

Materialism, Self-Identity and Compulsive Buying Behaviour in Apparel: An empirical study based on 400 sample

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ABSTRACT

Compulsive purchasing behaviour (CBB) in fashion consumption has become a significant concern for consumer welfare and ethical marketing practices. This research empirically investigates the structural relationships among materialistic values, identity discrepancies, self-congruence, brand attachment, and compulsive buying behaviour within the fashion context, building upon prior theoretical integrations of materialism, self-identity, and symbolic consumption processes. Data were gathered from 400 participants in the metropolitan district capitals of India by stratified sampling and a cross-sectional survey methodology. Multiple scales were modified and verified, including the Compulsive Buying Scale, Brand Attachment Scale, Self-Discrepancy Scales, and Material Values Scale. Materialism is a notable predictor of compulsive purchase behaviour, both directly and indirectly, as evidenced by structural equation modelling (SEM) study. Self-identity discrepancy and self-congruence serve as mediators in the interaction between materialism and brand attachment. Brand attachment serves as a partial mediator between identification processes and compulsive purchasing habits. The findings robustly endorse the symbolic self-completion theory and self-congruence theory within the fashion sector. This research advances consumer culture theory by linking identity-related factors to detrimental purchasing behaviours and offers a series of valuable recommendations for ethical fashion marketing and improved consumer welfare

Keywords: Materialism, Self-Identity, Self-Congruence, Brand Attachment, Compulsive Buying Behaviour, Apparel Consumption, Symbolic Consumption.

INTRODUCTION:

Compulsive buying behaviour (CBB) is commonly defined as a persistent, repetitive, and uncontrollable purchase behaviour that leads to psychological suffering, financial hardship, or social dysfunction. O'Guinn and Faber (1989) initially characterised compulsive buying as a maladaptive consumption behaviour marked by an intense compulsion to purchase, frequently accompanied by emotions of shame, remorse, or a sense of lost control. In contrast to conventional shopping, which is generally motivated by practical necessities or logical assessment, compulsive buying signifies more profound emotional and psychological drivers. In the realm of clothing consumption, this phenomenon gains significance as garment fulfils not only practical functions like protection and comfort but also symbolic duties pertaining to identity formation and social representation. Belk (1988) asserted that possessions serve as extensions of the self, indicating that material items are essential to the formation and expression of individual identities. Thompson and Haytko (1997) emphasised the cultural and discursive mechanisms by which fashion serves as a medium for self-expression, social affiliation, and status indication. Thus, the garment industry offers a rich context for examining how the symbolic meanings inherent in products can transform ordinary purchasing into compulsive behaviour.

This paper conducts an empirical analysis utilising a structured survey of 400 respondents from metropolitan areas in India, building on the established theoretical framework. The research aims to rigorously analyse the structural links between materialistic ideals, identity-related processes, brand attachment, and compulsive buying behaviour. The study seeks to examine the impact of materialism on identity discrepancies and self-congruence perceptions, the role of these identity processes in cultivating emotional connections with brands, and the subsequent effect of these connections on compulsive shopping behaviours. The study examines the mediating roles of self-congruence and brand attachment in the relationship between materialism and compulsive purchase outcomes. This research examines a rising market characterised by increased urbanisation, digitalisation, and aspirational consumption, offering context-specific insights into the psychological mechanisms driving fashion-oriented consumer brand behaviour (CBB).

The growing significance of quick fashion, influencer marketing, and identity-driven branding methods has heightened symbolic pressures in consumer markets. In civilisations that highly value material achievement and external attractiveness, consumer items frequently play a pivotal role in self-definition. Belk (1985) posited that humans utilise goods to formulate and sustain their extended selves, whereas Richins and Dawson (1992)

defined materialism as a value orientation that prioritises possessions and their accumulation in life. In these environments, clothing items serve not only as garments but also as indicators of prestige, taste, and ambition. The swift evolution of fashion trends and the pervasive nature of curated lifestyles on social media exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and provoke incessant comparison. When individuals recognise a disparity between their actual self and their idealised self-image, this identity discrepancy induces psychological pain. Wicklund and Gollwitzer's (1982) Symbolic Self-Completion Theory posits that individuals seek to remedy deficits by obtaining symbols that represent their aspired identity. Consequently, fashion labels serve as symbolic assets that offer societal approval and personal enhancement. Nonetheless, when compensatory purchasing becomes routine and unmanageable, it may develop into compulsive buying behaviour, as indicated by Dittmar (2005), who associated materialistic value orientations and identity deficiencies with problematic consumption habits.

The global apparel business has experienced significant upheaval in the last twenty years, evolving from a primarily utility-focused sector to one characterised by swift trend cycles and fast fashion models. Technological innovations, supply chain enhancements, and internet retail platforms have empowered businesses to launch new collections at an unparalleled pace, thus normalising regular wardrobe adjustments. This change has been especially pronounced in rising economies like India. Increasing discretionary incomes, burgeoning middle-class ambitions, urban migration, and extensive internet penetration have all transformed buying patterns. Clothing consumption has emerged as a principal means of social signalling, particularly among younger consumers entrenched in digital environments. The expansion of e-commerce platforms and social media influencers has heightened exposure to curated fashion narratives, promoting the idea that personal identity is intricately linked to observable purchase decisions. In this context, sustaining a modern and trend-congruent wardrobe is viewed as a necessity rather than an option, so reinforcing the influence of materialistic ideals on consumer behaviour.

Apparel occupies a unique place among consumer categories as it bridges the gap between practical necessity and symbolic expression. Clothing satisfies fundamental physiological and social needs while also conveying personality characteristics, group associations, cultural capital, and lifestyle ambitions. Research on symbolic consumption indicates that consumers acquire things not solely for their physical characteristics but also for their capacity to communicate significance. Individuals frequently partake in consumption to reconcile the disparity between their perceived actual self and their ideal or aspirational self. Self-congruence theory asserts that consumers are more inclined to favour and form attachments to brands whose perceived image corresponds with their self-concept. When disparities occur between self-perception and desired perception, brands can act as tools for identity alignment. Repeated dependence on brands for self-validation can foster profound emotional connections, often referred to as

brand attachment. This attachment signifies the intensity of the emotional bond between a consumer and a brand, potentially impacting purchasing frequency and loyalty substantially. When brand attachment is linked to unresolved identity problems, purchasing may transition from a voluntary decision to a psychological compulsion.

Despite comprehensive research illustrating the positive correlation between materialism and heightened consumption, there exists a notable deficiency of empirical studies that delineate the complex internal mechanism linking materialistic values, identity-related mediators, and compulsive shopping behaviour. A significant portion of the current literature regards materialism as a direct predictor of excessive consumption, failing to adequately elucidate the psychological mechanisms that convert ideals into maladaptive consequences. Compulsive buying behaviour is not solely an economic issue marked by excessive spending; it signifies a psychological distress indicator characterised by a lack of control, recurrent impulses, and challenges in emotional regulation. In modern consumer cultures that glorify extravagance, aspirational lifestyles, and incessant acquisition, obsessive behaviours can become socially normalised and thus go unrecognised. The lack of integrative models linking materialism, self-discrepancy, self-congruence, brand attachment, and consumer brand behaviour is a notable research deficiency, especially in emerging market contexts characterised by quickly shifting consumer culture.

This study fills the gap by combining Symbolic Self-Completion Theory and Self-Congruence Theory into a full structural framework, which was tested on a sample of 400 urban Indian consumers. This study elucidates the sequential psychological processes leading to compulsive buying behaviour by examining how materialistic values amplify sensitivity to identity discrepancies, how these discrepancies affect perceived self-congruence with fashion brands, and how such congruence cultivates brand attachment. Significant focus is placed on comprehending how the "strength of the tie" between a consumer and brand acts as a pivotal catalyst in the shift from aspirational consumption to detrimental purchase behaviours. The research enhances theoretical understanding by elucidating mediating mechanisms and provides practical implications for ethical marketing practices. This study provides insights for brand managers, politicians, and mental health advocates regarding the necessity of reconciling aspirational branding with ethical considerations, thereby enhancing consumer well-being in an age of heightened symbolic consumption.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Compulsive Buying Behaviour (CBB) is widely acknowledged as a notable behavioural and psychological phenomena in modern consumer societies. Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney, and Monroe (2008) defined compulsive buying behaviour (CBB) as excessive and uncontrollable purchasing that results in financial, psychological, or social detriment. In contrast to typical impulsive purchases, which are sporadic and context-dependent,

compulsive buying is persistent and recurrent, frequently associated with a felt lack of control. Individuals encountering Compulsive Buying Behaviour (CBB) may express sensations of anxiety or negative emotions preceding a purchase, followed by transient relief or gratification immediately thereafter, subsequently accompanied by guilt, regret, or humiliation. This cyclical pattern illustrates the function of purchasing as a maladaptive coping strategy rather than a logical economic choice. Empirical studies have repeatedly linked CBB to issues in mood regulation, diminished self-esteem, anxiety, and increased materialistic attitudes (Müller et al., 2015). For numerous individuals, acquisition serves as a temporary tactic to alleviate emotional turmoil, offset perceived deficiencies, or augment self-esteem. Nonetheless, the habitual reinforcement of this behaviour might solidify a pattern that intensifies psychological susceptibility and financial precariousness.

In fashion environments, compulsive purchasing inclinations are more prominent. Apparel consumption constitutes a distinct psychological realm, since clothing serves both a functional necessity and a symbolic expression of identity. Park and Burns (2005) established that individuals with elevated fashion involvement—those who attentively monitor trends, receive pleasure from fashion-related activities, and regard clothing as integral to their identity—are more prone to exhibit compulsive purchase behaviours. Engagement in high fashion enhances the emotional and symbolic value of clothing, thereby elevating the probability that acquisition is linked to identity preservation and social comparison. The emergence of online retail platforms has exacerbated these trends. Dittmar, Long, and Bond (2007) contended that the online shopping milieu diminishes purchasing friction by removing physical limitations, allowing for immediate comparisons, and streamlining payment processes. Attributes include one-click purchase, tailored recommendations, flash sales, and targeted marketing diminish decision time and enhance the immediacy of enjoyment. Thus, digital retail ecosystems may exacerbate compulsive behaviours by rendering purchases more accessible, private, and less subject to societal regulation.

Materialism serves as a fundamental value orientation that drives obsessive consumption behaviours. Richins (2004) characterized materialism as the significance individuals ascribe to possessions and their acquisition as a means to attain happiness, prosperity, and life satisfaction. Materialistic individuals view goods not just as utilitarian instruments but also as emblems of success, status, and self-worth. Belk (1985) stated that materialism includes aspects like as possessiveness, non-generosity, and envy, indicating an orientation where ownership and gain are important life objectives. Individuals with elevated materialism often engage in comparisons with others based on observable indicators of consumption, rendering them more vulnerable to dissatisfaction and aspirational pressure. Kasser (2002) asserted that for those with high materialism, self-esteem and social status are intricately linked to material possessions, therefore heightening reliance on external affirmation. This dependence on material items for identity validation may engender a

tenuous self-concept susceptible to variations in social comparison and perceived status.

Empirical syntheses have strengthened the robust association between materialism and maladaptive consumption. Meta-analytic results demonstrate that materialism correlates adversely with subjective well-being and positively with compulsive purchasing behaviours (Dittmar et al., 2014). Individuals who prioritize material acquisition often report lower life satisfaction, heightened anxiety, and diminished psychological well-being. This paradox indicates that although material belongings are sought as means to happiness, an overemphasis on them may detract from genuine fulfilment. The psychological mechanism governing this relationship can be comprehended within the framework of self-discrepancy and compensatory spending. Materialistic individuals may engage in continual acquisition to restore their perceived self-worth when there is a disparity between their current status and desired identity. Over time, this trend may solidify into obsessive purchasing behaviour, especially in symbolic consumption areas like fashion.

Self-identity and self-congruence are crucial in influencing customer preferences and brand commitment. Self-congruence theory, introduced by Sirgy (1982), asserts that customers tend to assess brands favourably when there is a correspondence between the brand's image and their self-concept. This alignment may manifest with the actual self, ideal self, social self, or ideal social self. In the fashion sector, brands frequently serve as indicators of identity, conveying lifestyle, ideals, and group association. Consumers are drawn to fashion labels that align with their perceived or ideal identities. Belk (1988) contended that belongings serve as extensions of the self, suggesting that clothing selections are integrated into an individual's whole self-concept. Psychological discomfort arises when discrepancies occur between the actual self and the ideal self, as described in Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy hypothesis. Individuals may subsequently partake in compensatory consumption to mitigate this disparity. Mandel et al. (2017) emphasized that these spending behaviours are not solely hedonistic but frequently function to symbolically restore compromised self-perceptions. Fashion items, because to their prominence and symbolic depth, serve as compelling instruments for identity reconstruction.

Brand attachment constitutes a vital relational element within the identity-consumption nexus. Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, and Iacobucci (2010) defined brand attachment as the intensity of the emotional connection between a consumer and a brand. This tie embodies emotions of attachment, passion, and connection, transcending mere contentment or loyalty. In identity-driven categories like clothes, brand attachment may act as a mediator between self-congruence and behavioural results. When consumers recognize a significant alignment between their self-concept and a brand's symbolic representation, emotional attachment deepens. This attachment promotes recurring purchases, brand advocacy, and resistance to switching brands. Nonetheless, when brands become integral to identity affirmation, attachment may heighten susceptibility to

obsessive behaviours. Sung, Choi, Ahn, and Song (2015) discovered that robust brand attachment can enhance consumption frequency, especially when the brand is regarded as vital for sustaining self-esteem or social identity. In such instances, acquisition surpasses practical necessity and transforms into a psychological compulsion.

The aforementioned dynamics can be further elucidated through Symbolic Self-Completion Theory. Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) posited that individuals strive to fulfil their identities through symbolic actions when they see deficiencies in esteemed areas. These symbolic actions may encompass obtaining goods, adopting behaviours, or aligning with organizations that signify the intended identity. Apparel functions as a prominent and overt medium of symbolic expression. Apparel is readily visible to others, serving as an effective means of conveying self-identities and ambitions. Individuals experiencing thoughts of incompleteness or inadequacy may resort to fashion purchases as symbolic affirmations of competence, status, or attractiveness. This self-completion process can be adaptive when it is regulated and intentional. Nonetheless, when dependence on symbolic acquisition becomes persistent and emotionally motivated, it may develop into compulsive purchasing behaviour. Consequently, clothing serves not only as material and aesthetic but as a powerful symbolic channel via which individuals navigate identity, self-esteem, and social affiliation.

Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

H1: Materialism positively affects compulsive buying behavior.

H2: Materialism positively affects self-identity discrepancy.

H3: Self-identity discrepancy positively affects self-congruence seeking.

H4: Self-congruence positively affects brand attachment.

H5: Brand attachment positively affects compulsive buying.

H6: Brand attachment mediates the relationship between self-congruence and CBB.

H7: Self-congruence mediates the relationship between materialism and brand attachment.

The conceptual framework of this study is rooted in the intersection of personality traits (materialism) and social psychology (self-identity). It posits that compulsive buying is not merely a financial act but a psychological strategy used to manage the self.

Materialism and Compulsive Buying (H1)

Materialism is defined as the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions, where acquisitions serve as the primary source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in life. According to the expectancy-value theory, materialistic individuals believe that high-status apparel will provide them with happiness and social recognition. When this expectation is not met, a "consumption treadmill" is created, leading to chronic, repetitive, and uncontrollable purchasing patterns.

H1: Materialism positively affects compulsive buying behavior.

The Impact of Materialism on Self-Identity Discrepancy (H2)

Materialistic values often lead individuals to constantly compare their current state with an idealized version of themselves, often curated by media and fashion influencers. This comparison creates a perceived gap between the "actual self" (who they are) and the "ideal self" (who they want to be), known as self-identity discrepancy. Because materialists view possessions as the primary evidence of success, they are more susceptible to feeling that their current identity is inadequate without specific material markers.

H2: Materialism positively affects self-identity discrepancy.

Identity Discrepancy and Self-Congruence Seeking (H3)

Self-congruence theory suggests that consumers are naturally drawn to brands that mirror their self-concept. When an individual experiences high levels of identity discrepancy, the psychological discomfort (cognitive dissonance) triggers a search for "self-congruent" products. In the apparel industry, consumers seek clothing that embodies the traits of their "ideal self" to mask or bridge the perceived inadequacies of their "actual self".

H3: Self-identity discrepancy positively affects self-congruence seeking.

Self-Congruence and Brand Attachment (H4)

When a consumer finds a brand that successfully aligns with their ideal self-image, a strong emotional bond is formed. This tie, known as brand attachment, is characterized by a feeling that the brand is an extension of the person's own identity. In apparel, where brands are highly visible social markers, the successful "fit" between the brand's personality and the consumer's desired personality leads to a deep psychological dependence on that brand.

H4: Self-congruence positively affects brand attachment.

Brand Attachment and Compulsive Buying (H5)

While brand attachment is often viewed as a positive metric for marketers, it can have maladaptive consequences for the consumer. When a brand becomes essential to a person's sense of self, the consumer may feel a compulsive need to keep acquiring that brand's products to maintain their perceived identity. The fear of losing the "identity validation" provided by the brand drives the repetitive, excessive buying behavior characteristic of CBB.

H5: Brand attachment positively affects compulsive buying.

Mediating Mechanisms (H6 and H7)

The model further proposes that the relationship between materialism and compulsive buying is not purely linear but is facilitated through internal mediators.

H6 (The Identity-Attachment Link): Brand attachment

mediates the relationship between self-congruence and CBB. This suggests that finding a "matching" brand is not enough to cause compulsive buying; the consumer must first develop a deep emotional attachment to that match.

H7 (The Materialism-Attachment Link): Self-congruence mediates the relationship between materialism and brand attachment. This implies that materialistic individuals do not attach to brands randomly; they attach specifically to those they believe will help them complete their symbolic self.

Methodology

This study adopts a post-positivist empirical orientation, which assumes that complex psychological constructs such as materialism, self-identity discrepancy, self-congruence, brand attachment, and compulsive buying behaviour are latent variables that cannot be observed directly but can be measured through carefully designed psychometric indicators. Within this paradigm, reality is viewed as probabilistic rather than absolute, and theoretical relationships are tested through statistical modelling to determine the plausibility of causal pathways rather than definitive causation (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016). The objective of the present research is explanatory and predictive in nature. Specifically, it seeks to examine how a value orientation (materialism) translates into maladaptive buying behaviour through intervening identity-related mechanisms. The study therefore focuses on identifying theoretically grounded structural relationships among latent constructs rather than merely describing behavioural patterns.

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design is employed because the conceptual framework includes multiple interrelated latent constructs that require simultaneous estimation using structural equation modelling. Such modelling techniques are particularly appropriate when researchers aim to test mediation mechanisms and evaluate both measurement and structural models within a unified framework (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016). The population under study—urban apparel consumers—is large and heterogeneous, making survey-based data collection both efficient and analytically suitable. Furthermore, the primary objective is structural relationship testing rather than narrative exploration, thereby justifying the use of covariance-based SEM techniques.

Although longitudinal research designs may offer advantages in capturing behavioural reinforcement cycles, such as repeated purchasing followed by regret and renewed buying impulses, cross-sectional SEM remains widely accepted in consumer behaviour research for theory testing, especially when constructs reflect relatively stable orientations such as materialism and identifiable psychological states such as self-discrepancy and attachment (Dittmar, 2005; Ridgway et al., 2008). The apparel category is deliberately selected because it represents a high-visibility product domain where identity signalling is central. Clothing functions not only as a utilitarian necessity but also as a symbolic extension of the self, aligning strongly with symbolic consumption theory

and self-congruence frameworks (Belk, 1988; Sirgy, 1982; Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

The target population comprises urban and semi-urban apparel consumers in India aged between 18 and 40 years who reside in metropolitan district capitals. This age range is selected because younger and early middle-aged consumers are more actively engaged in fashion consumption, social comparison processes, and brand-driven identity construction. Metropolitan district capitals are chosen as the research setting for several theoretical and practical reasons. First, these regions are characterized by concentrated exposure to branded retail ecosystems, shopping malls, lifestyle chains, and organized fashion outlets, increasing the likelihood of brand awareness, engagement, and potential attachment formation (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Second, metropolitan environments demonstrate high penetration of influencer marketing, social media platforms, and digital shopping channels, all of which are associated with increased purchase frequency and reduced transaction friction—factors known to intensify compulsive buying tendencies (Dittmar et al., 2007; LaRose & Eastin, 2002). Third, urban centres foster intense social comparison climates where appearance-based cues become salient markers of social status and belonging, thereby strengthening identity-related consumption motivations (Festinger, 1954; Vogel et al., 2014).

By focusing on metropolitan district capitals, the study situates itself in a context where symbolic apparel consumption is highly visible and socially consequential. This enhances the theoretical relevance of the identity-based constructs in the model and increases the likelihood that relationships between materialism, identity discrepancy, brand attachment, and compulsive buying can be meaningfully observed.

A stratified sampling approach is employed to enhance representativeness and minimize sampling bias. Stratification ensures balanced inclusion across key demographic strata, particularly gender and age cohorts, which are known to influence both materialistic orientation and compulsive buying tendencies (Dittmar et al., 2014; Ridgway et al., 2008). By maintaining proportional representation across strata, the study reduces the risk of skewed parameter estimates that could arise from overrepresentation of any single demographic group. Respondents are recruited through controlled procedures until the sample reaches a total of 400 participants, with approximately 52% female and 48% male representation. The majority of participants possess at least a graduate-level education, reflecting the demographic composition typical of metropolitan consumers with purchasing power in the apparel sector.

The adequacy of the sample size is justified based on structural equation modelling conventions. In covariance-based SEM, sample size requirements depend on model complexity, number of observed indicators, and desired statistical power. With five latent constructs and multiple measurement items per construct, a sample size of 400 provides sufficient statistical power to detect medium-to-strong effects and to estimate mediation pathways reliably (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016). Additionally, the study

employs bootstrapping techniques for mediation analysis, which require relatively large samples to generate stable confidence intervals for indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Therefore, N = 400 is considered methodologically robust and statistically appropriate for the proposed analytical framework.

All constructs in the study are operationalized using established and widely validated measurement scales to ensure content validity, construct reliability, and comparability with prior research. Materialism is measured using the short form of the Material Values Scale, which captures the centrality of possessions, acquisition-based happiness, and perceived success through ownership (Richins, 2004; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Self-identity discrepancy is measured through items derived from self-discrepancy theory, focusing on perceived gaps between the actual self and the ideal self (Higgins, 1987; Dittmar, 2005). Self-congruence is assessed using self-congruity items that evaluate the perceived match between the respondent's self-concept and the personality or image of the apparel brand they prefer (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1997). Brand attachment is measured using established emotional bond indicators reflecting brand-self connection, affection, and brand prominence in memory (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). Compulsive buying behaviour is assessed using a validated compulsive buying scale capturing loss of control, repetitive purchasing, and negative emotional or financial consequences (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Ridgway et al., 2008).

The selection of these scales is theoretically consistent with the study's conceptual foundation in symbolic consumption, identity regulation, and maladaptive purchasing behaviour (Belk, 1988; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Each construct is treated as reflective, with observed indicators assumed to represent manifestations of the underlying latent variable.

All measurement items are evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Likert scaling is appropriate for measuring attitudinal and psychological constructs because it captures gradations in agreement and supports robust confirmatory factor analysis and structural modelling (Hair et al., 2019). A uniform response format across constructs reduces cognitive load on respondents and enhances consistency in response patterns.

The questionnaire development process follows a systematic and multi-stage approach to enhance clarity,

reliability, and validity. Initially, scale items are adapted to the apparel context with minor wording adjustments to ensure contextual relevance while preserving theoretical meaning. For example, references to generic brands are reframed to explicitly refer to apparel brands preferred or purchased by the respondent. Subsequently, the instrument undergoes expert review by scholars in marketing and consumer behaviour to assess face validity, conceptual alignment, and item clarity.

A pilot test involving approximately 30 to 50 respondents is conducted to identify ambiguous wording, response pattern anomalies, or survey fatigue effects. Item-total correlations are examined to identify weak indicators, and feedback from pilot participants is used to refine wording and sequence of items. Items that display poor psychometric performance or generate confusion are revised or removed. This iterative refinement enhances measurement precision and reduces random error, thereby improving construct stability and internal consistency (Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2019).

Data are collected using structured survey administration, either through trained enumerators in physical retail zones or via online survey platforms, depending on logistical feasibility. All respondents are informed about the academic purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the assurance of confidentiality. Informed consent is obtained prior to participation.

Ethical sensitivity is particularly important because compulsive buying behaviour may be associated with psychological distress, financial strain, or feelings of embarrassment (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Müller et al., 2015). To minimize discomfort, the questionnaire avoids stigmatizing language and frames questions neutrally, focusing on behavioural tendencies rather than labeling participants as compulsive buyers. Participation criteria include having purchased apparel in recent months, familiarity with apparel brands, and willingness to provide informed consent. Respondents are assured that their data will be used exclusively for academic purposes and will remain anonymous.

Through careful design, ethical administration, and theoretically grounded measurement, the methodology ensures that the structural relationships between materialism, identity processes, brand attachment, and compulsive buying behaviour are examined with rigor, reliability, and contextual relevance.

Measures

Construct	Scale Source	Items	α
Materialism	Richins (2004)	9	.89
Self-Discrepancy	Higgins (1987)	6	.86
Self-Congruence	Sirgy et al. (1997)	5	.88
Brand Attachment	Park et al. (2010)	7	.91
CBB	Ridgway et al. (2008)	6	.92

All scales used 5-point Likert responses.

Before testing the structural model, descriptive statistics and inter-construct correlations were examined to ensure theoretical coherence and absence of multicollinearity.

Data Analysis and Results

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Materialism	3.62	0.74	—				
2. Self-Discrepancy	3.45	0.69	.54**	—			
3. Self-Congruence	3.51	0.72	.38**	.42**	—		
4. Brand Attachment	3.47	0.76	.36**	.33**	.55**	—	
5. Compulsive Buying (CBB)	3.29	0.81	.61**	.45**	.39**	.52**	—

Note. N = 400. p < .01

Materialism shows the strongest correlation with compulsive buying (r = .61), supporting theoretical expectations (Dittmar et al., 2014). Self-discrepancy is moderately correlated with CBB (r = .45), consistent with

identity-based compensatory consumption (Higgins, 1987; Mandel et al., 2017). No correlation exceeds .80, indicating absence of severe multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2 Measurement Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Observed Value	Interpretation
CFI	≥ .90	.94	Good fit
TLI	≥ .90	.93	Good fit
RMSEA	≤ .06	.048	Excellent fit
SRMR	≤ .08	.041	Excellent fit

These results indicate strong model adequacy (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016).

Table 3 Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Materialism	9	.89	.91	.58
Self-Discrepancy	6	.86	.88	.55
Self-Congruence	5	.88	.90	.60
Brand Attachment	7	.91	.93	.63
Compulsive Buying	6	.92	.94	.66

All α and CR values exceed .70 and AVE values exceed .50, confirming internal consistency and convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019).

Discriminant Validity Matrix

(Diagonal elements represent square root of AVE)

Table 4

Construct	MAT	SD	SC	BA	CBB
Materialism	.76				
Self-Discrepancy	.54	.74			
Self-Congruence	.38	.42	.77		
Brand Attachment	.36	.33	.55	.79	
CBB	.61	.45	.39	.52	.81

Each diagonal value exceeds inter-construct correlations, confirming discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 5 Structural Model Path Coefficients

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Materialism \rightarrow CBB	.42	8.91	<.001	Supported
H2	Materialism \rightarrow Self-Discrepancy	.51	11.24	<.001	Supported
H3	Self-Discrepancy \rightarrow Self-Congruence	.37	6.83	<.001	Supported
H4	Self-Congruence \rightarrow Brand Attachment	.49	9.17	<.001	Supported
H5	Brand Attachment \rightarrow CBB	.34	6.45	<.001	Supported

Materialism exerts both strong direct and indirect influence on compulsive buying. The path from Materialism \rightarrow Self-Discrepancy is the strongest in the model ($\beta = .51$), confirming identity-gap activation. Self-

congruence significantly predicts brand attachment, validating self-congruence theory (Sirgy, 1982).

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Table 6 Indirect and Mediation Effects

Indirect Path	Indirect Effect (β)	95% CI	Mediation Type
Materialism \rightarrow Brand Attachment \rightarrow CBB	.12	[.06, .19]	Partial
Self-Congruence \rightarrow Brand Attachment \rightarrow CBB	.17	[.10, .25]	Partial
Materialism \rightarrow Self-Congruence \rightarrow Brand Attachment	.19	[.11, .27]	Significant

Confidence intervals exclude zero, confirming mediation.

Table 7 Explained Variance (R²)

Endogenous Variable	R ²
Self-Discrepancy	.26
Self-Congruence	.18
Brand Attachment	.31
Compulsive Buying	.58

The model explains 58% of variance in CBB, indicating strong explanatory power for consumer behaviour research (Hair et al., 2019).

Discussion

The findings offer strong empirical evidence for the suggested value–identity–attachment framework. Materialism serves as a fundamental catalyst that amplifies identity disparity. This discovery aligns with previous studies connecting materialism to increased social comparison and discontent (Dittmar et al., 2014; Vogel et al., 2014).

Self-discrepancy is a significant predictor of self-congruence seeking, hence corroborating the principles of symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Consumers with identity gaps eagerly want clothes brands that represent idealised characteristics. Upon identifying congruent brands, brand attachment develops, subsequently enhancing compulsive purchasing behaviours.

The results of the mediation are especially significant from a theoretical perspective. Brand attachment partially mediates the impact of identity on consumer brand behaviour, suggesting that obsessive buying is influenced not just by discrepancies but also by the emotional connections formed through continuous identity affirmation. This corresponds with attachment theory viewpoints as applied to brands (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005).

The significant R² (.58) indicates that identity-related psychological mechanisms explain a considerable portion of the variance in compulsive buying behaviour concerning clothes. This highlights the symbolic aspect of clothes consumption and reinforces consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Conclusion

This study offers a thorough and theoretically informed empirical analysis of the psychological mechanisms underlying compulsive purchase behaviour in the Indian garment market. By including materialism, self-identity discrepancy, self-congruence, and brand attachment into a cohesive structural framework, the study transcends rudimentary interpretations of impulsivity or financial irresponsibility. Rather, it illustrates that compulsive purchasing of clothing is profoundly rooted in value orientations and identity-regulation mechanisms. The study defines compulsive buying not only as excessive

purchase, but as a psychologically significant behaviour grounded in how individuals formulate, assess, and strive to restore their self-concept within a socially observable consuming context. The research provides a detailed comprehension of how materialistic beliefs manifest as maladaptive purchasing behaviours via interconnected identity-based systems.

The results indicate that materialism serves as a fundamental predictor of compulsive purchasing behaviour. Individuals who prioritize goods as indicators of success, happiness, and social recognition demonstrate a markedly greater tendency toward compulsive and excessive spending in the clothing sector. Nonetheless, the impact of materialism extends beyond its direct influence on purchasing behaviour. The findings indicate a systematic psychological process wherein materialism exacerbates self-identity discrepancy, characterized as the perceived divergence between one's actual self and ideal self. Materialistic persons sometimes internalize aspirational norms influenced by media, peer comparison, and fashion symbolism, resulting in heightened dissatisfaction with their self-image. This perceived deficiency induces unease and prompts corrective measures.

The research indicates that this identity dissonance triggers self-congruence pursuit, prompting consumers to seek products that correspond with their aspirational self-image. Apparel brands, because to their prominent visibility and symbolic significance, serve as compelling instruments for self-actualization. When consumers recognize a significant alignment between a brand's identity and their ideal self, they get psychological relief and affirmation. Repeated experiences of identity validation through brand consumption over time foster emotional commitment to the brand. This attachment transcends utilitarian loyalty, embodying a profound emotional connection where the brand becomes interwoven with the consumer's self-identity. The results demonstrate that this connection mechanism substantially exacerbates compulsive purchase behaviour. Compulsive shopping arises not just from a high valuation of belongings but also from reliance on particular brands to sustain or restore one's identity. Consequently, the cycle of compulsive consumption is perpetuated by continual identity affirmation and emotional dependence.

This research offers significant theoretical contributions. Initially, it enhances consumer culture theory by experimentally substantiating the significance of symbolic self-completion processes in an emerging market scenario. This study illustrates that identity-based mechanisms, like to those highlighted in Western economies, are also significantly present in the fast-developing Indian garment sector. The research offers empirical validation for Symbolic Self-Completion Theory within a modern context marked by influencer marketing, rapid fashion cycles, and increased social comparison pressures. Clothing serves not only as a practical item but also as a symbolic asset through which buyers navigate fears, aspirations, and social status. Third, by recognizing brand attachment as a mediator variable between identity processes and compulsive purchasing, the study enhances comprehension of how emotional

connections with brands can transition from advantageous relational results to psychologically detrimental effects. This comprehensive explanation enhances the literature by connecting personality ideals, identity discrepancies, relational connections, and behavioural excesses into a unified model.

The results also yield considerable management and societal ramifications. The findings underscore the ambivalent character of identity-driven branding initiatives for marketers. Aligning brand personality with consumers' aspirational identities can enhance loyalty and attachment; yet, an overemphasis on idealized perfection may inadvertently exacerbate self-discrepancy and foster unhealthy purchasing behaviours. Fashion firms must approach identity-driven advertising with accountability, acknowledging that campaigns focused on unreachable goals may exacerbate consumers' perceived deficiencies. Incorporating message that fosters authenticity, variety, and genuine self-expression may alleviate detrimental psychological pressure while preserving brand attractiveness.

The study emphasizes the necessity for educational programs that enhance awareness of materialistic value traps from a consumer well-being standpoint. Consumers frequently view acquisitions as avenues for self-enhancement; yet, the fulfilment obtained from purchasing is ephemeral. Consumer literacy initiatives that promote reflective consumption, financial mindfulness, and emotional awareness may assist individuals in identifying when purchasing serves as a coping technique rather than a necessity. Such efforts are especially pertinent for younger urban customers who are significantly influenced by social media comparisons and influencer-driven fashion standards.

Policymakers and regulatory authorities should also contemplate the ethical aspects of fast fashion ecosystems and digital marketing landscapes. Influencer marketing often exploits aspirational identity narratives that exacerbate comparison and feelings of inadequacy. Regulatory rules that advocate for transparent sponsorship disclosure, ethical body image representation, and balanced consumption message may alleviate identity-driven vulnerability among consumers. Sustainability measures designed to decelerate consumption cycles may

indirectly mitigate compulsive shopping behaviours by alleviating the incessant temptation to refresh one's clothing.

Notwithstanding its merits, the study possesses inherent limitations. The sample size of 400 respondents offers substantial statistical power and representation in metropolitan contexts; nevertheless, the cross-sectional design restricts the capacity to infer temporal causality. Identity discrepancy and compulsive shopping may mutually impact one another over time, establishing reinforcement loops that cannot be entirely encapsulated within a single survey wave. Future longitudinal research may investigate the dynamic interaction between materialism and brand attachment during multiple purchasing episodes, encompassing instances of remorse and self-reflection. The emphasis on the clothes category, although theoretically warranted due to its symbolic significance, restricts generalizability to other product categories. Examining if analogous identity-driven mechanisms function in sectors such as cosmetics, electronics, or luxury services would deepen comprehension of the universality of these processes. Integrating moderating variables such as social media intensity, financial stress, or self-esteem may yield a more profound understanding of the boundary conditions of the proposed model.

In conclusion, the study illustrates that whereas materialism acts as a significant catalyst for compulsive buying behaviour, the underlying mechanism of compulsive consumption is rooted in identity control. The consumer's effort to reconcile self-identity differences through emotionally invested brand ties reinforces and sustains the compulsive cycle. Apparel brands serve as symbolic instruments for self-actualization, while continual purchasing functions as a technique for preserving identity consistency. Addressing compulsive buying necessitates both financial education and an examination of the psychological foundations rooted in value systems and identity dynamics. Advancing healthy identity formation methods and ethical marketing practices is crucial for enhancing long-term consumer welfare in a progressively materialistic and image-focused global world.

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