



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

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Received: 11.05.2020

Accepted: 25.08.2020

Review Article

Cite as: Baltacı, A. (2020). Tüketici Davranışlarında Benlik Saygısı Kavramı: Bir Literatür Taraması. Bucak İşletme Fakültesi Dergisi, 3 (2): 257-269

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 relevant pieces of 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 is expected to contribute to the Turkish literature by touching on the unresearched issues from the global literature.

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

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of self-esteem has comprehensive 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 is not a surprising fact that applies self-esteem literature by marketing researchers for explaining consumer behavior.

2. SELF-ESTEEM

It is thought that the concept of self-esteem was 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 was drawn with the research of Rosenberg in 1965 and can be defined as an individual's positive evaluations of 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 is 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 merely, even if it could (Heatherton and Wyland, 2003: 39). On the other hand, some theories claim that self-esteem is contingent and closely associated with social conditions, and mood significantly affects 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 of 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 which defines the total competence capacity and individual's self-evaluation of how his/her efficiency. The second dimension is value-substantive self-esteem, which 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.

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

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

Cast and Burke (2002) assert that 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.

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

Because of this subjective structure of self-esteem, Baumeister et al. (2003) emphasize that it is 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 such 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 research made by Caprara et al. (2009: 277) on 428 couples 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 results from two independent variables: self-efficacy and self-love.

Zeigler-Hill and Terry (2006) assert that self-esteem is misevaluated, and they believe it is 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 external effects can change fragile self-esteem, 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 a correlation between perfectionism and self-esteem in the research they conducted in 2007. This research also asserts that perfectionism may lead to negative mental results such as eating disorders, compulsive personality disorder, and depression. There is research in the literature about the relationship between self-esteem and negative behaviors. Anorexia, neurosis, and eating disorders are some examples of this relation (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Meyers & Biocca, 1992).

Forsyth et al. (2007) researched to figure out the negative correlation between students' academic success and self-esteem. First, they chose a sample of students with low academic success levels. Then, 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 of career achievement.

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

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

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

Researcher / Year	Conceptual Approach	Potential Motivator
James, 1890	The ratio of success to failures in domains deemed important	Goal achievement and competence enhancement in important domains
Cooley, 1909; Mead, 1913	The extent to which the individual matches up to internalized/socialised values and standards	Maintenance of acceptance of self in the eyes of others
Rogers, 1951; Maslow, 1954	The extent to which we are congruent with our own needs/values/standards	Reclaim a deeper sense of self and own needs, not contingent on others
Baumeister, 1993-1999	Defense 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 internalized 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 that 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 research.

Rosenberg's (1965) scale may give different results based on the person's mood, which is the most scathing criticism of 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. Consequently, almost every self-esteem scale relies on individual self-reports, and they all take self-esteem as a cognitive process (Heatherton & Wyland, 2003).

Cuhadaroglu made translation and validation of Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale in 1986. Turkish researchers have widely used this scale since then. In addition, 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 used by Turkish researchers, especially in 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:

- The Collective Self-Esteem Scale developed by Luthanen and Crocker (1992) measures self-esteem by an individual's self-evaluation based on 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.
- The 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 is not possible to say they found a wide area of usage.

4. RESEARCHES ABOUT SELF-ESTEEM AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

While the self-esteem concept was 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 began after the 2000s.

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

Dittmar and Durry (2000) state that self-esteem (especially self-image) and buying behavior are correlated. Their research shows that buying increases 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 to increase their 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. They 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 build and manage identity. They also added that 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. They 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 their high level of self-esteem. In this case, consumers may exhibit more leadership characteristics (Liu, 2010: 75).

Cunningham 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 high self-esteem prefer functional goods and focus on value (Cunningham & Drake, 2011).

Truong and McColl (2011) mention that a consumer's buying behavior to reward himself is a hedonic consumption resulting from increasing self-esteem.

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 self-esteem increases with 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 spending, 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 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. Consequently, an increased level of self-esteem leads them to make conspicuous consumption. 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 that while their self-esteem decreases, their tendency is increasing for luxury brands. Adversely, there was no evidence for a correlation between conspicuous consumption and self-esteem for Canadian attendants.

Some researches indicate a positive correlation between self-esteem and happiness (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 2006). While conspicuous consumption increases happiness, it also increases self-esteem with its satisfactory characteristics (Truong & 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 & McColl, 2011; Lewis & Moital, 2016).

Four theses related to self-esteem and consumer behavior were found in the Turkish National Thesis Center on 10 May 2020. 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 the complaining propensity of the 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. Many of these articles were from the psychology and educational sciences field. On the other hand, only four articles have been 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 is not possible to assert that all needs and wants of consumers that result 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 a vital self-evaluation process.

Self-esteem is a subjective process in an individual's self-evaluation about the level of meeting personal expectations from life, other people, life, and many other variables. In comparison, people are reaching their expectations, and 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 is possible to say that literature focuses on the results of low self-esteem. On the other hand, a small number of researchers mention the results of a high level of self-esteem. Because of this, research 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 such 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 have not 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 consumers' motives, intentions, behaviors, decisions, and choices.

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