



Concept of Self-Esteem in Consumer Behavior: A Literature Review

Alişan BALTACI^{1*}

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ABSTRACT

Since the structure of consumer behavior, literature is suitable for multi-disciplinary studies the number of such researches is increasing day by day. One of the most suitable literature for consumer behavior is psychology where the concept of self-esteem has been shaped. Self-esteem is the subjective result of the self-evaluation of a person. Each level of this evaluation causes a different emotional state which brings a different pattern of behavior. This study examines the concept of self-esteem and its current intersection with consumer behavior literature theoretically. On the other hand, it's expected to make a contribution to the Turkish literature by touching on the unresearched issues from the global literature.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Consumer Behavior, Literature Review.

¹ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Yüksek İhtisas University, Medical Services and Techniques Department, Orcid No: 0000-0002-3280-405X

* Corresponding author

E-mail: armada.alisan@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of self-esteem has wide human behavior literature coverage since the end of the 1800s. Especially the scale developed by Rosenberg in 1965 makes the subject more attractive for the researchers. By the end of WWII, consumer behavior discipline has arisen in the second half of the 1940s. Consumer behavior is a multidisciplinary field that grew under the marketing discipline with the help of sociology, psychology, anthropology, behavioral economics, and economy disciplines. After all, it's not a surprising fact that applying self-esteem literature by marketing researchers for explaining consumer behavior.

2. SELF-ESTEEM

It's thought that the concept of self-esteem has been brought to literature by James in 1890. James (1890) defines self-esteem as a barometer that waves between the desires and achievements of an individual.

The frame of the self-esteem concept has been drawn with the research of Rosenberg in 1965 and can be defined as an individual's positive evaluations about himself/herself. Another definition made by Baumeister et.al. (1998: 1252) says self-esteem is an evaluation tool for the self. People shape their future behaviors by measuring their self-value with self-esteem. Even though there are many different definitions in the literature a general intersection of all can be emphasized as "while the self is what an individual thinks about himself/herself, self-esteem is an individual's positive and-or negative evaluations, and feelings about his/her self". Conceptualization efforts in the literature are getting shaped around three issues:

- Dimensions: Understanding the different dimensions of the subject,
- Consistency: If it's changing through situations or person to person.
- Understanding if the self-esteem evaluations are cognitive or not (Heatherton ve Wyland, 2003: 39)

According to conventional theories, self-esteem is a consistent trait of personality, and it can never be changed or changed just merely even if it could (Heatherton and Wyland, 2003: 39). On the other hand, some theories claim that self-esteem is contingent, closely associated with social conditions, and mood has a significant effect on it (Kernis, 1993: 1192).

Long-term researches give researchers a solid ground for understanding the dynamic nature of self-esteem (Thewissen et.al., 2008: 43). Additionally, some researchers indicate that self-esteem may be inconsistent since individuals can not avoid negative feelings all the time, and the success conditions sometimes depend on external factors (Thewissen et.al., 2008). The level of self-esteem is highest at the fifth level Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs which is self-actualization (Maxwell and Bachkirova, 2010: 17).

According to Gecas (1982) and Cast&Burke (2002), self-esteem can be conceptualized in two dimensions. The first dimension is the competence that defines the total competence capacity and individual's self-evaluation about how his/her efficiency. The second dimension is value-substantive self-esteem that is the perception of an individual about how important and-or valuable he/she sees himself/herself. When these two are taken together, they shape the individual's self-evaluation.

Issues given below are taken into consideration while measuring self-esteem:

- Resultants of a certain behavior,
- The cognitive buffer that prevents negative results,
- Self-motives that directs future behaviors. (Sages and Grable, 2011: 1)

Cast and Burke (2002) assert those three components are not well synthesized. From this point of view, they developed the Formal Theory of Self Esteem by using the frame of Stryker's (1980) identity theory. The Formal Theory of Self-Esteem synthesizes motivational, buffering, and protection components together.

Researchers indicate that when comparing two different people while they are in a high level of self-esteem, one of them may be in a calm state of mood even though the other one is in pathological inflation of ego (ZeiglerHill and Terry, 2007).

Because of this subjective structure of self-esteem, Baumeister et.al. (2003) emphasize that it's a "perception rather than reality".

Stryker (1980) defines the self as a multidimensional structure that indicates different identities. Each of these identities defines how to fit into society for a person. This definition discusses the self with the frame of Social Identity Theory which is based on an individual's need for self-verification. Cast and Burke (2002) who applied this structure in their paper say "Verification of role identities increases an individual's worth-based and efficacy-based self-esteem". Even though self-verification may result negatively or positively, it has a significant effect on shaping self-esteem.

Crocker and Major (1989; 609) indicate that self-esteem differs from concepts as self-confidence, self-evaluation, collective self-esteem, and hereditary self-esteem. They also added that these concepts should be taken together with social groups while self-esteem is a concept about an individual's perception of self-value. The result of the research made by Caprara et.al. (2009: 277) on 428 couple of twins indicates that self-esteem has a genetic component the same as optimism and life satisfaction. On the other hand, Ramsdal (2008: 337) says self-esteem is a result of two independent variables: self-efficacy and self-love.

Zeigler-Hill and Terry (2006) assert that self-esteem is misevaluated, and they believe it's wrong to take it as a consistent and routinized structure. Based on these assumptions they developed fragile self-esteem and secure self-esteem concepts. While fragile self-esteem can be changed by external effects secure self-esteem is a more stable structure. Based on this information given, they assert that fragile self-esteem is one of the underlying reasons for negative behaviors. Zeigler-Hill and Terry also indicate that there is a correlation between perfectionism and self-esteem in the research they made in 2007. This research also asserts that perfectionism may lead to some negative mental results as eating disorders, compulsive personality disorder, and depression. There are researches in the literature about the relationship between self-esteem and negative behaviors. Anorexia, neurosis, eating disorder are some examples of this relation (Grabe and Hyde, 2006; Meyers and Biocca, 1992).

Forsyth et.al. (2007) made a research to figure out the reason for the negative correlation between students' academic success and self-esteem. They chose a sample from the students whose academic success level is low. They applied different methods to increase the level of self-esteem of these students. As a result, the academic success level of the students decreased while their level of self-esteem increased. Based on this finding, they assert that self-esteem is not one of the critical components for career achievement.

On the other hand, some researchers indicate that a high level of self-esteem may help people to adapt to rapid changes, carrying on their life, and-or finding a new way for solving problems (Dweck, 2008; Renaud and McConnell 2007; Zeigler-Hill and Terry, 2007)

General definitions for self-esteem are given chronologically in Table-1 that adapted from Maxwell and Bachkirova (2010).

Table 1. A chronological glance at the self-esteem literature

Researcher / Year	Conceptual Approach	Potential Motivator
James, 1890	Ratio of success to failures in domains deemed important	Goal achievement and competence enhancement in important domains
Cooley, 1909; Mead, 1913	Extent to which the individual matches up to internalised/socialised values and standards	Maintenance of acceptance of self in the eyes of others
Rogers, 1951; Maslow, 1954	Extent to which we are congruent with our own needs/values/standards	Reclaim deeper sense of self and own needs, not contingent on others
Baumeister, 1993-1999	Defence or maintenance of a perceived sense of self	Self-enhancement or self-consistency
Ryan and Warren Brown, 2003	Authentic self-esteem as non-contingent on internalised sources	Goals and causes greater than itself

Resource: Maxwell and Bachkirova, 2010: 20 (Adapted from the original article)

It can be said that the concept of self-esteem has evolved from success in life to an authentic and independent cognitive phenomenon.

3. MEASURING SELF-ESTEEM

Rosenberg (1965) indicates components of self-esteem can be drawn apart global and specific, and he developed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory based on this assumption. Until then, many researchers have applied this scale for their researches.

Rosenberg's (1965) scale may give different results based on the mood of the person, and this is the most important criticism for this scale (Andrews and Brown, 1993: 570). In other words, this scale measures a current mood rather than a general state. On the other hand, Andrews and Brown (1993) indicate that the scale contains both positive and negative self-evaluation items and they recommend taking these items separately. In consequence, almost every self-esteem scale relies on individual self-report, and they all take self-esteem as a cognitive process (Heatherton and Wyland, 2003).

Translation and validation of Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale were made by Cuhadaroglu in 1986. This scale is widely using by Turkish researchers since then. The shortened version of the scale was validated and translated by Tulus in 2010. Our research in databases shows that both of the scales are widely using by Turkish researchers especially from educational sciences, psychology, and medical sciences.

Although the scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) is the most common measurement tool using by the researchers, there are also different scales for measuring self-esteem:

- Collective Self-Esteem Scale developed by Luthanen and Crocker (1992) measures self-esteem by an individual's self-evaluation based on social his/her social group.
- State Self-Esteem Scale developed by Heatherton and Polivy measures self-esteem by using the level of satisfaction of an individual from his/her social, cognitive, and physical resources.
- Visual Analogue Self-Esteem Scale developed by Brumfitt and Sheeran (1999) can be applied when it's not possible to measure self-esteem by words.

There are some other scales in the literature, but it's not possible to say they found a wide area of usage.

4. RESEARCHES ABOUT SELF-ESTEEM AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

While the self-esteem concept announced at the end of the 1800s and rose after Rosenberg's (1965) research; the interest in the self-esteem concept in consumer behavior literature begun after the 2000s.

In this section, featured researches from the consumer behavior literature that built on the concept of self-esteem are mentioned chronologically.

Dittmar and Durry (2000) state that self-esteem (especially the self-image) and buying behavior are correlated. Their research shows that buying is increasing self-confidence in addition to self-esteem.

Bizman and Yinon (2002) indicate that consumers tend to interrelate their identity and the prestige of the brands for increasing their level of self-esteem.

Market mavens are defined as people who inform other people about the desirable prices, goods, or services in the market (Tayfun, 2015). Clark and Goldsmith (2005) studied the psychological effects and found that marketing mavens have a high level of self-esteem, and they are affecting and manipulating the decisions of the people who have a low level of self-esteem.

Adkins and Ozanne (2005) indicate that buying behavior is a social activity that helps people to build and manage identity. They also added consumers try to increase their self-esteem and dignity even in their daily routine buying behavior.

Park and Roedder-John (2009) tested the effects of discrepancies between implicit and explicit self-esteem on the level of materialism and found that the materialistic tendency and discrepancy level are positively correlated.

Consumer's belief in making the best choice between alternatives may rise because of the high level of self-esteem. In this case, consumers may exhibit more leadership characteristics (Liu, 2010: 75).

Cuningham and Drake (2011) assert that the people who have a low level of self-esteem are imitating the narcissists and buying for prestige. On the other hand, they also mention that people with a high level of self-esteem are preferring functional goods and focused on value (Cuningham and Drake, 2011).

Truong and McColl (2011) mention that consumer's buying behavior for rewarding oneself is a hedonic consumption as a result of increasing self-esteem level.

Sages and Grable (2011) claim that dimensions of value and efficiency based self-esteem and their financial behaviors correlate. According to this research, self-esteem is output for past actions, a barrier for future negative behaviors, and a determiner for future positive actions. The same research indicates that level of self-esteem increases by the level of education. Because of this, highly educated people are expected to spend more lavishly on keeping their self-esteem at a certain level. These may lead them to use credit to fund their spendings and in some conditions, they may lapse into default.

Research made by Lee and Lin (2011) indicates that patients' self-esteem increase when they use private insurance instead of general health insurance.

Some researchers study the issue based on self-image. Self-image is a sum of feelings and notions when an individual defines himself/herself as an object (Rosenberg, 1979). The research made by Souiden et.al. (2011) shows that both Canadian and Tunisian consumers are trying to show their social status through their self-images and as a consequence of that increased level of self-esteem leads them to make conspicuous consumption. The level of such behavior increases while the level of self-image and brand image congruence. Also, the social status of Tunisian attendants has a substantial effect on their self-esteem. Another finding of Tunisian attendants is while their level of self-esteem decreases, their tendency is increasing for luxury brands. Adversely, there was no evidence found for a correlation between conspicuous consumption and self-esteem for Canadian attendants.

There are also researches that indicate a positive correlation between self-esteem and happiness (DeNeve and Cooper, 1998; Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 2006). While conspicuous consumption increases happiness hence it also increases the level of self-esteem with its satisfactory characteristics (Truong and McColl, 2011).

Similarly, some other researchers assert that social media usage may increase the level of self-esteem, and that may lead to conspicuous consumption (Troung ve McColl 2011; Lewis ve Moital, 2016).

A search made in the Turkish National Thesis Center on 10 May 2020 and four theses found that are related to self-esteem and consumer behavior. Table-2 summarizes the current situation.

Table 2. Self-Esteem and Consumer Behavior Titled Theses Written in Turkey

Year	Diploma Level	Author	Thesis Title
2011	MSc	İbrahim Bozacı	An empirical study on the factors affecting complaining propensity of consumer to firm at complaint management process
2015	PhD	Filiz Eroğlu	The role of personal factors, postmodern consumption styles and advertising as a marketing effort on compulsive buying tendency
2018	MSc	Fulya Midilli	An exploratory study on Turkish consumers' attitude and purchase intention towards green products
2019	MSc	Begüm Çeliktutan	The link between the self and the fear of missing out in marketing

396 article has found about self-esteem by examining the DergiPark system (<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/>) on 10 May 2020. A large part of these articles was from the psychology and educational sciences field. Only four articles have located related to consumer behavior that is not derived from the thesis in DergiPark. These articles are shown in Table-3 chronically.

Table 3. Self-Esteem and Consumer Behavior Titled Articles Written in Turkey

Year	Journal	Author	Article Title
2009	Gazi University Journal of Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences	Can Armutlu; M. Mithat Üner	An Empirical Study In The Relationship Between Self- Congruity, Consumer Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty
2016	Journal of Süleyman Demirel University Institute of Social Sciences	Aysel Erciş; Güzin Kotan; Bahar Türk	Effects of Death Anxiety on Consumer Attitudes
2017	COMU International Journal of Social Sciences	Sermin Asıl	Self Perception Of Consumption: Being a Consumer in Social Media Accounts
2018	Journal of Social Research and Behavioral Sciences	Tülay Korkmaz Devrani	The Moderating Effect of State Self-Esteem on the Relationship between Advertising Viewing and Compulsive Buying

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It's not possible to assert that all needs and wants of consumers that resulted in a buying decision are filtered objectively. Based on this assumption, consumers' subjective evaluation processes should be considered carefully for understanding and interpreting consumer behavior. In this case, the self-esteem concept appears as an important self-evaluation process.

Self-esteem is a subjective process that an individual's self-evaluation about the level of meeting personal expectations from life, other people, life, and many other variables. While people are reaching their expectations their self-esteem increases. The negative gap between expectation and reality would trigger action for closing the gap. Consumption is one of the options for this gap-closing action.

At this point, it's possible to say that literature is focusing on the results of low self-esteem. A small number of researchers mention the results of the high level of self-esteem. Because of this, researches about the results of the high level of self-esteem may contribute to the literature. Also, the concept of self-esteem can be taken together with many consumer behavior patterns as brand loyalty, green consumerism, conspicuous consumption, impulsive/compulsive buying, complaint behavior, etc.

According to the literature review, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale leads the field while the other scales haven't received enough attention yet. Based on this determination, it could be said that using different scales instead of Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale may help to enlighten the undiscovered areas of consumer behavior.

Eventually, the self-esteem concept has a large area to clarify in the consumer behavior literature. Using the self-esteem concept as a clarification tool will make us understand the motives, intentions, behaviors, decisions, and choices of consumers.

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