

## Analysis of Consumer Dependence in *Confessions of Shopaholic* by Sophie Kinsella

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### Article Info

### Abstract

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Human needs are essential for mental well-being and determining the direction in life. Failure to meet these needs may result in individuals experiencing emotional instability, identity confusion, and internal conflict. Sophie Kinsella's novel *Confessions of a Shopaholic* illustrates this dilemma through the character Rebecca Bloomwood, whose compulsive purchasing transcends mere lifestyle; it signifies deeper mental health concerns. The objective of this study is to examine the psychological challenges encountered by the main character and how her behavior is influenced by unfulfilled needs, particularly those pertaining to self-esteem and belongingness. This research employs a qualitative methodology grounded in psychological literacy critique and Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. An in-depth examination and textual analysis of the argument reveals that Rebecca Bloomwood undergoes two significant psychological phases: the emotional turmoil phase, characterized by unmet wants, and the nascent self-awareness phase, during which she tries to take charge of her life again. The character's journey shows that psychological needs must be met from the inside, not the outside. Rebecca's story shows how hard it is to live in a culture where appearances and social standing can change who you are.

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## INTRODUCTION

Shopping world is a fun world for everyone. This economic activity which has become a part of daily life fulfills the needs of food, clothing, and shelter. However, nowadays shopping is not only an economic activity, but it also a part of lifestyle, entertainment, and even a form of self-esteem. Moreover, if the item you like is included in the discounted item, then it is certain that the item will be targeted in shopping, even though you did not initially intend to spend the item. On the other

hand, this phenomenon also raises several issues; such as, consumer behavior, and social pressure to follow certain trends and lifestyles. Furthermore, many people do shopping as an escape from stress or a form of emotional compensation, which in the long term can have an impact on financial and psychological conditions. Currently, shopping does not require us to use cash but we can shop just by using a credit card. Big discounts and low interest rates are the target of shopaholics.

A shopaholic is someone who has a habit of shopping excessively who sometimes does not care

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about whether the item will be used or not later. This phenomenon is becoming more complex with the existence of a culture of consumerism, which places goods as a measure of a person's success and happiness which creates social pressure to keep up with trends. In the midst of the modern world filled with advertisements, discounts, and ever-changing trends, and the ease of shopping in this digital era makes it difficult to distinguish between wants and needs. We have done it without realizing it, where we see an opportunity that seems like it will not come twice, when in fact it is not; for example, there is someone who every time he is stressed at work, he immediately opens an online application and starts buying things that he does not really need. It will become a habit and is difficult to stop which results in credit card debt piling up and not in accordance with financial conditions. There are those who feel that having a certain branded bag or shoes will make him more confident and accepted in the social environment so that even though his finances are tight, he still dares to shop for the sake of "appearance". This is an example of how the digital era has greatly influenced shopping behavior, making it easier, faster, and more accessible through online platforms and mobile applications. Consequently, consumption development has undergone a significant, with individuals increasingly relying on digital transactions and demanding instant access to goods and services—reflecting a profound transformation in consumer behavior and modern lifestyle.

Consumption development began to increase in the 1980s to 1990s where during that time consumption experienced even greater acceleration, driven by globalization and the economy. International brands such as Nike, Apple, Chanel, and others began to be widely known and became part of the lifestyle of the global community. It results in consumption conditions not only functioning practically, but also turning into a social identity - a way for someone to show who they are in front of others. Entering the year 2000 brought major changes due to the presence of digital technology and the internet which makes it easier for us to shop by accessing advertisements, discounts, or the ease of relying on installments or credit cards. Currently, an item is not only seen from its function but also from its design to attract

consumers to buy it. It is what then continues to increase consumer behavior in society. Consumer behavior is a form of behavior of people in consuming goods compulsively; for example, using all kinds of ways to get the desired goods, either by using money in savings or going into debt through a credit card. This consumer behavior is inseparable from the mass media which increasingly increases the desire to shop in society. Furthermore, rapid development occurs in big cities like Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Los Angeles, and London.

London is known as one of the prestigious cities in the world. Life in London is synonymous with high mobility, competitive jobs, and high social expectations. Many people come to this city with the hope of building a brilliant career, living independently, and appearing "successful" in the eyes of others. In fact, the cost of living in London is very high, starting from rent, transportation, to daily necessities. In addition, there is an unspoken pressure to always look stylish, follow trends, and have a "classy" lifestyle in order to be considered relevant or successful. This is where the dark side of big city culture emerges: the pressure to continue to prove oneself can make someone feel like they are never enough. Many people end up using shopping as a form of escape from stress or a way to "buy" an ideal self-image. This phenomenon is reflected in *Confessions of a Shopaholic* novel.

In *Confessions of a Shopaholic* novel which takes place in the midst of the glamorous and busy life of London. Rebecca Bloomwood, is a representation of someone who lives under the pressure of consumer culture in a big city like London. The character shops not only because she wants to, but also to escape from stress, anxiety, and social pressure. London, as a metropolitan city with luxurious storefronts and a culture of appearing glamorous, reinforces the consumer habits that she lives. It is in line with the life of today's urban society which is trapped between the desire to appear ideal and the reality of personal conditions which are not necessarily supportive.

There are previous studies related to *Confessions of a Shopaholic* by Sophie Kinsella which used various literary and psychological approaches. These studies serve as a foundation for understanding the psychological aspects of the main character; besides, help identify a research

gap, particularly in relation to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The study which had been conducted by Resty Wahyuni and Rendi Nurindahsari (2021) entitled "Hedonism in *Confessions of a Shopaholic* Novel" focuses on the hedonistic lifestyle of the main character, Rebecca Bloomwood, using Epicurean hedonism theory, which is categorized into aesthetic, ethical, religious, and egoistic forms. It shows that Rebecca's excessive shopping behavior is a form of false happiness-seeking. However, it does not explore deeper psychological motivation through a structured theoretical framework like Maslow's.

Another study which had been conducted by Dewi Wijaya (2019) entitled "Kecemasan Tokoh Utama dalam Novel *Confessions of a Shopaholic* Karya Sophie Kinsella": Tinjauan Psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud examines various forms of anxiety experienced by the main character—namely, neurotic, moral, and realistic anxiety—through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis. In addition, it provides insights into the character's internal conflict in which it does not explicitly address the motivational basis of her behavior.

Furthermore, Ayu Diah Amelia (2020) in her undergraduate thesis "Shopping as a Coping Mechanism in *Confessions of a Shopaholic* by Sophie Kinsella" analyzes how shopping serves as a coping mechanism for emotional and social stress. By using a psychodynamic literary approach, the study highlights Rebecca's emotional responses, but it does not fully relate them to Maslow's structured model of human motivation.

The three aforementioned studies offer valuable insights into the psychological dynamics of the main character; particularly, in terms of consumer behavior, emotional conflict, and coping strategies. However, none of them comprehensively analyze Rebecca Bloomwood's behavior through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Therefore, the aim of this study is to fill that gap by examining how the five levels of human needs—physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization—are manifested through the character's actions, dialogue, and internal thoughts, as well as how imbalances in fulfilling these needs affect her psychological condition.

This study will provide alternative meaning to all readers about Analysis of the Main Character's Personality Depicting Consumer Dependence in "Confessions of a Shopaholic" by Sophie Kinsella. This study differs from previous research which primarily focused on linguistic features and narrative structure. On the other hand, the present study focuses on psychological analysis of the main character by applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory so that it offers a new contribution to the understanding of character psychology in popular literary works.

This article addresses two specific objectives. First, it aims to examine the psychological problems experienced by the main character in *Confessions of a Shopaholic* novel. Second, to analyze how the character's behavioral patterns reflect the self-esteem needs as conceptualized in Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Thus, through this dual focus, the study integrates psychological analysis and literary interpretation to offer a deeper understanding of character development within the context of consumer culture.

## METHODS

This article used a qualitative approach with the Abraham Maslow's theory on psychological literary criticism method in order to analyze main character's psychological needs in the *Confessions of a Shopaholic* novel by Sophie Kinsella by examining psychological elements within literary texts which focused on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. It consists of five levels that are physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.

Furthermore, the sources were primary data which comes from the novel while secondary data were comes from library research, including psychology books, academic journals, and other relevant sources. In addition, data collection was performed through close reading by identifying passages in the novel in which reflect the character's to fulfil her psychological needs.

The analysis was conducted by using heuristic reading to find out the general content of the story; besides, hermeneutic reading to interpret the deeper psychological meanings found in the character's actions, dialogues, and inner thoughts. This article underlines how the main character,

Rebecca Bloomwood, attempts to satisfy her needs based on Maslow's hierarchy, and the psychological consequences which arise when those needs are not met in a reasonable way. In addition, in order to ensure the validity of the data, theoretical triangulation and repeated readings are used in order to maintain consistent and credible interpretations.

In accordance with qualitative research design, the researcher functioned as the primary research instrument (human instrument), being directly involved in the processes of data collection, selection, analysis, and interpretation. A human instrument refers to a researcher who possesses the capacity to understand contextually embedded meanings through observation, personal experience, intuition, and theoretical insight. As stated by Sugiyono (2019), "in qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument since only humans are capable of understanding the meaning behind social interactions." Moreover, accordingly, the active involvement of the researcher in interpreting the text is essential in ensuring the depth and validity of the analysis. This approach is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the character's psychological dynamics within the context of universal human needs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The novel *Confessions of a Shopaholic* discusses how the main character, Rebecca Bloomwood, depends on shopping not only for practical reasons but also as a way to escape her problems and boost her mood. Her behaviors show that she has a deeper emotional emptiness, where things she buys fill the gaps in her self-esteem, sense of belonging, and need for approval. This pattern comprising the need for validation, feeling insecure all the time, and having difficulty controlling her emotions points to a psychological condition. For Rebecca, overspending signals an underlying psychological problem rather than merely a money or social issue. She uses consumption as a way of coping-by-escape: that is, she consumes to help her turn away from distress about unfulfilled needs.

*Confessions of a Shopaholic* novel examines critically how compulsive buying

can be an indication of deeper psychological problems. In this context, it is important to recognize that consumer dependence is a reflection of identity crisis in contemporary consumerist society as well as a personal struggle.

### Psychological Problem Reflected in Consumer Behavior

The psychological problems experienced by individuals are often reflected in their patterns of consumption, especially when consumer behavior becomes a coping mechanism for managing emotional distress. In *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, the main character, Rebecca Bloomwood, demonstrates symptoms of anxiety, denial, and low self-esteem, which are expressed through compulsive shopping and irrational financial decisions. Her consumption patterns are not only driven by need but by an emotional urge to alleviate internal psychological discomfort.

Kasser and Kanner (2004) state that over-consumerism can be associated with underlying psychological vulnerabilities like insecurity, anxiety, and lack of meaning or purpose in life. These problems are frequently expressed through materialistic behavior as individuals attempt to fulfill emotional gaps through external possessions. Similarly, Dittmar (2008) explains that for some individuals, buying goods becomes "a way of coping with negative emotions and a substitute for psychological needs that remain unmet in other areas of life."

These concepts are suitable for how Rebecca behaves. Her shopping addiction is a temporary way to deal with her problems with her identity and low self-esteem. When she stops enjoying her purchases, she feels guilty and hates herself, which keeps the cycle of mental health issues. This shows that the way consumers act in the novel is like a psychological mirror that reveals the character's inner conflicts with self-esteem, independence, and self-actualization, which is in line with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory.

"I'm well aware that at the back of my mind, thumping quietly like a drumbeat, are the twin horrors of Guilt and Panic." (Kinsella, 2001, p. 60)

The phrase clearly illustrates that Rebecca is aware of the psychological pressure she experiences. The phrase "twin horrors of Guilt and Panic" indicates that guilt and panic are two persistent emotions she experiences, even if they are not always apparent. Her shopping habits make her feel guilty, and her panic shows how worried she is about the financial consequences that constantly overshadow her consumer behavior.

"I mean, when I think about it, what's more important? Clothes – or the miracle of new life?" (Kinsella, 2001. p.120–125)

This quote shows Rebecca's internal struggle between wishing for material things and deeper emotional values. When she asks herself if "clothes" are more important than "the miracle of new life," she starts to understand that things like "clothes" can't make her feel good on an emotional level. This feeling shows how Rebecca feels caught between wanting to buy things and knowing that they won't make her relationships better. This quote is important because it shows that Rebecca is beginning to realize how her shopping addiction is hurting her. This awareness is the beginning of a change in her identity and her search for a deeper meaning in life.

"The point is, today is the beginning of my new frugal life. From now on, I'm just going to spend absolutely nothing." (Kinsella, 2001. p. 95)

This quote shows an important phase in Rebecca's journey. She says she is determined to live a more frugal life because of the financial problems that her shopping behaviors caused. This choice shows a change from reaching psychological needs through consumption to making a conscious effort to break harmful habits in order to self-regulate, which is an essential aspect of the process of self-actualization.

According to Maslow, self-actualization is the most important hierarchy of needs. Rebecca is still in the early stages, but she is showing signs that she can fulfill her esteem needs in a healthy way by gaining self-control, responsibility, and integrity. This initiative not only makes her life better in terms of her health

and emotional condition, but it also shows that she is committed to growing as a person and changing her values. Such an effort is a real step toward living a more meaningful and authentic life.

### **Rebecca Bloomwood's Behavior as a Reflection of Self-Esteem Needs in Maslow's Hierarchy**

The character of Rebecca Bloomwood in *Confessions of a Shopaholic* is a good example of someone who is trying to meet their self-esteem needs, which is one of the levels in Maslow's hierarchy of human motivation. Maslow's (1943) five-tier model puts self-esteem at the fourth level. This level includes the desire for confidence, achievement, respect from others, and a sense of personal worth. Rebecca's compulsive shopping, image maintenance, and social comparison are all examples of her need for recognition and validation throughout the novel. These behaviors aren't just signs of materialism; they're also based on a deeper psychological need to build and affirm a desirable sense of self. This section looks at Rebecca's choices through the lens of Maslow's theory to find out how her unmet self-esteem needs cause her emotional problems and affect her decisions in a consumerist society.

"There is no question. I have to have this scarf.... People will refer to me as the Girl in the Denny and George Scarf." (Kinsella, 2001, p. 15)

The statement makes it clear that the character wants to be recognized and validated by others. Rebecca wants to feel better about herself by imagining that people call her "the Girl in the Denny and George Scarf." According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, this behavior shows that she is trying to meet her self-esteem needs, which include the need for recognition, respect, and a sense of belonging. The scarf is more than just a fashionable accessory; it becomes a way for her to build an identity that she thinks will be liked and accepted by others.

"So, I buy it. The most perfect little cardigan in the world. People will call me the Girl in the Gray Cardigan. I'll be able to live in it. Really, it's an investment." (Kinsella, 2001. p. 105)

Rebecca's choice to buy the cardigan isn't because she needs it; it's because of the symbolic significance she gives it. Her obsession with others' perceptions—"People will call me the Girl in the Gray Cardigan"—shows that she depends heavily on outside approval to shape her identity. From Maslow's point of view, this shows that she is trying to fulfill her self-esteem needs, which include the need for recognition, respect, and a sense of personal worth. People think of the cardigan as a "investment" not in money, but in her social and psychological identity. She uses it to show a better side of herself, hoping that this fake persona will get approval from society and make her feel better about herself. This behavior depicts how things in the novel can be used to make people feel safe and boost their self-esteem.

"Even better, although no one can see them, I know that underneath I'm wearing my gorgeous new matching knickers and bra with embroidered yellow rosebuds." (Kinsella, 2001, p. 14)

This quotation demonstrates Rebecca's internal sense of self-worth, demonstrating that her confidence is based on her feelings about herself rather than just how other people see her. She feels empowered and satisfied in private even though no one can see the undergarments. This attitude represents the level of self-esteem, especially the component of self-respect, in the structure of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Rebecca finds confidence and value in an intimate and personal experience that makes her feel unique, rather than in validation from others. This concept implies that self-esteem can be strengthened by internal affirmation based on one's identity as well as by external recognition.

"A man will never love you or treat you as well as a store. ... And when your fingers first grasp those shiny, new bags... oh yes... oh yes." (Kinsella, 2001, p. 11)

Rebecca Bloomwood's comparison between shopping and romantic love highlights how her consumption habits serve as her main source of emotional solace and a sense of self-worth. In this context, purchasing material possessions acts as a replacement for emotional stability, highlighting a profound psychological dependence on external validation. Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that this behavior is a

pursuit of self-esteem, based on the desire for self-respect and social recognition. However, the pleasure gained from consumption is fleeting and influenced by external factors, ultimately lacking the ability to deliver enduring psychological stability.

## CONCLUSION

Rebecca Bloomwood is a real-life representation of an individual trapped in an identity crisis and complex psychological conflict. Her shopping addiction is not just an impulsive habit, but it also a symptom of deeper psychological problems—especially anxiety, self-insecurity, and unmet needs for appreciation and acceptance. She diverts it through consumer behavior as a form of self-reward—rewarding oneself to cover up feelings of failure, anxiety, or low self-esteem.

The psychological phenomenon which was experienced by Rebecca is very relevant to today's social life; especially, among the younger generation. Many people believe the need to buy for the sake of image and social recognition. Rebecca's story reflects modern reality, where the need for self-esteem and emotional fulfilment is often disguised in consumer behavior, which if left unchecked, can develop into serious psychological problems.

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