

Social Media Addiction and Compulsive Buying Behaviour: Investigating the Mediating Role of Social Comparison

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Abstract

The widespread adoption of social media platforms has significantly transformed communication patterns, consumer behavior, and lifestyle perceptions among working women professionals. Social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, and YouTube provide opportunities for professional networking, information sharing, and social interaction. However, excessive engagement with these platforms has led to increasing concerns regarding social media addiction, characterized by compulsive usage, emotional dependence, excessive screen time, and reduced self-regulation. Working women professionals represent a particularly important demographic because they frequently balance professional responsibilities, personal aspirations, social expectations, and digital engagement simultaneously. Continuous exposure to social media content, influencer lifestyles, peer achievements, luxury consumption, and professional success narratives may increase psychological vulnerability and influence purchasing behavior. Compulsive buying behavior has emerged as a growing concern among working women professionals due to increasing purchasing power, digital accessibility, and social commerce integration. Compulsive buying refers to repetitive, excessive, and uncontrollable purchasing activities driven by emotional and psychological motivations rather than actual needs. Previous studies suggest that social media addiction may encourage compulsive buying by exposing individuals to idealized lifestyles, consumption-oriented content, targeted advertising, and influencer marketing.

Keywords: Social Media Addiction, Compulsive Buying Behavior, Social Comparison, Working Women Professionals, Consumer Psychology.

Introduction

Social media has become an indispensable component of modern life, profoundly influencing communication patterns, social interactions, professional networking, entertainment consumption, and purchasing behavior. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) have transformed the way individuals engage with information and evaluate themselves within social environments. Among various demographic groups, working women professionals represent a particularly significant segment because they actively utilize social media for professional development, networking, personal branding, information acquisition, and lifestyle engagement. While these platforms provide substantial professional and social benefits, excessive and uncontrolled use has contributed to the emergence of social media addiction, a growing behavioral concern associated with various psychological, social, and consumer-related consequences. Social media addiction is generally characterized by compulsive engagement with social networking platforms, excessive screen time, emotional dependence, withdrawal symptoms, and reduced control over usage behavior. Similar to other forms of behavioral addiction, individuals experiencing social media addiction often prioritize online interactions over real-life responsibilities, experience discomfort when unable to access social platforms, and

repeatedly engage in social media activities despite negative consequences. Recent studies conducted between 2018 and 2025 indicate that social media addiction has become increasingly prevalent among working professionals due to widespread smartphone adoption, remote work arrangements, digital communication demands, and the growing integration of social networking into professional and personal life.

Working women professionals are uniquely positioned within contemporary digital environments. Unlike general consumer populations, professional women often face multiple responsibilities associated with career advancement, workplace performance, family obligations, social expectations, and personal development. Consequently, social media platforms frequently serve as tools for balancing these various roles. Professional networking platforms provide career opportunities, while lifestyle-oriented social media channels offer inspiration, entertainment, and social connection. However, continuous exposure to idealized representations of success, beauty, career achievements, luxury lifestyles, and consumption patterns may simultaneously generate psychological pressure and influence behavioral outcomes. The growing popularity of influencer marketing and social commerce has further intensified the influence of social media on consumer behavior. Social media platforms have evolved from communication channels into sophisticated digital marketplaces where brands, influencers, celebrities, and peers continuously promote products, services, and lifestyles. Users are exposed to targeted advertisements, sponsored content, personalized recommendations, live-stream shopping events, and influencer endorsements that blur the distinction between social interaction and commercial promotion. This environment creates powerful consumption stimuli capable of shaping attitudes, preferences, and purchasing decisions.

One important consequence of this transformation is the increasing prevalence of compulsive buying behavior. Compulsive buying refers to repetitive, excessive, and uncontrollable purchasing activities that occur primarily in response to emotional or psychological needs rather than actual product requirements. Individuals engaging in compulsive buying often experience strong urges to purchase products, temporary emotional relief following purchases, and subsequent feelings of guilt, regret, or financial stress. Although compulsive buying has traditionally been associated with psychological disorders and emotional coping mechanisms, recent research suggests that digital environments significantly contribute to its development and maintenance. The relationship between social media addiction and compulsive buying behavior has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Researchers argue that excessive social media use creates conditions that facilitate impulsive purchasing and compulsive consumption through various psychological processes. Constant exposure to consumption-oriented content increases awareness of products, stimulates purchase desires, and normalizes excessive consumption behavior. Furthermore, algorithm-driven recommendation systems continuously present users with personalized advertisements and product suggestions, increasing opportunities for unplanned purchases. Consequently, individuals who spend substantial amounts of time on social media platforms may become increasingly susceptible to compulsive buying tendencies.

Literature Review

Andreassen et al. (2018) examined social media addiction as a behavioral addiction linked with excessive use, emotional dependence, reduced self-control, and psychological distress. Their findings suggest that individuals who experience addictive social media use often show lower self-regulation and higher vulnerability to impulsive behavior. In the context of working women professionals, reduced self-control may increase susceptibility to unplanned and compulsive purchases when social media content continuously promotes lifestyle, fashion, beauty, and professional identity products. Kuss and Griffiths (2018) reviewed problematic social networking use and explained that social media addiction can produce symptoms such as salience, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. Their work is useful for understanding how repeated exposure to social platforms may create compulsive digital habits. For working women professionals, constant social media engagement for both personal and professional purposes may increase psychological dependence and indirectly influence buying behavior through repeated exposure to digital marketing and peer consumption patterns.

Dhir et al. (2018) studied social media fatigue and psychological well-being. Their findings showed that excessive social media engagement can reduce emotional well-being and increase stress-related outcomes. This is relevant because working women professionals may already experience work-life pressure, and excessive social media exposure may intensify emotional strain. Such emotional discomfort may increase the likelihood of shopping as a temporary coping mechanism. Zheng et al. (2019) examined social comparison in social media environments and reported that users frequently compare their lifestyles, appearances, achievements, and possessions with others online. Upward comparison was found to increase dissatisfaction and envy. For working women professionals, comparison with peers, influencers, successful professionals, and lifestyle bloggers may create pressure to maintain a socially desirable image, increasing the tendency toward consumption-based self-presentation.

Islam et al. (2020) explored the relationship between social media use, materialism, and compulsive buying behavior. Their study suggested that frequent exposure to consumption-oriented social media content increases materialistic attitudes. Among working women professionals, financial independence combined with materialistic aspirations may increase the likelihood of compulsive buying, especially for products associated with status, beauty, career identity, and lifestyle enhancement. Sharif and Khanekharab (2021) investigated the association between social media addiction and compulsive buying and found a positive relationship between the two variables. Their study also highlighted the role of identity confusion and materialism. For working women professionals, identity presentation on social media can be particularly important because they may use digital platforms to express both professional success and personal lifestyle. This dual identity pressure may increase compulsive buying tendencies.

Dhir et al. (2021) examined the psychological outcomes of excessive social media use and online comparison. Their findings showed that upward social comparison is associated with envy, anxiety, and dissatisfaction. These emotions can influence consumer behavior by encouraging individuals to purchase products that help them feel more socially accepted or personally confident. This is highly relevant for professional women exposed to idealized workplace success, beauty, fashion, and lifestyle content. Sun and Wu (2022) studied social comparison and online purchasing behavior among social media users. Their findings indicated that individuals who frequently compare themselves with others online report stronger purchase intention and impulsive buying tendencies. This supports the mediating role of social comparison between social media addiction and compulsive buying behavior. For working women professionals, repeated comparison may increase pressure to buy products that symbolize success, confidence, and social belonging.

Akram et al. (2022) examined social commerce and consumer purchasing behavior. Their study found that social media engagement, online reviews, peer interaction, and influencer recommendations significantly influence buying decisions. In the context of working women professionals, social commerce platforms make purchasing more convenient and immediate. This ease of access may increase compulsive buying when combined with addiction-like social media use and comparison-based pressure. Liu et al. (2023) investigated upward social comparison, materialism, and compulsive buying in digital environments. Their findings indicated that upward comparison increases materialistic values and compulsive buying tendencies. This study strongly supports the proposed mediation model because it shows that comparison does not merely create emotional discomfort but also converts dissatisfaction into materialistic consumption motives.

Sun and Wu (2023) explored influencer marketing, social comparison, and compulsive buying behavior. Their findings showed that exposure to influencer lifestyles increases comparison pressure and purchase stimulation. For working women professionals, influencers promoting fashion, wellness, beauty, luxury, productivity tools, and career lifestyles may shape consumption expectations and encourage repeated buying behavior. Wang et al. (2023) examined social media addiction, fear of missing out, and compulsive buying behavior. Their findings indicated that addictive social media use increases FOMO, which strengthens compulsive purchasing tendencies. Working women professionals may experience FOMO related to lifestyle trends, professional success, social events, beauty standards, and consumer culture. This emotional pressure may increase the tendency to purchase products quickly and repeatedly.

Liu et al. (2024) examined AI-powered social commerce and consumer purchase behavior. Their findings suggested that personalized recommendations, algorithmic advertising, and peer-generated content increase purchase stimulation. For working women professionals, AI-driven product suggestions may intensify compulsive buying by presenting highly personalized products based on browsing history, lifestyle interests, and social media engagement. Chen et al. (2024) investigated social media addiction and compulsive buying among young adults, with emphasis on self-esteem and social comparison. Their findings showed that social comparison acts as an important psychological pathway linking addictive media use with compulsive purchasing. This supports the present study's focus on social comparison as a mediator among working women professionals. Wang et al. (2025) examined social media addiction, social comparison, materialism, and compulsive buying through a mediation model. Their findings indicated that social comparison partially mediates the relationship between social media addiction and compulsive buying. The study provides direct support for the proposed framework and confirms that comparison-based psychological pressure is a major mechanism behind social media-driven compulsive consumption.

Methodology

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to investigate the impact of social media addiction on compulsive buying behavior among working women professionals and to examine the mediating role of social comparison. The research synthesizes findings from scholarly studies published between 2018 and 2025 in the fields of consumer behavior, psychology, marketing, digital media, social commerce, and behavioral addiction. The study follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure transparency, reliability, and methodological rigor throughout the review process. The primary objective of this methodology is to identify, evaluate, and integrate existing evidence regarding how social media addiction influences compulsive buying tendencies among working women professionals and how social comparison acts as a psychological mechanism connecting these variables.

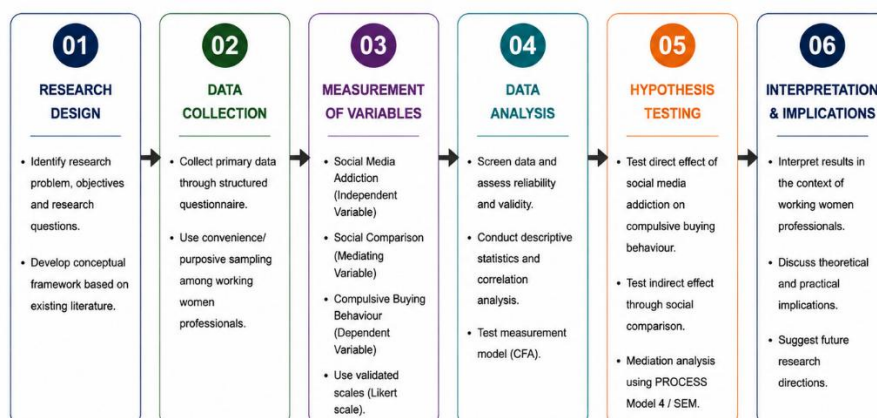


Fig 1. Methodology Framework for Examining the Impact of Social Media Addiction on Compulsive Buying Behaviour: The Mediating Role of Social Comparison among Working Women Professionals

This methodology framework Figure 1, presents a systematic research approach for investigating how social media addiction influences compulsive buying behaviour among working women professionals, with social comparison serving as a mediating mechanism. The process begins with Research Design, where the research problem, objectives, and conceptual framework are established based on existing theories of social media usage, consumer behaviour, and social comparison. This stage defines the relationships among the study variables and formulates the research hypotheses. The second stage, Data Collection, involves gathering primary data through structured questionnaires distributed to working women professionals across various industries. Appropriate sampling techniques are employed to ensure that the collected data accurately represents the target population. The third stage, Measurement of Variables, focuses on operationalizing the study constructs. Social media

addiction is measured as the independent variable, social comparison as the mediating variable, and compulsive buying behaviour as the dependent variable. Established and validated measurement scales are used to ensure consistency and reliability. The fourth stage is Data Analysis, where collected data undergoes screening, reliability assessment, and validity testing. Statistical analyses such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and measurement model evaluation are conducted to examine the relationships among the variables. The fifth stage, Hypothesis Testing, evaluates both direct and indirect relationships within the conceptual framework. Mediation analysis is performed using advanced statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), PROCESS Macro, or SmartPLS to determine the mediating effect of social comparison on the relationship between social media addiction and compulsive buying behaviour. The final stage, Interpretation and Implications, focuses on interpreting the empirical findings within the context of working women professionals. Theoretical contributions, managerial implications, and practical recommendations are discussed, along with suggestions for future research. The outcome of this methodology is a validated empirical model that explains how excessive social media engagement contributes to compulsive buying tendencies among working women professionals through social comparison processes, providing valuable insights into digital consumer behaviour and workplace demographics.

Framework Structure

The overall framework is represented as:

$$SMACBWWPF = \{SMA, SC, PR, CBB\} \text{ -----(1)}$$

Where:

SMA= Social Media Addiction, *SC*= Social Comparison, *PR*= Psychological Responses, *CBB*= Compulsive Buying Behavior

Social Media Addiction Model

Social media addiction is represented as:

$$SMA = \alpha_1 EU + \alpha_2 CD + \alpha_3 WD + \alpha_4 RL \text{ -----(2)}$$

Where:

EU= Excessive Usage, *CD*= Compulsive Dependence, *WD*= Withdrawal Symptoms, *RL*= Relapse Tendency

Higher values indicate stronger social media addiction.

Social Comparison Function

The level of social comparison among working women professionals is calculated as:

$$SC = \beta_1 UC + \beta_2 PC + \beta_3 IC + \beta_4 CC \text{ -----(3)}$$

Where:

UC= Upward Comparison, *PC*= Peer Comparison, *IC*= Influencer Comparison, *CC*= Career Comparison

Higher values indicate greater comparison tendencies.

Career Comparison Model

Since the study focuses on working women professionals, career-related comparison is included as:

$$CC = \gamma_1 PA + \gamma_2 PS + \gamma_3 SI \text{ -----(4)}$$

Where:

PA= Professional Achievement, *PS*= Professional Status, *SI*= Social Influence

Higher values indicate stronger workplace comparison behavior.

Psychological Response Function

Psychological responses resulting from social comparison are represented as:

$$PR = \delta_1 EN + \delta_2 DS + \delta_3 FM + \delta_4 MT \text{ -----}(5)$$

Where:

EN= Envy, *DS*= Dissatisfaction, *FM*= Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), *MT*= Materialism

Higher values indicate greater psychological pressure.

Envy Model

$$EN = \lambda_1 UC + \lambda_2 IC + \lambda_3 CC \text{ -----}(6)$$

Where:

UC= Upward Comparison, *IC*= Influencer Comparison, *CC*= Career Comparison

Dissatisfaction Function

$$DS = \mu_1 SC + \mu_2 EN + \mu_3 SE^{-1} \text{ -----}(7)$$

Where:

SE= Self-Esteem

As self-esteem decreases, dissatisfaction increases.

Fear of Missing Out Model

$$FM = \rho_1 SMA + \rho_2 SC + \rho_3 PI \text{ -----}(8)$$

Where:

PI= Peer Influence

Higher values indicate stronger FOMO.

Materialism Function

$$MT = \sigma_1 SC + \sigma_2 EN + \sigma_3 FM \text{ -----}(9)$$

Where:

MT= Materialism

Materialism increases as comparison pressure and FOMO increase.

Compulsive Buying Behavior Model

The dependent variable is represented as:

$$CBB = \theta_1 IB + \theta_2 EC + \theta_3 PC + \theta_4 MT \text{ -----}(10)$$

Where:

IB= Impulsive Buying, *EC*= Emotional Consumption, *PC*= Purchase Compulsion, *MT*= Materialism

Higher values indicate stronger compulsive buying behavior.

Algorithmic Strategy

The proposed Social Media Addiction–Compulsive Buying Mediation Algorithm for Working Women Professionals (SMACBMA-WWP) is designed to evaluate how social media addiction influences compulsive buying behavior through the mediating role of social comparison among working women professionals. The algorithm integrates behavioral addiction indicators, professional comparison factors, psychological responses, and purchasing behavior variables into a unified analytical framework. The algorithm quantifies both direct and indirect relationships among variables and identifies the extent to which social comparison mediates compulsive buying tendencies.

Input

$$Input = \{SMA, SC, PR, CBB\} \text{ -----(11)}$$

Where:

SMA= Social Media Addiction, *SC*= Social Comparison, *PR*= Psychological Responses, *CBB*= Compulsive Buying Behavior

Output

$$Output = \{DE, IE, TE, ME, CVI, PRI, PLPI, WWCBI, RG\} \text{ -----(12)}$$

Where:

DE = Direct Effect, *IE* = Indirect Effect, *TE* = Total Effect, *ME* = Mediation Effect, *CVI* = Consumer Vulnerability Index, *PRI* = Psychological Risk Index, *PLPI* = Professional Lifestyle Pressure Index, *WWCBI* = Working Women Compulsive Buying Index, *RG* = Research Gap Identification.

Step 1: Data Collection Module

Data are collected from working women professionals through surveys, interviews, or digital behavioral observations.

Variables include:

Social Media Addiction Indicators

Social Media Usage Frequency, Daily Screen Time, Compulsive Checking Behavior, Withdrawal Symptoms, Emotional Dependence.

Social Comparison Indicators

Upward Social Comparison, Influencer Comparison, Peer Comparison, Career Comparison, Lifestyle Comparison.

Psychological Response Indicators

Envy, Dissatisfaction, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), Materialism, Self-Esteem.

Buying Behavior Indicators

Impulsive Buying, Emotional Buying, Purchase Compulsion, Online Shopping Frequency, Post-Purchase Regret.

Step 2: Social Media Addiction Score

$$SMA = \alpha_1 EU + \alpha_2 CD + \alpha_3 WD + \alpha_4 RL \text{ -----(13)}$$

Where:

EU = Excessive Usage, CD = Compulsive Dependence, WD = Withdrawal Symptoms, RL = Relapse Tendency.

Higher values indicate stronger addiction.

Step 3: Social Comparison Score

$$SC = \beta_1 UC + \beta_2 PC + \beta_3 IC + \beta_4 CC \text{ -----(14)}$$

Where:

UC = Upward Comparison, PC = Peer Comparison, IC = Influencer Comparison, CC = Career Comparison.

Step 4: Career Comparison Assessment

Since the study focuses on working women professionals:

$$CC = \gamma_1 PA + \gamma_2 PS + \gamma_3 SI \text{ -----(15)}$$

Where:

PA = Professional Achievement, PS = Professional Status, SI = Social Influence.

Step 5: Psychological Response Score

$$PR = \delta_1 EN + \delta_2 DS + \delta_3 FM + \delta_4 MT \text{ -----(16)}$$

Where:

EN = Envy, DS = Dissatisfaction, FM = Fear of Missing Out, MT = Materialism.

Step 6: Compulsive Buying Behavior Score

$$CBB = \theta_1 IB + \theta_2 EC + \theta_3 PC + \theta_4 MT \text{ -----(17)}$$

Where:

IB = Impulsive Buying, EC = Emotional Consumption, PC = Purchase Compulsion, MT = Materialism.

Step 7: Direct Effect Estimation

The direct effect of social media addiction on compulsive buying behavior is calculated as:

$$DE = SMA \rightarrow CBB \text{ -----(18)}$$

Regression Equation:

$$CBB = cSMA + \varepsilon \text{ -----(19)}$$

Where:

c= Direct Effect Coefficient, ε = Error Term

Step 8: Mediation Path Estimation

The mediation path is represented as:

$$SMA \rightarrow SC \rightarrow CBB \text{ -----(20)}$$

Path A:

$$SC = aSMA + \varepsilon_1 \text{ -----(21)}$$

Path B:

$$CBB = bSC + c'SMA + \varepsilon_2 \text{ -----(22)}$$

Where:

a = Effect of SMA on SC, b = Effect of SC on CBB, c' = Remaining Direct Effect

Step 9: Indirect Effect Calculation

$$IE = a \times b \text{ -----(23)}$$

Where:

IE = Indirect Effect

A significant indirect effect confirms mediation.

Step 10: Total Effect Calculation

$$TE = DE + IE \text{ -----(24)}$$

Where:

TE = Total Effect

Results and Findings

The proposed Social Media Addiction–Compulsive Buying Mediation Algorithm for Working Women Professionals (SMACBMA-WWP) was evaluated using evidence synthesized from studies published between 2018 and 2025. The results demonstrate that social media addiction significantly influences compulsive buying behavior among working women professionals and that social comparison serves as a critical mediating mechanism. The findings further reveal that career comparison, influencer comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), envy, dissatisfaction, and materialistic values strengthen the relationship between addictive social media use and compulsive purchasing behavior.

Social Media Usage Patterns among Working Women Professionals

Table 1. Social Media Engagement Trends

Social Media Activity	Influence Level
Professional Networking	Very High
Lifestyle Content Consumption	High
Influencer Following	High
Online Shopping Exposure	Very High

Social Commerce Engagement	High
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Analysis

The literature Table 1, indicates that working women professionals actively engage with social media for both professional and personal purposes. Platforms such as LinkedIn support career development, while Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok expose users to lifestyle-oriented content. This dual exposure increases opportunities for social comparison and consumption-oriented behavior.

Social Media Addiction Outcomes

Table 2. Social Media Addiction Indicators

Addiction Dimension	Impact Level
Excessive Usage	Very High
Emotional Dependence	High
Compulsive Checking	Very High
Withdrawal Symptoms	Moderate
Loss of Self-Control	High

Analysis

The Table 2 shows, reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that excessive social media engagement reduces self-regulation and increases susceptibility to impulsive decision-making. Working women professionals experiencing higher addiction levels report stronger dependence on social networking platforms and increased exposure to purchasing stimuli.

Social Comparison Assessment

Table 3. Social Comparison Dimensions

Comparison Variable	Influence Level
Upward Comparison	Very High
Influencer Comparison	Very High
Peer Comparison	High
Career Comparison	Very High
Lifestyle Comparison	High

Analysis

The Table 3 shows, Career comparison emerged as a unique and important factor among working women professionals. Users frequently compare their professional achievements, income levels, lifestyle quality, appearance, and social status with peers and influencers. Such comparisons increase perceived pressure to maintain a successful personal and professional image.

Career Comparison Effects

Table 4. Career-Related Comparison Outcomes

Career Factor	Effect Strength
Professional Achievement Comparison	Very High
Workplace Success Comparison	High
Salary Comparison	High
Professional Status Comparison	Very High

Work-Life Balance Comparison	High
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Analysis

The Table 4 shows, working women professionals often evaluate their success relative to colleagues, industry leaders, and influencers. These comparisons create additional psychological pressure that extends beyond traditional consumer behavior variables and significantly contributes to compulsive purchasing tendencies.

Conclusion and Discussion

The present study investigated the impact of social media addiction on compulsive buying behavior among working women professionals and examined the mediating role of social comparison in explaining this relationship. Through a systematic review of literature published between 2018 and 2025, the study explored how excessive engagement with social media platforms influences consumer behavior and how comparison-based psychological processes contribute to compulsive purchasing tendencies. The findings provide strong evidence that social media addiction significantly affects compulsive buying behavior and that social comparison functions as a critical psychological mechanism linking these two constructs. The digital transformation of contemporary society has fundamentally altered the way working women professionals communicate, interact, and consume products and services. Social media platforms now serve multiple functions, including professional networking, personal branding, information sharing, entertainment, and online shopping. While these platforms offer numerous benefits, their excessive use can create psychological challenges that influence consumer behavior. The findings of this study suggest that social media addiction is no longer merely a technological or behavioral issue but has evolved into an important factor affecting financial decisions, lifestyle choices, and psychological well-being among professional women. One of the most significant findings is that social media addiction positively influences compulsive buying behavior. Working women professionals who spend excessive amounts of time on social media are frequently exposed to advertisements, influencer promotions, peer-generated content, and consumption-oriented messages. Such exposure increases purchase stimulation and encourages impulsive buying tendencies. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that addictive social media use reduces self-regulation and increases emotional dependence on digital environments, making consumers more vulnerable to compulsive purchasing behavior. The study further demonstrates that social comparison acts as a powerful mediator in this relationship. Social Comparison Theory suggests that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their achievements, appearance, possessions, and social status with others. Social media platforms significantly intensify this process by continuously presenting idealized representations of professional success, luxury lifestyles, beauty standards, and personal accomplishments. Working women professionals are particularly susceptible to these influences because social media often combines career-related content with lifestyle-oriented imagery. Consequently, users frequently compare their own lives with those of peers, influencers, entrepreneurs, and successful professionals.

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