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	β Values	T Values	P values	Results
ISI -> CBB	-0.023	0.357	0.721	Not Supported
NSI -> CBB	0.137	1.902	0.057	Not Supported

ISI=Informative Social Influence; NSI=Normative Social Influence; CBB=Compulsive Buying Behaviour

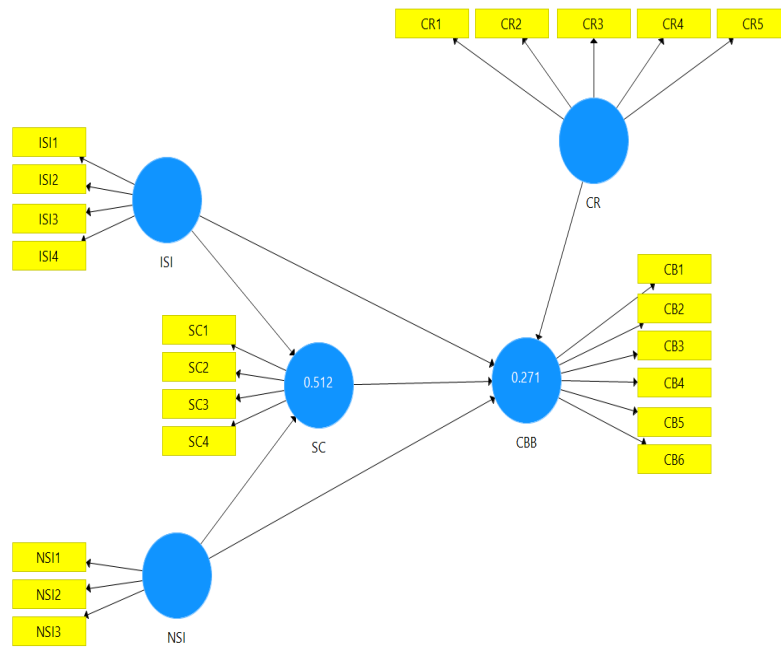


Fig. 1. Model Predictive Power

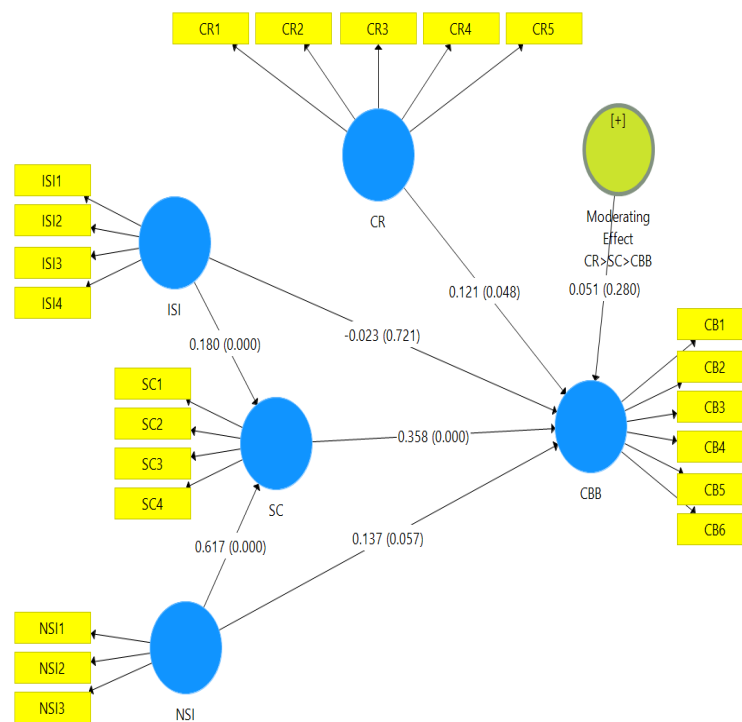


Fig. 1. Path Coefficients of research model

Mediation Test

Mediation result can be seen in Table. 5. The t value of the indirect effect (3.240) for the ISI → CBB was 0.064, yielding a p value of less than 0.05, making this association statistically significant, thus accepting H2 (a) reflecting full mediation. The indirect effects' empirical t value (4.951) of the NSI → CBB was 0.221, and a p value of less than 0.05. Thus, we can conclude that the SNS mediated social comparison is statistically significant and fully mediates the relationship between the paths from normative social influence to CBB. Thus, H2 (b) was supported.

Table 5
Mediation Effects

	B Values	T Values	P values	Results	Mediation Type
ISI -> SC -> CBB	0.064	3.240	0.001	Supported	Full Mediation
NSI -> SC -> CBB	0.221	4.951	0.000	Supported	Full Mediation

ISI=Informative Social Influence; NSI=Normative Social Influence; CBB=Compulsive Buying Behaviour; SC=SNS Mediated Social Comparison

Moderating Effect

According to Table. 6, although SNS-mediated social comparison was considered a mediator in this study, it was treated as an independent construct while testing the moderating effect of consumer resilience. The moderation hypothesis aimed to assess whether consumer resilience weakens the positive relationship between and CBB. However, the statistical results ($\beta = 0.051$, $p = 0.280$, $T = 1.080$) indicate that consumer resilience does not significantly alter this relationship suggesting that consumer resilience neither weakens nor strengthens the impact of SNS-mediated social comparison on CBB, contradicting expectations that resilience would mitigate compulsive buying tendencies.

The moderation effect plot further supports this finding. The three lines, representing different levels of consumer resilience (-1 SD, Mean, +1 SD), show a consistent positive slope, indicating that CBB increases with SNS-mediated social comparison regardless of resilience levels. If consumer resilience had a buffering effect, the high resilience line would have exhibited a flatter slope. Instead, the near-parallel nature of the lines suggests that individuals with higher consumer resilience still engage in CBB at similar rates, implying that other factors may be more influential in mitigating compulsive buying behaviour driven by social comparison on SNS platforms.

Table 6
Moderation Effects

	B Values	T Values	P values	Results
CR x SC -> CBB	0.051	1.080	0.280	Not Supported

CBB=Compulsive Buying Behaviour; SC=SNS Mediated Social Comparison; CR=Consumer Resilience

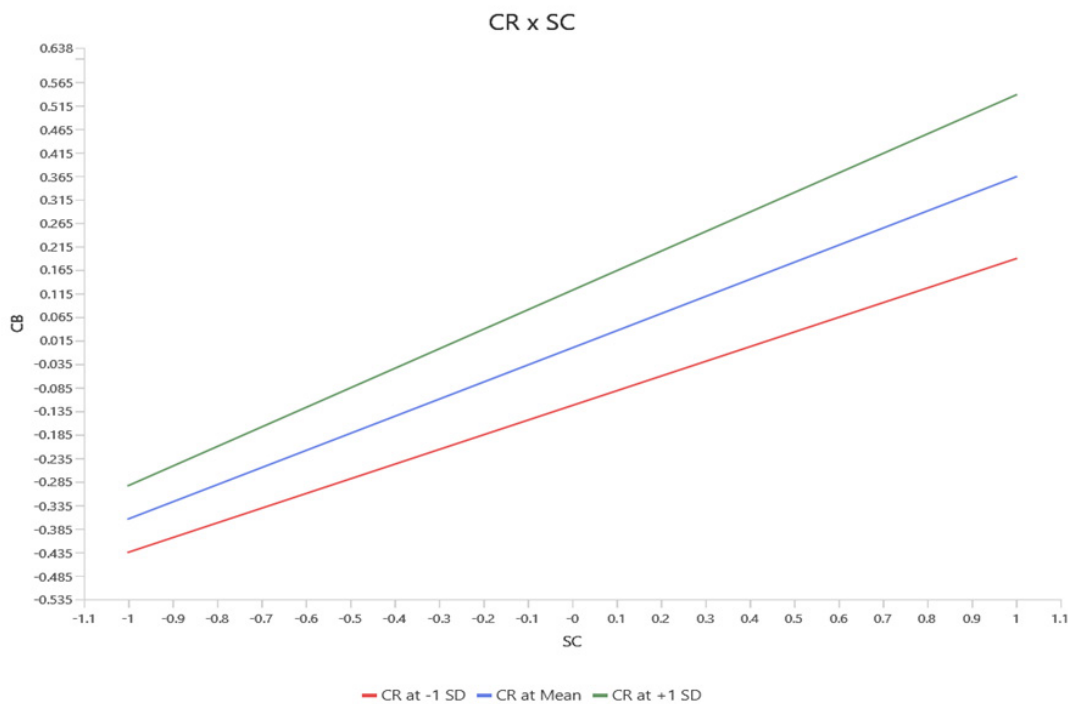


Fig. 3. Moderation Effects Plot

Discussion

The research study provides significant insights into the mechanism of susceptibility to social influence, SNS-mediated social comparison, and CBB in the context of SNSs. The results indicate that neither normative social influence nor informative social influence impacts CBB directly, instead their

impact is fully mediated through SNS-mediated social comparison. Thus, the findings demonstrate that direct effects in complex models tend to be masked by mediators according to (Hair et al., 2017). Thus, socially influenced individuals tend to perform social comparisons on SNSs which subsequently leads to more CBB. Research by Pahlevan Sharif et al., (2022) confirmed that financial social comparison and materialism mediated the association between heavy SNS usage and online compulsive buying. Also, the research by Ling et al., (2023) showed that materialism and envy mediated the association between upward social comparison and online compulsive buying among college students. Further, another research also confirmed that passive SNS Usage will result into upward social comparison and state anxiety, which may enhance compulsive buying among young women (Zheng et al., 2020). Thus, these studies confirm the role of social comparison as a mediator in the compulsive buying studies.

The current study showed that consumer resilience failed to create any meaningful impact on the relationship between SNS-mediated social comparison and CBB. Research by Hegner et al., (2024) also confirmed that consumer resilience acts as a negative factor in relation to CBB thus demonstrating resilient consumers regulate their spending better. The present research shows that resilience alone does not effectively combat the robust effects social comparison has on CBB. This research differences might be the result of cultural factors and the usage patterns of SNS platforms in Pakistan which intensify the effects of social comparisons on consumers.

CONCLUSION

This research illustrates that social comparison is a key antecedent of CBB in SNSs. While both normative social influence and informative social influence do not directly impact CBB, their effects are fully mediated by SNS-mediated social comparison. This confirms that people indulge themselves in social comparisons on SNSs, which aggravate their materialistic desires leading towards irrational buying behaviours. Moreover, in this study consumer resilience role as a moderator did not weaken the strong association of SNS mediated social comparison and CBB. This suggests the future researchers that resilience on its own does not mitigate the influence of SNS-mediated comparisons. Instead, the additional moderating variables should be used to offset this association. This research also highlights the need for awareness campaigns on financial literacy and self-regulation in SNSs environments and evaluation of compulsive buying tendencies across different cultures to develop more effective strategies for the promotion sustainable consumption behaviour of fashion apparel.

Implications

The study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it expands on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) by demonstrating that social comparison, rather than direct social influence, is the primary driver of CBB in SNS contexts. The findings contribute to consumer behaviour research by establishing that normative social influence and informative social influence indirectly influences CBB through SNS-mediated social comparison, offering new insights into the mechanisms underlying CBB. Additionally, the lack of moderating effect of consumer on this relationship challenges existing research that positions resilience as a protective factor in compulsive consumption behaviours (Hegner et al., 2024).

From a practical point of view, brands can utilize social comparison techniques by strategically positioning influencers and user-generated content that encourages aspirational consumption which should be considered as responsible consumption. Regulatory authorities should develop official guidelines that outline proper digital marketing standards for industry use. Authorities should introduce guidelines to overcome the adverse consequences of social comparison, leading to uncontrollable purchases resulting in financial burden for customers. Awareness campaigns should be run to inform users about the psychological effects of SNS-mediated social comparisons and encouraging consumers towards mindful shopping of fashion apparel. Pahlevan Sharif, et al., (2022) also recommended in their study to execute such awareness initiatives along with financial literacy campaigns. Lou and Yuan (2019) also examined how influencer influences consumer purchasing decisions on SNSs. However, all these insights should be used by marketers to develop marketing content which encourages sustainable and mindful purchasing behaviour.

Limitations & Future Scope

Although the current research generated useful insights, but it also has some limitations that needs to be addressed. This study is conducted in Pakistan therefore, the consumer response patterns is based on culture, social structures and economic conditions of Pakistan. Therefore, future studies need to duplicate this research in various other cultural environments to strengthen its general applicability. Young adults (18-40 years) made up most of the research sample, but they might not fully demonstrate how compulsive buying behaviours differ between age demographics. Future research should consider adding older demographic groups to study how generational factors shape compulsive buying behaviour of fashion apparel consumption. Future research should also be done on products other than apparel. The research collected its information through self-reported data that faces the potential for social desirability bias.

Future investigations should implement behavioural tracking systems to generate more objective observational data. Longitudinal research designs would enable better understanding of how excessive SNS usage results into CBB over time. Additional factors need to be included in consumer resilience operationalization because the analysis indicates limited significance from current moderating factors. It is suggested that future research should evaluate how financial literacy, self-regulation capabilities, mindfulness and psychological wellness levels affect the connection between social comparison and CBB.

Competing Interests

The authors declared no competing interests.

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