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Understanding the Role of Emotions and Art in Online Shopping Among Young Women in Pakistan

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Abstract: *This qualitative research investigates the online shopping behavior of young urban women in Pakistan, particularly in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi, and how social media platforms influence their decision-making process. The study applies the phenomenological method and draws from uses and gratification theory and information-seeking behavior theory to explore digital consumer behavior. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight working women aged 25 to 35 who had made at least one online purchase in the previous three months. Data were analyzed thematically to identify motivations, behaviors, and decision patterns. The findings reveal two primary consumer profiles: (1) Smart/Rational Shoppers—who research products thoroughly, compare prices, and prefer secure payment methods—and (2) Moderate/Impulsive Shoppers—who are trend-driven and often influenced by influencers, aesthetics, and emotional gratification. Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp emerged as the most influential platforms in shaping shopping preferences. Clothing, cosmetics, and home gadgets were the most frequently purchased items, with ATM/bank transfer and mobile wallet apps as the dominant payment methods. The study concludes that social media not only fulfills informational needs but also contributes significantly to the emotional satisfaction of online shopping. These insights are valuable for marketers aiming to target and retain female consumers in Pakistan's growing digital economy.*

Keywords: Social Media, Clothing, Consumer, Products, Aesthetics, Influencers

Introduction

The rise of online shopping has transformed consumer behavior globally, and Pakistan is no exception. With increasing internet penetration, smartphone adoption, and the growing presence of social media platforms, e-commerce has become a dominant force in urban consumer markets. According to a report by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), as of 2023, more than 124 million Pakistanis use mobile broadband, and social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp have become integral to daily life—particularly among urban youth and working women.

In urban centers such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, online shopping is no longer considered a novelty but a regular consumer practice. Platforms like Daraz, Bagallery, Instagram-based boutiques, and Facebook Marketplace offer products ranging from fashion and beauty to electronics and home essentials. These platforms are heavily marketed through visually appealing posts, influencer endorsements, time-limited discounts, and user testimonials—especially targeting women who are socially and economically active.

Women in Pakistan, particularly those between the ages of 25 to 35, are emerging as a powerful consumer segment. Educated, digitally connected, and often financially independent, they are turning to online platforms not just for convenience but for emotional and lifestyle fulfillment. Social media plays a pivotal role in this transformation. It serves not only as a source of entertainment and interaction but also as a product discovery tool, peer review platform, and shopping assistant. As a result, social media has redefined how young women in Pakistan perceive needs, desires, and purchasing decisions.

Despite its advantages—such as time-saving, product variety, and ease of access—online shopping also presents numerous challenges. These include uncertainties around product quality, hidden costs, payment fraud, limited return policies, and lack of consumer protection regulations. While some women report high levels of satisfaction, others describe frustration, dissatisfaction, or regret after making online purchases. Therefore, understanding why and how women shop online through social media is essential for both marketers and policymakers. This study is grounded in Uses and Gratification Theory and Information-Seeking Behavior Theory, both of which emphasize that media consumption is an active, goal-directed process. Consumers are not passive recipients but rational actors who choose media platforms based on their needs—be it information gathering, emotional relief, or social influence. Furthermore, in the age of new media, digital engagement is shaped by interactive content, user feedback, peer influence, and the algorithmic design of platforms.

Against this backdrop, the current study aims to explore the behavioral patterns, motivations, and experiences of young women in urban Pakistan as they use social media to fulfill their online shopping needs. By employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research investigates the following core question:

1. To explore how visual aesthetics and artistic presentation on social media platforms evoke emotional responses that influence the online shopping behavior of young women in urban Pakistan

a. How do young women in Pakistan use social media platforms to search for product information for online shopping?

b. What are the underlying motivations that drive young women to incorporate online shopping into their lifestyle?

Through this investigation, the study hopes to contribute to the growing literature on consumer behavior in digital economies, while offering culturally contextualized insights relevant to Pakistan's e-commerce and marketing sectors.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing the phenomenological method, to explore how young women in urban Pakistan use social media in relation to their online shopping behaviors. Qualitative research is grounded in the interpretation of real-life contexts and does not begin with predefined hypotheses or theoretical assumptions. Instead, it emphasizes observing and understanding naturally occurring phenomena from the participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2007).

The phenomenological approach was selected to allow the researcher to capture the lived experiences of the participants—how they navigate online shopping through social media, what influences their decisions, and how they interpret satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their buying behavior. As Creswell (2007) explains, phenomenological research involves direct engagement with participants in their natural settings to comprehend the meanings they assign to their experiences.

Sampling and Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select eight young women aged 25 to 35 from urban centers in Pakistan, specifically Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad. All participants were employed, digitally literate, and had made at least one online purchase in the previous three months via platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or WhatsApp. The inclusion criteria ensured that participants had both experience and autonomy in online shopping.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This format provided the flexibility to explore participants' perspectives while allowing them to express their motivations, habits, and challenges freely. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via video calls (due to logistical considerations) and were recorded with consent. Each session lasted between 30 to 45 minutes.

The interview guide included open-ended questions covering:

- Social media usage patterns;
- Types of products searched and purchased;
- Information sources influencing decisions;
- Payment preferences and security concerns;
- Perceptions of satisfaction or disappointment.

Data Analysis

The data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying recurring patterns and themes across interviews. The process included:

1. Familiarization with data,
2. Generating initial codes,
3. Searching for and reviewing themes,
4. Defining and naming themes.

To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, the study employed triangulation of sources, member checking, and reflective journaling during the research process.

This methodological design allowed for a deep understanding of how social media shapes the online shopping behaviors of young Pakistani women, enabling the researcher to interpret not just the observable behaviors but the subjective meanings behind them.

A. Research Findings

The evolution of online shopping platforms in Pakistan has mirrored global e-commerce trends, with a growing number of consumers engaging with digital marketplaces such as Daraz, Yayvo, Bagallery, Naheed.pk, and online Instagram stores. These platforms offer user-friendly interfaces, quick installations via Google Play Store or Apple App Store, and integrated mobile wallet payment options, making online transactions increasingly accessible and convenient for tech-savvy consumers.

In Pakistan, e-commerce typically refers to digital platforms owned and operated by retailers who manage their inventory, while marketplaces function as intermediaries allowing various vendors to sell through their virtual storefronts. Examples of the former include Bagallery and Naheed.pk, while Daraz operates as a hybrid platform, combining vendor listings with its own product inventory.

To engage in online shopping, users usually download an app, register with personal information, browse product categories, compare prices, and finalize purchases through integrated payment options such as bank transfers, mobile wallets (e.g., Jazz Cash, Easypaisa), or cash on delivery (COD). The convenience of these applications—especially when linked with banking apps—has reduced the need for in-person banking or physical shopping, although digital literacy and access remain barriers in some demographics.

A national trend toward information-seeking prior to purchase is increasingly evident. A significant percentage of consumers now research product details—such as features, specifications, price comparisons, and user reviews—before making purchase decisions. A 2021 survey by Gallup Pakistan found that over 60% of internet users between the ages of 20–40 consult product reviews or social media recommendations before buying online. Fashion, cosmetics, electronics, mobile accessories, and grocery items rank among the top-selling categories.

The findings of this study align with these national patterns. All eight participants reported using social media—particularly Instagram and Facebook—as their primary platforms for browsing and purchasing products online. Most informants reported that before committing to a purchase, they typically:

- View multiple seller pages for price comparisons.
- Examine product reviews and testimonials.
- Use Instagram stories, reels, or WhatsApp statuses to discover trending items or sales.
- Consider influencer recommendations, especially for fashion and makeup items.

Device Preferences and Shopping Habits

- Smartphones were the preferred device for initial browsing and product discovery due to portability and real-time access.
- However, desktop or laptop devices were occasionally used to complete transactions, particularly when detailed product specifications or side-by-side comparisons were needed—offering a greater sense of trust and control.
- Shopping frequency was highest midweek (Wednesday and Thursday), while weekends saw a dip, possibly due to offline commitments or delays in order fulfillment.

Payment Preferences and Consumer Trust

Despite the availability of multiple payment options, bank transfers and COD remain the dominant modes of transaction in Pakistan’s urban markets. Mobile wallet usage (e.g., Easypaisa, JazzCash) is growing, especially among younger women. However, many participants still expressed concerns about data privacy, product authenticity, and return/refund policies, which often influence their payment method choices.

This aligns with broader market research showing that trust remains a crucial determinant in online consumer behavior. While digital shopping offers flexibility and broad product access, apprehensions around quality control, hidden costs, and post-sale service remain unresolved for many buyers.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Informants by Age Group

Age groups	Percentage (%)
25-27	37
28-30	25
31-33	25
34-36	13

Table 2: Distribution of Informants According to Reported Monthly Income in Pakistani Rupees (PKR)

Salary Range (PKR/Month)	Percentage (%)
Less than 35,000	12
35,000-45,000	25

46,000-55,000	38
More than 55,000	25

From the results of the study seen in table 1 and table 2 shows that most informants are women aged 25-35 years this can be understood with the position of those who already have income so they have economic independence. Viewed from the level of informant education can be said that all informants with upper high school education, the majority are undergraduate level there are 4 persons then, 2 persons are past as diploma 3, and there are 2 persons already on level magister.

Table 3: Distribution of Informants According to Their Educational Background

Qualification	Number of Participants
Diploma(Associate degree)	25%
Bachelor's Degree	25%
Master's Degree	50%

Table 4: Distribution of Participants by Marital Status, Product Preferences, and Transaction Frequency

Marital Status	Number of Participants
single	63%
married	37%
Product categories Purchased Online	
Product Catagory	Number of mentions
Fashion (clothing, shoes, bags,etc)	8
Food and snacks	6
Makeup and accessories	5
Electronics (gadgets, devices)	3
Frequency of Online Transactions (Last 3 Months)	
Number of transaction	percentgaes
Less than 3	25%
3-5	50%
6-7	12%
More then 7	13%

Based on marriage status majority informant stated not married, 3 informants claimed have married and have child. The products they are looking by online are mostly fashion that includes cosmetics, adult clothing, children's clothing, shoes, bags; foods that include packaged foods, snacks and milk; make up & accessories include powder, lipstick, perfume and accessories of hijab, bracelets, necklaces; while electronic products include printers, HP, watches, and household utensils

FIGURE 1:

Table 5: Distribution of Participants According to Preferred Online Payment Methods

Payment Method	Percentage (%)
Bank transfer/ mobile app (jazz cash , easypaisa)	88
Cash on delivery (COD)	12

Based on the number of transactions it appears that the majority of informants make transactions between 3-5 times. The preferred payment system informants mostly stated use ATM transfers only one person who claimed to have done COD

Findings and Discussion

Similar to worldwide e-commerce developments, purchasing goods online has expanded quickly in Pakistan, especially among young urban women. According to recent research, Pakistani digital media utilization has increased dramatically. As of January 2024, over 71.7 million people (almost 30% of the population) were active social media users. 82% of internet users in developed metropolitan areas have shopped online, according to Nielsen, a 7% increase over 2018. With an estimated $4.2 billion in sales in 2021, Pakistan's online shopping sector ranked 46th in the world, and in 2022, top local merchants including J. the Store, Gul Ahmed, and Limelight each made tens of millions.

Adolescent girls have established themselves as a major buyer group in this context, and social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, which were initially used for connecting with others, have developed into commercial channels. For instance, local apparel companies regularly share product catalogues on Facebook and Instagram, enabling busy urban women to look through products and make purchases without going into markets. Studies show that the number of Pakistani women using Instagram increased steadily between 2012 and 2021 and into the future, with one survey stating that 85% of Pakistani women use Instagram to make decisions about what to buy. These results highlight how social online has grown into the main buying source for savvy Pakistani women.

Influence of Visual Content, Influencers, and Social Proof

Young women's purchasing habits is significantly influenced by the aesthetically pleasing character of websites like Instagram. Visual advertising through content works quite well in Pakistan's fashion industry. According to Hussain et al. (2024), important components of graphic marketing, such as societal influence, reliable data, emotive narrative, and striking imagery (visual appeal), all have a major impact on customer purchase behaviour. To put it another way, carefully chosen images and videos in Instagram feeds motivate customers, influence their decisions to buy, and draw attention. These informational components "significantly improve selection and consumer engagement." A brief fashion film or an appealing product image can provide young consumers with emotional fulfilment by capturing the enjoyment and anticipation of trying out new looks.

Within this particular sector, evidence of effectiveness and influencer advertising are very effective. In the absence of in-person testing, Pakistani women said they believe endorsements from celebrities and peer ratings. According to Rizwan and Qamar (2023), eighty-five percent of Pakistani women using Instagram "make purchase decisions by following influencers," viewing their ratings as reputable and trustworthy. This indicates that Instagram influencers are important. Influencers offer first-hand accounts that dispel doubt through "parasocial interactions" and direct product endorsements. Similar to this, user-generated content—such as friend photographs or customer posts—offers social proof, which confirms a product's attractiveness by showing peers or well-known people utilizing it. According to Aamir (2024), Instagram's user interface, which is described as "captivating" and has a compelling visual story, engages young customers by fostering an aspirational style.

Advertisers may create a unified "look" (colors, themes, and styles) on Instagram that complements users' perceptions of themselves. This carefully chosen design supports personality representation: young women indicate that they connect to a trendy social circle by like or buying products that suit a trendy feed. In conclusion, Instagram and Facebook's visual richness and social features—such as images, posts, ratings, and remarks—significantly influence consumers' intentions to make purchases by acting as both persuasive and entertaining material.

Motivational Drivers for Online Shopping

There are several functional and psychological explanations for why young Pakistani women purchase online. A major contributing aspect is fashion awareness, as many people want to stay up to date with social circles and worldwide trends. Users may easily find the newest clothes as well as jewellery that suit their fashion inclinations by browsing through catalogues on the web or Instagram shops.researchgate.net. Online shopping also provides hedonic pleasure and psychological fulfilment. Hedonic shopping value, as defined by consumer behaviour research, is the enjoyment and amusement that come with shopping. According to the research, hedonic motivations—such as the need for novelty, satisfaction, or tension relief—may be just as significant as utilitarian ones. For instance, watching an influencer's unwrapping video or viewing a gorgeous garment on Instagram might get you excited.

The focus on celebrity endorsements as well as individual styling suggests that spending are an opportunity to convey one's social image. Online purchasing is also a form of self-expression and identity construction. Pakistani urban women can curate a personal style by choosing from a number of online brands – from modern Western clothing to stylish ethnic clothing – that align alongside their sense of self desires Online purchasing is also frequently treated as an enjoyable pastime. Given busy urban lifestyles and little time for market expeditions, many find browsing by means of social media merchants to be a soothing hobby**.** The simplicity and range offered make it an enticing enjoyable substitute to mall visits.

Accessibility (the opportunity to purchase whenever and wherever you choose) is a non-financial advantage of e-commerce. according to Rasheed et al. (2023), who also claim that accessibility and satisfaction are important. Overall, this demographic's internet buying is driven by both psychological objectives (fun, emotional uplift, identity affirmation) and pragmatic aims (e.g., saving time, being fashion-forward).

Online purchasing has significant drawbacks for young Pakistani women, considering its allure. The absence of touch is a major problem as customers are unable to physically examine or try on things, which causes them to be doubtful about the fabric, fit, colour, or craftsmanship. This frequently results in problems with the quality of the item buyers could receive goods that are poorly made or appear distinct from internet photographs. These worries are exacerbated by delivery uncertainty. Long wait periods or delayed shipments are frequent (particularly outside of big cities), which can be frustrating. worries about safety and confidence are very common in the Pakistani environment. According to Rasheed et al. (2023), the adoption of online purchasing is severely hampered by perceived hazards, such as worries about fraud, payment security, or a lack of regulatory control.

Similar to this, Tufail et al. (2024) point out that although consumers value the ease of online shopping, they are cautious because of persistent trust issues. In qualitative findings, respondents emphasise being concerned about frauds and fraudulent vendors; in fact, different research indicates that in Pakistan, "the incidence of frauds, illegal activities, and dishonesty also surged" in tandem with the growth of e-commerce.

Other frequent grievances involve online strict pricing (no room for negotiation) and hidden expenses (unanticipated delivery charges). Problems with customer service are another issue that some consumers mention; ignored messages or delayed answers can make them even more unhappy. All of these dangers combined make even eager consumers apprehensive about making transactions through the internet. In conclusion, Pakistani young women survive in a world where internet shopping offers variety but additionally raises questions about trustworthiness, genuineness, value, and shipping.

Trust-Building and Service Mechanisms

Several trust-building strategies are used by online business firms to lessen these difficulties. One important tactic is quick customer service. Reliability impressions may be considerably enhanced by providing qualified, supportive service, according to academic research. For instance, according to customer service excellence (quick help, clear communication) significantly improves consumer satisfaction (Fatima and Ramzan, 2022). In reality, Pakistani internet merchants frequently promote round-the-clock chat assistance or hotlines. Handling complaints well is also essential since prompt resolution of problems (such replacing broken items) may restore confidence. Indeed, unanswered complaints cost merchants a lot of money, according to Meuter et al. (2000), therefore providing excellent customer service is crucial to the long-term viability of e-commerce.

Social evidence, as demonstrated by user reviews and ratings, is another crucial approach. Encouraging consumers to provide reviews of goods or vendors fosters verified by the community trust. Implementing a review-and-rating system might allay Pakistani purchasers' fears, according to Tufail et al. (2024). In fact, prospective purchasers are reassured by reading dozens of favourable reviews or high seller ratings. In a market with limited official restrictions, peer evaluations act as an informal quality check, which makes it particularly useful. To demonstrate legitimacy, several merchants display influencer endorsements or "verified buyer" marks in addition to reviews.

Guidelines regarding returns and refunds are also crucial. Perceived risk is decreased with generous, unambiguous return alternatives. To increase trust, Fasih et al. (2020), for example, found that experienced female buyers in Pakistan favoured items with simple exchange/return procedures and quick delivery (within 3 days). In order to stand out, contemporary Pakistani shops like as Daraz and Telemart notably offer return policies of seven or fifteen days. Emphasising aspects like "cash-on-delivery" (COD) payment, which delays payment until after delivery, helps to further increase confidence. The presence of COD, a financial advantage, has a favourable impact on purchase intentresearchgate.net, according to Rasheed et al. (2023). This is probably because it allays worries about payment security.

Lastly, openness in information helps to build confidence. Displaying full information on the item (materials, dimensions, provenance) and dealer authentication improves revenue, according to several studies. According to Pakistani women were "more likely to purchase online when complete product information – price, variants, payment mode, and brand history – was provided," according to Fasih et al. (2020). In conclusion, e-commerce websites that integrate expert customer service, unambiguous complaint procedures, authentic feedback, open return policies, and open information produce an environment that promotes recurring business by restoring customers' trust.

Satisfaction Determinants

How happy a young lady is with her online shopping experience depends on a number of things. Purchase transparency and ease are highly valued. According to Fatima and Ramzan (2022), happiness with the product is highly correlated with the ease of the purchase procedure (simplified ordering, user-friendly website). In reality, this convenience is facilitated by a seamless checkout process (such as a one-click purchase) and a variety of payment options (such as COD, bank transfers, and mobile wallets). In particular, the convenience of digital payments has proved crucial: according to a recent study, users' pleasure and loyalty are much increased by mobile wallet apps' perceived ease of use (PakistanBusinessPerspectives.org). To put it another way, people are more satisfied when making payments online seems easy and safe.

Item quality and accuracy also affect customer satisfaction. Customers believe their purchase was valuable when the delivered item meets their expectations from the website (i.e., the proper size, colour, and quality). On the other hand, getting a subpar or inaccurate product is a huge annoyance. Rasheed et al. highlight the significance of "quality product" as a benefit of e-commerce (in comparison to a traditional store), despite the paucity of empirical evidence on product-match satisfaction in Pakistan. A further significant factor is service dependability. Excellent outcomes are significantly increased by prompt shipment and undamaged packaging. This is demonstrated by Fasih et al. (2020), whose respondents appreciated the guarantee of exchange/return alternatives to feel secure and preferred delivery within three days (up to one week). Customer satisfaction suffers when packages come late or in bad shape. Reliable delivery is a distinction in Pakistani cities due to logistical issues (traffic, addresses).

Lastly, service expertise is important. This covers every element that interacts with customers: prompt employees, polite correspondence (even through chatbots), and easy problem-solving. According to Fatima and Ramzan, customer happiness may be considerably raised by providing higher-quality services. In conclusion, happy customers are those that obtain goods as promised, feel treated with respect, have a smooth shopping experience (including simple payment), and receive their items on time.

Consumer Segmentation: Smart vs Impulsive Shoppers

Researchers have discovered several internet purchasing niches among young Pakistani women. One common classification separates "Impulsive (Hedonic) Shoppers" from "Smart Shoppers." These two divisions were specifically identified by Subawa et al. (2022) in millennial e-commerce, along with smaller "Aesthetic" and "Comfortable" kinds. Utilitarian and methodical, smart shoppers investigate things, evaluate costs, and frequently watch for specials or reductions. They are less influenced by fleeting appeals and actively seek value (money, time). Similar to utility-oriented customers, these buyers value making well-informed choices and exhibit characteristics including emotional stability (reduced impulsivity) and conscientiousness. A savvy Pakistani consumer could carefully read reviews, enquire about fabric specifications, and even buy products that are on sale or with discounts.

On the other hand, impulsive/hedonistic shoppers respond to their impulses. They go shopping for excitement, amusement, or the rush of getting a new item. For these customers, shopping is enjoyable in and of itself rather than just a means to an end. This groupmdpi.com has a high hedonic shopping value (HSV), which is the pleasure and delight gained from the buying experience. Attractive images or promos frequently prompt their purchases, and they react fast to influencer recommendations or temporary deals. When choosing to purchase anything from, impulsive buyers may be more receptive to "popularity claims" (such as "best-seller," social endorsement), according to Subawa et al.'s segmentation. These customers probably love the escape of perusing fashion or sales and spend more time on social media feeds.

Additionally, each group displays distinct digital behaviors. While Impulsive Shoppers may browse Instagram, Facebook, or WhatsApp groups and click to make an impulsive purchase, Smart Shoppers may regularly utilize price-comparison apps or official brand websites. Knowing this contrast makes it easier to understand why some marketing tactics—like flash deals or celebrity endorsements—are more effective on a certain market segment than others—like comprehensive product information pages that appeal more to the astute section. The smart vs. impulsive typology encapsulates two general behavioral profiles: the former is defined by utilitarian, rational buying motivations, while the latter is characterized by hedonistic, emotional impulses**.**

5. Conclusion

The research reveals that young women in Pakistan actively use social media platforms to search for product information and make online purchases, driven by both practical and emotional motivations. Online shopping has become an embedded lifestyle habit, offering flexibility, entertainment, and satisfaction.

The findings emphasize that while social media advertising often stimulates emotional buying, rational decision-making still plays a crucial role, especially regarding price, product quality, and trust in the seller. The convenience of browsing, comparing, and buying through mobile devices has transformed the way women engage with consumer culture.

Marketers should note the importance of combining aesthetic appeal with transparency, reliable customer service, and secure payment options to effectively capture and retain this consumer segment. Meanwhile, consumer education and policy frameworks must evolve to ensure safe and informed online shopping experiences.

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