

## **Social Comparison and Consumer Well-Being**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

The general happiness of customers is influenced by several factors; one of which is envy. Such envy could arise from having a basic need for relatedness, as well as a need to assess judgements and skills. This motivation includes a desire to build one's reputation and lessen ambiguity, which is known as social comparison. Comparisons are divided into upward and downward comparisons. With upward comparisons, one person sees the other as superior on a given metric, whereas downward comparisons are the exact reverse. Researchers have investigated whether using social networking sites actually promotes jealousy and upward social comparison. Yet, it has become evident through studies on how social networking sites affect subjective well-being through upward and downward social comparisons. Considering this, the purpose of this study is to review prior research and determine how social comparison may change customer well-being. This was done by focusing on one's demonstrating some upward and downward social comparisons. It was observed that upward social comparison does have a favorable impact on the customer's well-being whereas downward social comparison has a negative impact. The study provided some recommendations to decision-makers as well as to upcoming scholars in this subject based on the findings of the prior literature.

**Keywords:** Social Comparison, Upward Social Comparison, Downward Social Comparison, Consumer Well-Being, Positive Emotions, Negative Emotions.

### **Introduction**

Recently, the importance of customer well-being has increased, particularly within the context of marketing and psychology. The term "well-being" refers to an individual's or a group's situation in a variety of domains, such as their psychological, physical, social, or economic status. It is considered a general evaluation of a person's life and considers life satisfaction to be a component of it (Oral and Thurner, 2018). As a matter of fact, consumer well-being is a metric for measuring how satisfied consumers are with their purchases throughout the whole consuming process. The simultaneous purchasing and ownership of a product together measure the consumer's entire pleasure and well-being (Manchanda, 2017).

It is worth noting that social comparison is considered one of the main factors that could influence customer well-being (Zheng et al., 2022). People constantly make comparisons with others and discover that they are either well off or worse-off than those individuals (Gheorghiu et al., 2021). Upward social comparisons can be harmful to one's self-worth and trigger coping mechanisms intended to boost one's self-esteem (Lee, 2020). How negative social comparisons may impact consumer choices and behavior is less understood. Being wealthier than others has been seen to improve one's subjective well-being and self-perception. It was claimed that people who feel threatened might improve their mood and self-esteem by drawing parallels with someone who has it worse off (Zheng et al., 2022).

While neglecting the potential interpersonal costs of these comparisons, a worldview like this overemphasizes the egocentric benefits of downward comparisons. According to this research, upward comparisons lead to self-threat and increase the need for self-efficacy, but downward comparisons increase social discomfort and the desire for social relationships. Consequently, this research uses earlier research that looked at this link to analyses how social comparison and consumer well-being are related. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to study the effect of social comparison on consumer well-being (positive and negative emotions and moods).

Researchers who investigated the correlation between social comparison and consumer well-being are very few. For example, Coleman and Zayer (2013) examined how advertising practitioners perceive consumer comparisons to advertising representations as well as how advertising practitioners comprehend the social comparison process among consumers. The previous study limited their study to understanding consumer comparisons and their impact on advertising practitioners' orientations. The relationship between social media use, social comparison orientation, self-esteem, and emotion was examined by Gallinari (2018). It was only focused on self-esteem and emotions as the factors of consumer well-being. Furthermore, Meier et al. (2020) then investigated the benefits of upward comparison on consumer well-being on social networking sites. However, the impact of downward comparison on consumer well-being was not examined. In addition, the experience sampling approach was utilized by Wirtz et al. (2021) to investigate the effects of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram use on the three aspects of subjective well-being. Boehm et al. (2022) investigated whether seeing positive and negative social media portrayals can promote a negative hedonic experience, while this research did not examine correlation between social media portrayals and the concept of consumer well-being.

Accordingly, the current paper aims to fill the gap in the literature by investigating the connection between social comparison and consumer well-being from the literature review perspective. Additionally, the current paper throws light on upward and downward social comparisons and their impact on consumer well-being.

This research is divided into seven sections. Section (1) provides the introduction of the paper and its aim. Section (2) seeks to introduce the definitions and types of social comparison and how it shows in literature. Section (3) seeks to introduce the definitions and types of consumer well-being and how it is shown in literature. Section (4) investigates the relationship between social comparison and consumer well-being. Section (5) contains the conclusion of the literature and the developed framework. Section (6) is the recommendation which the paper gives to decision makers. Finally, section (7) introduces the paper limitations and provides some suggestions to future researchers.

## **Social Comparison**

A person's ability, convictions, attitude, sentiments, physical characteristics, accomplishments, and other features are all evaluated in relation to other people or groups through the process of social comparison (Fleischmann et al., 2021). The urge to manage conduct more thoroughly in reference to others is a crucial component of social comparison. One of the most well-liked social psychology theories is motivated as a major component.

Social comparisons are frequently depicted as strategic activities that are carried out to achieve objectives. Social comparison is typically viewed as a process used to satisfy basic needs including self-evaluation, self-enhancement, and self-improvement. Not all social

comparisons, though, seem to be carried out in such a thought-out and calculated manner. On the contrary, they are frequently carried out accidentally and without planning. They might not be effective means in this situation to achieve a specific objective. There must be more reasons why people compare themselves to others, as evidenced by the occurrence of such irrational comparisons (Corcoran et al., 2011).

A key factor affecting people's opinions, experiences, and behavior is known as social comparison, which can be defined as comparing oneself to others. The idea that humans continuously make social comparisons is supported by psychological studies. It may be argued that whenever people learn anything about how other people are, what they can and cannot do, or what they have accomplished and what they haven't, they tend to link it to themselves. In the same way, if they want to understand who they are or what they are capable of, they are likely to do so by assessing how others' traits, circumstances, and limitations compare to their own. One sign of the strength of social comparison is the fact that individuals will occasionally make comparisons with others who do not provide pertinent data. The ability of social comparisons to arouse common human emotions is another indication of how significant they are. When people exceed competitors, they may feel proud. When they are in awe of another person's greatness, though, they may also feel hurt because they are envious of them (Crusius et al., 2022).

## ***2.1 Social Comparison Theories***

The term "social comparison" can be discussed through two main theories, these theories can be discussed as follows:

### ***2.1.1 Social Comparison Theory***

The social comparison theory was established by Festinger in 1954, as he suggested that individuals are driven to assess their growth and position in numerous areas of their lives. In the lack of objective criteria, people then compare themselves to others to determine where they stand (Fardouly et al., 2015). In his now-classic book, Festinger proposed nine hypotheses that outlined the circumstances in which people are more or less likely to compare themselves to others, as well as the purposes and results of such comparison processes. Festinger focused on the fact that people have a natural need to create correct assessments of them when discussing the function of motivation. People frequently choose to rely on nonsocial, objective methods to do this (Guyer and Vaughan-Johnston, 2020).

Comparisons conducted using objective, nonsocial techniques sometimes entail employing well-known experts as a yardstick by which to measure one's skills or performance. A budding musician, author, or athlete, for instance, can assess their performance and/or abilities in comparison to that of a more seasoned expert in a comparable field. Festinger claimed that people will seek comparisons with comparable persons in situations when objective, nonsocial means are not accessible. That is, people will try to find others who are like them on attributes like gender, age, experience, and so on in the lack of opportunities to compare themselves in an objective manner. They will then evaluate themselves against these like others using more subjective standards (Samuel et al., 2022).

Subsequent work made it abundantly apparent that people seem to prefer to compare themselves to others who were like them in terms of traits that were predictors of achievement once more for the aspect being analyzed, as well as incidental traits like the target's experience level and whether they had a professional or amateur. Festinger made a crucial observation, namely that as the gaps between talents, beliefs, and performance increase, so does the temptation to make subjective comparisons with others. In fact, in many research individuals

are driven to exaggerate contrasts with others in some situations, especially when doing so either serves to defend or boosts one's self-esteem. (Yan et al., 2022). In other words, people can prevent themselves from being injured by making the comparison seem less relevant by highlighting these distinctions and perceiving possible comparison subjects as being unlike themselves. Thus, evidence reveals that social comparison can sometimes take on a biased, self-serving role in specific settings, which contrasts with Festinger's theory that social comparison was intended to enable realistic self-evaluation.

A wealth of research expanded Festinger's fundamental framework after the establishment of social comparison theory. Major issues that permeated much of this work were the path of comparison (upward vs. downward), as well as the many causes and consequences of social comparison in direction. In the original formulation of the social comparison theory, Festinger did not even include self-improvement as a prime motivator driving upward social comparisons; however, this concept is completely consistent with the theory that individuals have a unidirectional drive upward when trying to compare their abilities to those of others. Even so, early social comparison studies either predicted or assumed that downward comparisons were favored, at least in the context of psychological danger, and that upward comparisons were rejected because of their detrimental impacts on happiness, emotional well-being, and self-esteem. However, further research revealed that one's expectations regarding the degree of perceived similarity to the comparison target helped to reduce these negative impacts (Rancourt et al., 2015).

### ***2.1.2 The Multiple Discrepancies Theory***

Self-discrepancy theory, developed by Higgins in 1987, could offer a framework for comprehending individual variations in the degree of social comparison. According to the theory, there are three basic domains of the self: (a) the actual self, which is a person's representation of the qualities they believe they actually possess; (b) the ideal self, which is a person's representation of the qualities they wish they had in an ideal world; and (c) the ought self, which is a person's representation of the qualities they believe they ought to have. The ideal and ought selves are referred to as self-guides, whilst the real self is regarded as one's self-concept. Accordingly, there are two fundamental perspectives from which the self can be evaluated: (a) one's own personal perspective, and (b) the perspective of some significant other (such as a parent, sibling, spouse, or close friend). There is an ideal self-discrepancy from either of these perspectives if the real self does not "line up" with the ideal self. Like this, an ought self-discrepancy is felt when the real and ought selves differ. This idea states that people are driven to arrive at a state where their self-concept fits their individually relevant self-guides (Wesseldyk, 2017).

Those trying to lose weight have also shown positive results linked to upward social comparisons. When comparing their weight to targets who are lighter (upward comparisons) or heavier (downward comparisons), overweight young adult women reported having more thoughts about food and activity. Compared against targets who were slimmer (but not heavier) boosted healthy activity practices, which is significant. Together, a growing body of research demonstrates that upward social comparison, in contrast to past theories regarding its detrimental effects, can occasionally result in favorable outcomes (Holland and Tiggemann, 2016). Evidence implies that downward social comparisons are predominantly driven by self-enhancement reasons, in contrast to upward social comparisons, which often result from both self-enhancement and self-improvement motives. The fundamental tenet is that people can improve their perceived well-being by comparing some aspect of themselves to an inferior or less fortunate person (Liao, 2021). According to Alfasi (2019), people often engage in this type of comparison when they experience negative impact, which is commonly triggered when they

believe their subjective well-being or self-esteem is under danger. In fact, while under psychological stress, people frequently compare themselves to those who are less fortunate or inferior to them to boost self-esteem.

Concerning literature, Van de Ven et al. (2011) aimed to investigate if creating envy experimentally and determining which types of envy can do so would lead to a greater demand for a product. In trials 1-3, this theory was put to the test. In Experiment 1, individuals' propensity to compare themselves to others was assessed, controlled, and tested to understand if the comparison with others leads to the generation of jealousy that contributes to raising their willingness to pay. Experiment 2 tested whether participants' willingness to pay (WTP) for the attractive product was affected by imagining being benevolently or maliciously envious of someone who had an attractive product, or by imagining that they really liked a product that someone owned. Lastly, in experiment 3, manipulation was employed to elicit either constructive or destructive jealousy in participants, via a video of a fellow student gushing over a desirable possession. Results proved that perceived deservingness affects the sort of envy that is elicited. Results also revealed that benign envy places a premium on keeping up, and malicious envy on moving away from superior others.

Hill et al. (2012) investigated how social comparison (upward/downward) influences how consumption restraint and life happiness are related. The 2005–2008 wave, which comprises persons 18 and older from 56 different nations, was used. Using surveys which have been interpreted and back-translated worldwide to assure uniformity, nearby colleges and/or social science study teams gather WVS data in each country through in-person interviews. The association between consumption limitation and life happiness is moderated by social comparison (upward/downward), using information from more than 56,000 consumers in 38 countries. The propensity of making upward social comparisons paired with inadequate access to commodities and services specifically affects life happiness; this unfavorable effect is further made worse by poverty. These results go against expectations by demonstrating that social comparisons are far more effective indicators of life happiness for people living in less advanced, emerging civilizations than for people who live in more advanced, more developed nations.

According to Chrisler et al. (2013), an experimental study that looked at the impact of viewing idealized pictures in the media found that women often felt so much better about themselves following viewing photos that portray the ideal of beauty. Twitter gives the option to naturally see audience reactions. 977 tweets were investigated that were sent before and after the 2011 Victoria's Secrets Fashion Presentation and made mention of it. Even though the bulk of tweets were offbeat remarks, many of them display symptoms of societal comparisons to a designer on an upward scale. There were tweets on self-harm, eating disorders, body image, weight, and food and alcohol desires. The results support the social comparison theory and suggest that more vulnerable viewers could be impacted.

Allard and White (2015) drawn attention to a brand-new aftereffect of guilt: cross-domain preferences for actions that promote self-improvement. It contended that shame generates a broad desire to better oneself when there are no possibilities to take specific steps to address the guilt's root cause. It demonstrated that, even in areas unrelated to the one where the shame originated, guilt can result in preferences for alternatives targeted towards enhancing significant dimensions of the self. It's significant that this rise in self-improvement product demand is not seen in reaction to other unfavorable feelings (e.g., embarrassment, shame, or sadness). Study 1 (n = 169, MTurk) illustrates our hypothesis that guilt drives self-improvement strivings, which in turn lead to preferences for self-improvement items. The study used a 2

(guilt vs. neutrality) between-participants design. Study 2 (n = 166 students) used a mixed design with a 2-level within-participants component and a 2-level between-participants factor (emotion: guilt vs. neutral). Study 3 (n = 157) examines the impact of guilt (vs. neutral) on self-improvement in comparison to controls, embarrassment, humiliation, and sadness for the alternative interpretation of a punishment seeking incentive. Results show that only guilt has the unique motivational consequence of activating a general desire to improve the self, which subsequently drives self-improving product choices.

Through the mechanisms of upward social comparison and moderating by the number of strangers one follows, Lup et al. (2015) explored a theoretically supported mediated model of the link between Instagram use and depression symptoms. Online surveys with questions on demographics, Instagram usage frequency, the number of strangers followed, the Center for Epidemiological Resources Depression Scale, and the Social Comparison Rating Scale were completed by 117 young adults between the ages of 18 and 29. The favorable social comparison was strongly adversely related to depressive symptoms, whereas Instagram use had a modestly positive correlation with these symptoms. The number of strangers you follow considerably attenuated the links between Instagram usage and depressive symptoms and social comparison, as well as the marginally significant association between Instagram use and depressive symptoms via social comparison.

Most social media research focuses on its advantages; little is known about the negative aspects of social networking sites was clarified by Fox and Moreland (2015). Adult Facebook users' narratives on their negative psychological and interpersonal experiences with the social networking site and its features were revealed through focus groups (N = 44). Five themes emerged from a thematic analysis of Facebook stressors: controlling offensive or obnoxious information, being chained, lacking privacy and control, social comparison and jealousy, and relationship strain and conflict. Results show that despite regularly experiencing unpleasant feelings, Facebook users feel compelled to log on frequently out of a sense of not wanting to miss anything and to keep up with demands for relationship maintenance. Due to Facebook's reach, connectedness, and tenacity, several participants have alleged privacy issues. Additionally, these characteristics made it possible to constantly compare oneself to other network users, which led to feelings of envy, anxiety, and other unfavorable emotions. Conflict on Facebook became public, causing relationship instability. The comments of several participants indicated fundamental contradictions: initially they asserted that Facebook was unimportant, but later they related significant stressful or unpleasant incidents connected to Facebook.

Users perform selective self-presentation using social media and camera phones by picking, editing, and posting pictures of oneself (such as selfies) to social networking websites for an imagined audience explored by Fox and Vendemia (2016). Photos frequently highlight users' attractiveness, which may exacerbate already-existing social constraints about body image. Social networking site users were selected from a nationally representative U.S. sample (N=1,686) and looked at how men and women behaved in relation to images, including how they posted and edited pictures and how they felt about social comparisons with other people's pictures. The following sex differences were found: Women modified pictures more often than men did, and they felt worse following upward social comparison. These effects were mediated by body comparison tendencies and body image.

Yang (2016) went beyond looking at SNS usage as a whole to have a deeper understanding. The personal qualities of potential moderators must also be taken into consideration. Social comparison orientation (SCO), a very significant personality

characteristic given that SNSs offer numerous chances for social comparison, has received little attention in social media research. The links between loneliness and different Instagram behaviors were examined as well as the function of SCO in this context, drawing on literature on the psychological consequences of social media usage SCO. A self-report survey was filled out by 208 college students at a university in the mid-south of the United States. Results indicated that while Instagram broadcasting was linked to increased loneliness, Instagram engagement and Instagram surfing were both connected to reduced levels of loneliness. Instagram engagement was only associated with less loneliness for users with low SCO scores because SCO attenuated the association between Instagram usage and loneliness.

Gilovich et al. (2016) investigated consumer decision-making processes for material and experience purchases, expanding on past research on the hedonic advantages of spending money doing rather than having. According to this argument, people prefer to consume items at a faster rate than they do experiences (such as apparel and electronics). The willingness of the buyers to postpone experiential purchases than material ones was investigated. When asked to pick their optimal consumption times, people exhibit a relative propensity to be now and do later. In the subsequent set of studies, it was found that participants chose a less valuable material item now over a more valuable item later due to this distinction in preferred consumption, but they postponed making a more valuable experiential purchase in favor of delaying a more valuable experience later. Customers prefer to wait for experiences over things, which is what has led to this trend. Finally, evidence that these preferences affect how people choose their actual consumption timing was provided.

Zheng et al. (2018) analyzed the unintentional sense of envy as the underlying mechanism to investigate if social comparison in a prior, non-consumption condition influences consumers' materialism and subsequent purchasing propensity. These theories have been put to the test in four experiments. In experiment 1, academic comparisons were manipulated, and after undergraduate students compared themselves to better or worse students, materialism was examined. Experiment 2 examined the mediating function of envy using a memory task to influence social comparison. Experiment 3 looked at how materialism was impacted by the two forms of envy—beneficial and malignant. Experiment 4 looked at the long-term effects on consumers' inclination to spend in both public and private environments. The results show that when consumers are making upward social comparisons as compared to downward or no comparisons, they place a greater value on material belongings and are more inclined to spend money on items that are visible to the public. The effect of unintended social comparison on materialism has also been shown, and envy acts as a mediator for this effect.

By examining how social comparisons and envy on social networking sites connect to inspiration, a complex motivational state, Meier and Schäfer (2018) seek to fill this knowledge vacuum. It concentrates our inquiry on Instagram due to its unique qualities as a creative and aesthetic visual culture. An investigation of 385 Instagram users' data using structural equation modelling shows that the intensity of social comparisons was positively correlated with inspiration and that benign envy totally mediated this association. Additionally, Instagram inspiration was linked to an uptick in happy emotions. The findings highlight the necessity to consider the motivating benefits of social comparison and envy in order to fully comprehend how SNS affect wellbeing.

By focusing on how the iGeneration naturally forms upward and downward comparisons and how social comparisons lead to psychological desires for materialistic consumption, Billiot (2020) attempted to provide an SCT conceptual model. This article discusses how corporations may tap into their workers' natural areas of expertise and profitably

use these inborn characteristics rather than trying to change human behavior. By putting this paradigm to the test, businesses may learn more about how to combine social media with materialism (i.e., extrinsic rewards) to enhance employee wellbeing. This article offers a theoretical framework for firms to use when developing well-being plans for employees from the iGeneration. This conceptual model shows how exposure to materialism through social media directly affects both upward and downward comparisons. A direct link between upward comparison and status consumption is suggested at the top of the model. The next hypothesis is that status consumption and wellbeing are related. It forecasts a connection between conspicuous consumption and downward comparison at the model's base.

Understanding how reciprocity impacts subjective well-being and how unequal social comparison influences it, was the goal of Olivos et al. (2021). People's social networks served as a neighborhood reference group for the plan. The competing hypotheses were tested on the negative and positive effects of comparison with significantly worse (downward) and good (upward) aspirations using a random sample of 1596 Chileans over the age of 18. The findings support the idea that social comparison affects life satisfaction. When employing the social network as just a reference group, the positive benefits of downward comparison and the negative impacts of upward comparison were confirmed. Comparisons above seemed to matter more than comparisons below. The favorable effect of downward comparison also slightly reduces when responders and targets have a reciprocal connection of support. The application of network analysis allowed for the understanding of the mechanisms behind social comparison processes.

According to the previous studies, the different types of social comparison, which are upward social comparison and downward social comparison are discussed in the following subsections.

## ***2.2 Upward Social Comparison***

When individuals contrast themselves with others, they think are superior to them, this occurs. These upward comparisons frequently center on the desire to elevate one's present standing or degree of proficiency. People could judge themselves against someone who has it better than they do and search for means to have the same outcomes. When they can be used to disprove the consequences of subpar performance, upward comparisons are preferred to downward ones. The prevalence of upward social comparisons to individuals receiving bigger benefits is greater, and these comparisons seem to cause more intense feelings and behavioral reactions. There are two main ways that people react to social comparisons on the upward side (Tai et al., 2012).

As people work harder and push themselves to learn to get better rewards, upward comparisons may drive positive behaviors that complement the intended impacts of reward variance. Through social comparison, people assess their relative contributions to reward outcomes and may raise their contributions to increase their benefits. As an alternative, people may compare themselves to others, notice how much better off they are than they are, feel envious of them, and react with feelings of unfairness that might lead to a variety of actions that could be detrimental to productivity. Researchers identify three unfavorable behavioral reactions that reduce productivity because of the unpleasant feelings that come along with upward comparisons (Cohn et al., 2014).

The first is that workers could purposefully hurt or destroy the efforts of those obtaining higher incentives. Second, workers may influence those who decide how to distribute incentives to change it in their favor. Thirdly, employees may just put in less effort at work, whether as a

form of protest, to cause harm to the company that made the unfair allocation, or simply to lessen the inputs that led to an unsatisfactory relative output. As a result, a variety of actions that either increase or decrease productivity have an overall impact on how upward social comparison affects organizational productivity. An effective organizational designer would therefore aim to maximize the advantages of reward variance and to reduce the expensive behavioral reactions that come along with social comparison (Obloj and Zenger, 2017).

### ***2.3 Downward Social Comparison***

People compare themselves to others who are less fortunate when engaging in downward social comparisons. It is a regular occurrence for people to compare themselves to others to reassure themselves about their actions. The benefits of downward social comparisons are varied and can potentially have unfavorable impacts, even though they may appear like a fast and dirty way to raise someone's self-esteem. People are more inclined to create negative social comparisons when their sense of self and wellbeing are in jeopardy because they help them feel better about themselves. Other beneficial effects of negative social comparisons include raising one's self-esteem, experiencing joyful sensations, and reducing worry (Huang, 2016).

According to some experts, an individual's response to social comparisons will determine whether they have an upward or negative effect. The comparison's orientation does not ensure solely favorable or unfavorable effects. People can be inspired to work for new accomplishments by upward social comparisons since someone like them has already attained them, but they may also continuously be reminded of how inferior they are to others. The downward social comparisons should make people feel better about their current situation, according to the social comparison theory, and they can find solace in the fact that things might be worse. However, negative social comparisons may make them sad because they serve as a constant reminder that things might always be worse, or they may make them unhappy because they know things may get worse (Dong, 2023).

Such negative societal comparisons help one appreciate their personal situation and maintain motivation and well-being. Downward social comparison is a skill that is developed early in life and is used throughout the lifetime, although it tends to grow more prominent as people age. To find value in their own situation and maintain or even increase subjective well-being, older people who are experiencing age-related losses frequently compare themselves to those who are in worse circumstances. The use of downward social comparison is connected with better positive affect over time, but only among those whose stated life regret was immutable, as research has shown. This research also shows the importance of this strategy in dealing with severe life regrets (Stewart et al., 2013).

### ***2.4 Social Comparison and Social Networking Sites (SNS)***

Users can build personal profiles on social networking sites (SNSs), express their identities, interact with other users and businesses, and browse, share, upload, and comment on photographs, messages, videos, and other information that has been uploaded to their newsfeeds. SNSs are growing more and more commonplace in people's daily lives all around the world. In addition, a 2015 industry analysis by Social Media Examiner indicated that over 96% of companies utilize SNSs to sell their brands and goods since they may boost brand awareness, drive traffic to websites, cultivate devoted followers, and gather market insight. Consumers are also increasingly using SNSs to learn about businesses and goods (Phua et al., 2016).

Social comparison with others in one's social circles is a self-improvement technique that allows one to boost one's self-esteem by comparing oneself to important reference groups.

Consumer purchases and use of peer-endorsed products are significantly influenced by the consideration of social comparison. Social comparison may have a substantial impact on consumers' views of brand communities on SNSs owing to users' ability to observe brands and goods followed and/or liked by others within their social networks as well as posts and comments submitted by peer consumers on brand sites (Kim et al., 2014).

Information about others is required to create social comparisons. On social networking sites, a user is only a mouse click away from accessing a vast amount of information about others. As a result, social comparison may be done on a never-before-seen scale. Additionally, most social networking sites differ from offline environments in a number of ways that increase the likelihood that envy and upward social comparisons will occur. First off, social networking sites frequently provide asynchronous communication, giving users plenty of time to send amusing comments or beautiful images. This further encourages individuals to unnecessarily impress themselves and may cause the recipient of this information to make upward social comparisons. Second, many social networking sites include features that make it simple to connect with and learn about comparable individuals who publish information that is pertinent to the perceiver—features that tend to raise the likelihood of feeling envious (Verduyn et al., 2017).

As a matter of fact, advertising plays an important role in the development of consumers' subjective well-being (Chang, 2020). An individual typically consumes many marketing messages every day from numerous media sources. These messages may be educational with the intent of helping people make decisions, or they can be emotionally challenging (Leung et al., 2022). It can evoke emotions that are not always associated with the goods being advertised, but in any case, advertising may help or harm the general welfare of the consumer (Kemp et al., 2020). However, advertising also contributes to the promotion of materialism among viewers (Gurrieri et al., 2022).

Consumers are affected by advertising through social comparison. A little exposure to advertising causes unfavorable impacts through social comparison. When examining Chinese colleges Students claim that advertisements motivate them to watch them and that they also desire to emulate famous people to spread materialistic ideas. This causes a lack of happiness with life and a growing yearning for more. However, the upward comparison band has received most of the interest in this area of advertising research, whereas the downward comparison has received far less attention. (Dittmar and Isham, 2022).

O'Donnell (1995) aimed to investigate the nature of social comparisons more thoroughly (whether they are voluntary or imposed by the environment on the individual), the effects of the various types of comparisons, and ultimately the effects of those effects on the individual's perceptions of the advertisement, the product being promoted, and their propensity to purchase the product. The results showed that linking social comparison affect to advertising explains the process that occurs when adolescent females compare themselves with models in ads as well as the ultimate emotional consequences of those comparisons.

Richins (1995) examined how these idealized advertising representations affect customers' perspectives of their life, particularly in relation to their material goods, using ideas from social psychology. The author makes the case that exposure to idealized pictures causes consumers to compare, frequently unintentionally, their own lives with those shown in idealized advertising images based on the social comparison hypothesis. Moreover, information integration frameworks are used to describe how consumers' expectations are raised and how their conceptions of how their lives should be, particularly in terms of their

material belongings, are influenced by frequent exposure to idealized pictures. For some customers, the outcome of both processes is dissatisfaction and a heightened need for more.

By examining whether comparisons to these appealing models may have a detrimental influence on advertising efficacy, Bower (2001) built on earlier efforts. The pattern of findings from two research suggests that when enough negative emotion is produced because of comparison with gorgeous models, both the model's role as a spokesman and the case for the product may suffer because of model derogation. To determine the connection between the unfavorable effects of HAM comparisons and the consequent effects on assessments of HAM expertise and product arguments, two investigations were conducted. Investigation 1: To choose a model to utilize with the treadmill, 38 undergraduate female participants were given five consecutive photocopies of the models. Investigation 2, One hundred and eleven female participants took part in this investigation. One of the surveys was rejected because it was unfinished. When sufficient negative affect is generated because of comparison with beautiful models, evaluations of advertising (both the model and the product) may be affected adversely.

## Consumer Well-Being

A generic phrase describing a person's or a group's condition in a variety of circumstances, such as their psychological, physical, social, or economic health, well-being is becoming more and more important. The phrase "well-being" includes a wide range of meanings and measurements, with many disciplines concentrating on well-being elements unique to their field of study. A growing number of academics and managers from a variety of fields, including psychology and marketing, have expressed interest in consumer well-being. The term "consumer well-being" refers to a consumer's or a group of consumers' welfare. Consumer well-being focuses primarily on the well-being of an individual as a consumer and on the idea that it is crucial to take consumption-related variables into consideration as opposed to the generic concept of well-being (Lee and Ahn, 2016).

Humans often strive for well-being, particularly in the domain of consumption. Consumer satisfaction, pleasant feelings, and perceived quality of life are three elements that make up consumer well-being, which is defined as a cognitive and emotional response that customers produce in the context of their shopping experiences. Since the beginning of time, happiness has been the main objective of human endeavor. Consumer well-being has been severely harmed by frequent safety incidents. Therefore, how to help the company establish a proper notion of operation and how to assist clients in achieving a greater degree of satisfaction are the urgent needs of the times and the focus of theoretical circles. The conversation focused on the difference between consumer behavior and consumer well-being from an economic standpoint. Since that time, consumer behavior and well-being have been separated, creating new theoretical frameworks and study domains. The study of consumer well-being has so far evolved into a significant idea. Researchers have discovered that consumer physical and mental wellness may enhance personal health, customer loyalty, word-of-mouth, and other factors (Zhao and Wei, 2019).

Although there is no universally accepted definition of consumer well-being in academic circles, it can be roughly divided into three categories: the first increases consumer satisfaction in particular consumption regions; the second keeps adding emotional and attitude factors to the measurement of satisfaction; and the third goes beyond the perspective of individual hedonism and takes psychological well-being and social well-being into account. It was believed that consumer well-being is the pleasure and satisfaction people derive from their

purchases. Although there is no universally accepted definition of consumer well-being in academic circles, it can be roughly divided into three categories: the first increases consumer satisfaction in particular consumption areas; the second keeps adding emotional and attitude factors to the unit of measure of satisfaction; and the third goes beyond the viewpoint of individual hedonistic and takes psychological well-being and social well-being into account (Huppert and So, 2013).

Customer pleasure should be a first consideration in determining consumer well-being. The fulfilment of personal wants can increase happiness, according to the self-determination hypothesis. Products or services may meet the requirements of customers, including their physiological, monetary, cultural, and emotional needs, making them happy. The word "consumer well-being," according to Leong et al. (2016), refers to customers' overall satisfaction with a range of experiences linked to the sale, ownership, usage, upkeep, and handling of goods. Some of its subfields include item ownership, product consumption, item maintenance, object disposal, and product mix. It has also shown the need for fulfilment. Second, the satisfaction that goods or services give customers includes pleasant emotions. Researchers have concluded that the reason why food makes people happy is because it triggers pleasant emotions in them, in line with the idea that consumer well-being is not only reflected in functional value but also emotional worth, for example (Leong et al., 2016).

It is commonly known that the word "consumer well-being" encompasses a wide range of distinct characteristics, even though there are divergent opinions on its definition and dimensions in academic circles. The satisfaction with life scale, that some researchers used to measure consumer pleasure, could show certain features of happiness, but it might not necessarily represent it. According to the literature study in this article, the three most used instruments to measure consumer well-being are the Asian Consumer Well-being Scale, Demand Fulfillment Model, and Consumer Life Cycle Model. Additionally, some academics concentrate on the evaluation of customer satisfaction in service environments. It has been done on further outcome aspects because wellbeing is the ultimate ideal condition that customers should strive to achieve. The person level and the enterprise level are primarily the focus of the current studies. Customer satisfaction promotes both physical and mental wellness on an individual and corporate level. Additionally, it could boost client retention and promote positive word-of-mouth (Zhao and Wei, 2019).

### ***3.1 Consumer Well-being Theories***

The concept of consumer well-being can be discussed through two main theories, which give a more complete view of the improvement of consumers' well-being. These theories can be discussed as follows:

#### ***3.1.1 Goal-driven behavior theory***

According to Bagozzi's (1992) goal theory, human behavior is mostly intentional and is divided into two stages: goal establishing and goal striving. Establishing a goal intention is a pre-decisional deliberative step of goal planning. At this point, a person's goal intention is determined by their views about their likelihood of success, their likelihood of failure, and the process of obtaining their objectives. Goal striving, which is motivated by predetermined objectives, is the process through which customers make attempts and take action to achieve and maintain goals.

By having an impact on consumers' goal-pursuit strategies, the service organization can enhance the well-being of its clients. In the goal-setting stage three key variables (self-efficacy,

outcome expectations, and process expectations), boost consumers' goal intentions both directly and indirectly. When consumers are in the goal-striving stage, their goal intentions guide the goal-striving process, which results in goal achievement and improved domain-specific well-being (Tang et al., 2016).

### ***3.1.2 Social-cognitive Theory***

Social-cognitive theory calculates a person's propensity to participate in a certain behavior based on internal and external factors and how they interact. Triadic reciprocity, or the interaction of an individual, the environment, and attitudes, forms the core of this theory. It functions as a controller and influences a person's mindset. According to this idea, the state of the job, the weather, and other psycho-social factors demonstrate how ethical behavior is governed by ethical analysis. Therefore, social-cognitive theory adopts an interactionist perspective to moral phenomena and suggests a system where personal factors, such as moral thought and affective self-reactions, moral conduct, and environmental factors all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other in determining outcomes (Thomas and Gupta, 2021).

According to SCT, people's cognitive perception and subsequent behavior may be influenced by messages and visual depictions of any situation. It follows that information about various elements that would arouse personal or societal cognitions that will affect people's views and motivate consumers. Accordingly, within the social comparison context, consumers engage in interaction. Since personal interaction and social context are provided by the messages, their underlying meanings also serve to influence consumer behavior (Rakib et al., 2022).

## ***3.2 Emotions***

Consumer behavior research demonstrates that emotions are crucial in the decision-making processes of consumers as well as in the formation and maintenance of preferences for certain items, both commodities and services. In essence, customers frequently appreciate or regret their decisions. Also, people frequently link the use of particular products or purchases with intense emotions like pleasure, fear, love, optimism, pride, grief, or imagination. Affective reactions therefore have an impact on processes including evaluation, memory, judgement, and risk perception. Choosing green offerings involves a lot of emotion. The correlation between sustainable consumption and emotions is stronger than that of intellect. A certain form of pro-environmental activity may be predicted by an emotion. The majority of previous research on the subject concentrates mostly on self-conscious feelings like remorse and pride (D'Agostin et al., 2021).

### ***3.2.1 Positive Emotions***

In addition to playing a crucial part in daily life, positive emotions are more than just "good sensations" that were targeted to experience fleeting pleasure. There are several definitions of "emotion," but they all seem to belong to one of two categories. First of all, emotions are a condition or sensation that cannot be created willfully. Second, emotions are attitudes or reactions to a circumstance or an item, similar to judgements (Casaló et al., 2021). There are different types of positive emotions such as optimism, admiration, and ambition. A feeling of optimism is one that makes you want to look forward to a bright future and has you confident that most things will turn out as you expect them to. A sense of heartfelt approbation, respect, and appreciation for someone or something is known as admiration. A strong desire to do something big or lofty is known as aspiration (Johnson and Tran, 2020).

### 3.2.2. *Negative Emotions*

Negative emotional reactions are unpleasant and disturbing. Sadness, anxiety, rage, and jealousy are a few examples of unpleasant emotions. Not only are these emotions unpleasant, but they also make it difficult to operate in day-to-day activities and get things done. It's crucial to remember that no feeling, even an unpleasant one, is intrinsically harmful. Feeling these feelings in particular contexts or circumstances is very natural. When these feelings continue and interfere with your ability to go about your daily activities, they become troublesome (Young et al., 2019). There are different types of negative emotions such as depression, envy, and shame. A depression sense of melancholy, emptiness, and lack of joy are symptoms of depression, a mood condition. When one lacks another's ability, accomplishment, or property, one experiences the emotion of envy and either wishes they had it themselves or wishes they didn't. Shame is an unpleasant sensation that makes one feel self-conscious. It's frequently linked to low self-esteem, the desire to give up, and emotions like pain, exposure, distrust, helplessness, and worthlessness (Leahy, 2021).

### 3.3 *Mood*

The meaning and applications of the term "mood" are numerous. The phrase might be used to describe a phenomenological aspect of a person's subjectively experienced emotional state, such as whether they are feeling happy or angry. A point-of-purchase display, for instance, can have a "sophisticated mood" or a "fun mood." One can also use mood to describe the quality of an inanimate item. Moods can be separated from emotions, which are often stronger, more attention-grabbing, and associated with a specific activity. One is nearly always conscious of their emotions and how they affect them, which might draw attention to the cause of the feeling and stop an action that is already in progress. One's mood and its consequences may or may not be conscious, and they can color attentional processes and impact, but seldom interrupt, ongoing activity (Gardner, 1985).

It is simple to recognize many positive moods like joy, tranquilly, and sexual warmth as well as negative moods like guilt, worry, and sadness. The available study does not offer much insight into the consequences of moods, even though classifying moods as positive or negative may be oversimplifying the situation. The majority of research has used general manipulations intended to elicit either good or negative moods rather than attempting to influence or measure particular moods. It is sometimes challenging to determine the produced mood or its intensity; for instance, people who are informed that they failed a test of their perceptual motor abilities may not react emotionally or they may feel unhappy, disappointed, or nervous. Also, a lot of typical manipulations may fail to elicit distinct moods, and naturally existing emotional states could manifest in groups (Kuvaas and Kaufmann, 2004).

Individuals frequently attempt to read each other's moods both in advance of interactions and while they are happening. These methods for gathering and using informal mood information to support social and professional relationships. For instance, understanding the boss's disposition on a given day may enable an employee to foresee the boss' responses to a raise request. In a similar vein, analyzing customers' emotional states during marketing scenarios may help marketers gain a deeper understanding of consumers and how they respond to marketing strategies and methods. Understanding customer behavior as it is influenced by service interactions, point-of-purchase cues, the content of marketing communications, and the environment in which these communications occur may be especially aided by this knowledge of mood states (Gardner, 1985).

Examining customers' emotions and feelings might provide more broad insights into consumer behavior. The knowledge of the cognitive mediators of consumer behavior has been

greatly improved by extensive research utilizing the conventional information processing paradigm. Research that has looked at noncognitive (nonbelief) elements such subjective familiarity, fun as well as fantasy, motor and somatic representation of affect, mood, and attitude towards the commercial has also provided significant insights into consumer behavior. Results suggest that these emotion-focused elements may be crucial in shaping customer attitudes and brand preference (Moore and Hutchinson, 1983).

As mood states are a group of affective characteristics that are particularly significant, they are present in every marketing scenario and have the potential to affect customer behavior in a variety of settings. Moods may change quickly and are readily influenced by little things. Now of purchase, little modifications to the physical environment may have an impact on customers' emotions, and minor adjustments to communication tactics may have a big impact on consumers' moods after being exposed to advertising. Even though events outside of a marketer's control frequently affect customers' moods, seemingly insignificant features of marketer conduct, such as a salesperson's grin or a lengthy wait for a doctor's appointment, may have a significant impact on consumers' moods. Due to their ubiquitous nature and ease of manipulation by marketers, mood states may have a significant impact on customer behavior (Pantano, 2020).

### ***3.4 Factors Affecting Different Emotions of Consumer Well-Being***

By concentrating on the quantity of Facebook friends and self-presentation techniques, Kim and Lee (2011) explored if and how Facebook promotes college-age users' subjective well-being (positive vs. honest). The number of Facebook friends exhibited a positive connection with subjective well-being; however, this association wasn't really mediated by perceived social support, according to a structural equation modelling of cross-sectional questionnaire responses of 391 college students who used Facebook. Furthermore, a negative curvilinear (inverted U-shape curve) association between Friends on Facebook and perceived social support were discovered. Regarding self-presentation techniques, although positive self-presentation used to have a direct impact on subjective well-being, honest self-presentation had a sizable indirect impact via perceived social support.

With participation serving as a moderator, Kim et al. (2012) sought to evaluate the structural relationships between chain restaurant patrons' brand views, utilitarian values, hedonism values, well-being judgments, and behavioral intentions. Following a survey of the most recent papers in these disciplines, the authors identified ten assumptions that they used to construct a structural model. To test the model, data from 433 patrons of chains of eateries were acquired. Theoretical links were hypothesized, and confirmatory factor analysis as well as structural equation modelling was used to explore them. Hedonic value and brand attitude have a positive impact on customers' views of their well-being, according to data analysis. However, it was shown that utilitarian value has minimal impact on how clients see their well-being. Additionally, it was discovered that the strongest predictor of customers' constructive behavioral intentions is their assessment of their well-being. More significantly, the association between hedonic value and behavioral intentions was fully mediated by well-being assessment. Finally, it was discovered that engagement plays a substantial moderating effect in the links between behavioral goals and well-being perception.

Howell et al. (2012) investigated the theory that buying experiences makes individuals happier, which is gaining popularity. However, there hasn't been much research done on the causes or long-term consequences of the desire to purchase experiential products. Given how significant experience purchasing is for improving wellness, it is essential to comprehend consumers' preferences. To measure recurrent experiential buying, the Experiential Buying

Tendency Scale (EBTS) was developed. The development and testing of the EBTS on eight samples ( $n = 9634$ ) showed that it was valid, reliable, and capable of forecasting consumer behavior and psychological well-being. An experienced buying impulse was correlated with higher degrees of extraversion, flexibility, empathetic concern, and reward seeking. A preference for experience purchases was also suggested by non-materialistic values, which in turn improved the satisfaction of psychological demands and, ultimately, improved subjective well-being. The argument makes the case that choosing to buy an experienced item or service may be influenced by one's reward sensitivity, emotional response to situations, and enjoyment of the attractiveness of the setting.

The level of debt, financial considerations, spending patterns, money-management skills, and compulsive shopping are just a few of the financial well-being indicators that Garðarsdóttir and Dittmar (2012) look at in connection to materialism by investigating in Iceland at a time of economic expansion. Study 1 ( $N = 271$ ) found that those who adhere to materialism are more likely to be concerned about money, have less effective money-management skills, and are more likely to engage in purchase behavior and spending. The findings of Study 2 ( $N = 191$ ) support those of Study 1 and show that, after accounting for income and financial management skills, debt levels, particularly mortgages, can be highly correlated with materialism. The research advances our understanding of the physiology of materialism and excessive consumption and provides a strong scientific foundation for the development of interventions that encourage individuals to better manage their financial security.

According to El Hedhli et al. (2013), a shopper's well-being of how a mall affects their level of happiness in key life areas leads them to conclude that the mall has a major positive influence on their overall quality of life. Functionality, convenience, safety, leisure, atmospherics, and self-identification are six retail mix predictors that were highlighted as having an impact on shoppers' well-being. Through a mall intercept, information was gathered from actual customers in two metropolitan Canadian retail malls. After agreeing to take part in the investigation, customers were taken to a designated sitting area to complete the survey. 483 of the 922 consumers that were caught in the first mall consented to complete the investigation. 378 of the 705 customers at the second mall consented to fill out the survey. Shoppers between the ages of 18 and 25 make up 48% of the population. The results found a positive significant effect of functionality, convenience, safety, leisure, atmospherics, and self-identification on shopper well-being.

In Dittmar et al. (2014), the connection between a person's materialistic perspective and their personal happiness is examined. Psychology's theoretical perspectives concur that placing a priority on money and related goals is detrimental to people's wellbeing, but they disagree on the extent to which this is always the case. To address these and other issues, it examined 753 effect estimates from 259 separate independent samples. Materialism was significantly associated with worse well-being for the most prevalent and comprehensive indicators (materialist beliefs and values relative relevance of materialist goals, and more so than for measures evaluating emphasis on money alone). Happiness levels and negative affect showed the smallest relationships, with the association's intensity varying depending on the type of well-being result. Risky consumer and health habits had a detrimental effect on the connection as well. The moderator analyses' findings indicated that certain demographic factors (gender and age), the cultural economic indicators, and the situation of value systems (study/work environments that priorities affective autonomy and cultures that uphold materialistic values) all influenced how strong the relationship between economic growth and wealth disparities

was. Investigations into the mediation process suggested that the adverse association may be caused by insufficient psychological need fulfilment.

Guevarra and Howell (2015) seek to investigate the consequences of acquiring experiential goods, or purchases that fall between material possessions and life experiences, on wellbeing. According to Studies 1 and 2, experiential goods were more uplifting than material possessions and offer wellbeing levels that were comparable to those of life events. For purchases that were successful, Study 3 confirmed this conclusion. Additionally, Study 3 demonstrated that experiential items provide higher feelings of competence but fewer emotions of relatedness when compared to life events. This helped to explain why these two types of purchases produce equal levels of wellbeing. The findings were examined, along with how they support the Holbrook and Hirschman paradigm for hedonic consumption, the Positive-Activity Model, and the Self-Determination Theory. The results also addressed the reasons why life events and experiential goods satisfy psychological needs.

Seegebarth et al. (2016) introduced the concept of sustainability-rooted anti consumption (SRAC), which characterizes consumers' voluntary behaviors of simply living and, to a smaller extent, collaborative consumption and boycotting to support sustainable economic growth. Three empirical investigations are used to validate the SRAC measuring technique. The findings of Study 2 show that SRAC is mostly adversely correlated with consumer overconsumption attitudes in a typical German population. It is possible that boycott aim, and exemplary voluntary simplification will lead to falling levels of debt. According to Study 3, SRAC and overconsumption are positively correlated with psychological well-being. However, living a simpler life and being more likely to boycott are not always linked to psychological wellbeing. The concepts presented in this article can be used by practitioners and policymakers to harness current SRAC principles through "new" marketing strategies (sharing offerings) or to have an impact on the current level of consciousness to effectively pave the way for significant advances in the sustainability movement.

There is much evidence linking excessive consumption, namely materialism, with consumer happiness (CWB). Since materialism and anti-consumption are incompatible, and since materialism is bad for CWB, anti-consumption should be in CWB's favor. Lee and Ahn (2016) looked at research on materialism, CWB, and anti-consumption to find the fundamental ideas that differentiate them to investigate this link. A framework based on four components is then developed, theoretically highlighting the distinctions between materialism and anti-consumerism in terms of CWB. 1. Consumption control; 2. The breadth of issues; 3. Material desire; and 4. The source of happiness Initial qualitative information and analysis of online blogs, forums, and websites confirm the study's claims.

Ho and Ito (2019) wanted to find out how usage engagement (COE) in SNSs affected young adults' personal wellbeing, particularly regarding stress, self-esteem, and overspending. Data were gathered from a dataset compiled from a survey of college students in Singapore's use of social media. The poll, which was conducted in an anonymous fashion using paper and pencil, involved five higher education institutions in Singapore. There were 900 full surveys with valid replies in all. The ages of the participants varied from 17 to 24. The hypotheses were tested using moderated hierarchical regression. COE was inversely correlated with self-esteem and favorably correlated with worry and excessive expenditure. These correlations were moderated by people's materialistic ideals and social comparison as a mediator.

## **Role of Social Comparison in Enhancing Consumer Well-Being**

Social comparison is considered an important factor that could influence consumer well-being. As a matter of fact, consumers utilize social media to compare themselves to other customers. When customers compare themselves to peers to acknowledge that they are not the only ones in this situation (network support) or when customers compare themselves to peers to learn how other people deal with the condition (esteem support, emotional support, or information support), these social comparisons may appear to overlap with social support (Smailhodzic et al., 2016).

Gibbons (1986) evaluated the social comparison processes of 50 depressed and 48 non-depressed college students were chosen based on their results from the Beck Depression Inventory. When others are doing worse could help depressed people to feel somewhat better. Upward comparison generated more positive affect than downward comparison only for subjects high in perceived control. Downward comparison generated more negative affect than upward comparison, regardless of perceived control.

Bearden and Rose (1990) presented the findings from two studies that examined the measure's reliability in detecting individual differences in sensitivity as well as its capacity to control the relative weight of interpersonal influence factors in Minard and Cohen's (1983) model of behavioral intention. The outcomes of two studies that looked at how peer pressure and sensitivity to social comparison information affected compliance rates are then provided. Before presenting the research, a description of the nature of social comparison information as well as the part that attentiveness to such information plays in consumer behavior is provided. The results indicated that Control subjects under no social pressure are compared with high and low ATSCI subjects under pressure revealing that, high ATSCI subjects are more likely to comply with normative pressures.

Using a small-scale exploratory study, Hogg and Fragou (2003) question existing theories on the possible impacts of women's representations in print advertising on young women's self-esteem and body image. It investigated the potential effects of young women's social comparison goals—self-evaluation, self-improvement, and self-enhancement—on their perceptions of themselves and their sense of self-worth. According to the findings, the need for social comparison exerts a significant moderating impact on how consumers see and take in advertising imagery. The results corroborate past research, confirm it, and go beyond it. They also challenge common perceptions of women as passive consumers of advertising messages, prone to negative self-talk in response to idealized pictures, and, thirdly, as pursuing a single objective while consuming it.

The purpose of Tiggemann and McGill (2004) was to look at how women react to photographs of thin-idealized feminine beauty in terms of social comparison processes. 126 women were chosen at random to see magazine advertising that featured whole-body, body-part, or product imagery. Control, appearance emphasis, and social comparison were the three levels used to alter the instructional set. Whereas state weight anxiety and the frequency of appearance comparison were only examined after the advertising, mood and body dissatisfaction were measured both before and after seeing the ads. It was discovered that exposure to complete body or body component photos enhanced negative mood and body dissatisfaction, although image type and instructional set both had an impact on how much comparison processing was done. Regression analyses, which were significant, revealed that the degree of reported social comparison acted as a mediator between the effects of picture type

on mood and body dissatisfaction. It was determined that a significant factor in the detrimental consequences is the processing that women do in reaction to media pictures.

The significance of social comparison in the impact of slim media images on the emotions and food intake of binge eaters and non-binge eaters was examined in Bola (2007). In the present investigation, 79 undergraduate students were exposed to thin media pictures and given the option of focusing on the image's aesthetic aspects or making social comparisons with the models. The findings showed that compared to non-binge eaters, binge eaters consumed more food overall. Binge eaters who were instructed to compare themselves to skinny media pictures ate more than those who were advised to concentrate on the aesthetic aspects of the image. At two different research time periods, it was discovered that binge eaters showed higher negative affect than nonbinge eaters. Also, it was shown that compared to non-binge eaters, binge eaters have more difficulty avoiding the slim model (e.g., the aesthetic quality job).

Chan and Sengupta (2013) contribute to the literature on flattery in two additional ways in addition to demonstrating the contradictory attitudes that flattery causes in observers. First, by specifying theoretically determined boundary requirements, the social comparison process that generates the implicit attitude was clarified. Second, the behavioral effects of witnessing real flattery were examined. It was found that sincere flattery may work as a surprisingly powerful persuasive message for spectators, influencing them to behave in a way that would be desired by the flatterer to lessen their feelings of jealousy. These hypotheses were evaluated in five experiments. Observers' Comparing themselves with the target will produce an implicit negative reaction rooted in the unpleasant sensation of envy while 'observers' deliberative attitudes toward sincere flattery may be positive.

Coleman and Zayer (2013) investigated how advertising professionals understand the social comparison process amongst consumers using a mixed method qualitative approach. The effects of social comparison are a subject of research as well. The researchers employed a qualitative method across two waves of data collection to examine how advertising practitioners see consumer comparisons to advertising representations. Field observations, a focus group, as well as unstructured and semi structured interviews with advertising practitioners were done in a significant American advertising agency during the first round. Twenty people were subjected to "grand tour" questions. Both men and women actively engage in social comparison to advertising representations, most informants focused on women. Women's perceived vulnerability to negative effects of social comparison. The effects of men's comparisons predominantly are seen as positive and aspirational.

Fardouly et al. (2015) used an experimental design to examine how Facebook use affected women's mood and body image, whether these effects were different from those of an online fashion magazine, and whether an individual's propensity for making comparisons to others' appearances affected any of these effects. Before completing state assessments of mood, body unhappiness, and appearance disparities, 112 female participants were randomly allocated to spend 10 minutes perusing their Facebook account, a magazine website, or an appearance-neutral control website. An additional trait assessment of the propensity to compare appearances was performed by participants. Compared to participants who used the control website, Facebook users reported feeling more down. In addition, following exposure to Facebook rather than the control page, women with a strong propensity for beauty comparison reported larger differences in facial features, hair, and complexion.

The purpose of Tiggemann et al. (2019) was to examine how women respond to thin idealized representations of beauty and the role that processing plays in this. 144 women were selected at random and exposed to magazine advertising with slender ideal or product pictures. Three layers of manipulation—control, social comparison, and fantasy instructions—were used to alter the instructional set. It was discovered that exposure to slim ideal pictures enhanced negative mood and body dissatisfaction, whereas instructional sets had an impact on good mood and body dissatisfaction. In contrast to daydream instructions, which promoted good mood, social comparison instructions for slim ideal pictures increased negative mood and body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, regression studies revealed a relationship between women's reactions to slender ideal pictures and both comparison processing and fantasy processing, both of which were favorably linked.

The process of customer organizational socialization in counseling programs was examined by Guo et al. (2013), as well as how it may encourage co-production behaviors and so improve customers' well-being and happiness with the business. In relation to debt management programs, the model was designed through its paces. The data came from 364 clients of a major American credit counselling company. The research shows that three socialization factors—role clarity, task mastery, and goal congruence—have different effects on three different types of consumer co-production behaviors (compliance, individual initiative, and civic virtue). In general, compliance has the greatest effect on happiness, while both compliance and self-determination increase organizational satisfaction. Over time, consumers who rely on business choose different pathways to pleasure; the high-dependence group places a greater emphasis on individual initiative, while the low-dependence category values conformity.

The social service environment was included in Jani and Han (2014) adaptation of the affect-satisfaction-behavioral intention model for hotel guests to clarify the influence of social comparison on consumption-based affect by accounting for the moderating impact of hotel ambiance on interpersonal relationships. Hotel customers' affect is highly influenced by social comparison, and affect is crucial in causing satisfaction and behavioral intentions, according to structural equation modelling of survey data from hotel guests. The relationships at the hotel are moderated; a high ambiance deepens the ties more than a low ambiance. Findings confirm that social settings are considered when forecasting hotel guests' experiences and highlight management implications for improving service delivery.

Analyzing the connections between social media use, social comparison orientation, self-esteem, and emotion was the aim of Gallinari (2018). Using the use of Mechanical Turk and convenience sampling, participants (N=234) were found. Measures were taken of Facebook usage, social comparison orientation, self-esteem, and affect. It was predicted that those who are more inclined towards social comparison will use Facebook more frequently, and that more Facebook use will be linked to poorer self-worth and more negative emotions. The impact of gender was also looked at, and it was predicted that women would perform better than males across the board. The findings suggested a connection between Facebook use, mood, and social comparison orientation. Negative affect and social comparison orientation were both positively connected with Facebook use. There was no discernible link between Facebook usage frequency and self-esteem. Women claimed to use Facebook more frequently and participate in more social comparison.

In their investigation of college students from Croatia, India, China, and the United States, McCardle and Speck (2019) looked at the relationships between consumerism, televised social comparison, and subjective well-being. A uniformly favorable link between materialism

and social comparison has been found, according to the findings of structural equation modeling. However, in individualistic and collective societies, materialism serves as a clear mediating force between social comparison and subjective well-being.

Chatterjee et al. (2019) seeks to explain how young Indian adults' perceived income stability (IS), materialistic ideals, and socially motivated objectives affect their financial well-being (FWB). Utilizing the materialism and FWB accessible scales, a questionnaire was created. Inquiries were included to gauge IS and societal comparability. Using information from 327 respondents, a structural equation method was utilized to investigate a potential model of FWB. Utilizing the materialism and FWB accessible scales, a questionnaire was created. Inquiries were included to gauge IS and societal comparability. Using information from 327 respondents, a structural equation method was utilized to investigate a potential model of FWB.

Meier et al. (2020) provided clarification on the positive effects of upward comparison on well-being on social networking platforms. On social networking sites (SNS) like Instagram, passive exposure to others' positive self-presentations has repeatedly been related to lower wellbeing, particularly via fostering envy and upward social comparison. Prior studies, however, have generally disregarded the potential that upward comparisons on SNS may assist good outcomes, particularly image inspiration, a feel motivated that is extremely advantageous to wellbeing. Two experiments were conducted to determine if and how the cognitive-affective examination of visual SNS postings results in inspiration. Study 1 provides the first proof that 270 users react with stronger upward comparison to Instagram nature and vacation photographs that are more pleasant and optimized, which inspires via an integrationist emotion (benign envy), enhancing wellbeing. Preregistered Study 2 supports these findings (408 participants). The findings demonstrate that users may get motivation from upward comparisons on SNS, which may temporarily improve their wellbeing.

Lee (2020) investigated the impact of social comparison orientation on psychological health in social networking platforms. It examines how self-esteem and perceived social support function as mediators in the relationship across social comparison orientation and mental well-being. 236 South Korean volunteers in an online survey were used to get the data. The research showed a link between social comparison orientation and emotional well-being that was detrimental. The variables; self-esteem perceived social confidence and perceived social support all exhibited negative meditative effects on the relationship between social comparison orientation and psychological well-being. Perceived social support had no meditative effect. Social networking services' propensity for social comparison may elicit negative emotions that reduce mental well-being, self-esteem, and perceived support from others.

Wirtz et al. (2021) used the experience sampling method to examine whether Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram use had any impact on the three components of subjective well-being: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. These three social networking sites are the most widely used in the United States. Over a 10-day period, everyday usage of social media increased negative affective states rather than reduced positive ones or life satisfaction, which led to a drop in subjective well-being. On all three social networking websites, this tendency was discernible. Social comparison was a significant predictor when it came to understanding why using social media negatively impacted subjective well-being. Particularly, participants' subjective well-being decreased the more they admitted to comparing oneself to others when using social media. Traditional, offline social contacts, on the other hand, had the beneficial effect of enhancing positive affect and lowering negative affect, which increased happiness.

Therefore, the current study demonstrates that consistent, everyday use of social networking sites over time has a detrimental impact on subjective well-being and highlights the advantages of utilizing independent well-being measurements and comparing the usage of other sites.

Nevertheless, Boehm et al. (2022) had seldom been verified experimentally. Research implies that witnessing successful or lucky others' social media depictions may encourage a more negative hedonic experience via social comparison tendencies. Here, it was investigated if seeing positive and negative social media depictions (as opposed to neutral ones) can likewise encourage a bad hedonic experience. In Experiment 1, individuals reported their moods both before and after watching happy, unhappy, or neutral (boring) social media depictions. Only those individuals who saw the sad representation reported higher negative affect balance than those who saw the neutral portrayal, which runs counter to popular theory. Results from Experiment 2 showed that individuals who saw an unhappy (vs. fortunate) representation showed increased negative affect balance. Although somewhat incongruous with common understanding, the data imply unpleasant hedonic experiences can propagate on social media.

Weber et al. (2022) Users of social networking sites like Instagram are exposed to many social comparison cues, which may cause jealousy and reduced self-esteem. To test if these detrimental effects may be lessened by quick cognitive treatments, two trials were conducted. In Experiment 1 (N = 391), a 2 (intervention: disclaimer vs. control) × 2 (Instagram profile: upward vs. downward comparison standard) were used between-subjects design to remind users of the false character of most Instagram postings. As dependent variables, positive and negative affect, jealousy, self-esteem, and wellbeing were used. In Experiment 2 (N = 184), it was determined if somewhat longer cognitive treatments (cognitive bias vs. "growth mentality" vs. control) might enhance participants' perceptions of upward comparisons, protecting them from jealousy or a decline in self-esteem. Social comparison orientation (SCO) was a possible moderator in both studies. The findings demonstrate that inciting envy does, in fact, cause more envy, with SCO reducing the impact. Via participant social comparison experiences, indirect impacts of the displayed Instagram accounts on positive affect, envy, self-esteem, and wellbeing were identified. The cognitive treatments, however, did not significantly lessen the detrimental effects of social comparisons. Neither did providing users with information on cognitive biases or mindsets.

## **Conclusion**

Principles from theories served as the foundation for early advances in social comparison. Recently, ideas like information availability and cognitive bias have been found to be helpful. Social comparison evaluation is now understood to entail a broad range of self-evaluative issues and self-motivations. In addition to assessing previous and present performance, comparison is also used to forecast potential future results. Different comparisons are used to evaluate preferences and beliefs, and validation is not always found in comparison with like people. Another crucial realization is that the direction of the comparison has no inherent bearing on the impacts of social comparison on self-evaluations. In every situation where relative position is important, comparison can have both beneficial and detrimental contrastive and assimilative consequences.

There are still a few concerns about the upward and downward comparison that need to be looked at. For instance, it is still unknown which factors are most crucial in deciding whether reactions are contrastive or assimilative. If research on social comparison is to be

beneficial for studying coping with health and other dangers, it will be critical to learn more about these factors. It is well recognized how comparison affects the mind and the heart, but less is known about how comparison affects conduct. Of fact, social comparison is just one method of self-evaluation. Its relative position in relation to direct input, comparisons with the past selves, and other sources of data utilized for self-evaluation is yet unknown. Modern ideas and studies offer some explanations for how people might gain from comparisons for performance prediction, opinion validation, and self-image enhancement.

Although research on social comparisons has demonstrated that upward comparisons might diminish self-esteem, it also notes that this is not always the case. In attempt to enhance their perceptions of themselves or to create a more positive sense of their own reality, people make upward comparisons, whether consciously or subconsciously, when they compare themselves to someone or something they consider as better or superior to themselves. In the hopes that self-reinforcement will also happen, upward societal comparisons of self-evaluation and self-improvement are established. In contrast to downward social comparison, which emphasizes similarities between individuals or groups, upward social comparisons are made by persons who wish to seem superior to or a part of the elite and accentuate the similarities between themselves and the comparison group.

Based on the research on the social comparison of all kinds, it can be concluded that upward or downward comparisons are the elements from which the positive or negative feelings of consumers are formed. Accordingly, future researchers are recommended to focus on the extent of the difference between upward comparisons on the generation of positive or negative feelings, examining the extent of the difference between downward comparisons on the generation of positive or negative feelings, and investigating the overall effect of social comparisons on consumer well-being.

## **Recommendation**

Based on the results of this paper and the findings of the previous literature study, this paper presents some recommendations. First, data shows that upward comparison serves self-evaluative and self-improvement purposes, which aids individuals in achieving and maintaining supremacy. However, given that they appear to shun other helpful feedback options, this might not be sufficient to explain why individuals are interested in upward comparison. As a result, interest in upward comparison may also be a result of comparers' sense of superiority toward others and their expectation that such comparison will genuinely aid to reduce or eliminate perceived status inequalities. According to the data analyzed, upward comparison will be ego-deflating when these expectations are less than pressures that encourage difference and the comparer is pushed to conclude that he/she belongs to a lower group. However, anticipation biases in comparison construal can work to reward comparers for their confidence in their own strengths.

Moreover, promotional and commercial content might be harmful to consumers' well-being. Therefore, marketers are recommended to be aware of these implications when using social comparison as a means of spreading marketing messages. Additionally, marketers that wish to sell their competence-oriented products should target people who frequently compare themselves to others or evoke situational upward comparison experiences from them. Further, marketers that are considering using social comparison to advertise their products should be aware that not all downward comparisons will result in consumer well-being, as several factors may have an impact on these effects. Moreover, government organizations and educational

institutions should launch programs that assist adolescents in becoming more aware of their propensity to prevent the harmful effects of heavy networking use. Thus, customers can safely make upward social comparisons if they think performance accomplishment is attainable without it having a negative effect. Finally, increased knowledge of the effects of networking usage on user well-being encourages educators, researchers, and policymakers to exert even more effort to fully comprehend the drawbacks of social media use, especially among young adults.

## **Limitations and Future Researcher Suggestions**

This article contains some shortcomings that could be addressed in follow-up investigations:

First limitation, the timeline is the first constraint; Thus, additional studies over a longer period are recommended.

Second limitation, the current study only focused on previous literature in the process of investigating the correlation between social comparison and consumer well-being. Hence, it is advisable for future research to target a research sample to study the impact of these dimensions more accurately and not to rely only on previous literature.

Third limitation, the current paper focused on the previous literature which investigated the topic of the paper in different countries to compare the results. Based on this limitation, future research is recommended to focus on more emerging countries and use comparative studies of developing and industrialized countries.

Fourth limitation, the current study only relied on previous literature on examining the correlation between social comparison and consumer well-being without conducting an empirical study; hence, it is advisable to collect qualitative and quantitative data.

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