



Online Narratives of Shopping Addiction: A Thematic and Emotional Analysis of YouTube Comments

Nur Özer Canarslan ¹ 

Abstract: The rapid advancement of digitalization and the widespread adoption of social media have significantly changed shopping behaviors, transforming shopping into an experience with emotional, social, and cultural dimensions. This research investigates shopping addiction by analyzing natural digital narratives, focusing on how individuals articulate their experiences and emotions in online contexts. Data were obtained from 102 user comments posted under a YouTube video addressing shopping addiction. Through thematic analysis, each comment was examined line by line, and recurring concepts were organized into themes and sub-themes. Emotional tones were coded to capture the affective aspects of these narratives. The analysis identified five principal themes: emotional and psychological factors; social, cultural, and media influences; economic constraints; minimalism and consumption awareness; and spiritual or value-oriented perspectives. Drawing on these findings, the study introduces the "online shopping addiction awareness spectrum model," which outlines the progression from unconscious immersion to conscious resistance and identifies novel behaviors such as "preventive consumption anxiety" induced by economic stress. Increased user awareness and alternative consumption practices, including simplification and minimalism, were observed as forms of resistance. The results underscore shopping addiction as a complex phenomenon at the intersection of individual, social, and cultural dynamics. By examining spontaneous online narratives, this study advances the literature on consumer behavior. It demonstrates the utility of qualitative methods for identifying both risk factors and resistance strategies associated with shopping addiction.

Keywords: Shopping Addiction, Online Narratives, Economic Stress, Preventive Consumption Anxiety, Online Shopping

JEL: M31, L81, D12

Received : 30 September 2025
Revised : 12 December 2025
Accepted : 26 December 2025

Type : Research

1. Introduction

Consumer behavior has undergone significant changes due to the acceleration of digitalization and the integration of social media platforms into daily life (Yelmate et al., 2025). Online shopping has become a profound experience that touches individuals' psychological, social, and cultural worlds. One of the most significant consequences of this transformation is the rise in shopping addiction, particularly in its online form (Akyüz & Yılmaz, 2023), which refers to individuals' tendency to shop uncontrollably via the internet and the potential for these behaviors to cause personal, economic, or social problems (Jiang et al., 2017; Rose & Dhandayudham, 2014).

Cite this article as: Özer Canarslan, N. (2026). Online narratives of shopping addiction: A thematic and emotional analysis of YouTube comments. *Business and Economics Research Journal*, 17(1), 101-117. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20409/berj.2026.488>

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¹ Asst. Prof., PhD., Anadolu University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Business Administration, Eskişehir, Türkiye, nurozer@anadolu.edu.tr

Shopping addiction is closely linked to individual psychological weaknesses and to personalized advertisements, algorithms, and digital incentives encountered through social media (Niedermoser et al., 2021; Sheykhangafshe et al., 2023). Purchasing often transforms shopping into an emotional and symbolic behavior, serving functions such as temporary pleasure, stress reduction, belonging, and identity construction (Black, 2007; Jiang et al., 2017; Sathya et al., 2023). Peer influence, social comparison tendencies, and constant online presence, particularly among young individuals, have made shopping addiction a more widespread and visible problem (Nyrhinen et al., 2024).

Many studies have examined shopping addiction primarily through quantitative surveys; how individuals experience this behavior, the emotional processes they undergo, and how they describe this experience in their own words have been mainly overlooked (Emin et al., 2025; Erzincanlı et al., 2024). Shopping addiction has significant consequences: on an individual scale, it results in financial difficulties, indebtedness, emotional turmoil, guilt, and the deterioration of interpersonal relationships (Aksu, 2023; Roberts & Pirog, 2004; Rose & Dhandayudham, 2014). At the societal level, it fosters heightened consumerism, status competition, and an extension of social inequalities, especially in developing economies where individuals may engage in excessive spending to signify success. (Dittmar et al., 2007; Emin et al., 2025). These multi-layered consequences reveal that shopping addiction is not merely a psychopathological syndrome but a multidimensional phenomenon, shaped interactively by the individual's social environment, emotional state, and broader economic and cultural conditions.

While the current literature frames shopping addiction primarily as a clinical syndrome, it risks overlooking how this condition is interpreted in individuals' own narratives. This gap limits the effectiveness of intervention strategies developed for addiction. This study aims to fill this gap in understanding. Analyzing authentic narratives in a natural digital environment, such as YouTube, reveals the lived and narrated dimensions of addiction. This approach reveals, for the first time, complex mechanisms like the anxiety associated with preventive consumption, which are often overlooked by quantitative studies.

Therefore, analyzing the experiences expressed by individuals in their words offers fresh perspectives on both the personal vulnerabilities and the structural drivers of shopping addiction, addressing a significant gap in the literature. By focusing on spontaneous digital narratives, such as YouTube comments, this study highlights both the negative consequences of shopping addiction and the coping mechanisms and alternative consumption practices (e.g., minimalism, simplification) that emerge as points of resistance. In this way, the research offers both methodological novelty and substantive contributions to understanding shopping addiction in contemporary digital contexts.

This study examines how individuals express their approach to shopping addiction in online environments, the emotions they associate with this behavior, and the thematic narratives they use to frame it. This qualitative research, conducted on YouTube, a natural digital interaction environment, analyzed comments posted under the video titled "Shopping addiction: Like reuniting with someone you long for (Alışveriş bağımlılığı: Hasretini çektiğin birine kavuşma gibi)," which was published on February 2, 2024, and had over 85,000 views and 165 user comments as of July 1, 2025.

Within this framework, the primary objective of this study is to identify the prominent emotional patterns and thematic structures in user reviews related to shopping addiction, thereby making this phenomenon visible in its individual and societal dimensions. The research aims to reveal that shopping addiction is a complex behavioral pattern intertwined beyond individual impulses to encompass social norms, economic pressures, and cultural discourses. In this context, the study sought to answer the following question: "What themes and emotional expressions stand out in users' online comments about shopping addiction?"

Given these premises, this qualitative analysis of YouTube comments aims to reveal users' emotional patterns and thematic narratives about shopping addiction, offering a new perspective on this complex phenomenon at both the individual and societal levels. The findings are expected to guide future research and intervention strategies targeting shopping addiction.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework and a review of the relevant literature on shopping addiction and digitalization. Section 3 outlines the research methodology, including data collection and analysis procedures. Section 4 reports the findings of the thematic and emotional analysis of YouTube comments. Section 5 discusses these findings in relation to existing literature and highlights their theoretical and practical implications. The paper concludes by summarizing the key contributions, acknowledging limitations, and suggesting directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Shopping Addiction: Psychological, Social, and Cultural Dynamics

Shopping addiction is a behavioral addiction characterized by an individual's repetitive and uncontrolled shopping behavior (Nawodya & Kumara, 2022). Various terms are used in the literature to explain excessive shopping behavior, such as "compulsive buying/shopping," "buying mania," "compulsive consumption," "impulsive buying," "uncontrollable buying," and "shopping addiction" (Akyüz & Yılmaz, 2023; Andreaassen et al., 2015; Bozdağ & Yalçınkaya Alkar, 2018; Murali et al., 2012; Rose & Dhandayudham, 2014). Today, the terms "compulsive buying" and "shopping addiction" are preferred to describe this phenomenon (Akyüz & Yılmaz, 2023).

Shopping addiction can lead to financial loss and deterioration in social relationships, feelings of emotional emptiness, and guilt in individuals (Aksu, 2023; Arora, 2025; Rose & Dhandayudham, 2014). According to behavioral addiction theories, shopping addiction fills a void in an individual's life, reduces emotional stress, or provides instant relief (Arora, 2025; Duong & Liaw, 2022; Roberts & Pirog, 2004). Such behaviors are more common in individuals with low self-control capacity (Andreaassen et al., 2015; Jiang et al., 2017; Nyrhinen et al., 2024).

Psychologically, shopping addiction is directly associated with emotional problems such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem (Bozdağ & Alkar, 2018; Erzincanlı et al., 2024; Yelmate et al., 2025). Nyrhinen et al. (2024) state in their study that shopping addiction is more prevalent in individuals who experience emotional regulation difficulties.

In a social context, shopping is no longer merely an act of fulfilling a need; it also creates visibility, prestige, and social belonging (Aksu, 2023). Individuals usually shop to gain visibility, follow 'trends', or keep up with their social circle, especially on platforms such as social media (Sathya et al., 2023). In this context, shopping addiction emerges as a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained solely by the individual's willpower. Macro dynamics, such as social norms, digital culture, media representations, and the economic structure, influence this behavior (Bozdağ & Alkar, 2018).

In a cultural context, individuals, particularly in developing countries, discover themselves caught between economic pressures and status concerns. In Turkey, individuals may spend beyond their income levels because they believe owning prestigious products is a "sign of success" (Emin et al., 2025). According to Roberts and Pirog (2004), one of the leading causes of shopping addiction is the desire for social acceptance and cultural values. Thus, shopping should be seen both as a personal weakness and as a reflection of social injustices and cultural standards.

Shopping addiction is a complex issue intertwined with a person's emotional vulnerabilities, cultural expectations, and the consumption-oriented standards of their social environment. While trying to meet external social demands, people also attempt to suppress their internal distress, which can lead to pathological consumption behaviors. This complex structure highlights the need for holistic approaches and comprehensive methods to address shopping addiction.

2.2. Digitalization and Shopping Addiction: The Triggering Role of Online Platforms

Traditional shopping behaviors are taking on a new form with digitalization; how people access shopping, how often they shop, and their motivations are changing radically. Online shopping weakens individual control and makes shopping behavior more impulsive through facilitating factors such as user-

friendly interfaces, personalized product recommendations, 24/7 access, and “one-click purchasing” (Yelmate et al., 2025). The instant feedback and low cognitive costs of online shopping reinforce impulsive consumption behaviors focused on short-term pleasure (Günük & Keskin, 2016).

Jiang (2022) states that the “flow experience” created in the digital environment directs individuals toward shopping behavior and that this situation, in which the perception of time is lost, and the focus of attention narrows, triggers unplanned and even addictive purchases. Visual shopping sites and live streams create strong attraction and internal motivation, leading to more frequent, uncontrolled shopping.

In this process, social media platforms ensure that shopping is not just a means of satisfying a need but also a social display arena (Özer Canarslan, 2022). Especially on visually heavy platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, “shopping videos,” “unboxing” content, or “my favorite products” posts shared by influencers affect followers both behaviorally and emotionally (Arora & Dutt, 2025; Nyrhinen et al., 2024). These contents both trigger the desire to purchase and shape the individual’s lifestyle, identity perception, and sense of social belonging (Aksu, 2023).

Sathy et al. (2023) note that online shopping is used to fill emotional voids, particularly among young adult women, and that this process often becomes an unknowing shopping addiction. Similarly, researchers state that shopping online creates short-term positive feelings such as happiness, excitement, and relaxation in individuals; however, in the long term, it triggers a cycle of addiction combined with regret, guilt, and financial difficulties (Arora & Dutt, 2025; Murali et al., 2012).

Digital content, such as YouTube comments, provides meaningful data sources that make this process visible. Here, users express their product experiences, as well as the emotional effects, internal conflicts, and regrets that shopping creates in them. Therefore, analyzing this content makes it possible to observe the psychosocial effects of shopping addiction on individuals directly.

Nyrhinen et al. (2024), when explaining young people’s susceptibility to shopping addiction, emphasize that lack of self-control and the influence of social media are the most important determinants. Both individual emotional states and the digital media environment create a reinforcing ecosystem for addiction; users associate shopping with encouraging content via social media, on the one hand, while resorting to shopping behavior to suppress emotional difficulties, on the other.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study used qualitative content analysis, a qualitative research method. Qualitative content analysis systematically analyzes meaningful content in written or spoken texts (Alanka, 2024). In this context, the researcher preferred an interpretive paradigm-based research design to reveal individual experiences, emotional processes, and social contexts related to shopping addiction.

Within the scope of the research, data were obtained from user comments posted under a YouTube video on the theme of “shopping addiction”. These comments consist of natural data written voluntarily with no external guidance. Therefore, this study is a naturalistic contextual qualitative research study based on secondary data. In this study, analyses of thematic and emotional tone have been integrated. Thematic analysis reveals what is being said in the comments, while emotional tone analysis maps how these themes are expressed with a certain emotional weight. Thanks to this integrated approach, we showed that the theme of economic constraints is an abstract category and is woven into participants’ narratives with intense negative emotions such as anxiety and helplessness.

3.2. Data Source

The qualitative data source for this research is a video published on the YouTube platform on February 2, 2024, which had received 85,000 views and 165 comments as of July 1, 2025 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YC5VM-8TMKE>, accessed on 01.07.2025). The YouTube video selected

as the data source was not chosen randomly but strategically based on three critical criteria. First, it contains both personal confessions and expert opinions; second, it provides a natural data set with high view counts and sufficient comments; and third, the comments are insightful. The video comprehensively addresses shopping addiction through both personal narratives and expert opinions, offering a multidimensional perspective on consumers' emotional triggers, online shopping habits, and the influence of social media. Furthermore, including clinical commentary on the psychological background of addiction allows for in-depth analysis in line with the study's research questions. The video has been selected as a rich qualitative data source for exploring individual experiences and societal trends related to shopping addiction.

3.3. Data Cleansing Process

A total of 165 YouTube comments were included in the study; however, they underwent a detailed preliminary review. Sixty-three comments were excluded from the analysis because they lacked contextual integrity, contained off-topic statements, or consisted solely of context-free expressions such as "great video" or "you explained it very well." Additionally, inputs that did not provide meaningful content, gave the impression of being artificial, or disrupted the integrity of the comments for technical reasons were also excluded. As a result of this filtering process, 102 comments that met the criteria for contextual integrity, content relevance, and potential for meaningful analysis were included in the final thematic and emotional analysis. This approach ensured data quality and strengthened the reliability and validity of the study's findings.

This cleaning process is critical for ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative data analysis and for making robust thematic inferences based on meaningful patterns. The comments in the analysis were selected for their direct reflection of individual experiences, emotional responses, and value-based approaches to shopping addiction.

The coding process was performed manually using Microsoft Excel. Codes were entered on separate lines for each comment, with themes, subthemes, and sentiment tones organized into separate columns. Additionally, emotional tones were categorized as positive, negative, or neutral, following common sentiment analysis frameworks (Çelik & Akbulut, 2024; Gaspar et al., 2016; Thelwall et al., 2012).

3.4. The Coding Process and Creation of the Code Book

The coding process was structured using a thematic analysis approach. The thematic analysis process was conducted according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step reflexive approach, one of the most fundamental references in the field. Under this framework, the process progressed through the stages of (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading, (2) generating initial codes line-by-line, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Themes were shaped around individual, emotional, social, economic, and value-based dimensions in line with the research question. The coding process was performed manually by the researcher; all data were read line by line and separated into themes. Each comment was matched to one or more thematic codes, and the emotional tone (positive, negative, or neutral) of each was also determined.

To ensure the coding process is systematic and transparent, a codebook has been created for each code, containing the code name, definition, sample content, and thematic explanations. The codebook was created using concepts defined in studies such as Akkaş (2021), Aksu (2023), Bozdağ and Alkar (2018), Horvath et al. (2015), Kearney and Stevens (2012), and Keskin and Günük (2017). Fundamental concepts such as criminality, viewing criminality as illness, economic stress, social comparison, and hedonistic motivation were interpreted in light of this literature.

The coding process was carried out in Microsoft Excel, with separate rows created for each comment; the code, theme, and emotional tone were structured in separate columns.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

This study ensured the reliability and validity of qualitative data analysis through a multifaceted approach. The initial dataset consisted of 165 user comments posted under the selected YouTube video. However, following a detailed preliminary review, 63 comments were excluded for lacking contextual integrity, being off-topic, or having insufficient analytical value (e.g., generic phrases such as "great video" or "you explained it very well"). The final thematic and emotional analysis was conducted on 102 comments, each of which was included in the coding process. This approach ensured sufficient thematic depth, code stability, and the repeatability of the identified patterns. In line with the principle of data saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Marvasti, 2006; Saunders et al., 2018), no new themes or emotional patterns emerged after approximately 80 comments, indicating that the study had achieved adequate diversity and depth. Expert opinion was sought from an academic experienced in thematic analysis to strengthen interpretive consistency, and the findings were supported with direct quotations from user comments to ensure internal validity (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The study has high ecological validity, as the analyzed data derive from participants' real-life experiences, expressed spontaneously and without intervention, in a natural digital environment (YouTube) (Soylu, 2022). Ethical principles were upheld throughout the research process: only publicly available comments were analyzed, personally identifiable information was excluded, usernames were anonymized, and only representative direct quotations were included. Ethically, only publicly available user comments were analyzed; personally identifiable information was not included in the study. While the research did not collect data directly from individuals and therefore did not require ethics committee approval, it adhered to the principles of honesty, confidentiality, non-maleficence, and respect specific to qualitative research.

4. Findings

Participant comments were analyzed for content and sentiment, then grouped into specific themes. This section presents findings structured into five main themes: individual experiences, social implications, and shopping addiction-related consumption habits.

4.1. Thematic Analysis of Participant Comments

Based on the thematic analysis of the comments, 18 subcodes were identified under five main themes. During the analysis, comments were systematically coded based on their content density, repetitive expressions, and emotional tone.

Table 1. Themes and Subcodes Identified in Participant Comments and Their Frequencies

Theme	Frequency	Code	Code description	Frequency
Emotional and psychological factors (D)	30	D1	Emotional reward and relief	7
		D2	Guilt and remorse	6
		D3	Criticism of addiction	3
		D4	Viewing it as an illness	14
Social, Cultural, and Media Impacts (S)	23	S1	Influencers and social media impact	4
		S2	Criticism of advertising and capitalism	6
		S3	Environmental and family factors	4
		S4	Social awareness and criticism	9
Economic Constraints and Material Factors (E)	21	E1	Fear of inflation and price increases	5
		E2	Concerns about debt and the future	3
		E3	Restrictions due to financial constraints	10
		E4	Chasing discounts and stockpiling	3

Table 1. Themes and Subcodes Identified in Participant Comments and Their Frequencies (Continued)

Theme	Frequency	Code	Code description	Frequency
Minimalism and Consumption Awareness (M)	21	M1	The pursuit of minimalist living, avoiding unnecessary consumption, and striving for simplicity	2
		M2	Need-based purchasing, shopping with a focus on genuine needs	8
		M3	Budget and spending control	3
		M4	Behavioral change and awareness	8
Spiritual and Value-Based Approaches (V)	7	V1	The search for lasting meaning	6
		V2	Productivity and experience-oriented focus	1
Total	102			

As shown in Table 1, the most frequently recurring theme was "*emotional and psychological factors*", followed by "*social, cultural, and media influences*", "*economic constraints and material factors*", "*minimalism and consumption awareness*", and "*spiritual and value-based approaches*". This distribution highlights that user comments on shopping addiction cover both individual and social, economic, and cultural dimensions, indicating the complex character of the phenomenon.

4.2. Emotional Tone Distributions

Analyzing comments both thematically and in terms of their emotional tone adds significant depth to understanding the emotional weight and diversity of individual experiences related to shopping addiction. Table 2 shows the number of comments expressed in positive, neutral, and negative emotional tones for each subcode within the theme. In addition, the dominant emotional tone and its overall interpretation are included in the table. This analysis contributes to mapping the emotional landscape of the social narrative surrounding shopping addiction by revealing which themes are associated with more intense emotional conflict or relief.

Table 2. Distribution of Emotional Tone in Comments by Thematic Category

Theme	Emotional Tone			Dominant Emotional Tone	Description
	(+)	(Neutral)	(-)		
Emotional and Psychological Factors (E)	3	2	25	(-)	Guilt, regret, and the need for psychological relief come to the fore.
Emotional Reward and Relief (E1)	2	1	4	(-)	
Guilt and Remorse (E2)	0	0	6	(-)	
Criticism of Addiction (E3)	0	0	3	(-)	
Viewing it as an Illness (E4)	1	1	12	(-)	
Social, Cultural, and Media Influences (S)	8	1	14	(+)	Critical, observant, constructive, and informative attitudes are at the forefront.
Influencer and social media influence (S1)	2	1	1	(+)	
Criticism of advertising and capitalism (S2)	2	0	4	(-)	
Environmental and family factors (S3)	1	0	3	(-)	
Social awareness and criticism (S4)	3	0	6	(-)	

Table 2. Distribution of Emotional Tone in Comments by Thematic Category (Continued)

Theme	Emotional Tone			Dominant Emotional Tone	Description
	(+)	(Neutral)	(-)		
Economic Constraints and Material Factors (E)	5	0	16	(-)	Feelings based on stress, such as anxiety, fear of inflation, and debt, are prevalent.
Fear of inflation and price increases (E1)	2	0	3	(-)	
Debt and anxiety about the future (E2)	1	0	2	(-)	
Restriction due to material insufficiency (E3)	2	0	8	(-)	
Chasing discounts and stockpiling (E4)	0	0	3	(-)	
Minimalism and Consumption Awareness (M)	17	0	4	(+)	Positive feelings such as simplicity, peace, and freedom are expressed.
The pursuit of minimalist living (M1)	2	0	0	(+)	
Need-based purchasing (M2)	6	0	2	(+)	
Budget and spending control (M3)	2	0	1	(+)	
Behavior change and awareness (M4)	7	0	1	(+)	
Spiritual and Value-Based Approaches (V)	6	1	0	(+)	Kindness, the search for meaning, and productivity are expressed through positive emotions.
The search for lasting meaning (V1)	5	1	0	(+)	
Productivity and experience-based focus (V2)	1	0	0	(+)	

As illustrated in Table 2, the distribution of emotional tones shows a clear divergence across themes. *Emotional and psychological factors, economic constraints, and material factors* are predominantly associated with negative emotions such as guilt, regret, anxiety, and financial stress, indicating that shopping addiction is often experienced as a source of distress and self-criticism. *Minimalism, consumption awareness, and spiritual and value-based approaches* are mainly associated with positive tones, highlighting the potential of alternative consumption practices and value-oriented perspectives to foster relief, peace, and resilience against addictive tendencies. Meanwhile, *social, cultural, and media influences* present a more mixed picture, where both critical and constructive attitudes coexist, reflecting how social environments and digital platforms can simultaneously reinforce and challenge shopping-related behaviors. This distribution underscores that shopping addiction represents both a psychological struggle and a socially negotiated and culturally embedded experience.

Below, each identified theme is discussed, and examples from user comments illustrate how these themes manifest in everyday experiences.

4.3. Emotional and Psychological Factors

Participant comments show that shopping addiction is a way of filling voids in the individual's inner world, providing emotional balance, and coping with stress. While shopping provides "reward" or temporary relief on the one hand, it also triggers negative feelings such as guilt, regret, loss of control, and obsession on the other. One user states, "*We reward ourselves by buying things, and we feel good. But this feeling is temporary,*" suggesting that, despite the short-term pleasure shopping provides, it does not lead to long-

term satisfaction. This statement reflects the emotional tension between temporary relief and inner emptiness.

Similarly, another participant expresses feelings of regret and guilt after shopping, saying, "I do not understand people who feel pleased when I feel guilty and regretful after buying something." Such statements reveal how shopping creates internal conflict in individuals.

Some participants directly described their behavior using the language of addiction: statements like "*I am addicted too, unfortunately*," or "*I am like an alcoholic*" show that shopping has become an involuntary compulsion—shopping functions as an impulse control disorder or a psychological escape route.

Obsessive and compulsive behaviors are another aspect of this theme. For example, the statement, "*I am obsessed with umbrellas, for instance; five umbrellas. Then that ends, and my glove obsession begins*," shows that thematic obsessions sustain consumption and have become a spiral.

In addition, some comments reveal defense mechanisms such as denial and humor. Statements such as "*I went shopping while watching; I think I understood the video correctly*" reveal an attempt to alleviate emotional pressure through humor.

While some users have begun to develop awareness (for example, "*I was wondering if I was becoming a bit of a shopaholic*"), this awareness comes with a sense of lack of control and hopelessness. For example, the statement, "*Even while watching this video, I am on a shopping site. I am hopeless*" contains both internal questioning and pessimism.

Under this theme, shopping behaviors are shaped by powerful emotional patterns such as temporary pleasure, reward, regret, guilt, loss of control, obsession, identification, and loneliness, and they emerge as actions that seek to fill the voids in the individual's psychological world.

4.4. Social, Cultural, and Media Impacts

Participant comments reveal that factors other than individual willpower influence shopping addiction behavior. Social media, influencer content, advertisements, capitalist consumer culture, and social norms stand out as external pressures that guide individuals' consumption behaviors. Emotional tones in this theme are mostly woven with anger, guilt, loss of control, and awareness, as well as humorous defense mechanisms and structural criticism. Some participants noticed how influencers triggered their shopping behavior and expressed this critically. For example: "*I am curious about many influencers. If they ever reach a point where they cannot afford to buy things anymore, will they still open packages every day or wear the clothes they have bought...?*" In such statements, social comparison, curiosity, and discomfort are intertwined; the emphasis is on how consumption behavior is fueled by exposure to others' lifestyles. The participant is not merely an observer; they also become a consumer who suffers from the passive effects of this content and struggles with their decision-making. Over time, this situation can cause a loss of control, feelings of inadequacy, and emotional stress.

In addition to social media pressure, some commentators view shopping addiction not as an individual weakness but as a systemic problem: "*The fault lies not with us, but with the advertising industry, capitalism, and social media. And I don't think it's a psychological problem; it's all coercion.*" This comment expresses structural criticism, anger, and anti-system sentiments; the individual attributes the pressure to consume to the media and the economic system. In the comment, the individual shifts away from self-blame and develops a broader critical awareness.

The influence of social variables is evident in some statements. For example, life events such as marriage or the pandemic transform shopping behavior: "*During the pandemic, we even go overboard with masks, hand sanitizer, and wet wipes; masks in every color...*". In this example, the pandemic's anxiety and hygiene pressures justify excessive consumption. The comment contains both retrospective awareness and humorous criticism.

But some comments display denial, belittlement, and exclusionary language: “*Empty people*,” “*What is this? You've made an addiction out of everything*.” These statements deny that shopping addiction is a problem, and underlying this denial are psychological factors such as defense mechanisms, anger, and lack of empathy.

All these comments show that shopping addiction is shaped by the individual's inner world, as well as by media influences, class pressures, cultural norms, and social conditions. While some participants question these influences and develop alternative ideas, others learn of the situation or deny it. Emotional tones range from humor to guilt, anger, awareness, disappointment, and pessimism.

4.5. Economic Constraints and Material Factors

This theme, which emerges in participant comments, reveals that shopping addiction is closely linked to individual psychological processes and economic conditions. The comments highlight concerns about rising prices, the urge to buy extra items, the need to limit spending to essentials, and the influence of economic factors on shopping behavior. In this context, shopping serves a dual role as a consumption activity and a protective response to economic uncertainty.

Some participants stated that the fundamental reason behind their shopping was the “fear that a product not purchased today will be more expensive tomorrow,” indicating this behavior is based on rational grounds. This statement shows that shopping can be an economic reflex rather than an addiction when combined with the urge to “secure the future.” One participant expressed this situation as follows: “*The only reason for my shopping addiction (if I have one) is the possibility that I will find the product I buy today more expensive tomorrow.*”

Similarly, shopping during discount periods, which are perceived as opportunities amid inflation, has been seen as conscious stockpiling behavior. This situation, conceptualized in the study as ‘Preventive Consumption Anxiety’, is embodied in these statements by a participant: “*I have 10 pairs of shoes in my closet, 5 of which are new... In this inflation, you have to stock up.*” However, these shopping practices are often associated with stress, feelings of loss, and emotional exhaustion rather than a positive experience. Participants indicate that shopping no longer brings inner peace but instead creates conflict and disappointment, questioning whether it is worth spending so much money on it. Economic pressure limits consumption and generates emotional internal conflict.

Some participants stated that they had distanced themselves from shopping addiction due to a direct lack of income, expressing that abandoning this behavior was “imposed” by economic conditions. These statements indicate that shopping behavior was experienced not because of internal awareness but as a forced renunciation or involuntary deprivation: “*I do not have such an addiction because I don't have money. I guess not having money worked for the first time.*” and “*Is there any shopping addiction left in the country... Thanks to our economy, we've given up that habit now.*”. All these accounts show that shopping behavior is suppressed and shaped by psychological factors and by material realities. Addictive behavior is sometimes masked by rationalized economic strategies and sometimes abandoned due to budget constraints. Shopping has become not just a “choice” for individuals but increasingly an unattainable privilege or a behavior that must be abandoned.

The emotional tone of this theme is primarily negative. Participants expressed intense feelings of unease, stress, regret, guilt, and helplessness while shopping. However, some comments also express awareness, and even relief mixed with irony, following this forced renunciation. For example, participants who humorously say that “not having money is useful” point out that the decline in consumption has an unintended positive aspect. This situation shows that economic conditions also trigger internal questioning about shopping addiction.

This theme demonstrates that shopping addiction is too complex to be explained solely by individual psychology; economic pressures and material constraints are among the most powerful external factors

shaping this behavior. The economy serves as a foundation that determines both an individual's behavior and the meaning they attach to it.

4.6. Spiritual and Value-Based Approaches

Some participants' comments approach shopping addiction not merely as an economic or psychological problem, but within a deeper questioning of the meaning of life. This theme highlights dimensions such as developing conscious distance against consumption habits, individual awareness, spiritual values, productivity, experience-orientedness, and environmental sensitivity.

A mental shift is observed, in which the short-term pleasures of shopping are questioned, and lasting meaning, inner satisfaction, and social contribution are brought to the forefront. For example, some comments emphasize the value of experiences and memories over consumption: "*What matters are not our possessions, but our experiences and memories.*" In this approach, shopping behavior ceases to be a temporary source of satisfaction and is replaced by more meaningful life goals. Another participant states, "*People should be able to create more lasting meaning in their lives.*" Such statements demonstrate the restriction of shopping behavior and its transformation into a conscious, value-based choice.

Statements that the money spent on shopping also costs resources such as "time and effort" reflect a tendency to consider the emotional and temporal costs of consumption: "*When you buy something, you buy it with time, not money. Think about that.*" Some comments highlight both individual transformation and social and environmental responsibility. For example: "*I think these people are unaware that they are creating a kind of consumption pollution in the world.*" In this statement, shopping addiction is considered not an individual weakness but a collective problem that affects the ecosystem.

Participants also emphasized the importance of production and creativity, stating that meaning comes not from accumulating objects, but from the inner satisfaction of producing: "*The joy of creating is greater than the joy of receiving.*" The approach developed in this theme to address shopping addiction involves more than just avoidance or guilt; it is based on conscious orientation, value-centeredness, and the pursuit of meaning in life. Participants argue that consumption should be replaced by production and that possession should be replaced by the creation of meaning, viewing shopping behavior as a superficial pursuit that lowers the quality of life.

Emotionally, this theme is distinctly more positive in tone than the previous themes. Participants highlighted feelings such as insight, awareness, hope, motivation, and satisfaction; they did not merely criticize shopping addiction but also proposed alternative value systems. While some comments had a neutral, questioning tone, even criticisms that emphasized environmental awareness and ethics drew attention to the goal of fostering positive awareness. Therefore, this theme represents both problem identification and solution-oriented mental restructuring.

4.7. Minimalism and Consumption Awareness

Participant comments reveal that minimalism and consumption awareness stand out as prominent forms of individual struggle against shopping addiction. This theme encompasses individuals' processes of questioning their consumption habits, clarifying the distinction between needs and wants, and developing self-control in shopping behavior by adopting a simple lifestyle.

Some participants stated they avoided shopping and met only essential needs, emphasizing that this tendency intensified, especially during critical periods such as the pandemic. For example: "*When I saw the title, I remembered that I had only been to a shopping mall once since the pandemic and had not browsed for clothes or technology.*" Such comments show that individual awareness has become a behavior pattern that directly reflects daily life practices.

During this process, some participants reviewed their relationship with shopping by focusing on cleaning or spending awareness at home. "*I've been in the process of simplifying for a month... Despite this, I've gotten rid of three large trash bags worth of unnecessary clothes from my home.*" Such examples reveal

that questioning shopping behavior is a gradual transformation process that unfolds over time, shaped by a step-by-step awareness rather than an abrupt break. Beyond material simplification, adopting a minimalist lifestyle has contributed to emotional and mental relief among participants: *"After discovering minimalism, I got rid of many of my possessions and felt lighter."* However, some participants say they cannot completely break their shopping habits and sometimes make uncontrolled purchases. *"I maxed out my credit card that arrived yesterday with 20,000 TL worth of spending. In one day. I want to break free from this."* Such statements show that minimalism is not equally simple to apply for everyone and that emotional ups and downs are also experienced during the behavioral transformation process. Some participants, however, have achieved this transformation in a much more radical way: *"I've been living with two T-shirts, two pairs of pants, two pairs of sweatpants, and 10-15 pairs of underwear for about two years."* This example points to a lifestyle practice that indicates an almost complete shift in its relationship with consumption, while also revealing individuals' potential to develop their own strategies and life models against shopping addiction.

When examining the emotional tones associated with the theme, three main trends were observed: positive emotions expressed as feelings of inner peace, liberation, satisfaction, and a sense of control. The psychological relief brought about by the transition to minimalism was frequently emphasized. *"After discovering minimalism, I got rid of many of my possessions and felt lighter."* Negative emotional tones reflect the persistence of shopping addiction, regret after uncontrolled spending, and feelings of guilt. Such comments reveal the painful and challenging aspects of the transformation process. *"I maxed out my credit card that arrived yesterday with 20,000 TL worth of spending today."* Neutral emotional tones consist of informative or straightforward explanations about the practical aspects of simple living, without conveying direct emotion. *"Taking more than one needs is a disease. Are they trying to prove something, or is there nothing else in their lives that would make them happy?"*

The process of struggling with shopping addiction involves behavioral change, as well as emotional restructuring. Minimalism enables individuals to free themselves from material burdens and psychological pressures; simplification emerges as both an attitude shift and an experience of liberation.

5. Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion

This study reveals how individuals experience shopping addiction, what emotions they associate with it, and within what social contexts they frame it, through a thematic and emotional analysis of YouTube user comments related to shopping addiction. The findings reveal that shopping addiction is not merely an individual psychological tendency; it is also a multidimensional construct shaped by social media influence, economic pressures, and cultural norms.

First, emotional and psychological factors, the most dominant theme of the study, revealed that shopping behaviors often serve functions such as temporary pleasure, relaxation, or self-reward. This aligns with the findings of Rose and Dhandayudham (2014) and Jiang et al. (2017), who approached shopping addiction as an emotional regulation strategy. The widespread expressions of guilt and regret among participants indicate these behaviors create internal conflict in individuals and that they are aware of the psychological cost of addiction. In this respect, the study presents shopping addiction as a compulsive urge and as an experience with a high emotional burden.

Another noteworthy finding is the relationship between shopping addiction and economic constraints. User comments frequently mention inflation, declining purchasing power, and financial concerns about the future; they emphasize this situation directly affects shopping decisions. The thought of "If I don't buy it today, I won't be able to buy it tomorrow," which is present in the minds of participants, points to a defense mechanism developed in the face of economic uncertainty, as also noted by Akyüz and Yılmaz (2023) and Akkaş (2021). This study refers to this phenomenon as "preventive consumption anxiety," wherein individuals justify their shopping addiction not merely as impulsive expenditure, but as a tactic of "hoarding" or "securing the future". This mechanism can be explained by the "loss aversion" theory

(Tversky & Kahneman, 1992), where the motivation to avoid future financial loss (due to inflation) outweighs the immediate pleasure of acquisition. This rationalization process reduces cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957); the individual resolves the internal conflict between their addictive behavior (guilt) and their self-image by reframing the addiction as a prudent economic strategy. Economic uncertainty functions as a paradoxical rationalization mechanism that fuels addiction. In this context, the research contributes to the literature by revealing that shopping addiction is not merely an individual psychopathology; it is also a hybrid behavior pattern triggered by economic stress and legitimized by the survival instinct.

In the social and cultural context, some have observed that users associate their shopping behavior with social media content and that the influencer effect, advertising algorithms, and visibility concerns are cited as triggering factors for shopping. This finding aligns with the studies by Arora and Dutt (2025) and Sheykhangafshe et al. (2023) on social media-based consumption behaviors. However, the original aspect of this study is that it reveals that users have developed critical awareness of these effects and sometimes construct a language of resistance against these digital directives. This situation shows that the relationship between shopping addiction and social media is not merely passive exposure; an active evaluation process also shapes it.

Another particularly noteworthy theme, minimalism and consumption awareness, has brought to light alternative lifestyles developed as a counter to shopping addiction. Users frequently mentioned themes such as simplification, needs-based shopping, budget planning, and awareness; in this context, individual solutions to shopping addiction have been proposed. Minimalist tendencies represent a way to avoid consumption while simultaneously serving as a transformative process that enhances individuals' sense of well-being. This situation is evident in Vihari et al. (2022)'s view of conscious awareness as an antidote to impulsive online purchasing and their emphasis on its capacity to reduce impulsivity and increase emotional stability, and in Brunelle and Grossman (2022)'s finding that lower reactivity and mindfulness predict compulsive buying and their suggestion that mindful awareness interventions may help reduce online compulsive buying. This finding is important because it shows that individuals complain about addiction and usually seek solutions.

Finally, comments grouped under the heading of spiritual and value-oriented approaches show that individuals recognize and embrace meaningful life practices that can replace shopping (such as productivity, cooperation, and experience-oriented living). In this respect, the study also reveals how alternative value systems against shopping addiction have developed and been internalized. These comments, which particularly highlight the search for meaning, reveal that shopping addiction is both a consumption problem and an issue related to lifestyle and identity construction.

These findings show that shopping addiction is shaped in a multidimensional way by individual psychology, social influence, economic stress, and cultural discourses. Unlike studies of shopping addiction in the literature, which are mostly limited to clinical or quantitative criteria, this study adds a new qualitative depth to the field by exploring the individual's own narratives.

5.2. Theoretical Implication: Online Shopping Addiction Awareness Spectrum Model

When the findings of this study are synthesized, it is suggested that shopping addiction is not a static condition but instead moves along a dynamic "online shopping addiction awareness spectrum model" that shifts according to individuals' levels of emotional and cognitive awareness. Based on the study data, this spectrum can be defined in three main stages:

Stage 1: The Unconscious Immersion

Ultimately, individuals are vulnerable to digital stimuli (e.g., influencers, advertisements). Shopping is coded as a "reward" or "therapy." As an original finding of the study, individuals in this phase act under the influence of psychological impulses and "economic fear" (inflation). The individual masks their consumption behavior with "preventive consumption anxiety". The fear seen in user comments, "If I don't buy it today, I won't be able to obtain it," serves as a rational cover for weak willpower. This anxiety makes

it difficult for the individual to break the cycle by transforming the addiction into the illusion of "saving" rather than "spending". Here, the individual is a passive consumer.

Stage 2: The Conflicted Awakening

This stage is the transition zone of the spectrum. Participants' intense expressions of "guilt" and "remorse" indicate this stage. The individual has learned of the system (capitalism, algorithms) and has begun to criticize it, but cannot yet entirely stop their behavior. Statements such as "I'm like an alcoholic" or "We are victims of the system" indicate an internal conflict (cognitive dissonance) that shows awareness has begun. However, willpower has not yet fully kicked in.

Stage 3: Conscious Resistance

At the other end of the spectrum are the practices of "minimalism" and "value-driven living," which break the cycle of dependency. Here, consumption awareness transforms into a "resistance strategy" against the system, not merely about cutting back on spending. The individual finds pleasure not in purchasing, but in creating, experiencing, and simplifying.

This model suggests that the treatment or understanding of shopping addiction should focus on how individuals can move along the spectrum from "unconscious immersion" to "conscious resistance" (through financial literacy and media awareness).

This spectrum model, developed based on the study data, is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The Proposed Online Shopping Addiction Awareness Spectrum Model

Stages	Stage 1: The Unconscious Immersion	Stage 2: The Conflicted Awakening	Stage 3: Conscious Resistance
Dominant Emotion	Temporary Pleasure, Relief, Excitement, Future Anxiety (Inflation Fear)	Guilt, Remorse, Anger, Burnout, Internal Conflict	Peace, Liberation, Satisfaction, Hope, Awareness
Behavioral Pattern	Impulsive Buying, Stockpiling, Chasing Discounts	Self-Questioning, Maxing Out Credit Cards, Forced Restriction	Simplification (Minimalism), Need-Based Focus, Experiencing
Triggering Factor	Social Media (Influencers), Algorithms, Economic Panic	Financial Difficulties, Emotional Void, Social Comparison	Inner Values, Desire for Productivity, Environmental Awareness
Rationalization	"If I don't buy it today, it will be more expensive tomorrow." (Preventive Consumption Anxiety)	"I am like an alcoholic / It's an addiction." (Admission of Addiction)	"What matters are experiences, not possessions." (Re-signification)

5.3. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aimed to analyze individual experiences and emotional patterns related to shopping addiction by analyzing comments from users in a natural digital environment. The thematic analysis revealed that shopping addiction is not limited to an individual psychological tendency; it is a multidimensional structure shaped by social media influence, economic pressures, and cultural norms. While users often described shopping as a temporary relief, reward, or emotional escape, they reported experiencing intense guilt, regret, and internal conflict after engaging in this behavior. This indicates that shopping addiction is not a consumption practice and is an emotionally burdensome experience.

Another important finding from the research is the decisive effect of economic uncertainty on shopping behavior. Fear of inflation, rising living costs, and declining purchasing power have driven many users to engage in impulsive consumption, driven by the anxiety that "if I don't buy it today, I won't be able to buy it tomorrow." In this context, shopping addiction has also been assessed as a reflection of economic stress and financial fragility. However, the analyzed comments also highlight the existence of various resistance mechanisms developed against shopping addiction. Conscious consumption strategies,

particularly minimalism, simplification, needs-based shopping, and budget control, stand out among the ways users cope with this behavior. These findings show that shopping addiction is both addressed as a problem definition and as a search for solutions.

The influence of social media, advertising algorithms, and influencer content is significant in shaping the shopping behavior of many users. However, research findings also reveal that users have developed a critical awareness of these digital influences. Users have questioned consumption pressures originating in social media and have expressed alternative values that resist them. Spiritual and value-based orientations, such as productivity, the search for meaning, cooperation, and experience-oriented living, have emerged as more sustainable and satisfying lifestyles that could replace shopping behaviors.

The findings of this study indicate that shopping addiction is not merely a matter of willpower but a multi-layered process shaped by economic and digital dynamics. In this context, the most significant contribution of this study to the literature is the model of online shopping addiction awareness, which explains individuals' journey of awareness and behavioral transformations within this process. This study approaches the topic with qualitative depth by interpreting users' own statements and offering a holistic perspective on shopping addiction at the individual, social, and structural levels. The literature often explains it using quantitative data. The research findings shed light on future academic studies and contribute to policies and practices that raise consumer awareness and transform shopping behavior.

In this context, the study's original contribution is also noteworthy. Analyzing a phenomenon such as shopping addiction, which is often addressed with quantitative measures on a psychopathological or economic axis, qualitatively in a natural digital environment through individuals' own narratives, distinguishes this research from similar studies in the field. Data from platforms like YouTube, which are public yet allow for the expression of personal experiences, have enabled direct observation of both individual emotional processes and the social and cultural effects of shopping addiction. In this respect, the study adds interdisciplinary depth to the literature by revealing how narratives related to shopping addiction intersect with alternative life practices such as simplification, search for meaning, and productivity. The research presents a model that serves as an example for qualitative studies by addressing consumer behavior through both purchasing practices and the broader social, economic, and psychological contexts of the digital age.

5.4. Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

This research used publicly available YouTube user comments to qualitatively analyze shopping addiction, drawing on naturally generated data from an online context. However, the study also has some limitations. First, the data was obtained from only one platform (YouTube) and from comments under a specific video. This limits the sample's representativeness and restricts the analysis to statements written by users in response to a specific piece of content. Because the comments are anonymous and spontaneous, no information about participants' sociodemographic characteristics could be obtained. This makes it difficult to establish a direct relationship between consumer profiles and emotional patterns. In addition, emotional tone analysis may involve some subjective assessment, as it relies on the researcher's interpretive framework.

Future studies could analyze shopping addiction by examining content produced on different social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, X), thereby revealing comparative emotional and thematic differences across platforms. This study employed qualitative data analysis; future research could develop quantitative data-collection tools to assess the generalizability of the identified themes. In this context, thematic topics such as minimalism, economic stress, social media exposure, and emotional regulation could be tested using structural models to examine relational patterns in greater depth.

Declarations and Disclosures

Ethical Responsibilities of Authors: The author of this article confirms that her work complies with the principles of research and publication ethics.

Conflicts of Interest: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding: The author received no financial support for the preparation and/or publication of this article.

Author Contributions: The author confirms sole responsibility for conceptualization and design, data collection, analysis of data and interpretation of results, writing the first draft of the manuscript, and review and editing.

Plagiarism Checking: This article was screened for potential plagiarism using a plagiarism screening program.

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