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Scrolling to Spending: The Role of Social Comparison in Linking Social Media Addiction to Compulsive Buying Behaviour among Transgender Individuals

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Abstract

In the digital era, shopping has permeated daily life, with India's market expanding rapidly. The rise of social media marketing has influenced consumer spending, which leads to problematic behaviours like Social Media Addiction (SMA) and Compulsive Buying Behaviour (CBB). This study explores the relationship between SMA, CBB, and the mediating role of Social Comparison (SC) among transgender consumers. Through the online survey of 96 transgender respondents, the study aims to provide insights into these dynamics, contributing to the broader understanding of consumer behaviour. The study provides insights into the dynamics of SMA and CBB among transgender consumers. The findings indicate that SMA has a significant influence on SC and CBB. Moreover, SC mediates the relationship between SMA and CBB. This highlights the need for targeted interventions to address SMA and CBB in the transgender community, emphasising the role of SC in these behaviours.

Keywords: Compulsive Buying Behaviour, Social Comparison, Social Media Addiction, Transgender Consumers

1. Introduction

In the digital era, online shopping has seamlessly woven into the fabric of individuals' daily routines (Ling *et al.*, 2023). With 700 million internet users, India is one of the world's rapidly expanding digital consumer markets (IAMAI, 2024). In the past decade, there has been a notable transformation in the marketing and sale of consumer goods, mostly due to technological considerations (Dolega *et al.*, 2021). This growth of technology has offered marketers a powerful tool called social media (Manzoor *et al.*, 2020). Several social networking platforms have surfaced, prompting marketers to leverage them to engage and communicate with their consumers effortlessly (Grover *et al.*, 2019). Due to rapid developments in technology, industry experts now have numerous ways to connect with consumers and reinforce their brand values (Saheb *et al.*, 2021). Social media has influenced customers to spend four times as much as they would spend on regular purchases, and their desire for products is so compelling that consumers make purchases every day (Varghese & Agrawal, 2021). This excessive use of online shopping platforms and social networks is recognised as problematic behaviour in the realm of internet-related addictions (Fineberg *et al.*, 2022).

SMA is a form of internet addiction characterised by an obsession with social media platforms (Griffiths, 2000). Andreassen & Pallesen (2014) assert that social media addicts frequently have excessive anxiety about it and are driven by an overwhelming desire to use it. Previous studies show that extended social media usage is linked to a range of behavioural issues (Roberts & David, 2023). These issues can lead to

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CBB as individuals attempt to find psychological relief from their difficulties (Williams & Grisham, 2012).

CBB refers to uncontrollable purchasing tendencies stemming from consumers' excessive urge to buy products. The urge often arises from negative emotions, as many afflicted consumers experience guilt, impairing their judgment and potentially causing harm. Seeking relief, consumers aim to purchase products aligning with their perceived or desired identities (Darrat *et al.*, 2016; Ebrahimi *et al.*, 2020; Flight & Sacramento, 2015). A recent study by Gao *et al.* (2023) examined how social networking might contribute to the emergence of online CBB. Their findings suggested that SC on social networks could play a role. However, this study focused solely on online buying habits within a specific demographic in one country, leaving much unknown about the broader relationship between SMA and CBB. Transgender consumers increasingly seek social construction identity (Crane, 2006) and spend to satisfy their aesthetic, comfort, and versatility needs (de Pinho Pessoa, 2012). It becomes essential to comprehend how transgender customers evaluate and understand other customers' and employees' emotions in a retail setting. Also, it is more significant to acknowledge that consumers' experiences are wholly subjective and exist only in their minds, and that several dimensions of engagement (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Therefore, there is a vital need to delve deeper into the link between SMA and CBB due to the existing knowledge gap, the mental distress they induce, and their escalating societal repercussions.

Several prior studies have confirmed SC's impact on smartphones, SMA (Mundel *et al.*, 2023; Bajwa *et al.*, 2023), and CBB (Ling *et al.*, 2023; Sharif *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, studies suggested a potential prevalence of shopping addiction among transgender, yet only a limited number of studies have investigated CBB concerning gender identity (Maccarrone-Eaglen & Schofield, 2023; Ruppert *et al.*, 2021). "Transgender is a broad term that encompasses those whose gender identity, gender expression, or behaviour differs from the sex they were assigned at birth" (American Psychological Association, 2023). Previous research on transgender consumption has examined their shopping experiences (Jones *et al.*, 2023), fashion (Tullio-Pow *et al.*, 2021), identity (Cavalcante, 2017), and the effect of digital marketing on purchasing (Sharma & Gupta, 2020). Despite all these findings, the value of transgender consumption patterns remains uncertain due to various factors. Past studies often emphasised the stigma and marginalisation experienced by the transgender community, influencing their consumer behaviour. Even with advances in cultural understanding, social progress, legal protections, and more sophisticated portrayals of transgender individuals in Western media, the emphasis remains unchanged (Oakenfull, 2013). Hence, it's important to note that despite societal progress, many transgender individuals still encounter challenges (Gomes de Jesus *et al.*, 2020).

In order to bridge the knowledge gap, this study looks at the relationship between SMA and CBB, particularly among transgender consumers. It seeks to determine if transgender individuals are susceptible to SMA and CBB. Furthermore, the study observes how SC acts as a mediator in the connection between SMA and CBB. By examining these relationships, this study offers notable insights into consumer behaviour, contributing to this field's existing body of knowledge. This study contributes to understanding CBB by expanding its theoretical foundation. As of now, the study exploring the effect of SMA on CBB among transgender individuals is limited. Despite positive societal changes, transgender community continues to face discrimination (Farber, 2024), potentially increasing their vulnerability to SMA and CBB. The results of the study will notify policymakers regarding the risks encountered by individuals vulnerable to behavioural addiction cycles, aiding in the development of interventions for behavioural addictions.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 SMA

The Internet, digital devices, and ICTs have revolutionised numerous conventional daily habits (Peláez & Marcuello-Servos, 2018). The emergence of social media has profoundly altered marketing strategies within the business landscape. Through strategic social media marketing, marketers can

bolster customer relationships and swiftly grasp consumer insights, fostering enhanced customer relationships and strategic business growth (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2023). The demand for social interaction could progressively propel the surge in social media usage, potentially leading to addiction (Karahanna *et al.*, 2015). Research has identified a prevalence of addiction among individuals exhibiting traits such as narcissism (Pearson & Hussain, 2017), extraversion, openness, and neuroticism (Zhou *et al.*, 2017). The conceptualisation of SMA varies among studies, but there's agreement that gratification (Gan & Wang, 2015) and pleasure (Hall *et al.*, 2017) drive its usage. SMA correlates with self-esteem (Hatun & Kurtca, 2023), depression (Haand & Shuwang, 2020), anxiety (Shabahang *et al.*, 2024), and the need for belonging. Additionally, SMA disrupts daily routines (Brand *et al.*, 2020; Kircaburun, 2016), and frequent device checking causes interruptions in concentration and task completion, affecting the individual's ability to perform intended activities (Carr, 2010).

SMA intensifies when individuals obsess over maintaining online social connections (Yohanna, 2020). Social media addicts experiencing exclusion may develop a fear of missing information, heightening anxiety and threatening their sense of belonging (Gao *et al.*, 2023). Seeking solace in others' negative experiences, individuals may temporarily alleviate their dissatisfaction. Fear of missing out's anxiety-inducing effects drive compulsive message checking on social media (Roberts & David, 2023), disrupting daily life and impacting time management, productivity, and achievements. Long-term consequences include heightened depression and sleep disturbances (Elhai *et al.*, 2016; Roberts & David, 2023). While fear of missing out can arise in various social contexts, its effects are exacerbated by social media usage (Tandon *et al.*, 2021), closely connected to prolonged online activity and particular habits of information sharing (Hayran & Anik, 2021). Excessive social media use may impair direct conversations (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022). Andreassen *et al.* (2016) identified links between depression, anxiety, and compulsive social networking, suggesting that socially anxious individuals may gravitate toward online communication. Mobile phone addiction frequently intersects with studies on SMA, given that social media platforms are commonly accessed through mobile devices (Kuss *et al.*, 2018). Paradoxically, SMA encompasses both technology addiction and resistance to it (Yao & Cao, 2017). Individuals with SMA may suppress or avoid acknowledging stressful feelings, potentially leading to additional mental health disorders (Rasmussen *et al.*, 2020). This behavioural loop can intensify tolerance, especially when compounded by fear of missing out (Martin *et al.*, 2013).

When access is restricted, SMA can cause symptoms of withdrawal like agitation and discomfort (Dalvi-Esfahani *et al.*, 2019), along with coping mechanisms such as repression or cognitive distortions. This is attributed to the involvement of brain regions associated with reward-based activities, where checking social media messages offers relief and compensation to users (Wegmann *et al.*, 2018).

2.2 SC

SC entails individuals assessing their attributes, capabilities, and actions with others (Festinger, 1954). In this study, SC occurs with general social media users who present idealised or aspirational lifestyles, irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Through this evaluative process, individuals develop an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, shaping their self-concept and behavioural tendencies. Favourable comparisons to others in specific domains can act as a source of motivation, prompting individuals to strive for consistency or improvement in related aspects of their lives (Van de Ven, 2017). Research has delved into the impacts of social media across various domains, including social media (Scully *et al.*, 2023; Verduyn *et al.*, 2020), social decision-making (Hu *et al.*, 2021), body image (Pan *et al.*, 2023), and fear of missing out (Servidio *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, while compulsions are often characterised as uncontrollable and overwhelming (Tangney *et al.*, 2018), a body of research indicates that SC may exert a significant influence on addictive behaviours. For instance, SC has been linked to increased addiction to brand addiction (Le, 2020), social networking sites (Kim *et al.*, 2021), and smartphone addiction (Bajwa *et al.*,

2023). Additionally, upward SC increased depression (Wang *et al.*, 2020) and social anxiety (McCarthy & Morina, 2020). Conversely, Kong *et al.* (2021) state that downward comparison involves individuals comparing themselves to others they perceive as less fortunate or inferior. When individuals experience unpleasant emotions following SC, the need to uphold a positive self-image may prompt them to engage in downward comparison (Gong & Zhang, 2020). Intriguingly, Kong *et al.* (2021) found that both the comparison types had parallel effects on vulnerable narcissism and social media use. Despite this, the exploration of SC in the context of CBB and SMA is limited. Hence, this research aimed to find the effect of SMA on CBB through SC.

2.3 CBB

CBB consists of three main characteristics, namely an insatiable desire to purchase, a loss of control over purchasing habits, and a pattern of excessive purchasing despite the detrimental effects on one's social, professional, or personal life (Dittmar, 2004). Predominantly affecting females and young consumers, CBB often emerges as a response to mitigate negative emotions associated with stress and low self-esteem (Zheng *et al.*, 2020). Recognised as a behavioural addiction (Díez *et al.*, 2018), CBB is characterised as a maladaptive behaviour or obsession with shopping or purchasing that disrupts regular activities. While both behaviours share similarities in spontaneity and outcomes, CBB is distinguished by recurring thoughts disrupting normal life, often centring on buying activities. Thus, CBB cannot be simply viewed as an escalated form of impulsive buying (Tarka *et al.*, 2022). Maccarrone-Eaglen and Schofield (2017) stated that individuals lacking self-control may exhibit imbalanced behaviour prone to compulsions, which disrupt conscious behaviour with distressing thoughts only alleviated through specific actions like purchasing (McElroy *et al.*, 1994). Unlike impulses, compulsions are uncontrollable for the individuals affected, while low impulse control implies consumers cannot resist urges, leading to harmful behaviours (Ridgway *et al.*, 2008).

CBB is characterised by a lack of ability to resist the urge (Müller *et al.*, 2015) to purchase for extended periods, leading to spiralling debt regardless of income. It often accompanies feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Bani-Rshaid & Alghraibeh, 2017). Spending functions as a coping mechanism, alleviating internal tension (Lee & Mysyk, 2004). Products, especially branded ones, align with one's ideal self, while items like clothing and books express self-identity (Japutra *et al.*, 2019). Purchases can also fulfil social acceptance needs and facilitate group integration and socialisation. Many individuals prefer online shopping to conceal their excessive buying habits (Weinstein *et al.*, 2016).

2.4 The Transgender Perspective: Social Media Use and Buying Behaviour

Maccarrone-Eaglen and Schofield (2023) indicated a possible link between CBB and transgender individuals, yet subsequent research hasn't explored this connection or investigated CBB among transgender consumers. Literature (Duncan-Shepherd & Hamilton, 2022) presents LGBTQ+ consumers as a homogeneous group, which may contribute to consumption that is stereotyped and propagated through marketing materials (Coffin *et al.*, 2019). This could lessen discrimination and make an obvious acceptance of individuals who are LGBT+, but it merely covers up the discrimination that persists in certain communities, even in developed nations (Bettinsoli *et al.*, 2021). Transgender individuals may be more susceptible to CBB because they have experienced high discrimination (Granberg *et al.*, 2020) and also exhibit anxiety and depression more frequently than others (Gibson *et al.*, 2021). These factors can affect identity development, self-esteem, and mental health conditions that can lead to CBB (Black, 2022). This could be especially important for particular LGBT+ subgroups. For instance, due to more complicated identity issues, transgender people exhibit higher levels of anxiety and depression (Ross *et al.*, 2018; Rowe & Rowe, 2015).

A sense of community and socialisation could be somewhat relieving to individuals impacted by the aforementioned problems, even though they occasionally fall short of making up for feelings (Williamson & Spence, 2001). Parui and Halder (2023) state that when transgender customers use social media

effectively, it can change individuals' perceptions for the better and create an inclusive offline social environment. However, it can also lead to distress because of cyberbullying (Herrmann *et al.*, 2024). It seems that some LGBT+ community members manage this by employing multiple platforms to present different online personas as a means of safeguarding their well-being (Talbot *et al.*, 2022). However, social media may be a double-edged sword that makes most LGBT individuals dependent on it (Fisher *et al.*, 2024; Han *et al.*, 2019).

3. Hypotheses

The existing literature review reveals significant gaps in understanding the association between SMA and CBB, particularly concerning the function of SC in this context. Furthermore, it underscores the underrepresentation of the transgender community in consumer behaviour and CBB research. Despite their potential vulnerability to both addictions due to identity-related challenges (Buss *et al.*, 2021) and limited societal acceptance (Pariseau *et al.*, 2019), they have been largely overlooked in previous studies. This study addresses these gaps by formulating three hypotheses based on the identified rationale.

Sharif and Yeoh (2018) state that only a few things are known about the degree to which SMA influences the development of CBB, and the information available is limited to online purchases and the moderating effects of specific personality traits in this situation. Yet, as previously mentioned, research has indicated that transgender individuals are more susceptible to SMA due to their need for higher sensitivity and loneliness (Berger *et al.*, 2022). Overuse of social media is linked to stress, anxiety, and depression (Hussain & Griffiths, 2021), which triggers CBB. Furthermore, despite recent improvements in society, discrimination against individuals of the transgender community persists (Abbate *et al.*, 2024), such as unwelcome online aggression via social media, which may increase their susceptibility to CBB by causing anxiety and other unfavourable feelings (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989).

H_1: SMA has a much greater effect on CBB among transgender

Further, since SC is strongly linked to SMA and can heighten obsession with frequent social media browsing (Yue *et al.*, 2022), it may also be the cause of or a contributing factor to CBB, as the underlying conditions of both SMA and CBB are similar (Roberts & David, 2020). The transgender community are more susceptible to social media and invests a long time online (Herrmann *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, Trimpey (2020) found that when social networking sites are used to foster connections and the user has established social networking site preferences, the user's social support network grows, and their psychosocial well-being rises. On the other hand, increased use of non-connection-promoting media and encounters with online bullying are linked to detrimental effects for mental health and upward SC among transgender. Hence, it is posited that

H_2: SMA has an effect on SC.

Lastly, earlier researchers have proven that SC can have a major effect on addictive behaviours, even though its mediating effect on the connection between SMA and CBB has received limited attention. Since SC may increase some addictions like Smartphone addiction (Bajwa *et al.*, 2023) and SMA (Jiang & Ngien, 2020), it may also intensify the link between SMA and purchase intention (Mundel *et al.*, 2023). Taking these outcomes into consideration, it is hypothesised that

H_3: SC mediates the relationship between SMA and CBB among transgender customers. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of all the hypotheses proposed in the study.

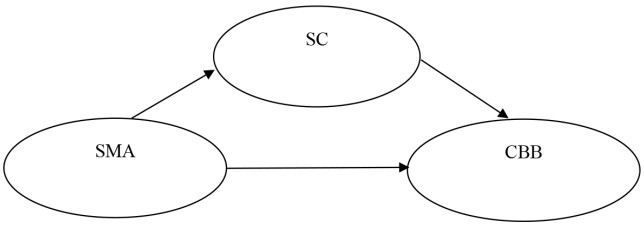


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.
Source: Author's Compilation

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants and Data Collection

Participants were transgender individuals who use general social networks like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Transgender users who also bought textile clothing online were the study's primary focus because this product category is closely linked to compulsive buying. An A-priori power analysis was used to determine the required sample size. A total of 153 responses were collected, of which 106 were fully completed questionnaires. After applying the compulsive buying behaviour cutoff criteria, 96 participants who exhibited compulsive buying tendencies were selected as the final sample for the study using a purposive sampling method.

4.2 Tools and Measurement

The study employed validated scales to measure the constructs. For SMA, a subset of 9 items from Van den Eijnden *et al.* (2016) was utilised, encompassing nine aspects of addiction, such as preoccupation, tolerance, and withdrawal. To measure CBB, the six-item scale from Maccarrone-Eaglen and Schofield (2017) was employed. SC was gauged using a six-item scale by Gibbons and Buunk (1999). All variables within each measure were presented on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'), with intermediate options appropriately labelled and numbered. The study also considered the possible relationship connecting SMA and CBB, given the shared underpinnings of depression, stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem, as evidenced in previous literature.

Table 1. Quality standards for composite model evaluations and reflected model assessments

Latent variable	Variables measured	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
SMA	SMA1	0.881	0.883	0.515
	SMA2			
	SMA3			
	SMA4			
	SMA5			
	SMA6			
	SMA7			
	SMA8			
	SMA9			
SC	SC1	0.818	0.820	0.526
	SC2			
	SC3			
	SC4			
	SC5			
	SC6			
CBB (CBB)	CBB1	0.810	0.816	0.515
	CBB2			
	CBB3			
	CBB4			
	CBB5			
	CBB6			

4.3 Procedure and Data Analysis

The research employed a single questionnaire to assess SMA, SC, and CBB of transgender individuals. Data analysis employed smart PLS. Four distinct categories were identified from the results for SMA and CBB: "non-compulsive (scores ranging from 1 to 2), occasional compulsive/addictive occurrence (scores ranging from >2 to 3), mildly compulsive/addicted (scores ranging from >3 to 4), and severely compulsive/addicted (scores from >4 to 5)". A purposive sampling method was used to select the sample respondents who had both SMA and CBB.

5. Data Analysis

Table 1 displays reliability test results using Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability, with a cutoff value of 0.7 for adequate convergence/internal consistency (Hair, 2009). All construct-measuring statements exhibited high reliability via Cronbach's alpha, with self-congruence statements yielding the highest values, yet not reaching redundancy. Validity, assessed through AVE values, indicates all constructs are valid, surpassing the 0.5 threshold (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Table 2 presents hypothesis-testing results for the initial two hypotheses. Hypothesis 1, asserting SMA on CBB, showed a significant relationship ($\beta = 0.359$, $p<0.05$). Hypothesis 2, exploring the connection between SC and CBB, demonstrated statistical significance at a 95% confidence level ($\beta = 0.254$, $p<0.05$). Hypothesis

Table 2. Hypothesis testing of the model

Path relationships	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	p values	Decision
SMA CBB	0.359	0.376	0.114	3.139	0.002	Supported
SC CBB	0.254	0.251	0.117	2.165	0.030	Supported
SMA SC	0.686	0.699	0.063	10.982	0.000	Supported

Table 3. Explanation factors

Variables	R square
SC	0.471
CBB	0.319

Table 4. Mediating results

Path	Total effect			Indirect effect			
	Original sample	T statistics	p values	Hypothesis	Original sample	T statistics	p values
SMA CBB	0.533	6.743	0.000	SMA SC CBB	0.174	2.014	0.044
Direct effects				Original sample	T statistics	p values	
SMA SC				0.686	10.982	0.000	
SC CBB				0.254	2.165	0.030	
SMA CBB				0.359	3.139	0.000	
Decision				Partial complementary mediation is supported.			

3, examining the relationship between SMA and SC, was highly significant ($\beta = 0.686$, $p<0.000$).

According to the data presented in Table 3, the coefficient of determination (R^2) values are 0.471 and 0.319 for SC and CBB, respectively. These results suggest that SMA accounts for 47.1% of the variance in SC. Furthermore, SC explains 31.9% of the variance in CBB.

Zhao *et al.* (2010) assert that establishing mediation requires a significant indirect effect. Table 4 demonstrates the importance of SMA's indirect impact on CBB through SC. Therefore, it is inferred that SC plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between SMA and CBB. To determine the kind of mediating effect, the procedures proposed by Hair Jr *et al.* (2017) and Zhao *et al.* (2010) are adhered to. Since the link between SMA and CBB, SMA and SC, and SC and CBB exist, it can be concluded that a partial mediating relationship exists.

6. Discussion

Earlier studies have revealed that excessive social media use can exacerbate psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which can drive SMA (Acar *et al.*, 2022; Keles *et al.*, 2020). These same psychological manifestations have been linked to CBB, a coping mechanism used to ease increasing internal pressure. Research has also demonstrated that SC in social media can be caused by online social exclusion (Selkie *et al.*, 2020), which can worsen SMA-related mental health conditions. However, up until now, little attention has been given to how much SMA and/or SC affect the growth of CBB. Longobardi *et al.* (2020) assert that SMA increases due to the increased inclination to become popular, which results in cyber victimisation. Transgender consumers have been found to have negative experiences in social media (Herrmann *et al.*, 2024), which can also act as triggers for CBB. Therefore, it is surprising that while many studies looked at how SMA affected CBB in the general population, only limited studies looked at how SMA and CBB related to transgender individuals. Despite reports on mental health traits that may predispose LGBT+ consumers to compulsive behaviour (Jennings *et al.*, 2022), particularly among transgender (Ruppert *et al.*, 2021), CBB research has overlooked transgender consumers. Furthermore, although earlier research has indicated that SC can have a positive impact on addictive behaviours, less attention has been given to SC's effects on SMA, CBB, and interactions. This study fills in these knowledge

gaps by investigating how SMA affects CBB among the transgender population. It also looks at how SC mediates the relationship between SMA and CBB.

First, transgender-compulsive buyers have a strong purchasing inclination. They are more likely to develop CBB and SMAs. For transgender individuals, social media platforms serve as both spaces of empowerment and sites of vulnerability. While these platforms provide opportunities for community building, self-expression, and advocacy, they also expose individuals to heightened SC pressures and unrealistic beauty standards. This contradiction highlights the intricate connection between transgender customers' well-being and social media usage. Transgender individuals struggling with social stigma and SMA may serve as a form of escapism and coping mechanism, wherein CBB offers temporary relief from distressing emotions and negative self-perceptions.

Second, this study has proved a significant relationship between SMA and SC. SMA fuels SC among transgender individuals as a mechanism for seeking validation and affirmation within digital communities. The pursuit of likes, comments, and followers becomes a metric of social worth and acceptance, incentivising individuals to be involved in upward SC by emulating the perceived successes and achievements of others, often at the expense of their self-esteem and well-being. SMA instigates SC among transgender individuals by perpetuating the fear of missing experiences, opportunities, and social connections displayed on digital platforms. The incessant scrolling, liking, and sharing of content engenders a sense of urgency and anxiety, compelling individuals to constantly compare themselves with others and strive for validation through conspicuous consumption and lifestyle pursuits.

Third, the results also indicate that SC has a significant mediating effect on SMA. SC on social media platforms often revolves around seeking validation and approval from peers and influencers. Transgender individuals, already grappling with societal pressures, may use CBB as a means of garnering attention and acceptance within digital communities. SC offers an escape from distressing realities by providing a platform for distraction and fantasy. CBB, in this context, becomes a way to temporarily alleviate feelings of stress and discomfort, offering a sense of control and empowerment amidst adversity. However, this coping mechanism is ultimately maladaptive, as it perpetuates a cycle of consumption-driven validation and exacerbates financial strain and emotional distress.

SC influences individuals' perceptions of social norms and acceptable behaviours, shaping their attitudes toward consumption. As transgender individuals compare themselves to others within their online networks, they may internalise the notion that excessive spending and material possessions are indicative of success and happiness. This normalisation of CBBs through SC further reinforces the link between SMA and compulsive spending among transgender individuals.

SC on social media often involves comparing one's current circumstances to idealised representations of experiences or future aspirations. Transgender individuals may engage in temporal comparison, wherein they measure their progress towards gender transition or acceptance based on the achievements and milestones shared by others. This comparison process may lead to feelings of inadequacy or urgency, prompting compulsive purchases of gender-affirming products in an attempt to align with perceived societal standards and expectations.

7. Implications

Marketers should prioritise ethical advertising practices that promote inclusivity and authenticity. Transgender individuals are especially susceptible to the pressures of SC due to the idealised representations on social media. Brands can create a positive impact by highlighting diverse, realistic portrayals of transgender individuals. This strategy reduces adverse upward comparisons and discourages CBB brought on by irrational expectations.

Influencers who emphasise self-acceptance and authentic living can counteract negative comparison-based effects; brands should work with influencers who genuinely resonate with transgender audiences and

promote positive, empowering messages; and ethically guided influencer content can reduce compulsive buying triggers rather than amplify addictive social media engagement. Influencer marketing is still a powerful tool, but its use must be responsible to avoid exacerbating SMA and CBB among transgender individuals.

As SMA can result in CBB through social comparison, marketers can create personalised, non-exploitative strategies that serve the unique needs of transgender people. Data-driven campaigns should emphasise emotional health, positive messaging, and content that guides clear of triggering impulsive or addictive buying behaviors.

Additionally, brands can use their platforms to create welcoming online communities where transgender people are appreciated and feel seen. These environments lessen reliance on damaging comparison patterns and promote constructive peer interactions. Building these communities encourages healthier digital behavior and improves customer engagement.

Furthermore, brands can make a significant contribution by promoting financial literacy that is specific to transgender consumers, especially those in the retail and financial sectors. Initiatives to promote financial literacy should pay particular attention to budgeting techniques, responsible spending, and methods for controlling compulsive or impulsive purchasing. Brand loyalty and trust can be increased by offering transgender people workshops, educational materials, and tools that enable them to make knowledgeable purchasing decisions. This contribution is in line with long-term sustainable marketing strategies and directly promotes the welfare of consumers.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows that SMA significantly influences SC, which in turn drives CBB among transgender individuals. The findings highlight that the heightened engagement with social media platforms fosters an environment where transgender individuals frequently compare themselves to others, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and a compulsion to purchase as a means of achieving perceived social standards. SC serves as a crucial mediating factor in this relationship, indicating that the psychological impact of social media use extends beyond direct interactions, deeply affecting consumer behaviours. Addressing the dynamics of SC may therefore be key in mitigating the CBB tendencies linked to SMA in this community.

9. Limitations

Although the study yielded valuable information, it is essential to acknowledge a few limitations. First, the cross-sectional research design makes it more difficult to determine the relationship between the variables. Future longitudinal studies could provide more robust evidence of the causal pathways between SMA, SC, and CBB among transgender individuals. Additionally, the use of self-reported measures may include bias in response or social desirability effects, which could compromise the validity of the results. Utilising mixed-method approaches or incorporating objective measures of online behaviour could develop the rigor and validity of future research in this area. Lastly, the study focused specifically on transgender individuals, and the results might not apply to other demographic groups.

10. Future Research

Several avenues for further research could build upon the findings. Firstly, investigating the function of coping mechanisms and emotion regulation strategies in regulating the relationship between SMA and CBB among transgender individuals could provide valuable insights into protective factors and intervention strategies. Additionally, studying the effect of gender-affirming content and online communities on SC dynamics and consumer behaviour could shed attention on distinct experiences and difficulties faced by transgender individuals in digital spaces. Additionally, evaluating the efficacy of focused interventions such as mindfulness-based practices or cognitive-behavioural therapy, in lessening SMA and CBB among transgender individuals can assist in creating evidence-based interventions suited to

specific populations. Overall, bridging these research gaps can add to the development of more targeted and efficient interventions designed to encourage safe online conduct and lessen its negative impacts on SMA and CBB among transgender individuals.

11. Declaration of Interest Statement

The author declares that there are no potential conflicts of interest.

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