



Exploring Social Media Usage and Self-Image Congruity as Predictors of Online Conspicuous Consumption

Asma Yunus ¹, Ruqia Safdar Bajwa ², Shahzad Khaver Mushtaq ³, Malik Mureed Hussain⁴

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Sargodha, Pakistan.

Email: asma.yunus@uos.edu.pk

² Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan.

Email: ruqiasafdar@bzu.edu.pk

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Sargodha, Pakistan.

Email: shahzadkhaver@gmail.com

⁴ Associate Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Pakistan.

Email: malikmureed@bzu.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

In the digital era, social media platforms play a vital role in shaping the self-image and consumption behaviors of individuals, making it essential to investigate the relationships between these variables. This study seeks to determine how Social Media Usage (SMU) and Self-Image Congruity (SIC) influence Online Conspicuous Consumption (OCC) among young adults. Using a cross-sectional survey methodology, a purposive sample of 262 individuals was recruited. The questionnaire contained four sections: Demographic information, SMU, SIC, and OCC questionnaires. To analyze the data, descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. Findings revealed a significant impact of social media usage and self-image congruity on online conspicuous consumption. The findings of this research contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the psychological and behavioral effects of social media and have significant implications for a wide range of stakeholders, such as individuals, marketers, legislators, and academics. Despite its limitations, this study provides the groundwork for future research into the complex interaction between SMU, SIC, and OCC in diverse cultural and geographic contexts. The findings can be used to inform marketing strategies, policy formulation, and ethical use of social media in the digital age, thereby enhancing individual and societal well-being.

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Corresponding Author's Email: malikmureed@bzu.edu.pk

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The impact of social media on molding consumer behavior has garnered considerable scholarly interest in the last decade (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Numerous studies have consistently documented the significant impact of social media platforms in facilitating conspicuous consumption, a concept originally introduced by Veblen (2017) to denote the behavior of consumers who publicly showcase their affluence or social standing by acquiring and showcasing various goods and services. Nevertheless, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the interconnections between SMU, SIC, and online conspicuous consumption, especially in non-western contexts such as Pakistan. This correlational study aims to address the existing gap in the context of Sargodha, a city experiencing significant digitization and urbanization. The concept of Self Image Congruity (SIC) refers to the extent to which individuals perceive a match between their self-image and the image associated with a particular brand or product. This feature has been recognized as having a significant influence

on customers' choices when it comes to making purchases (Sirgy, 1985). The impact of social media usage (SMU) on the alignment between one's self-image and subsequent consuming behaviors is an emerging field of study that is highly relevant in today's technologically advanced cultures.

1.2. Introduction

The present study investigates the influence of social media usage (SMU) and Self self-image congruity (SIC) on the phenomenon of Online Conspicuous Consumption (OCC) among young adults in the context of Sargodha, Pakistan. The increasing prevalence of digital technology and the rapid growth of social media platforms necessitate an examination of the underlying mechanisms that influence patterns of consumption on these platforms. The existing body of literature has predominantly concentrated on the Western environment, hence constraining the applicability of the findings to cultural situations beyond the Western sphere, such as Pakistan (Dholakia & Kshetri, 2004). Moreover, there is a lack of scholarly study that examines the interconnectedness of theoretical concepts such as SMU, SIC, and online conspicuous consumption. This highlights the need for a thorough inquiry to enhance our comprehension of consumer behavior in the era of digital technology. This study aims to investigate the influence of online interactions on purchasing habits within the setting of Pakistan, where social media has significantly transformed communication and socialization (Awan, 2017). The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of SIC on OCC behaviors in young people of this region. Self-image congruity, a variable that is frequently disregarded, will be thoroughly investigated to gain a comprehensive understanding of its function in influencing such behaviors. Through this endeavor, the research makes a valuable contribution to the extant body of knowledge in the field of social psychology and digital consumer behavior. Consequently, it provides practical insights that hold relevance for marketers and policymakers in the contemporary era of social media.

2. Literature Review

The incorporation of social media into individuals' everyday routines has prompted a reassessment of conventional theories about consumer behavior (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Previous studies have emphasized the influence of SMU on many facets of consumer behavior, such as the inclination towards conspicuous consumption (Roper & La Niece, 2009). Belk (1985) explicated the notion of conspicuous consumerism as the inclination of an individual to exhibit affluence or societal standing, a behavior that has recently assumed a novel embodiment on social media platforms. Moreover, recent research has emphasized the significance of SIC in influencing customer behavior (Nawaz et al., 2021; Sirgy, 1985). According to Sirgy (1985), the notion of SIC suggests that individuals tend to favor brands that closely fit with their self-image. The digital era has witnessed the amplification of this theoretical approach, as social media platforms provide individuals with the opportunity to carefully construct a certain self-image and subsequently shape their purchase patterns following it (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). Nevertheless, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the relationship between SMU, SIC, and OCC, especially in non-western cultures. The examination of this interplay is of utmost importance, considering the substantial impact that social media currently wields inside society. For this reason, the current study aimed to explore the levels of SMU, SIC, and OCC. Further, the main objective was to assess the impact of SMU and SIC on the OCC among young adults. The racial, ethnic, and personal characteristics that might affect the relationships between SMU, self-image consistency, and online conspicuous consumption were also assessed.

3. Theoretical Review

The foundation of our comprehension regarding this subject matter is rooted in two theoretical frameworks: Veblen's Theory of Conspicuous Consumption (1899) and Sirgy's SIC Theory (1985). Veblen's theory posits that individuals partake in conspicuous consumption as a means to showcase their affluence or societal status to their peers. This idea holds particular significance within the realm of social media, as individuals often showcase their purchases or experiences as a means of protecting their desired social status (Roper & La Niece, 2009). According to Sirgy's idea of SIC, customers exhibit a preference for products or brands that closely correspond to their self-image. Within the realm of social media, an individual's self-image is frequently manifested through their online persona, hence exerting a potential impact on their patterns of purchase. Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) have employed this theoretical

framework in the context of social media, suggesting that online platforms provide individuals the opportunity to meticulously shape their self-presentation and harmonize it with their patterns of consumption. To get a thorough comprehension of OCC in Sargodha, it is imperative to investigate the interplay between these two theoretical frameworks inside the realm of SMU.

3.1. Significance of Research

The study on the impact of SMU on SIC and OCC holds substantial significance for many stakeholders, including consumers, marketers, lawmakers, and academics. This study aims to explore the intricate dynamics of the digital era, with a specific focus on understanding the connections between various factors. By doing so, it seeks to make a valuable contribution to the expanding body of scholarly literature concerning the psychological and behavioral consequences of SMU. The study aims to enhance our comprehension of the mechanisms that underlie SIC and conspicuous online consumption within the realm of social media utilization. By integrating a range of theoretical viewpoints, this study aims to enhance the construction of a comprehensive framework that elucidates these phenomena and offers guidance for future research endeavors. The study's results offer policy-makers significant insights that can inform the development of regulations and legislation aimed at fostering ethical and responsible utilization of social media platforms. In light of the possible adverse impacts of social media on consumer behavior and self-perception, policymakers possess the ability to create regulatory measures that protect users and mitigate the probability of unfavorable consequences. Moreover, through the examination of the impacts of social media utilization on the alignment between self-image and online conspicuous consumption, this research has the potential to enhance users' awareness of their online conduct and its possible consequences. Consequently, persons may possess improved abilities to discern the appropriate times and methods for utilizing social media, thereby cultivating more beneficial online practices and augmenting their mental well-being. In summary, the research holds substantial importance due to its potential to enhance theoretical comprehension, provide valuable insights for marketing and policy-making endeavors, and empower individuals to navigate the digital landscape with enhanced proficiency and accountability.

4. Research Methodology

This section outlines the quantitative research methodology used for the investigation of the relationship between SMU and OCC among young adults in Sargodha, Pakistan. This study used a cross-sectional survey research design. To gather data, a sample of 262 young adults was selected with purposive sampling.

4.1. Sampling Technique

A non-probability sampling design and a purposive sample technique were employed to select respondents for the study. The inclusion criterion for respondent selection was i. individual had an active social media account and ii. was at least 18 years old. People were accessed in parks, shopping centers, and academic institutions with a response rate of 89 %.

4.2. Instrument for Collecting Data

A structured questionnaire was adapted to collect data on the topic. The participants were asked to fill out a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire had four sections:

- a. Demographic Information: This section gathered information on the participants' ages, genders, incomes, and levels of education.
- b. Preferred Social Media Platform: It inquired about the participants' use of social media, their favorite platforms, and the activities they engaged in there.
- c. SIC: Items from preexisting scales Sirgy (1985) were adapted to measure participants' perceptions of how closely their actual and ideal self-images on social media coincide.
- d. Online Conspicuous Consumption: Items from established measures (Wang et al., 2019) were adapted to assess participants' involvement in conspicuous consumption activities on social media platforms.

Each scale item was evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5. (Strongly agree).

4.3. Procedure of Data Collection

It took a month to complete the data collection process. Trained research assistants sought potential participants in public settings to explain the study to them. Those who decided to participate were given the paper-based questionnaire, and the research assistants were on hand to clear up any misconceptions or questions. The questionnaires were finished, gathered, and securely kept. The researchers took informed consent from the participants in written form. Also, the issues of privacy, confidentiality, and privacy of the participant was taken care of by the researchers.

5. Analysis of data

The survey data was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Descriptive statistics Chi-square test of independence and Linear regression were applied to provide an overview of the broad patterns in SMU, SIC, and online conspicuous spending.

5.1. Results

The data were analyzed using the SPSS-28 version. Descriptive statistics and Chi-square test of independence and Linear regression were applied. The following table (table 1) describes the descriptive profile of the respondents. Majorities were males and 47.7% were females. The majority of respondents belonged to the age group of 18-20. Table 2 describes the descriptive statistics of the scales (SMU, SIC, and OCC). The majority of respondents (56.9%) scored high on the SMU scale. 65.3 % of respondents scored high on the questions related to SIC and there was nearly equal distribution of high and low scores in OCC.

Table 1: Descriptive Profile of the Respondents

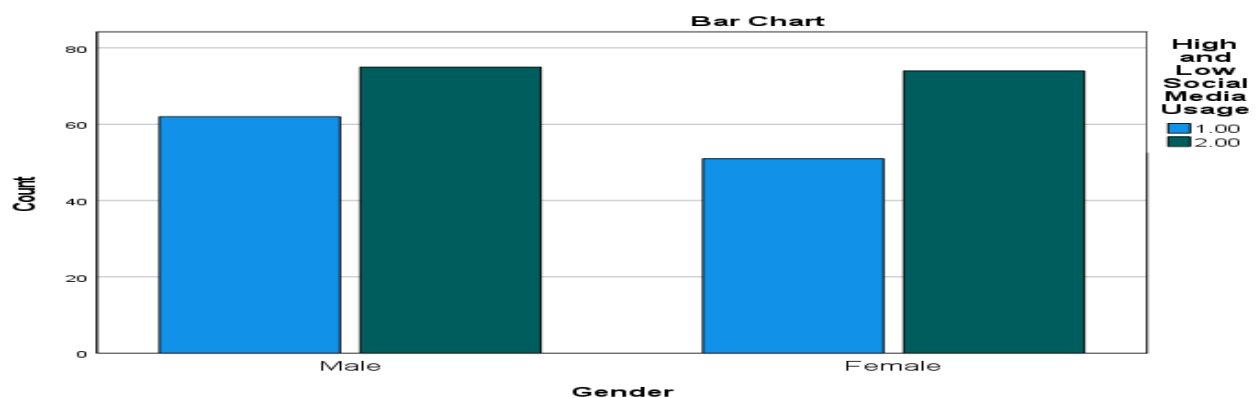
Gender		Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	SD
	M	137	52.3	1.48	.50
	F	125	47.7		
	Total	262	100		
Age		Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	SD
	18-20	121	46.2	1.67	.73
	21-25	113	43.1		
	26-30	35	13.4		
	Total	262	100		

Table 2: SMU, SIC and OCC Scales

SMU Scores		Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	SD
	Low	113	43.1	21.5	4.60
	High	149	56.9		
	Total	262	100		
SIC		Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	SD
	Low	91	34.7	21.2	4.40
	High	171	65.3		
Total	262	100.0			
OCC		Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	SD
	Low	125	47.7	15.0	3.70
	High	137	52.3		
Total	262	100.0			

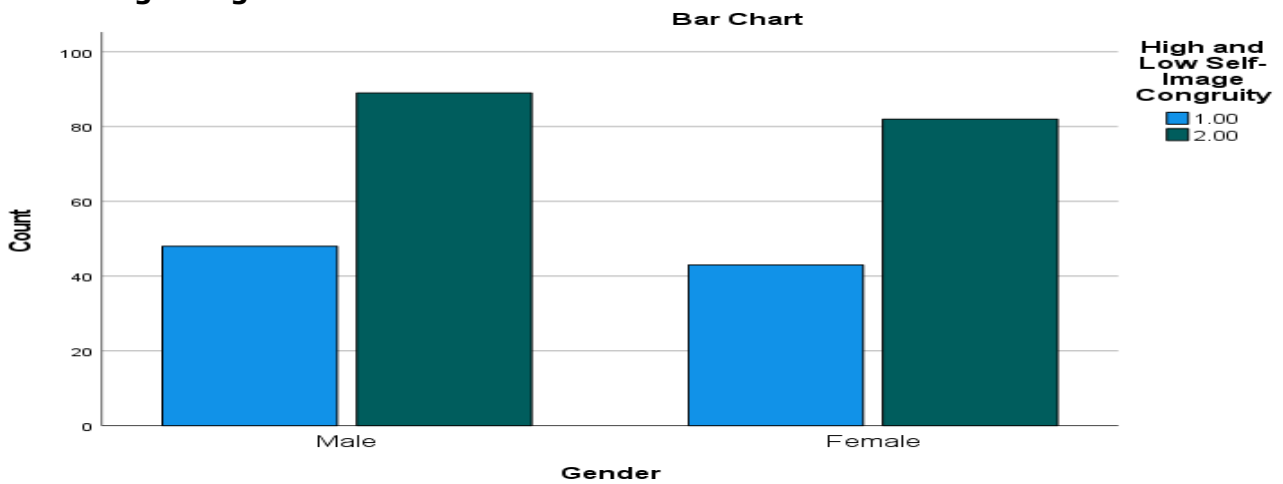
As Participants responded to the questions regarding SMU, among males more participants scored high on SMU as well as among females as shown in Figure 1. It shows there is no association of gender with the scores of SMU.

Figure 1: Chi-square clustered bar chart showing gender differences on SMU scores



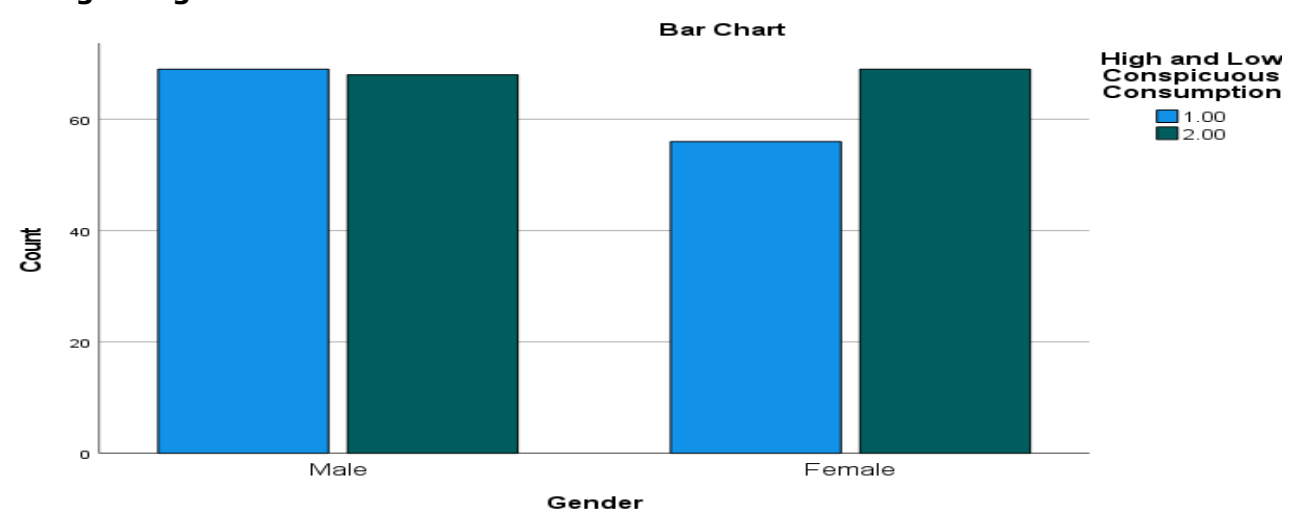
Participants told about their SIC, among males more participants scored high on SMU as well as among females as shown in figure 2

Figure 2: Chi-square clustered bar chart showing gender based differences regarding SIC



Participants told about their OCC, males almost equal participants scored on high and low OCC while among females majority respondents scored high on OCC As shown in figure 3

Figure 3: Chi-square clustered bar chart showing gender-based differences regarding OCC



Two hypotheses were framed to investigate whether SMU and SIC significantly impact OCC. The dependent variable OCC was regressed on the predicting variables SMU and SIC to test the hypothesis. SMU and SIC significantly predicted OCC, $F(2, 258) = 121.204, p=0.001$, which indicates that SMU and SIC can play a significant role in shaping OCC ($b = .199; .419, P = .001; .001$) respectively. Moreover, the R^2 depicts that the model explains 48.4% of the variance in OCC. These results indicate the positive effect of SMU and SIC. Table 3 shows the summary of the findings.

Table3: Regression Results

Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R ²	F	t-value	p-value	Hypothesis supported
SMU-OCC	.199	.484	121.204	3.960	.001	yes
SIC-OCC	.419			8.162	.001	yes

Note: $p=0.001$. SMU: Social media usage, OCC: Online Conspicuous Consumption, SIC: Self Image Congruity

6. Discussion

The primary objective of the study was to investigate how people's self-image and sense of self-esteem are shaped by their display of consumption on social media. Different social media platforms are controlling the behavior of people by their content. Results of Berry, Emsley, Lobban, and Bucci (2018) highly support that less social networking use

suggests a low sense of self-worth. Self-esteem is predicted by one's social media posts regarding their feelings. According to the study, persons who are frequent users of social media had higher SIC Burnasheva and Suh (2021), demonstrating that SMU and SIC have a strong positive relationship. Brand awareness, value awareness, and brand loyalty are all significantly impacted by social media activity. Therefore, H1 proves that active SMU predicts SIC among people. Brand awareness, value awareness, and brand loyalty are all significantly influenced by media activities Ismail, Nguyen, and Melewar (2018), greater use of SMU has a greater impact on brand consciousness and materialism. This study supports that less use of social media highlights low mood of self-esteem Findings of Burnasheva and Suh (2021) demonstrate that Self-esteem and SMU have a significant connection. There is a potential impact of social media on people's self-esteem without psychosis and almost negative psychological consequences if people get negative reviews on social media. The outcomes of Hadi (2018) research show that using social media boosts self-esteem and has a positive impact on conspicuous expenditure. It means that social media and self-esteem have a strong influence on ostentatious consumption. H2, Therefore, proves that self-esteem as a personality trait has largely described that there is a direct association among SMU.

According to research findings Chien et al. (2021); Wai (2019), SMU is strongly correlated with conspicuous consumption and has a substantial impact on self-esteem and conspicuous spending. Similar to other research, this one demonstrates how social media has a significant influence on conspicuous consumption and self-esteem. It also reveals a strong association between SMU and conspicuous consumption. According to the results of this study, there is a connection between SMU, self-esteem, self-image congruency, and overt online consumption (Burnasheva & Suh, 2021). H3, therefore proves that SMU correlates with conspicuous consumption. This study admires that fast growth in social media activities is leading people toward more self-esteem and SIC which is becoming a cause of conspicuous consumption.

6.1. Limitations of this research

Notwithstanding its notable contributions, it is important to acknowledge many limitations in this study pertaining to the examination of the impact of SMU on SIC and online conspicuous consumption. The utilization of a convenience sample method raises concerns regarding the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Sargodha or other geographical areas. The cross-sectional research approach entails gathering data at a certain moment, without considering potential fluctuations in participants' OCC practices, SIC, or SMU over an extended period. The questionnaire's dependence on data provided by individuals themselves renders it susceptible to potential bias stemming from social desirability or inaccurate recollections. The potential consequences of this phenomenon can significantly influence the reliability and credibility of the obtained outcomes. The study's exclusive focus on Sargodha limits its generalizability to other cultural or geographical contexts.

6.2. Recommendations

The following suggestions are provided for additional research in this field given these limitations:

- To obtain a more representative sample of the population, future studies should take into account using probability sampling techniques, such as stratified random sampling or cluster sampling, to improve the generalizability of the findings.
- Longitudinal design can be used to follow participants over a prolonged period and track changes in their use of social media, SIC, and OCC for in-depth exploration of the issue
- Forthcoming studies can investigate the use of objective measures, such as social media analytics or observational data, to analyze SMU and consumption patterns to lessen the risk of bias associated with self-reported data.
- Researchers can examine these phenomena in a range of geographical and cultural contexts to better understand the influence of regional and cultural traits on the links between SMU, SIC, and online conspicuous consumption.
- The relationships among SMU, self-image congruency, and OCC in terms of any potential moderating or mediating effects of additional characteristics, such as personality traits, social norms, or cultural values may be evaluated in future studies.

- Further research in the research area can improve our comprehension of the intricate connections between SMU, SIC, and OCC by addressing these constraints and taking these suggestions into account. This will ultimately lead to more logical SMU, regulations, and advertising strategies.

7. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of SMU on SIC and online conspicuous consumption. A survey was conducted in Sargodha, Pakistan to gather data for analysis. Through the analysis of the interrelationships among these factors, the research aimed to elucidate the intricate connections between individuals' utilization of social media, their self-perceptions, and their patterns of consumption within the contemporary digital era. The findings of this research add to the expanding body of knowledge concerning the psychological and behavioral impacts of social media. These results contain substantial significance for various stakeholders, such as individuals, advertisers, legislators, and academics. This study underscores the importance of understanding these phenomena and their impacts by emphasizing the substantial influence of SMU on SIC and online conspicuous consumption. Notwithstanding the constraints inherent in the study, the results furnish a basis for forthcoming investigations in this domain. Subsequent investigations may further enhance our comprehension of the intricate interconnections among social media utilization, congruity of self-image, and conspicuous consumption in online settings across diverse cultural and geographic domains. This can be achieved by rectifying the aforementioned limitations and integrating the previously proposed recommendations. Therefore, the present study sheds light on the impact of SMU on SIC and OCC in the context of Sargodha, Pakistan. The analysis of these interrelationships enhances our understanding of the digital environment and its impact on human behavior. The findings of this study have the potential to contribute valuable insights for informing marketing strategies, policy creation, and the utilization of social media. Ultimately, these insights can facilitate the promotion of ethical and responsible practices in the usage of digital platforms, thereby benefiting both individuals and society as a whole.

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