

The Relationship between Self-Esteem and Impulsive Purchase Behavior: Evidence from Urban India

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Abstract

Self-esteem is a person's assessment of their own value (Rosenberg, 1965), whereas impulsive buying is the propensity to make, impulsive purchases motivated more by emotion than by necessity (Rook, 1987). Researchers have assumed these constructs are related, even though they originate from separate branches of psychology - one is a situational activity, the other is a fixed personality trait. Individuals who have poor self-esteem may be more likely to make impulsive purchases, frequently using them as a means of obtaining comfort, approval, or emotional satisfaction.

The current study looked at the association between self-esteem and impulsive purchase behavior among young Indian consumers, and whether demographic factors such as gender, occupation, shopping type, and shopping frequency influenced these patterns. A cross-sectional, correlational design was used with a convenience sample of 99 participants from urban Indian settings. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was used to assess self-esteem, and impulsive buying was assessed with an 8-item adaptation of the Impulsive Buying Scale (Rook & Fisher, 1995).

The study found no significant correlation between self-esteem and impulsive buying ($r = -.051$, $p = .614$). It also found no significant differences between groups based on gender ($F(2, 96) = 0.08$, $p = .921$), occupation ($F(3, 95) = 0.32$, $p = .810$), or shopping type ($F(2, 96) = 1.783$, $p = .174$). However, shopping frequency was the only factor showing a notable difference in impulsive purchase ($F(4, 94) = 3.467$, $p = .011$), with more frequent shoppers having higher impulsive buying tendencies. These findings imply that behavioral habits, rather than self-esteem or socio-demographic traits, may be more closely related to impulsive consumption in the Indian context.

Keywords - self-esteem, impulsive buying, young Indian consumers, self-discrepancy, materialism.

Introduction

India's fast economic liberalization, rising disposable incomes, and rapid expansion of e-commerce platforms have significantly changed the purchasing power. For young Indian consumers, shopping has increasingly become an emotionally driven activity rather than a functional one, with deal-seeking and mood states playing a notable role in purchasing behavior (Pandey, 2016). Shopping has shifted from a functional activity to an emotionally draining experience for young Indians, who range in age from 18 to 25. The growth of digital payment systems, one-click purchasing, and algorithmically designed advertising has resulted in environment conditions that are fundamentally favourable to impulse purchases. Impulsive buying is broadly characterized as unplanned purchasing activity that occurs when a buyer has a sudden

and compelling desire to buy, which is frequently accompanied by less deliberative reasoning (Rook, 1987). Rook (1987, p. 191) defined it as “a consumer experiencing a sudden, often powerful, and persistent urge to buy something immediately.” Importantly, the construct is distinguished by emotional urgency, limited cognitive deliberation, and indifference to the consequences of the purchase. Unlike habitual or planned consumption, impulsive buying is motivated by emotional arousal and can lead to post-purchase regret.

Psychological factors, such as self-esteem, have long been regarded as predictors of impulsive and compensatory consumption. Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as a worldwide evaluative attitude toward oneself, whether positive or negative, that influences how people regulate their emotions and respond to social situations. The definition of self-esteem as a global, trait-like disposition proposed by Rosenberg in 1965 has remained the main framework in psychological research for over fifty years. Self-esteem is often regarded as an indicator of psychological well-being and as a factor that influences the way people react emotionally to environmental stress. An alternative view is provided by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which claims that self-esteem is determined by the extent to which basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met. People whose fundamental needs are not satisfied over time may end up with low self-esteem, which in turn causes them to adopt maladaptive coping mechanisms like excessive consumerism. Individuals with chronically poor self-esteem may use material acquisition to improve their mood, indicate themselves socially, or establish their identity. On the contrary, individuals with high self-esteem may participate in hedonic purchasing to celebrate or reward themselves, suggesting a non-linear or context-dependent link between self-esteem and purchase behavior (Jain et al., 2024).

Besides psychological determinants, demographic variables such as gender, occupation, shopping type, and frequency have gained more theoretical and empirical attention. The influence of environmental factors on the connection between self-esteem and impulsive purchasing in India should not be overlooked. Even though men spend more time shopping in general, Indian women have more favourable views of shopping in malls and associate it with leisure, while men tend to see it as more task-related (Kuruvilla et al., 2009). In the Indian context, gender norms around consumption, income disparities across occupational groups, the distinct interactive quality of online versus offline shopping, and the reinforcing effects of habitual shopping are all significant contextual variables that may strengthen or weaken the relationship between self-esteem and impulsive buying. This relationship, too, could be affected by income, people’s occupations, the degree of interactivity available online as compared to offline retail environments, and individual shopping habits. Nevertheless, there is at present very little empirical evidence in the Indian literature concerning these specific contextual factors when it comes to self-esteem and impulsive buying.

The current study is prompted by a significant gap in existing consumer psychology research. While impulsive buying has been extensively studied in Western and East Asian contexts, empirical research on the Indian young adult population remains relatively scarce, despite India being one of the world’s fastest-growing consumer markets (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2023). This demographic and geographic discrepancy provides compelling reasons for the current study. Another reason is the theoretical gap regarding self-esteem as a predictor of impulsive buying. Prior research has shown inconsistent results across cultures, with some reporting strong inverse connections (Lejoyeux et al., 2011; Sehgal, 2023), while others found null or positive associations depending on mediating variables (Jain et al., 2024; Dhewi et al., 2024). Understanding this in a culturally different sample like India, where collectivism, economic

disparity, and increasing technology usage overlap, requires empirical research. Cultural norms appear to shape consumption patterns in India, where decisions in collectivist settings are often guided by family and group input, whereas individualist orientations are more closely tied to personal needs and self-expression (Manoj et al., 2025). The current study is also relevant because it explores the lived experience of the generation in question. Young Indians today are the first generation to have grown up entirely in the era of algorithmic commerce, social media influence, and one-click purchase contexts that structurally normalize impulsive consumption in ways that earlier generations never experienced. The growth of platforms like Instagram and YouTube, as well as local e-commerce giants like Flipkart and Meesho, has transformed purchasing into a form of social involvement and emotional regulation for this age group. The present research was designed to fill this gap by investigating: (a) the relationship between self-esteem and impulsive buying in a young Indian sample; and (b) whether group differences exist across gender, occupation, shopping type, and shopping frequency in terms of both self-esteem and impulsive buying.

Literature review

Self esteem and impulse buying

The relationship between self-esteem and impulsive purchasing remains debated, with some scholars arguing that low self-esteem drives impulsive buying as a coping mechanism, while others believe its influence depends on additional factors (Guo et al., 2024). Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) states that people may try to use consuming to ease the emotional suffering caused by the perceived difference between their ideal and actual selves. This approach is empirically supported by more recent research, which demonstrates that self-discrepancy is linked to higher materialism and lower life satisfaction, both of which predict higher impulsive purchasing (Pupelis & Šeinauskienė, 2023). Modern theoretical models, including the Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model (Mandel et al., 2017), further clarify that self-discrepancy drives a wider variety of compensatory consumer behaviors, such as symbolic self-completion and escapism, in addition to impulsive buying. However, several research have found varied or inconsistent effects depending on individual and contextual circumstances, suggesting that this link may not be as straightforward as previously thought (Dhewi et al., 2024; Jalees et al., 2024; Singh & Nayak, 2016).

Low self-esteem, which is frequently found in such self-discrepancies, has been connected to compulsive and impulsive buying as an emotional regulation mechanism (Lejoyeux et al., 2011; Sehgal, 2023). However, the empirical evidence remains contradictory, as recent findings suggest this relationship is not universally direct but is instead heavily moderated by variables such as hedonic motivation, gender, and occupational status (Bayer et al., 2018; Jain et al., 2024; Roberts & Roberts, 2012).

Several gaps remain in the existing research. According to Guo et al. (2024), there are few empirical studies on the role of self-esteem in college students' online impulse buying. Although their study showed that self-esteem is a negative predictor of online impulse buying, an inhibitory effect that is further reinforced by low-quality interpersonal relationships and high interdependent self-perception, the data were only collected from undergraduates, which limited their generalisability.

Self-esteem is rarely studied as a direct predictor across demographic subgroups like gender, occupation, age, and kind of purchasing; instead, it is usually modeled as a mediator between an underlying cause (such social exclusion or self-discrepancy) and impulsive buying. The current study extends to this discussion by studying this link in a young Indian population, where cultural norms around self-expression and consumption may differ from those in Western contexts.

Gender differences

It has been extensively studied that gender plays a role in purchasing behaviors, however, the findings differ in different studies. For instance, women are stereotyped as having higher rates of impulsive and compulsive buying tendencies, especially in areas such as clothing, cosmetics and home decorations (Gallagher et al., 2017). Conversely, men have shown comparable levels of impulsive buying in product categories such as electronic, sporting products (Laskowski et al., 2025). The inconsistent findings on compulsive and impulsive buying behaviors across gender can be found in the literature. For instance, in a sample of 573 Spanish adolescents, Pérez de Albéniz-Garrote et al. (2021) indicated that females scored significantly higher on compulsive buying compared to males. This finding is supported by some previous studies. However, some other studies showed similar prevalence rates between genders (Roberts & Roberts, 2012). It is suggested that the gender effect on impulsive buying behavior may be different in terms of direction and magnitude, which depends on the age group of the sample, culture, and the construct of buying. Moreover, the underlying important mediator behind the inconsistent findings is self-esteem. According to the previous studies, low self-esteem can increase the possibility for people to engage in compulsive buying as a coping mechanism to reduce negative self-evaluation (Jalees et al., 2024; Sehgal, 2023). For instance, women tend to make appearance related purchases to compensate for self-discrepancies, while men tend to make impulsive purchases of status related products to improve low self-esteem (Mandel et al., 2017). Thus, it is important to analyze the relationship between gender and self-esteem in order to understand various types of impulsive purchase.

Occupational differences

Occupation often functions as a substitute for several psychological and structural factors that shape consumption, including financial independence, time availability, social identity, and peer influence. Students and adolescents, for example, may participate in impulsive purchasing as a form of social comparison, identity expression, or as a way to cope with materialistic pressures and influence their subjective well-being (Manolis & Roberts, 2012). For younger demographics, impulsive buying often serves as a maladaptive coping strategy to bridge the gap between their actual and ideal self, particularly when baseline self-esteem is low or influenced by family and peer environments (Singh & Nayak, 2016; Sehgal, 2023). The financial risk tolerance of self-employed people may differ from that of salaried workers, influencing their spending habits. According to studies comparing the two groups, self-employed people are more likely to make future-focused financial decisions and are less risk-averse, which is most likely due to the uncertainty and delayed income that come with independent work (Bayer et al., 2018). Self-employed individuals may also be more vulnerable to risky, more impulsive spending compared with those with salaried jobs, with a stable paycheck that allows them to spend more carefully in a measured way. Such high risk tolerance may extend beyond just investing, as the uncertain nature of most entrepreneurial careers could put self-esteem at risk, leading to compensatory consumption that bolsters professional image, whereas those who have stable work identities tend to spend more carefully.

Shopping type

E-commerce platforms like Flipkart, Amazon India and Meesho in India have increasingly used gamification and time-limited incentives to tap into impulsive behaviour. Online vs offline shopping is an important contextual variable that may influence the relationship between self-esteem and impulsive buying. Offline shopping may lead to more impulsive buying than the online platform, as offline stores stimulate five senses in a way that online retail cannot fully imitate (Moreira et al., 2017). However, online environments have their own triggers. Research indicates that social presence created by interactive

websites shapes consumer enjoyment and purchase attitudes, which may in turn influence impulsive buying (Chen & Yao, 2022). There is a strong connection between this kind of shopping and self-esteem; those who have low self-esteem might prefer to shop online since the anonymity and the sense of control help to alleviate the social anxiety and fear of being judged that they experience in physical stores, thereby making it more likely that they will make impulsive purchases (Guo et al., 2024; Dhewi et al., 2024). The act of shopping online also eliminates various obstacles: the one-click checkout option, algorithmic recommendations, targeted advertisements, and the lack of physical barriers all encourage impulsive buying (Verplanken & Sato, 2011). Physical shops have their own factors as well, such as sensory stimulation, the arrangement of the space, and the presence of salespeople. Regardless of the environment, marketing can highlight the gap between the actual self and the ideal self, and an impulsive purchase can be an effort to reduce that gap. It can also provide temporary social validation which boosts self-esteem and helps to maintain the impulsive behaviour (Mandel et al., 2017; Pupelis & Šeinauskienė, 2023).

Shopping frequency

Shopping frequency reflects how often people engage with purchasing environments, and it both influences and results from impulsive buying behaviors. Regular visits to shopping platforms, combined with positive experiences, tend to reinforce the likelihood of future impulsive purchases (Sun & Wang, 2023). Those who shop more frequently have more opportunities to make spontaneous buys, and over time, repeated exposure to these settings can develop into habitual impulsive responses (Rook, 1987; Sun & Wang, 2023). Psychologically, the drive behind frequent shopping often stems from a desire to repeatedly regulate self-esteem. Individuals with low self-esteem may engage in frequent shopping to experience the temporary hedonic boost and self-enhancement that accompanies a new purchase (Jain et al., 2024). While frequent shopping increases exposure to purchasing contexts, the resulting compulsive buying behaviors can lead to substantial monetary costs and a significantly reduced quality of life (Zhang et al., 2017). This creates a vicious cycle: the subsequent financial strain and post-purchase guilt further erode self-esteem, which in turn increases the reliance on frequent impulsive buying as a maladaptive coping mechanism, ultimately degrading overall subjective well-being (Manolis & Roberts, 2012; Zhang et al., 2017).

Materials and Methods

1. Research design

The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational design. Data was collected at a single point in time from a convenience sample of young Indian consumers.

2. Hypothesis

- H1: There will be a significant correlation between self-esteem and impulsive buying.
- H2: There will be significant differences in impulsive buying and self esteem across age categories.
- H3: There will be significant group differences in impulsive buying and self esteem across gender categories.
- H4: There will be significant group differences in impulsive buying and self esteem across occupational categories.
- H5: There will be significant group differences in impulsive buying and self esteem across shopping type.
- H6: There will be significant group differences in impulsive buying and self esteem based on shopping frequencies.

3. Sample

The sample included 99 participants recruited from urban Indian settings. One participant chose "prefer not to say" for gender, while 51 identified as female and 47 as male. Participants were primarily young adults aged 18 to 25. The sample comprised people from a variety of occupational groups (e.g., students, employees, and self-employed), as well as people from all five shopping frequency levels. A convenience sample technique was used, consistent with exploratory research in applied psychological situations. To be eligible for participation, individuals had to be between the ages of 18 and 25, representing the young adult demographic; able to read and comprehend English, as both assessment tools were administered in this language; actively engaged in consumer behavior, having made at least one purchase (online, offline, or both); and willing to provide informed consent prior to participating.

4. Self esteem and Impulse buying

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) was used to assess self-esteem. It is a ten-item self-report scale that measures overall self-worth. Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. For the five positively worded items (Items 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10), responses were scored directly, with Strongly Agree = 3, Agree = 2, Disagree = 1, and Strongly Disagree = 0. For the five negatively worded items (Items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9), scoring was reversed, with Strongly Agree = 0, Agree = 1, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 3. Item scores were summed to produce a total score ranging from 0 to 30, with higher scores reflecting greater self-esteem. Based on the distribution of scores in the present sample, scores between 15 and 25 were categorized as falling within the normal range, scores below 15 were categorized as indicating low self-esteem, and scores above 25 were categorized as indicating high self-esteem.

Impulsive buying tendency was assessed using an 8-item scale adapted from the Impulsive Buying Scale developed by Rook and Fisher (1995), which measures a person's tendency to make unplanned, spontaneous purchasing decisions. Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Seven items (Q1–Q6 and Q8) were positively worded and scored directly, while one item (Q7: "I carefully plan most of my purchases") was reverse-worded and reverse-scored, such that Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 3, and Strongly Disagree = 4. Item scores were summed to produce a total score ranging from 8 to 32, with higher scores reflecting greater impulsive buying tendencies. Based on the distribution of scores in the present sample, total scores were categorized as low (8–15), moderate (16–23), or high (24–32) impulsive buying tendency.

Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, in accordance with standard ethical requirements for human subjects research. They were briefed on the study's objectives, told they could withdraw without penalty at any time, and instructed on how their data would be used. Several safeguards protected confidentiality throughout. Unique codes were assigned to each response, separating identities from raw data. Personally identifiable information was removed from the dataset itself; code keys were stored elsewhere, physically isolated from survey materials. This arrangement was deliberate—we wanted assurance that even accidental cross-referencing wouldn't compromise anonymity. During analysis, remaining identifiers were stripped entirely. Final reporting relied exclusively on aggregated results, where individual participants remain untraceable.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the two main variables in this study: self-esteem and impulsive buying. Self-esteem scores ranged from 2 to 30, with a mean of 18.22 falling on the normal range and a standard deviation of 5.28. Impulsive buying scores ranged from 8 to 31, with a mean of 17.58 falling on the moderate range and a standard deviation of 5.30. Both variables showed minimal skewness and kurtosis, suggesting that the scores were approximately normally distributed across the sample.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Range
Self-Esteem (SE)	99	18.22	5.28	2	30	28
Impulsive Buying (IMP)	99	17.58	5.30	8	31	23

Tests of normality

As presented in Table 2, a Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the data were normally distributed for both impulsive buying ($W(99) = 0.982, p = .189$) and self-esteem ($W(99) = 0.988, p = .501$). Given that all obtained p-values surpassed the .05 significance threshold, the normality assumption was upheld for both variables. These findings confirmed the appropriateness of proceeding with parametric statistical analyses.

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	p	Statistic	df	p
Self-Esteem	.077	99	.159	.988	99	.501
Impulsive Buying	.060	99	.200	.982	99	.189

Pearson correlation

To test the first hypothesis (H1), which predicted a significant relationship between self-esteem and impulsive buying, Pearson correlation was conducted. The results indicated a positive and statistically non-significant correlation between the two variables, $r(97) = -.051, p = .614$ (see Table 3). Therefore, H1 was not supported. These findings suggest that self-esteem scores did not meaningfully correlate to impulsive buying tendencies in the present sample.

Variable	Self-Esteem	Impulsive Buying
Self-Esteem	1	-.051
Impulsive Buying	-.051 ($p = .614$)	1

ANOVA

Table 1 consisting of self-esteem and impulsive buying by age group - A one-way ANOVA was conducted

to examine whether self-esteem and impulsive buying scores differed significantly across age groups. As seen in Table 1, no significant differences were found for either self-esteem, $F(2, 96) = .328$, $p = .721$, or impulsive buying, $F(2, 96) = 1.375$, $p = .258$. Accordingly, H2 is not supported.

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Self-Esteem	Between Groups	18.55	2	9.28	.328	.721
	Within Groups	2714.56	96	28.28		
Impulsive Buying	Between Groups	76.70	2	38.35	1.375	.258
	Within Groups	2677.48	96	27.89		

Table 2 consisting of self-esteem and impulsive buying by gender - The results revealed no significant gender-based differences for self-esteem, $F(2, 96) = .371$, $p = .691$, or for impulsive buying, $F(2, 96) = .082$, $p = .921$ (see Table 2). Accordingly, H3 was not supported. Gender did not appear to play a significant role in determining impulsive buying tendencies among the participants.

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Self-Esteem	Between Groups	20.97	2	10.48	.371	.691
	Within Groups	2712.14	96	28.25		
Impulsive Buying	Between Groups	4.70	2	2.35	.082	.921
	Within Groups	2749.48	96	28.64		

Table 3 consisting of self-esteem and impulsive buying by occupation - ANOVA was conducted to determine whether participants' occupational group was associated with differences in self-esteem or impulsive buying (H4). The results showed no significant effects for self-esteem, $F(3, 95) = .661$, $p = .578$, or for impulsive buying, $F(3, 95) = .322$, $p = .810$ (see Table 3). H4 was therefore not supported, suggesting that occupation did not significantly influence either variable in this sample.

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Self-Esteem	Between Groups	55.85	3	18.62	.661	.578
	Within Groups	2677.27	95	28.18		

Impulsive Buying	Between Groups	27.70	3	9.23	.322	.810
	Within Groups	2726.48	95	28.70		

Table 4 consisting of self-esteem and impulsive buying by shopping type - ANOVA was used to examine whether the type of shopping a participant preferred - online, offline, or both was associated with differences in self-esteem or impulsive buying (H5). No significant differences were found for self-esteem, $F(2, 96) = .203$, $p = .817$, or for impulsive buying, $F(2, 96) = 1.783$, $p = .174$ (see Table 4). H5 was not supported, indicating that shopping type preference did not significantly affect either variable.

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Self-Esteem	Between Groups	11.50	2	5.75	.203	.817
	Within Groups	2721.62	96	28.35		
Impulsive Buying	Between Groups	98.63	2	49.31	1.783	.174
	Within Groups	2655.57	96	27.66		

Table 5 consisting of self-esteem and impulsive buying by shopping frequency - A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant effect of shopping frequency on impulsive buying, $F(4, 94) = 3.467$, $p = .011$ (see Table 5). This indicates that participants who shopped at different frequencies also differed meaningfully in their impulsive buying scores. However, no significant effect of shopping frequency was found for self-esteem, $F(4, 94) = .390$, $p = .815$. As a result, H6 was partially supported shopping frequency significantly differentiated participants on impulsive buying but not on self-esteem.

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Self-Esteem	Between Groups	44.64	4	11.16	.390	.815
	Within Groups	2688.47	94	28.60		
Impulsive Buying	Between Groups	354.11	4	88.53	3.467*	.011*
	Within Groups	2400.07	94	25.53		

Discussion

The current study examined the relationship between self-esteem and impulsive buying among young Indian consumers, as well as whether demographic and behavioral variables such as gender, occupation, shopping type, and shopping frequency produce significant differences between these two constructs. The

results showed no significant group differences in impulsive buying across the demographic variables assessed, with the exception of shopping frequency.

- The correlation between self-esteem and impulsive buying was non-significant, indicating that self-esteem does not meaningfully predict impulsive buying behavior in this sample.
- No significant differences in impulsive buying were found across age groups, suggesting that impulsive buying tendencies were relatively consistent regardless of how old the participants were.
- Gender did not significantly influence impulsive buying scores, indicating that men, women, and other gender categories engaged in impulsive buying at comparable levels.
- Occupational status did not produce any significant differences in impulsive buying, implying that whether a participant was employed, a student, or otherwise occupied had little effect on their purchasing impulsivity.
- Shopping frequency was the only variable that significantly differentiated participants on impulsive buying, suggesting that how often a person shops plays a meaningful role in their likelihood of making unplanned purchases.
- Shopping type preference, whether online, offline, or both, did not significantly affect impulsive buying scores, indicating that the medium through which participants shopped did not meaningfully shape their impulsive buying tendencies.

In contrast to the first hypothesis, the current study did not find a significant correlation between impulsive buying and self-esteem. This result deviates from previous studies, such as the work of Maraz et al (2015), which showed that poor self-esteem is a significant predictor of compulsive and impulsive spending behaviors. The new study, however, contributes to the body of literature by indicating that this association is probably context-dependent and not universal. This is explained by the moderating effect of the Indian cultural context, where strong family ties, a sense of belonging to the community, and collectivist social structures act as psychological barriers against the emotional fallout from low self-esteem, thereby lowering the drive to pursue validation through material possessions. The relationship between poor self-esteem and compensatory purchasing behavior is probably lessened in societies where social identity is based on relationships rather than personal value. This interpretation fits with cross-cultural research showing that individualist and collectivist societies have very different emotional regulating functions of consumer behavior (Guo et al., 2024). Jain et al.'s (2024) findings show the same pattern—association between self-esteem and impulsive purchase operates through mediating variables like emotional dysregulation and materialistic values, not as a direct influence. That aligns with the lack of a direct effect in the current study. The direct path was likely non-significant precisely because these specific mediators were not included in the analysis. Research consistently demonstrates self-esteem's influence on purchasing is often indirect, fully mediated by factors such as hedonic motivation, materialism, or subjective well-being (Jain et al., 2024; Jalees et al., 2024; Pupelis & Šeinauskienė, 2023).

No significant differences emerged across age groups for either self-esteem or impulsive buying. Participants, in other words, scored similarly on both variables regardless of age. A plausible explanation lies in the composition of the sample: most respondents were young adults at a comparable stage of life, sharing similar financial circumstances, daily routines, and shopping experiences. Because the sample was concentrated within a narrow age band, genuine age-related differences should they exist would be difficult to detect. Age may well play a more meaningful role in impulsive buying than the present findings suggest, but testing this would require a broader and more diverse age range.

No significant gender-based differences were found in either self-esteem or impulsive buying. This indicates that men and women in this sample did not differ in how impulsively they shopped. This finding reflects a broader shift in consumer behavior, where traditional gender-based patterns of shopping appear to be fading especially among younger generations who have grown up with equal access to digital shopping platforms.

Occupation did not significantly influence impulsive buying scores. One possible reason is that impulsive buying depends more on psychological and situational factors than on employment status. Among young adults in India, financial circumstances often overlap: students frequently receive financial support from family, while employed participants may still be short of money. Occupational differences may therefore not produce meaningful differences in shopping behaviour in this age group.

Whether participants preferred to shop online, offline, or through both channels did not significantly affect their impulsive buying scores. There was, however, a visible trend: individuals who engaged in both online and offline shopping reported slightly higher impulsive buying. This pattern is intuitively plausible, as exposure to more shopping environments naturally creates more opportunities for impulse purchases. Given that the trend did not reach statistical significance, it may simply reflect a sample-size limitation, and future research with larger samples would be needed to confirm whether the effect is genuine.

The most notable finding of this study was the effect of shopping frequency on impulsive buying: participants who shopped more frequently reported significantly higher impulsive buying. Frequent engagement with shopping environments increases exposure to purchase stimuli, and repeated exposure over time may reinforce impulsive responses, rendering them more automatic and habitual. Practically, this suggests that interventions aimed at reducing impulsive buying may be more effective when they target shopping frequency rather than focusing solely on dispositional factors such as self-esteem.

This study's findings point to impulsive buying as a multidimensional behavior one that resists explanation by any single variable. Of the factors examined, shopping frequency emerged as the strongest predictor. Which suggests behavioral patterns may connect more directly to impulsive buying than psychological or demographic characteristics at least within this sample of young Indian consumers.

These findings draw attention to the importance of considering everyday behavioural tendencies alongside individual psychological traits when seeking to understand impulsive buying. Future research would benefit from incorporating additional variables such as emotional regulation, peer influence, and social media exposure, which may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors underlying impulsive buying behaviour in this population.

Limitations

Several limitations restrict the interpretation of these results. First, the convenience sample of 99 participants reduces statistical power and generalizability. Second, the cross-sectional design rules out causal inference. Third, self-report measures are vulnerable to social desirability bias, especially for constructs like impulsive purchase, which carries normative stigma. Fourth, the current study did not include critical potential mediating variables including materialism, emotional drive, financial stress, or smartphone usage. Fifth, the sample was restricted to urban Indians with adequate English literacy, limiting its application to rural or less formally educated people.

Scope for future studies

Future research should use larger, more representative samples from a wider age range, including rural

populations. Longitudinal designs would allow researchers to investigate whether self-esteem causes impulsive buying or vice versa. Mediation investigations should look into the roles of materialism, emotional drive, and social comparison in the self-esteem-buying relationship. Mixed-method techniques that include qualitative interviews may shed light on the subjective experience of impulsive buying among various professional and gender categories. Finally, researchers should look into platform-specific effects, comparing impulsive purchase on social commerce platforms (Instagram, YouTube Shopping) to traditional e-commerce, to better understand the digital consumption landscape for young Indians.

Conclusion

The current study investigated whether demographic and behavioral factors, such as gender, occupation, type of shopping, and frequency of shopping, result in significant group differences in these tendencies. It also looked at the relationship between self-esteem and impulsive buying among young Indian consumers. The study, which was carried out on a sample of 99 adults using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and a validated measure of impulsive purchase, adds a culturally grounded viewpoint to a body of literature that is primarily composed of samples from East Asia and the West.

The primary finding, that self-esteem and impulsive buying did not significantly correlate, is consistent with studies showing that the psychological relationship between self-worth and consumer behaviour is neither universal nor linear. This null result in the Indian context could be the result of culturally specific limitations that lessen the chance of using material expenses as a coping method, such as social bonding, familial integration, and religious frameworks. It may also stand for the concept that spontaneous purchasing is a result of India's algorithmically tailored, continuously lowered prices, and socially pushed shopping systems. The absence of notable differences among gender, occupation, and purchasing type challenges the belief that socio-demographic factors consistently distinguish impulsive buying behaviours. These insufficient findings suggest that young Indians exhibit a prevalent tendency for impulsive buying, which is more accurately interpreted as a situational and habitual response rather than a characteristic or identity-related behaviour. The key finding was the notable effect of shopping frequency on impulsive purchases. Because they are exposed to more environments that evoke impulses, frequent shoppers may develop conditioned habits of impulsive purchases that operate mostly independently of psychological self-regard. Compared to personality-level characteristics in this sample, shopping frequency is now a more direct correlate of impulsive purchase.

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