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Exploring the Nexus Between Online Consumerism and Women's Self-Esteem: A Critical Review

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Abstract

The rapid raise of digital technologies has significantly transformed consumer habits, establishing online shopping as a dominant mode of consumption. This review critically examines the relationship between online consumerism and women's self-esteem, discussing both positive and negative psychological effects. Grounded in frameworks like, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Model, Sociometer Theory, and Social Comparison Theory, analyzing the psychological, sociocultural, and consumer behavior aspects. This review explores how digital platforms, and different forms of marketing, algorithmic targeting, influencer marketing, and aspirational branding shape women's self-perception, identity formation, and emotional regulation. Online shopping positively stimulates, self-expression, and perceived control, offering instant validation on self-esteem and a sense of empowerment among women who indulge in it. However, constant exposure to idealized images, social comparisons with their ideal figures, and compulsive purchasing behaviors can exacerbate body dissatisfaction, psychological and emotional reliance, and diminished self-esteem. In the emerging study of consumer behaviour, this review identifies significant gaps in the current body of work, including the overrepresentation and the uncoerced infliction of Western culture on women, the lack of intersectional and longitudinal studies, and limited exploration of emerging technologies such as AI shopping assistants and augmented reality. By addressing these gaps, this future research can further research the dual role of online consumerism as both an instrument of empowerment and a source of social and psychological pressure. The paper highlights the importance of inclusivity, culturally sensitivity, and psychologically informed approaches to digital consumer experiences, especially in the case of women, further elaborating on the digital consumer policies.

Keywords: Online consumerism | Women consumers | Self-esteem | Social comparison | Emotional well-being.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The exponential growth of digital technologies has revolutionized consumer behaviour patterns in fundamental ways, with online consumerism becoming a preferred mode of business worldwide (Deng, 2022). In the present day, the inclination to purchase unnecessary and expensive products has emerged as a major consumer behaviour within society. Individuals, especially women are known to consume luxury products to satiate their social requirements, to be recognized, or find social acceptance (Eti, 2022).The convenience, ease of access, and customised experiences provided by online shopping websites have helped normalise frequent online consumption habits, tending to be driven beyond practical needs to hedonic and experiential drives (Shao, 2023). Simultaneously, the online world of business model in social media including strategic digital marketing, programmatic advertising has taken the aspects of visibility and personalization to an enhanced magnitude of marketing resulting in increased participation in digital consumer culture. (Dai et al., 2025),

Emerging literature on online consumerism indicates that digital consumption and consumer behaviour has positive and negative effects on introspection, mental health, and social comparison affecting an individual's self-esteem and identity formation. (Consiglio & van Osselaer, 2022). Self-esteem refers to an assessment by an individual of their own value (Jain, SHUKLA, et al., 2024). This self-criticality could be prolonged(chronic self-esteem) or momentary but recurring(state self-esteem) (De Ruiter, 2023), could be about one's entire self (global self-esteem) (Krupa-Kotara et al., 2023), or it could be on very particular factors like looks or other specific domain.(contingent self-esteem) (Earl, 2023). Self-esteem has been conceptualized as a multidimensional trait reflecting people's evaluative dispositions towards themselves, both their trait-level stability and state-dependent fluctuations.

The visual and interactive nature of online shopping coupled with constant exposure to consumer-oriented imagery creates novel psychosocial contexts wherein women negotiate personal value, social status, and self-concept (Consiglio & van Osselaer, 2022). Within this framework, perceived stress, avoidance coping, and self-esteem emerge as critical factors influencing compulsive online buying among women, revealing its psychological consequences, associations with mental health disorders, and its effect on consumer behaviour in the expanding e-commerce sector (Aryal & Bhattarai, 2024). Understanding these dynamics is critical, as the intersection of technology, consumerism, and psychology shapes not only individual well-being but also broader sociocultural norms around gender and consumption.

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on the interplay between online purchasing habits and women's self-esteem. In particular, it reviews empirical studies in psychological, sociocultural, and technological contexts to explore underlying processes, contextual moderators, and theory. Through the combination of evidence from psychology, consumer research, and digital media studies, the review attempts to offer a detailed analysis of how digital shopping contexts can enhance or erode self-esteem in women. The focus is on both immediate impacts of online shopping on self-judgmental processes and secondary impacts mediated by social comparison, materialism, and digital feedback processes.

For this review, online consumerism is understood as the regular practice of buying goods or services on the web, encompassing e-commerce portals, social media stores, and mobile apps (Akar, 2024). The review also takes into account theoretical models like sociometer theory, suggesting that self-esteem acts as a social inclusion and relational value monitor, offering some insight into the psychosocial processes connecting consumption practice and self-view. This paper aims to examine and synthesize empirical and theoretical research on online shopping behaviour among women, with a focus on the role of self-esteem, coping mechanisms, and sociocultural factors. It seeks to critically evaluate existing models, identify methodological limitations, and highlight gaps in the literature, ultimately providing insights for future research, theory development, and evidence-based digital consumer policy.

II. Conceptual & Theoretical Framework

A. Rosenberg's self-esteem model

The interconnection between women's self-esteem and online consumerism can be investigated based on several psychological, sociocultural, and consumer behaviour theories. These theories guide explanation of how digital shopping contexts affect women's self-esteem, which is increasing as part of consumer behaviour globally. Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES) was created to measure a person's overall positive or negative attitude toward themselves, reflecting the concept of global self-acceptance (García et al., 2019). The notion of status, beauty and success influences consumer behaviour in women making them indulge in shopping online for conspicuous and status consumption. Social comparison and digital ads are examples for external influence on self-esteem which leads to instability in self-perception. This external pressure and psychological influence can have a strong impact on women's views on their worth and, therefore, on their self-esteem (Lakshmi et al., 2024).

B. Sociometer theory

Another key theory is Leary and Baumeister's Sociometer Theory, which explains self-esteem as an internal measure of acceptance from society. This theory states that the level of self-esteem is mostly shaped by how someone feels they are included or excluded from significant social groups (Weisbuch et al., 2009). Digital spaces, social media, and marketing efforts frequently increase women's sense of belonging. Regular exposure to perfect, wished-for lives may reinforce or undermine their acceptance, impacting self-esteem directly. Online consumerism would involve women shopping with a purpose to preserve social relationships or increase their social status, where purchases are used as agents of securing social belonging. Consumer choice is driven by the need to "fit in" and be accepted

socially, enhancing the importance of self-esteem in these shopping experiences (Nadeem et al., 2020).

The theory suggests that individuals assess their abilities and attitudes by comparing them to those of others, a process that significantly influences self-image and subjective well-being. It identifies three types of social comparison: (a) upward social comparison, where one compares themselves to someone perceived as superior (e.g., in wealth, material possessions, social status, or physical attractiveness); (b) downward social comparison, where one compares themselves to someone perceived as inferior; and (c) lateral social comparison, where one compares themselves to someone considered equal.

c. Social Comparison Theory

Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory reinforces the statement, as it suggests that people assess their social value, abilities and attitude through comparing themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). For women consumers online, this comparison to peers, influencers, or celebrities is usually done through social media, most often with people they consider superior to them consciously or unconsciously. This process of comparison can have considerable effects on self-esteem, especially when idealized images do not match one's real life. The theory puts forth that regular exposure to extremely curated online identities has a negative impact on self-assessment and self-reflection, particularly when women compare themselves to digitally displayed standards of beauty, success, or lifestyle and perceive they do not live up to them, further affecting their self-esteem making them feel inferior (Crusius et al., 2022).

D. Consumer psychology and behaviour

With regard to consumption behaviour, hedonic vs. utilitarian shopping theories distinguish as two main purchasing reasons. Hedonic shopping is pleasure-driven, self-expressive, and emotionally gratifying, It is shopping is for the sheer joy of it, whereas utilitarian shopping is rational and focuses on need-satisfaction. In online consumerism, women tend to be influenced by both: convenience of purchase and ease of product accessibility to satisfy needs, as well as the emotional gratification from obtaining products that represents social identity and personal desires is equally significant. The hedonic quality of online consumption is driven by emotions and desire, and it can enhance self-esteem, as purchases often serve as symbols that reflect one's personal value and sense of self-worth.

The theory of impulse buying suggests that consumers frequently make impulsive purchases prompted by their emotional urges or their need for gratification, which often arises from poorly made decisions. Such behaviour is perceived in the context of online shopping also. Consumers feel validated and urged by the internet sites through customised tracking design, instant purchase bonuses and preset triggers to involve in impulse buying. Women usually fall prey to such gimmicks because women use consumption as a medium to attain a sense of social identity and emotional fulfilment. Impulse purchasing can be pleasing and gratifying, but later leads to regret and a feeling of inadequacy if the purchase does not serve long term of meet their actual expectations. This theory explores the concept of online consumption and self-esteem analysing how short-term gratification can damage a greater aspect of identity and value.

E. Digital media and female identity formation

The concept of Objectification theory provides an understanding of how psychological dynamics work in online consumerism. Convergence of online consumerism with this theory explains how imposed displays of idealistic content and indirect pressure to present oneself in a certain way can escalate self-objectification.(Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Digital consumerism further sets off women with self-objectifying by bombarding them with ads and posts on social media, reinforcing and glorifying unrealistic standards and materialism.(Calogero, 2012). This reinforced pressure and internalization distract women from cognitive reasoning and thinking, resulting in heightened vulnerability causing anxiety, depression, body dysmorphia and inferiority complex affecting their self-esteem and embedding diminished self-worth.

Techno capitalism, the intersection of technology with capitalist forms of economic behavior has a critical role in determining the digital economy (Krimsky, 2010). In the gendered digital economy, women are approached by marketing tactics that utilize socio-cultural expectations of femininity and consumerism (Rani et al., 2022). Although the digital economy holds the promise of empowerment and self-expression for women, it is situated in a system that still maintains traditional notions of gender and consumerist expectations (Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell, 2021). The outcome is a contradictory situation in which the identities of women are controlled through digital media that foster consumption as a means to empowerment while simultaneously supporting gender inequalities and supporting unattainable standards.

III. Patterns and Trends in Online Shopping Behaviour Amoung Women

Women's online purchasing behaviour is shaped not only by demographic and psychographic profiles but also by social motivations, cultural ideals, and digital marketing practices. As discussed above, the intersection of gender, consumer psychology, and digital technology makes this an important area of research for both academics and industry practitioners.

A. Demographic and Psychographic Trends

Demographic factors including age, income, education, and culture play powerful roles in shaping women's online buying habits. Mayee et al., (2023) state, on average, women aged 15 to 35 are the most active online shoppers, dedicating over an hour daily to e-commerce activities. While this age group exhibits strong brand loyalty, with 85% reporting some degree of allegiance to brands it is also observed that higher-income and more educated women are more likely to transition from in-store to online shopping, driven by the convenience and time-saving aspects of e-commerce (Biswas et al., 2024). (Duffy et al., 2022) states that educational attainment may not strongly influence perceptions of information quality but demographic factors do. Cultural context is a deciding factor in influencing consumption. For example, females in collectivist cultures (e.g., China, India) tend to seek inputs from families and cultural norms while shopping online, while females in more individualist cultures (e.g., USA, UK) tend to use consumption as self-expression (Hofstede, 2011; Zhou & Wong, 2021).

Lifestyle orientation, self-concept, and attitudes are some aspects of psychographic trends that further divide online female consumers. It has been found that women who are classified as "trendsetters" or "early adopters" are more open to buying from Instagram stores or TikTok bazaars directly, while cautious buyers only buy through well-established platforms such as Amazon (Lim et al., 2020) (Khan & Rana, 2023). Women's motivations for engaging in online shopping extend beyond utilitarian purposes.

B. Convenience

The major advantage of shopping online is that it breaks time and location barrier allowing customers to shop at any part of the day, it fits right into their busy lifestyle. Women, especially those with family responsibilities or demanding careers, prefer the convenience of various delivery options (e.g., express, same-day delivery) and also in case of any mistake in the order, it can be easily returned without much of a hassle. Digital wallets, credit card storage, and one-click purchase simplify the transaction process, further enhancing convenience. Online shopping eliminates the stress of crowds, long queues, and in-store sales pressures (Khan & Rana, 2023) it simultaneously removes opportunities for tactile product evaluation and social interaction, potentially altering consumption patterns and decision-making processes (Chaturvedi et al., 2022).

C. Emotional Regulation

"Retail therapy" refers to the act of shopping to boost one's mood or escape from unpleasant emotions. It typically involves purchasing items based on desire rather than necessity. It offers an immediate sense of relief, as buying new items can generate a temporary emotional boost (Tiwari & Tiwari, 2023).

- Aesthetic Escapism: (Altuwairiqi et al., 2019) notes platforms like Instagram and Pinterest offer visual experiences where users can browse aesthetically pleasing content, providing an emotional escape from everyday stressors.
- Instant Gratification: Online shopping often provides immediate purchase confirmation, which can generate a quick emotional payoff compared to in-store experiences (Lochab et al., 2025).
- Distraction from Negative Emotions: Women may engage in online shopping to distract themselves from personal issues or negative emotions, with browsing through sites and offers as an act of coping mechanism providing a temporary mental break says (Attarde & Choudhari, 2024).

D. Status Signalling and Identity

- Symbolic Consumption: when it comes to branded purchasing, the product and quality are prioritized second, it's the value of the brand and lifestyle it promotes that is viewed as a purchasing factor. It enables women to project wealth and identity, making them feel in range with their ideal personalities and celebrities(Prónay & Hetesi, 2016).
- Influencer Culture: This concept of marketing has been there for ages. In the social media era influencers have become an integral part in online marketing and determining purchase decisions among consumers. Women influencers posing the notion that purchasing helps them attain their desired identities, guides often mislead their followers. This helps understanding the link

between material consumption with personal expression.

- Public Performance: Flaunting and posting purchases and lifestyle choices on social media has become a form of personal branding. Displaying brands advertises lifestyle and self; according to (Matheson & Sedgwick, 2021) means self-commercialization

In shaping women's online consumption behaviour, advertisements and influencer marketing have become the primary factors. Large number of women who indulge in online consumption are mostly the ones exposed to targeted marketing, triggered by emotional appeals and a sense of belonging beyond the product feature.

E. Targeted Marketing

Fulfilling specific preferences of each individual can be challenging, as people have varied tastes and one product rarely satisfies everyone. To address this, many companies implement a strategy called target marketing (L. Chen, 2023), one of the most impactful features of online advertising is algorithmic targeting. This approach involves segmenting the market and tailoring products or services to meet the unique needs of each segment. The focus of target marketing is on understanding and addressing customers' specific needs and wants mostly based off of demographic and psychographic factors. These ads not only promote products but also reinforce established gendered consumption patterns. Research has shown that these targeted ads encourage women to purchase items that align with societal standards of beauty and femininity, subtly influencing their decisions and priorities when it comes to online shopping (Goodman et al., 2021) (Camilleri, 2018).

F. Aspirational Branding

In recent years, many brands have shifted their promotions toward aspirational branding, promoting narratives that equate empowerment, confidence, and beauty with consumption. Beauty companies frequently frame their products as crucial to self-confidence, while fashion campaigns promote the idea that style is empowerment, which partially is a fact. Yet, this expresses what (Parkins & Findlay, 2021) terms as "commodity feminism," where feminist ideals are appropriated and commodified, transforming empowerment into a purchasable product. The ulterior notion is that self-worth can be attained through material consumption making empowerment a mere consumer transaction. Far from genuinely challenging gender norms, such marketing strategies pose objectification by tying women's value to external appearance and consumer choices.

G. Influencers and Parasocial Relationships

Influencers become the faces of brands as they create a sense of aspiration and connection. Their recommendation often gives trust because they present themselves to be relatable and authentic. Unlike traditional advertisements, which are direct and promotional, influencers project to be personal and relatable which creates a sense of connection towards them. Women tend to trust influencers more than conventional ads, seeing them as real people whose opinions and recommendations are genuine without understanding the underlying marketing agendas (Kim & Kim, 2021). Studies have shown that influencers, especially those in beauty, fitness, and fashion niches, hold significant sway over purchase intentions, as they often set and reinforce appearance standards that women feel compelled to follow Influencers create parasocial relationships, where followers feel emotionally connected to them, leading to stronger influence when it comes to product recommendations (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). This, in turn, can encourage women to buy products that are promoted by influencers, perpetuating cycles of self-objectification, where women measure their value and success by their adherence to beauty and style standards.

H. Platform Effects: Shaping Women's Online Consumerism

The impact of online platforms on female buying behavior cannot be exaggerated further. Online platforms like Instagram and TikTok, and fashion apps like SHEIN, Zara, and H&M have permanently changed the way women shop online (Xie & Yang, 2023), with each one influencing purchasing behavior in its own distinct manner and having its own niche. Instagram and TikTok are interactive and visual shopping platforms, they allow women to interact with products not only through conventional adverts, but also through influencer posts, product demonstrations, and live reviews. This constant social validation generates a feeling of urgency and desire and urge them for call to action. Indirectly forcing women to buy products they view on these websites so that they can become part of hot trends or feel like they belong to specific social circles (Mehreen et al., 2020).

While Instagram and TikTok serve the aspirational and trendy sides of shopping, Amazon still stands supreme in the world of e-commerce by touting practicality and convenience. For women who value efficiency and dependability in shopping, Amazon is still the first choice. With its vast product offerings, instant shipping capabilities, and competitive prices, Amazon resonates with those looking for both cheap and convenient shopping. Similarly, Amazon customer reviews offer strong social proof, enabling women to make better-informed purchasing decisions through others' experiences. The fashion industry recognizes the demand for fast fashion online, especially among women, offering them easy, quick, latest and low-cost access. The corporate fashion industry taps into modern ideology of being in trend by being highly fashionable and visible online. Thus, online platforms serve aspirational, social, and practical motivations, but also underpins patterns of consumerism, appearance-based evaluation, and social conformity among female shoppers, (Sammanasu, 2021)

IV. Psychological Impacts of Online Consumerism on Women

Aforementioned, online consumption significantly affects a women's psychological health, both positive and negative. The emergence of e-commerce and the increasing digital and influencer marketing on social media and has made purchasing not just acquisition but also a part of identity formation, self-esteem and emotional well-being inflicting psychological impacts on women(Chouhan, 2023).

A. Positive Effects

(Jiang et al., 2024) affirm that psychologically, women feel empowered through the variety of choices and their control over them provided in online shopping. Compared to brick and mortar, women experience a more private and personalized shopping online, they find more security and abundance providing them cognitive ease. online stores are vast in range compared to physical retail stores. A space with abundance in choice create a sense of cognitive superiority, making them feel empowered when making the right choice. Full control over their planning and purchase experience, combined with social approvals, validations, and recommendations result in good decisions-making and makes them feel empowered.(Son & Lee, 2021). For these reasons, the ability to personally determine their own purchasing behaviours leads women to feel empowered, thus developing self-confidence, given that they are less swayed by outside influences, and focused on reflecting their own choices giving a boost in self-esteem. The sense of independence women feels making decisions of their own implies accountability and reflects the ease of shopping compared to physical shopping.

The online consumer experience, especially in the fashion/beauty industry, plays a large role in the promotion of self-expression and confidence. Women's attractiveness plays a significant role in shaping their self-perception. Researches have shown a positive link between attractiveness and self-esteem in women finding a positive correlation between physical appearance and appearance satisfaction (Mafra et al., 2022). Women can develop a personal style using online shopping, which promotes ownership of their identity and sense of authenticity. It allows women to express their identity by purchasing items 'closer' to a person's self-concept. Another way to perceive this is that women trying to imitate their online inspirations put pressure upon themselves and live a reinforced lifestyle (Matthew, 2024). Online shopping based on different industry provides women the opportunity to experiment with more new trends and products outside of societal standards. Self- expression through fashion and online shopping goes hand in hand with newly increased self-esteem, because women are aware they are presenting their ideal selves to the world.

B. Negative Effects

Though online shopping has been shown to facilitate empowerment and self-expression, it has serious negative psychological consequences, especially regarding self-esteem (Barari et al., 2020). Day in and day out, women are inundated with idealized portrayals of beauty, success, and lifestyle on social media and e-commerce platforms, which can sap their self-esteem. Often these portrayals are so heavily curated and filtered that they promote unattainable standards of wealth, and success. Women are especially vulnerable to social comparison, which is assessing themselves against an idealized framing of these standards (Betz et al., 2019). This diminishes their self-worth and self-concept that serves as a way to capture all the ideas, thoughts, and feelings they have about themselves. They may begin to internalize these standards of beauty or success and feel like they fall short in their own lives. The pressure to conform to idealized standards means that women feel more and more inadequate, impacting their own body image and self-esteem. The more women are exposed to these ideals, the more likely they are to compare themselves with others and feel less successful. According to Social Comparison Theory (1954), this happens because moving from group-based standards to personal standards is often seen as a sign of failure (Crusius et al., 2022).

Algorithmic targeting on Instagram, TikTok, and other fashion or e-commerce sites is only compounding this negativity by constantly presenting products that will get consumers to these idealized standards. While the personalization of advertisements aims to improve the online shopping experience, it can make women feel worse in this comparison and reinforce negative reinforcement.

In the last decade, studies have proven to show rising incidents which is seen more commonly among women, buying-shopping disorder, and an irresistible and intrusive preoccupation with purchasing items (Di Nicola et al., 2015). (Etxaburu et al., 2024) Emotional gratification that comes from acquiring products can create a short-term feeling of accomplishment or excitement. However, this behavior often leads to remorse and guilt once the emotional satisfaction fades, leaving women questioning their purchases. The compulsive desire to purchase products in response to emotional triggers, often exacerbated by limited-time offers and sales. This is closely linked to impulse buying, where women make unplanned purchases driven by the excitement of acquiring something new, rather than the actual need for the product. Over time, this behavior can lead to financial stress, emotional discomfort, and a sense of powerlessness, further impacting self-esteem (Santhiya, 2024).

Another negative psychological impact of online shopping is the emotional dependence that some women develop on “retail therapy”. Retail therapy, understood as shopping to relieve or improve mood, has received considerable attention in popular culture, particularly in the context of women’s consumer behavior. Psychological factors play a crucial role in influencing women’s engagement in retail therapy and how perceived stress and subjective well-being shape women’s reliance on retail therapy as a coping mechanism (Attarde & Choudhari, 2024). The act of purchasing products online can become a way to escape negative emotions or regulate stress, sadness, or anxiety. This form of emotional regulation provides temporary relief, but it is not a sustainable coping strategy. The repeated reliance on online shopping as a form of distraction from real-life issues can create a dependency, where the act of purchasing becomes an emotional crutch rather than a meaningful solution to underlying emotional needs.

This emotional dependence on shopping for relief can be particularly problematic for women who use retail therapy as a way to cope with negative self-perception or stress from external sources, such as work, family pressures, or societal expectations. Over time, the reliance on retail therapy can exacerbate feelings of isolation, guilt, and low self-esteem when women realize that their emotional needs are not truly being addressed by their purchasing behaviors.

The psychological outcomes of consumer behavior are deeply connected to cognitive and emotional processes, particularly around body image, identity coherence, and emotional regulation. Online retailers often feature models who reflect thin and attractive ideals to promote their products. While intended to drive sales, such imagery can also shape women’s body standards, leading them to reassess their own appearance. Frequent exposure may negatively impact well-being by reinforcing appearance concerns, increasing self-objectification, and lowering self-worth(Hollett et al., 2023). (Bonfanti et al., 2025)explains how online platforms exacerbates this exposure, leading to body dissatisfaction also known as ‘‘body dysmorphia” when women compare themselves to the digital images they see online. This constant exposure to idealized beauty standards, coupled with upward social comparison, can lead to a disconnection between women’s self-image and their body perception.

In terms of emotional regulation, the act of shopping online provides a momentary emotional escape or satisfaction, (Gioia & Rega, 2021) posit how it fails to address the deeper emotional issues that women may face. Emotional dependency is defined as a pattern of unmet emotional needs that individuals try to fulfil through (maladaptive) interpersonal relationships. The temporary emotional relief from buying products can create a false sense of emotional regulation. Emotionally dependent individuals display signs of addiction such as impulsivity, lack of emotional regulation, extreme signs of depression and anxiety. These characteristics explain how behavioural addiction and emotional dependency share core traits like Bipolar Spectrum Disorder (BSD) and how individuals develop compulsive buying behaviour (Mitchell & Potenza, 2014)

The purchase confirmation notifications like emails and messages following a purchase generates a sense of satisfaction, which pertains the positive emotional responses of shopping. Instant and continuous feedbacks, gratification and social validations online, fosters an emotional reinforcement loop (S. Chen et al., 2022) among women connecting purchase and transactional behavior with emotional reward driving them away from actual well-being, inducing impulse buying behaviour and emotional dependency on consumption. Feedback cycle can have a

long term effect causing digital addiction where social media approval and shopping site endorsement becomes more important and serious than real life interactions and personal satisfaction, further strengthens the understanding of the psychological impacts of online consumption on women's mental health(Mari et al., 2023).

V. Gaps, Contradictions, and Methodological Limitations in Current Literature

In the extending researches on the relationship between online shopping and women's self-esteem, there exists gaps, contradictions, and methodological limitation in the literature. One of the main contradictions in the pre-existing body of research is the psychological effects of online shopping on self-esteem. Mixed results were observed in the studies of this subject with some suggesting online shopping boosts self-esteem (Jain, Shukla, et al., 2024) and the rest indicating it diminishes (Guo et al., 2024). The current research also discusses both the positive aspects of online shopping; like sense of control and empowerment in women, alignment of purchase with personal identity and values, and negative aspects like unnatural standards affecting women's self-esteem, compulsive buying behavior, social comparison guilt, remorse and emotional reliance on online consumption displayed and retail therapy. This contradiction in findings on the impact of women's self-esteem in online shopping is subjective and dependent on various factors such as drivers of shopping behavior, individual characteristics, and the dynamics of the online environment.

A key limitation in much of the existing literature is over-representation of Western, urban, middle-class women in studies on online consumerism and self-esteem. The majority of research in this area focuses on women from Western countries like the United States (Kooti et al., 2015) and the United Kingdom (Kirby-Hawkins et al., 2019), primarily from urban middle-class settings (Yang et al., 2007). These findings may not be universal or apply to women from diverse culture, socioeconomic or geographical origins. Women of developing economy and rural setting can have diverse factors that influence their consumer behaviour like varied shopping motivation, varied access to digital platforms, and unique psychosocial factors.

The cultural bias present in these studies restricts the ability to evaluate the impact of self-esteem across diverse global contexts because of their lack of objectivity. Even if women are collectively considered, gender norms, consumer habits, and societal expectations of beauty and success differ significantly across cultures (Voegeli et al., 2021) (Briscoe et al., 2021). Studies examining women from collectivist societies (e.g., India or China) versus those from more individualistic societies (e.g., the United States or Sweden) may generate vastly different results in how online shopping influences self-esteem and identity. Cross-cultural studies are needed to explore in depth the current findings and to provide more understanding of self-esteem in the context of online consumerism.

Additionally, intersectionality is under-explored. Existing research is predominantly about women as a collective group, excluding the impact of variables like race, sexuality, and age on online consumer behavior and self-esteem. For instance, women from racial minorities or different ethnicities undergo pressures and motivations regarding beauty standards and consumerism compared to white women. Similarly, age-wise classifications in online shopping behavior are frequently neglected, with research predominantly focusing on younger women. An intersectional approach would provide a more extensive understanding of how connecting identities shape online shopping behavior and their psychological impacts.

Concluding, the methodology used in this research also emerges to be a limitation. The methodology adopted in this research is a review methodology where research carried out in the past have been reviewed and their findings presented in a critical manner. The drawback from a review method is that it tends to restrict originality, as it depends mainly on prevalent studies instead of producing new data. There is also the probability of bias creeping in if the sources selected are subjective. Furthermore, incomplete or outdated literature could impact precision, and conflicting findings could complicate synthesis, lower clarity, and validity of the research on the whole (Snyder, 2019).

A. Future Directions for Research

Several key areas remain underexplored in the study, highlighting important directions for future research. To enhance the depth and applicability of this field, scholars should focus on inclusive, longitudinal, and technologically informed studies.

One of the most significant gaps in existing research is as previously mentioned, lack of intersectionality. Most studies predominantly focus on Western, urban, and middle-class women, failing to account for the diverse experiences of marginalized groups. Future research should explore the experiences of women from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as women with various sexual orientations and age groups. Incorporating an

intersectional approach will provide a more nuanced understanding of how gender, race, class, and other social factors influence online shopping behaviors and their psychological consequences. This would help address the heteronormative, biased narratives that dominate current discourse and ensure a more representative view of women's experiences in online consumer culture.

Current studies largely rely on cross-sectional designs, which capture data at a single point in time, thus limiting our understanding of causal relationships and long-term effects. To better understand how online shopping impacts women's self-esteem and emotional health, longitudinal research is essential. Tracking women over time would allow researchers to determine how repeated exposure to digital consumerism influences self-esteem and identity formation, helping to clarify whether online shopping boosts or diminishes self-worth in the long run. Additionally, experimental designs could be used to manipulate exposure to online shopping environments (e.g., through targeted advertisements) and observe immediate changes in self-esteem and emotional well-being. Such studies would offer valuable insight into causal links between online shopping behaviors and psychological outcomes.

As digital technologies have already intertwined with human life, future research should investigate more on the new age AI shopping assistants, virtual try-ons, and augmented reality (AR) and its effects on women's online shopping experiences and psychological well-being. AI shopping assistants, for instance, are designed to recommend products based on individual preferences and behaviors, potentially influencing consumer decisions on a deeper emotional level. Similarly, AR and virtual try-ons enable consumers to interact with products before making a purchase, potentially reducing the uncertainty that comes with online shopping. All these advanced features enrich your shopping experience online by making it more customized and immersive. However, while these developments may enhance convenience, they also raise questions about privacy, data security, and the psychological impact of hyper-personalized shopping experiences. Research is needed to understand how these technologies shape consumer identity, emotional regulation, and self-esteem in both positive and negative ways.

As e-commerce is gaining attention, increased calls for ethical designs and advertising regulation is needed. The present regulation structure for online advertising, especially the one's concerning women's self-image, is required.

Research should be focused on how advertising regulations to reduce the negative effects of idealized representations could be adapted, particularly those related to beauty standards and materialism. An ethical viewpoint in needed in this research to assess how the design of platforms pushes purchasing triggers in user based on components of design, i.e., influencer marketing, product targeting, feedback loops, etc. Researchers can further explore the area for ethical design of an app that cuts down exploitative tactics while enhancing consumer experiences in a more empowering way.

VI. Conclusion

This review highlights the complex relationship between online consumerism and women's self-esteem, exploring both the positive and negative psychological impacts. On one hand, online shopping offers empowerment through choice, control, and self-expression, particularly in the fashion and beauty sectors. On the other hand, the constant exposure to idealized images on social media and e-commerce platforms can undermine self-esteem, instilling negative social comparisons, compulsive buying behaviors, and emotional dependence. Despite these insights, gaps in the literature, particularly regarding intersectionality, longitudinal studies, and technological advancements, hinder a comprehensive understanding of the psychological outcomes of digital consumption.

This review has implications for several fields. In psychology, debates are present on the need for a more combined approach to understand the emotional and cognitive outcomes of online shopping. In the case of gender studies, it identifies how heteronormative norms, gendered consumption patterns, and societal expectations shape women's self-concept and identity. The e-commerce industry can profit of these insights by adopting marketing strategies and curated platform designs that prioritize mental well-being and boost self-esteem.

Reflecting on these findings, online consumerism is identified as a double-edged sword in influencing women's self-esteem. Although it fosters opportunities for empowerment and self-expression, it parallelly induces unrealistic ideals and standards in women which may affect their emotional health and well-being. The future of digital consumer culture must handle forces with cautions, enabling women empowering choices simultaneously protecting their mental well-being. With technology advancing, future researches understanding that duality of

online consumption will essentially help in designing healthier, more inclusive, and more empowering shopping experiences.

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