

Social Comparison and Impulsive Buying Behavior, Moderating Role of Consumer Emotional Intelligence and Mediating Role of Stress: A Moderated Mediation Model

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Received: 07th June 2021-

Revised:- 11th August 2021

Accepted: 06th September 2021

Abstract: This study has explored the role social comparison, a social stressor, in shaping consumer impulsive buying behavior. This study investigated the processes through which social comparison lead to impulse purchase behavior, also a boundary condition in form of emotional intelligence is highlighted. To obtain data, this study adopted cross-sectional design and gathered data from consumers shopping in Pakistan, on questionnaires. A total of 637 complete responses were gathered and analyzed further. For data analysis AMOS and SPSS were used. For regression analysis PROCESS analytical technique by Preacher and Hayes was used. Results verified the proposed hypothesis. Findings highlight the role of social comparison and stress in shaping impulsive buying behavior of consumers. Moreover, findings also suggest that consumers high in emotional intelligence are less affected by the negative effects of social comparison. Impulsive buying impose may appear beneficial at the instant, yet it imposes serious threats on mental well-being of the consumers. This is study is investigating factors that contribute into this phenomenon to get a deeper insight into it.

Keywords: Impulsive buying, stress, social comparison, emotional intelligence

Introduction

Consumers, depending upon their age groups, social class, needs and wants, display different purchase behaviors. One type of consumers are impulsive consumers who indulge in excessive buying such that they

operate under the urge to buy at an exceptional rate; such buyers often carry out extensive shopping sprees (Black, 2007). Impulsive buying might render temporary benefits yet in long term such impulsive conduct can render harmful ramifications for the consumer. (Edwards, 1992). The buying impulse was explained by Rook (1987) as a distinctive type of behavior of consumers. It was explained as the behavior in which loss of control occurs for the sake of certain feeling. Compulsive buying is a negative behavior which could lead to adverse consequences for both consumers as well as the society in long run. Hence, understanding such challenging purchase behavior is crucial as a better understanding of such conduct would aid in managing such behavior effectively.

Individuals always compare themselves with others either intentionally or unintentionally (Gilbert *et al.*, 1995). Likewise, social comparison information often leads to favorable or unfavorable consequences which may eventually shape the buying choices of the consumers (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). Upward comparison is often done to boost one's perceived social status and strengthen one's self-identity. Individuals always perceive themselves to be a part of upper class and they consistently try to reduce the gap between their current and desired upper class (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). When this social comparison creates a discrepancy between actual and ideal self, stress is generated. Previous research has linked increased depression, anxiety and stress with dysfunctional buying behaviors (Koh *et al.*, 2020; Gallagher *et al.*, 2017). For instance, Moon and Attiq, (2018) argued that anxious customers are more prone to buy compulsively as they find it as way of escaping tension. Moreover, when people are depressed they often show compulsive disorders (Otero-López, and Villardefrancos, 2014) and indulge in impulsive behaviors such as impulse buying (He *et al.*, 2018). Stress has also been linked with dysfunctional buying behavior in previous studies (He *et al.*, 2018; Moon and Attiq, 2018). Researchers argue that impulsive buying is a means to reduce stress as it acts as a coping mechanism against social, financial and psychological stressors (Eccles, 2002; Lou and Byon, 2018). Hence, this study argues that social comparison can render harmful consequences for individuals, who may then feel depressed and stressed leading to dysfunctional buying behaviors.

Research has frequently linked social stressors and impulsive buying by incorporating concepts like interpersonal influence, social comparisons, interdependent self-construal etc. (Dameyasani and Abraham, 2013; Chen, *et al.*, 2010; Silvera *et al.*, 2008; Zhang *et al.*, 2010). Where this is well established notion that stress inflicts difficulty upon consumers in regulating their purchase behavior (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2003; Mattson and Dubinsky, 1987). Customers in negative inclinations might be currently endeavoring to reduce the repulsive state of mind (Elliott, 1994). This clarification for impulsive shopping is in accordance with discoveries on self-gifting, a behavior regularly propelled by endeavors to pick oneself up or be good to oneself as per others. The previous or current mental state of a consumer have a strong influence on the behavior of the consumer such that a negative mental state could lead to dysfunctional purchase decisions (Belk, 1975). Medical and clinical research also categorize impulsivity in buying as a disorder (Dell'Osso *et al.*, 2006), where stress is considered as a trigger of this disorder. Based on the arguments presented above, it can be inferred that social comparison is a stressful event that causes consumers to go for impulsive buying.

Along with, customer's emotional intelligence plays significant role in the marketing exchanges. Kidwell *et al.* (2008) developed a consumer emotional intelligence scale and construct in relevance to marketing and consumer based research. In 2011, Kidwell *et al.* (2011) provided the probable applications of consumer

emotional intelligence in the field of marketing exchanges, which included the moderating role of consumer emotional intelligence with relevance to buying behaviors.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

People have a drive to assess themselves and they assess themselves by comparison with others when non-social means are inaccessible (Sherlock and Wagstaff. 2019; Wood, 1989). Recent advent of social media has made these comparisons even more intense. Sherlock and Wagstaff (2019) highlighted that individuals from different age groups, varied social status and financial standing continuously indulge in social comparisons. Individuals socially compare themselves to others even though they are not aware of it. Goethals, (1986) noticed that it can be difficult to hear an individual on the radio who's savvy to a great degree, or see someone who's handsome to a great degree in the market, or take part on a board with a specialist without participating in social comparison regardless of the amount we might want not to.

Comparing either positively or negatively to others in the society is an act of personality and is known as social comparison (Wheeler and Miyake, 1992). To remain socially in group, customers can buy without thinking strategically or making cognitive efforts while shopping (Mead *et al.*, 2011). Inspired by what others with more power have envy comes into effect, and a consumer comparing is most probable victim of greed to get hold of others superior possession (Crusius and Mussweiler, 2012). Social appropriation of impulsive buying make it more common for consumers doing social comparisons (Podoshen and Andrzejewski, 2012). Doing shopping of luxury or fashion products mostly people are buying on the basis of social comparisons and they act impulsively by exhibiting impulsive buying behavior (Zhang and Kim, 2013). Social comparisons have been causing impulsive buying behavior among the youth in Indonesia, as youth have a cultural influence of comparisons with each other and they are depicting that in their shopping behavior (Dameyasani and Abraham, 2013). For the sake of social identity which is fully motivated due to social comparisons, consumer depict impulsive buying behavior (Segal and Podoshen, 2013).

Specifically in feudalistic cultures as well as collectivistic cultures, individuals derive self-worth and recognition from others thus when they feel that they lag behind others they tend to buy and deliver things impulsively to regain the self-worth. Making impulsive buying decisions is also seen as a method of pleasing others such as superiors and peers (Dameyasani and Abraham, 2013). Pleasing others makes individuals secure and content with themselves thus, in this way impulsive buying makes them feel that they are investing in their well-being. Moreover, latest research on consumers has demonstrated that social rejection can prompt endeavors at social reconnection through means, for example, affiliative spending (Mead *et al.*, 2011), and purchase of nostalgic items that assist in reinforcing reconnections with the past (Loveland *et al.*, 2010). This is all due to comparison state of one in which different times and others are being compared to one's own time and self. On the basis of this argumentation, it is proposed that

H1: *Social comparison has a positive impact on impulsive buying behavior*

The human tendency to take part in comparison is pervasive to the point that individuals automatically compare and other people who are unmistakably not applicable comparison targets, and they need to exert mental effort to fix the mental outcomes of such unseemly comparison (Gilbert *et al.*, 1995). Along these lines, while we may regularly take part in deliberate comparisons, much social comparison action happens without expectation (Mussweiler *et al.*, 2004). Thusly, a comparison with someone else who has a better possession may trigger jealousy, discontent and desirous behavioral inclination in a programmed form, without psychological exertion or expectation. This thinking proposes that social comparison may well be

an unconstrained and programmed response. Individuals may in fact be helpless before their envy-filled impulses and subsequently fall prey to stress (Crusius and Mussweiler, 2012).

Social comparison theory recommends that not all people are influenced to a similar degree by the indications they see in others. Those with a solid requirement for social comparison are particularly delicate to the indications they see in others and in this way are more inclined to stress (Buunk & Schaufeli, 1993; Mi-Youn & Suk, 2018). They also likewise propose that person's level of confidence gives off an impression of being vital to the comprehension of social comparison and stress.

Social strains such as problematic social life, such as feelings of being ostracized, excluded, and perceptions of insufficiency lead to negative attitudes and behaviors. In similar vein, we can infer that social comparison is a social strain which makes individuals feel that they are left behind which further makes them distressed and worried. Research highlights that individuals when feels depressed they tend to evaluate themselves negatively (Wetherallet *et al.*, 2019) which results in further negative outcomes. Negative social comparison is also linked with contemplation, dysfunctional behaviors, self-humiliation, and self-criticism. All these factors create a feeling of distress and individual begins to feel stressed, anxious and worthless. Social comparisons can cause demotivation to individuals, and threat to self-esteem resulting in chronic stress (Wheeler and Miyake, 1992). According to Schwartz, (2004) social comparisons may lead to reduction in satisfaction as it destroys our perception of wellbeing in comparison to others. This is a social chronic stress, that social comparisons may make individuals degraded and reduced in their status, when compared to others (Dittmar *et al.*, 2014). Due to curtailment of social comparisons lead to a threat to one's self-image (Dunn *et al.*, 2012). A sense of deprivations starts to develop among individuals who are doing social comparisons (Stark and Hyll, 2011). All these effects are causing agents of stress.

Stress in consumers, is pushing them towards a retail therapy (Impulsive Buying Behavior) to overcome stresses as identified by Hausman (2000). Lazarus and Folkamn's theory of stress also supports the notion that once individuals face stress they tend reduce it by certain means. To deal with negative experiences of stress, impulsive buying is used as an escape mechanism (Desarbo and Edwards, 1996). To regain emotional and mental stability and establish the sense of control, impulsive buying is used as a tool (Youn and Faber, 2000). For instance, fashion related purchases helps consumers to diminish the social stress through impulsive buying behavior (Park *et al.*, 2006).

As stated earlier, social comparison results in feelings of stress thus, to overcome the feelings of distress and anxiety, impulsive buying is opted as a coping mechanism (Darratet *et al.*, 2016). Stress exhausts one's resources, diminishes self-control, and destabilizes the emotional well-being, which often lead to impulse control disorder and impulsive buying (Baumeister, 2002). Stress is detrimental for mental health of victim and social chronic stress leads to impulsive buying; since it is a self-pleasure action providing relaxation to the individual doing it (Verplanken *et al.*, 2005).

Thus, it is proposed that

H2: Social comparison has a positive impact on stress

H3: Stress has a positive impact on impulsive buying

Comparing to the others in the society at the same level consumers have been found happy to pay more or buy impulsively due to their social comparison (Yoon and Vargas, 2010). In most of the cases due to social comparison evolution of negativity of self-evaluation in comparison to others rises, which is desirable as an individual may be lacking something or is behind others. This is a materialistic approach and as a coping mechanism unplanned possession through impulsive buying is done to reduce the stress (Dittmar *et al.*,

2014). Social comparisons relation to impulsive buying has been identified in mega retail stores (Attiq *et al.*, 2015). However if the social comparison is inappropriate the impulsiveness has probability to go high or low depending due to other factors (Music, 2014).

Negative social comparison lead to an unstable self-concepts and individuals begin to feel incompetent and left behind after episodes of negative comparison, this makes them distressed (Jiang and Ngien, 2020; Wilcox and Laird, 2000). Often material objects are used as tool to stabilize the self-worth (Atalay and Meloy, 2011); in such cases impulsive buying serves the means of decreasing stress and regaining self-worth. The fear of negative evaluations to others creates stress due to psycho social stressor like social comparison, the thinking that an individual is lacking something or behind someone causes chronic stress due to social factors (Dittmar *et al.*, 2014). Few research studies have identified social comparisons to effect consumption behavior of the consumer due to stress associated with the social competition and fear of negative evaluation (Crusius and Mussweiler, 2012; Dameyasani and Abraham, 2013; Chen *et al.*, 2010; Mead *et al.*, 2011).

As per the guidance provided by emotion focused coping theory by Lazarus (1984). Emotion focused coping is considered due to the reason that we are dealing with psychosocial stressors which are beyond the control of an individual and they cannot be solved based on problem focus coping. As society cannot be shaped as per an individual's desire, thus it is more likely the comparisons and resulting discrepancy between ideal and actual self will lead to a state of stress and this stress will then be mitigated via impulsive purchases. Thus it is proposed that

H4: Stress mediates the relationship between Social Comparison and Impulsive buying behavior in such a way that people with high social comparison will have high stress and the stress in turn will result in more impulsive buying behavior.

When we talk about coping to stress, Consumer emotional intelligence is characterized as an individual's capacity to skillfully utilize emotional information to accomplish a coveted outcome of purchaser. People vary in the ability with which they can recognize their emotions and those of others, control these emotions, and utilize the information offered by their sentiments to propel versatile conduct (Salovey *et al.*, 2001; Salovey and Mayer, 1990).

The connection amongst EI and stress is established on the idea that negative feelings and stress are the aftereffect of some broken connection between parts of the self and the environment, and that the capacity (EI) to 'peruse' and oversee feelings in the self as well as other people is a mediator in this procedure. Basically, emotional intelligence is considered to represent singular contrasts in the ability to process data of emotional nature and to have the capacity to relate these to more extensive perceptions (Slaski and Cartwright, 2003). Furthermore, it has been suggested that EI may cradle stress by advancing positive methods for adapting which, thus, prompt effective adjustment (Keefer *et al.*, 2009). Since adapting forms are dependent upon the (effective) operationalization of key individual capabilities/ assets (Compas *et al.*, 2001), these could well be presented by EI, interpreted as either a range of abilities situated as the convergence of cognizance and feeling, or as our 'emotional identity'. In that capacity, EI isn't about emotions essentially however more about the route in which people viably incorporate emotions with thoughts leading to behavior (Mayer *et al.*, 2000) thus can act to decrease aversive emotional encounters.

There is some preparatory confirmation to recommend that emotional intelligence may shield individuals from stress and prompt better adjustment. An essential part of emotional intelligence is the capacity to ponder and deal with one's feelings (Peter & Krishnakumar, 2010; Yakin & Totu, 2018). Emotional

intelligence provides individuals with the necessary skills to comprehend, manage, and control their emotions as well as those of others. Emotionally intelligent individuals possess higher control over their emotions and behaviors thus, it is perceived that when subjected to social comparison they will deal with the situation sensibly and not let the situation provoke themselves (Holmgreen *et al.*, 2017; Shih-Yu, 2019; Por *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, increased personal competencies and skills tend to buffer the perceptions of loss in stressful environments (Por *et al.*, 2011). Mayer and Gaschke, (1988) exhibited that people consistently think about their sentiments by checking, assessing, and controlling them, thus, it is plausible to expect that individuals high in emotional intelligence would not feel stressed after an adverse episode of social comparison rather they would deal with the situation more mindfully and practically. Thus it is proposed that,

H5: Consumer Emotional Intelligence moderates mediated relationship through stress between social comparison and impulsive buying behavior in such a way that people with high consumer emotional intelligence will weaken the mediated relationship with impulsive buying behavior.

Based on the argumentation presented above this study is aimed at investigating the role of social comparison in affecting impulsive buying behavior with the mediating role of stress. Also, this study aims at investigating a boundary condition of this relationship i.e., consumer's emotional intelligence. The conceptual framework of this study is shown below.

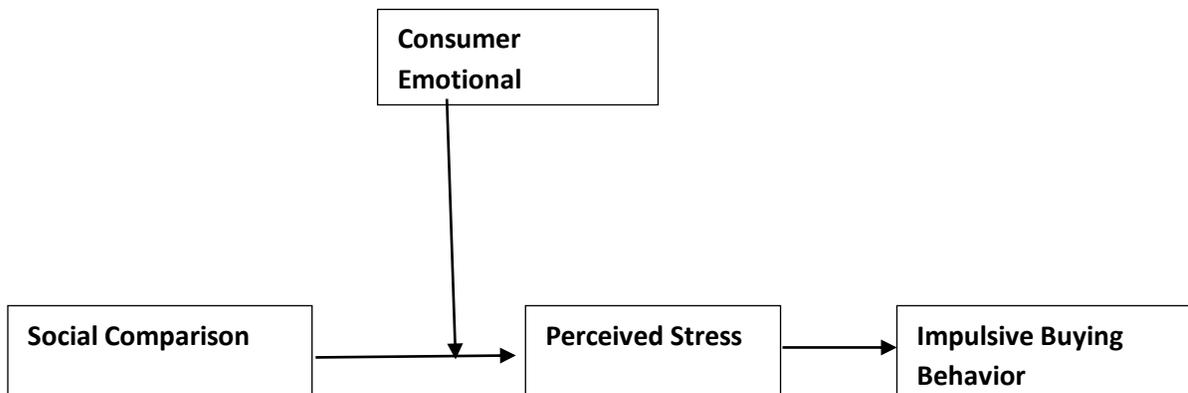


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Methodology

This study has used relational survey design, and cross sectional research type as the data has been collected from consumers at a single point of time and have been used for data analysis. This is a field study because the participant's i.e., consumers were contacted, who are shopping from malls and mega malls of Pakistan with relative buying powers and education, to fill the questionnaires in their shopping environment.

Sample selection has been done on the basis of convenience, from all across Pakistani. Prior to filling the questionnaire, they were asked that "Have they ever bought something unplanned or have they ever bought something which was not on the shopping list, this methodology has been classified as convenience sampling in line with the previous literature (Floh and Madlberger, 2013; Hsu *et al.*, 2012; Kinley *et al.*, 2010; Liu *et al.*, 2013). These studies used this recruitment method to recruit participants for their studies.

Data has been analyzed through SPSS and AMOS software. Multiple regression analysis Process V3.0 by Hayes (2018) was used to find out the predictions of Impulsive buying behavior by different independent variables, the mediating effects and moderated mediation effects. Model 4, and Model 7 were used.

Instruments

- **Social Comparison:** It is measured through instrument developed by Gibbons and Buunk, (1999) of 11 items. One sample item includes “I always pay a lot of attention to how I do things compared with how others do things.”
- **Perceived Stress:** Perceived Stress is measured through instrument developed by Cohen *et al.* (1983) of 14 items. One sample item includes “how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?”
- **Impulsive Buying Behavior:** Impulsive buying behavior is measured through instrument developed by Rook *et al.* (1995) of 09 items. One sample item includes “I often buy things spontaneously.”
- **Consumer Emotional Intelligence:** Consumer Emotional Intelligence is measured through instrument developed by Kidwell *et al.* (2008) of 18 items. One sample item includes “How useful might it be to feel tension when interacting with an aggressive/pushy salesperson when making a purchase?”

Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 637 complete responses were retrieved from respondents. Amongst respondents, 66.3% were males while 33.7% were females. Maximum respondents were 25 years or below of their age. Also most of the respondents were employed with an average salary of 25000 or below. Respondents also provided information regarding their educational qualification; amongst them 36.7% were graduate or below whereas 53.3% had higher level educational degrees including M.Phil. and PhD.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA was performed to assess the validity of measurements used and establish the discriminant and convergent validity of the scales.

According to Cuaet *al.* (2001) a construct having the factor loadings above 0.4 are considered as practically significant construct. Since all the items used has factor loadings greater than 0.4 so they were used in further analysis. Moreover, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all variables was >0.5. Detailed results of CFA are presented in Appendix 1.

Correlation Analysis

Table 1: Correlations

	Social	CEI	Stress	IBB
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	Comparison			
Social Comparison	(0.86)			
CEI	.53**	(0.84)		
Stress	.40**	.02	(0.81)	
IBB	.42**	-.07	.69**	(0.85)

Note: Alpha Reliabilities are given in parenthesis and bold.

Table 1 reports the findings of correlation, the degree of associate between variables is tested in this analysis. The main concerned degree of association is between independent variables and mediating and Dependent variables. Social comparison is positively correlated to stress ($r = 0.40, p < .01$) and impulsive buying behaviour ($r = 0.42, p < .01$). Consumer emotional intelligence has an insignificant correlation with stress ($r = 0.02^{ns}, p > .01$) and impulsive buying ($r = -0.073^{ns}, p > .01$). Stress is positively correlated to IBB ($r = 0.69, p < .01$).

Regression Analysis

Table 2: Stress as a mediator between Social Comparison and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Paths	B	SE	t	P	LL99%CI	UL99%CI
Direct and total effects						
Path C, total effect (SC-IBB)	0.12	0.01	3.21	0.001	0.04	0.19
Path a (SC-Stress)	0.11	0.04	2.67	0.008	0.03	0.18
Path b (Stress-IBB)	0.70	0.02	30.31	0.000	0.66	0.75
Path C', showing mediation	0.04	0.02	1.80	0.073	-0.00	0.09
			β	SE	LL99%CI	UL99%CI
Indirect effect using bootstrap						
			0.07	0.03	0.02	0.14

N=637, unstandardized coefficients of regression are reported. Bootstrap Sample size =5,000. LL=Lower Limit; CI= Confidence Interval; UL=Upper Limit

Path C is representing impact of Social Comparison on Impulsive buying behavior in the absence of mediating variable stress thus it can be justified as main effect relationship between Independent variable and dependent variable, the values ($\beta = 0.12, t = 3.21, p < .01$) of this relationship support hypothesis H1. Social Comparison has a positive and significant relationship with impulsive buying behavior.

Path a represents the relationship between Social Comparison and stress, it is basically the relationship between Social comparison and stress, the values ($\beta = 0.11, t = 2.67, p < .01$), show that the relationship between Social Comparison and stress is significant and positive. Thus supporting hypothesis H2. Social Comparison has a positive and significant relationship with stress.

Path b represents the relationship between Stress and Impulsive buying behavior, the values ($\beta = 0.70, t = 30.31, p < .01$), show that the relationship between Stress and Impulsive buying is significant and positive. Thus supporting hypothesis H3 Stress is positively and significantly related with Impulsive buying behavior.

Path C' represents the direct effect relationship of Independent variable Social Comparison and Dependent variable Impulsive buying behavior when mediator stress is part of the model. The values ($\beta = -0.04, t = -1.80, p > .01$), show that this relationship is insignificant when the mediating variable stress is playing its part.

But the values of Indirect effect ($\beta = 0.07$, $LL99\%CI = 0.02$, $UL99\%CI = 0.14$), show that mediation of stress exists between the main effect relationship of Social Comparison and impulsive buying behavior.

As per the findings of direct effect Path C' and Indirect effects it can be concluded that hypothesis H4 Stress mediates the relationship between Social Comparison and Impulsive buying behavior in such a way that people with high Social Comparison will have high stress and the stress in turn will result in more impulsive buying behavior, is supported with full effect as path a, path b are significant but path C' is insignificant and the indirect effect is significant with no zero value in lower level and upper level confidence intervals.

The results show that path C' is insignificant and indirect paths are significant, the mediation is fully valid (Hayes, 2009; Shrout and Bolger, 2002). As we can see that in path C' the value of coefficient has become insignificant this means that the people are doing more impulsive buying due to stress than that as it takes on the effect of Social Comparison towards Impulsive buying behavior in it making that path C' insignificant. Thus this relationship is fully mediated.

Moderating role of Emotional Intelligence

Table 3: Moderating role of Emotional Intelligence

Paths	B	SE	T	P	LL99%CI	UL99%CI
Direct and Total Effects						
Path a1 (SC-Stress)	0.18	0.04	4.93	0.00	0.11	0.25
Path a2 (EI-Stress)	-0.28	0.03	-8.29	0.00	-0.35	-0.21
Path a3 SCxEI	-0.26	0.03	-9.84	0.00	-0.31	-0.21
Path b Stress-IBB	0.70	0.02	30.30	0.00	0.66	0.75
Path C', Direct Effect	0.04	0.02	1.80	0.07	0.00	0.09
			B	SE	LL99%CI	UL99%CI
Index of Moderated Mediation						
			-0.18	0.02	-0.24	-0.14
Conditional indirect effects of Social Comparison on impulsive buying through stress						
		Moderator CEI	Indirect Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
		-1SD (-1.13)	0.33	0.05	0.25	0.44
		M (-0.13)	0.15	0.03	0.09	0.22
		+1 SD (0.98)	-0.05	0.03	-0.12	0.01

N = 637. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit

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Path a1 represents relationship of Social Comparison with Stress with the values ($\beta = 0.18, t = 4.93, p < .01$), showing that Social Comparison is positively and significantly related to Stress. Path a2 represents the relationship between the Consumer emotional intelligence and Stress, the values ($\beta = -0.28, t = -8.29, p < .01$), show that moderating variable Consumer emotional intelligence has a negative and significant effect on stress. Path a3 represents the interaction term and its moderating effect on the main relationship between Social Comparison and Impulsive buying behavior, the values ($\beta = -0.26, t = -9.84, p < .01$), show that Consumer emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between Social Comparison and Impulsive buying behavior. The path C' show the direct effect of Social Comparison on Impulsive buying behavior when Stress is part of the model the values ($\beta = 0.04, t = 1.80, p > .01$), show that this relation is insignificant due to moderated mediation effect. The index of moderated mediation is supporting the argument stated in hypothesis, as it is significant as there are no zero values between LLCI and ULCI and the coefficient is with negative sign. The LLCI and ULCI values if are non-zero and are significant they indicate that moderated mediation effect is valid (Hayes, 2015). Thus this provides full support to our hypothesis H5 Consumer Emotional Intelligence moderates the mediated relationship through stress between Social Comparison and impulsive buying behavior in such a way that people with high consumer emotional intelligence will weaken the mediated relationship with impulsive buying behavior.

Conditional Indirect effects at three different levels of moderating variable are also part of the above table, three different values of Consumer emotional intelligence depict that when CEI is at a lower level -1SD the indirect effect is significant and even significant at the moderate level but when the moderator value is on the higher side +1SD the indirect effect becomes insignificant as it contains zero values between LLCI and ULCI.

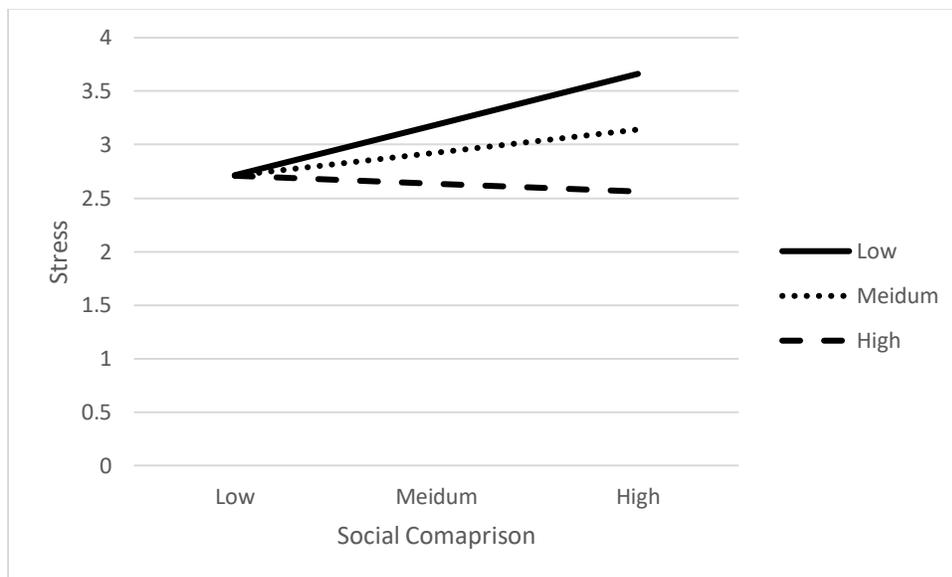


Figure 2: Mod Graph of CEI on relationship between Stress and Social Comparison

This graph explains that when people with low Consumer emotional intelligence have high social comparison their stress level is also high, when the people with a moderate level of consumer emotional intelligence face high social comparison their stress level is lower than that of people with low Consumer emotional intelligence. The people with high Consumer emotional intelligence facing high social

comparison their level of stress is at the lowest point in comparison to the people with low and moderate level of Consumer emotional intelligence. This effect continues to happen till the Social comparison is at medium level but this moderating effect becomes weak when social comparison goes weak and stress level start to rise among individuals this might be due to reason that their might be other factors coming into this relationship when the social comparison is low, the low social comparison individuals might be facing stress due to some other stressor which consumer emotional intelligence is unable to moderate. The moderating effect is fully valid on individuals with lower and moderate level of consumer emotional intelligence.

Discussion

This study aimed at investigating the detriments of social comparison for consumer feelings and behavior. By utilizing Lazarus, theory of stress and coping this study investigated whether social comparison instigate stress in consumer and if it does then how to consumers vent off this stress full fillings. The results obtained verify that social comparison results in negative feelings and instigate stress and to deal with this stress consumers indulge in impulsive buying. The findings are in line with the hypothesis made and support the argumentation being developed by the past researchers. Social comparison is positively linked with impulsive buying behavior, as Dittmar *et al.* (2014) have said that the negative feeling of being behind someone in materialistic possessions and lacking what others have result in pushing the individuals towards impulsive buying. This normally occurs when upward comparisons are being done by individuals (Diener *et al.*, 1999). The social exclusion pressure which is due to social comparison orientation can make individuals to act impulsively (Kaur, 2020; Mick and DeMoss, 1990). People do spend impulsively who are higher on their social comparison orientations (Attiq *et al.*, 2015). Specifically, the research on impulsive buying and related concepts such compulsive shopping and impulse purchases (Dittmar *et al.*, 1995) highlights that one's perceived social-image and the expression of self-identity impose a significant impact on the purchase decision. This study thus, supports existing research and enhances the literature regarding factors contributing in making impulsive purchase.

Amongst many factors affecting impulsive buying consumer's mood and emotional state are extremely vital (Oetomo, & Budiyo, 2017; Kacen and Lee, 2002). This study comprehends that consumers opt impulsive buying as a coping mechanism against social comparison. of The findings of this study are best explained as per interaction of theories of Lazarus stress and coping theory and Feeling state theory of impulse control disorder (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Madiawati, & Pradana, 2016; Miller, 2010). This is all due to the reason that they are facing high social comparison orientation, as the Feeling state theory suggest that to escape from the negative emotions caused due to social comparisons one will enact impulsively regardless of detrimental effects which can be result of impulsive buying. In this case the stress causing agent is beyond the control of individual and individual is exhibiting aggressive addictive behavior through impulsive buying as per emotion focused coping negative coping side. Individual is dealing with psychosocial stressors which are beyond the control of an individual and they cannot be solved based on problem focus coping. As society cannot be shaped as per an individual's desire.

Along with, this study also highlighted emotional intelligence as a buffering agent in social comparison-stress relationship. Consumer Emotional Intelligence has a negative effect on the main effect relationship as, emotionally intelligent people will be having skill of understanding and managing their emotions. So they will be facing less stress and will be exhibiting less impulsive buying despite having a negative social

comparison. As their perception and facilitation skills are good due to Consumer Emotional Intelligence (Landa *et al.*, 2008). This is also explained by emotion focused coping of stress by individuals (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The findings are also in-line with existing research which highlights that emotional intelligence is an individual resource that helps individuals in coping with stress (Rezvani and Khosravi, 2019) such that higher levels of emotional intelligence equips them with necessary abilities to deal with taxing experiences (Meng and Qi, 2018). Moreover, this study comprehends that such individuals do not let their negative experiences (social comparison) affect their emotional states (stress) and try to understand the situations and its repercussions instead of reacting impulsively. Hence, this study is a useful addition in literature on impulsive buying, social comparison and emotional intelligence.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Though the literature of clinical and applied psychology is looking into this type of theoretical model but from a slightly different lens. Marketing literature will now be able to refer to this study as a mechanism explaining consumer impulsive buying with its antecedents. These main effect relations and even moderated mediation relations have not been explained in the marketing literature as per the best of knowledge of the researcher. There is a need of theory development in this context which should be purely based on marketing literature. This study will facilitate theory development in context of consumer behavior and stress.

This study has linked work from clinical and applied psychology with the real life context of consumers and marketing literature. Which is another relevant novelty of this study. Thus the many un answered questions of marketing research relevant to consumer psychology and their behavioral antecedents have been answered by this research. Consumer emotional intelligence has been used in this study which is relevant marketing measure of emotional intelligence, this scale was developed by Kidwell *et al.* (2008).

This study will help consumers facing stressors, to use Consumer Emotional Intelligence for them to avoid impulsivity in their behavior. This implication is also valid for clinical and applied psychology practitioners to help their patients to overcome their problem of impulse control disorder through development of their emotional intelligence.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Though the study has lot to offer on the avenues of marketing and psychology literature and practice, but still there are some limitations which were part of this research and have effected the process of this research. Firstly the sample is limited and was taken conveniently this has an implications for the generalizability of results to the whole population. This limitation is dependent on another limitation of budgetary and time constraints being faced by the researcher as this research was self-financed by the researcher. It is recommended that this research should be carried out on a larger sample with cultural diversity, by including many other dimensions like materialism, power distance belief, gender diversity, occasional impulsive buying and type of cultures that is collectivist and individualistic cultures for more rich findings and more generalizable findings for the marketing literature.

Conclusion

The human tendency to take part in comparison is pervasive to the point that individuals automatically compare and other people who are unmistakably not applicable comparison targets, and they need to exert mental effort to fix the mental outcomes of such unseemly comparison. Stress is developed when particular

relationship between the person and environment is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being as being done due to Social Comparison. This study has made some useful contributions to the field of marketing research relevant to consumer psychology pertinent to stressors, stress and behavioral outcomes. This study has found many new dimensions which are applicable on modern day consumers. This study highlights that impulsive buying is a stress reaction to keep internal state relaxed. The findings of the study have an avenue for practicing marketers to find out in which markets and under what kind of stressors they can maximize their sales, by pushing the consumers towards Impulsive buying behavior. Moreover, this study has opened up avenues for future researchers and encourage them to integrate clinical and behavioural domains of psychology in marketing research.

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Appendix

Variables	Estimates
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Social Comparison and Impulsive Buying Behavior, Moderating Role of Consumer

Variables	Estimates
Emotional Intelligence	
CEIS1	.586
CEIS2	.597
CEIS3	.595
CEIS4	.614
CEIS5	.678
CEIS6	.637
CEIS7	.558
CEIS8	.579
CEIS9	.572
CEIS10	.732
CEIS11	.644
CEIS12	.470
CEIS13	.732
CEIS14	.815
CEIS15	.802
CEIS16	.671
CEIS17	.686
CEIS18	.675
Social Comparison	
sc1	.638
sc2	.597
sc3	.482
sc4	.593
sc5	.715
sc6	.776
sc7	.767
sc8	.827
sc9	.791
sc10	.751
Sc11	.533
Stress	
stress1	.599
stress2	.579

Variables	Estimates
stress3	.700
stress4	.474
stress5	.480
stress6	.622
stress7	.670
stress8	.769
stress9	.711
stress10	.458
stress11	.678
stress12	.642
stress13	.480
stress14	.600
Impulsive Buying Behaviour	
ibb1	.689
ibb2	.766
ibb3	.780
ibb4	.857
ibb5	.793
ibb6	.748
ibb7	.502
ibb8	.604
ibb9	.711