Chapter Six
Conclusion

Consumption is a social, cultural, and economic process of choosing goods, and this process reflects the opportunity and constraints of modernity. Especially, when it's use promoted by advertisement, and urban spaces from shopping malls to small shops where they are displayed, viewed and bought. However, the new technology consumer goods has rapidly increased the importance of consumers for the marketers. For a large part, this identity is created in interaction with other people. For instance, the bulky refrigerator have been replaced by those sleek flat two/three door digitalized automatic defrost systems that besides consuming minimum space offers hi tech quality.

Everyday life in the twenty-first century offers multiple instances of consumption that can be studied in many ways. The focus of this study is neither to commend nor condemn consumer culture, but to understand how, why and in myriad ways people learn to consume the way they do. The mediated discourse between their belief and practice provides a symbolic language for individuals to think in collective terms about their use and necessities. of nonetheless, to provide evidence to the fact that consumerism is practices, ideologies and attitudes towards consumption as an inevitable aspect of human civilization it. In this respect, consumption has been seen as a crucial form of communication in which people have redefined the consumption processes. The acquiring, receiving and using products and services have not only taken up a special and central place in people's life, it is also an important focus in academic research. The process of the construction of the self is especially important at younger age, when youngsters try out different possible identities. Consumer behaviour and its trends is an important part of this experimenting process. The most important finding of this research suggests that this behaviour does not occur in a social vacuum but in close interrelation with peers, personal background, values and attitudes. This does not mean that the obligatory practices such as using the mobile phone and the Internet is seen as consumption at all. However the study focuses on a wider context, this concept places the consumption practices at a point where social and collective ends get together.
Therefore it includes "sense of place" created by size, architecture, grandeur, ambiance or the profusion of consumer goods and the stories, trend behind the brands in all an immaterial strategy guiding the material consumption. An in-depth analysis of the people of National Capital Region establishes that these as prospective consumers perceive 'class identities. They also indicate differential attitude, values and practices as a measurement of unconscious identity formation. The standards of their lifestyles thus, is interlink between the unconscious consumer desires as well as their recourse to income, socio-economic background and demographic variables. The most important are the certain findings that have come into highlight in the research. These are as follows:

- Consumers consciously vis-à-vis unconsciously consider consumption to be a major part of their lifestyles and identities.
- Interaction and communication are extended through the meanings endowed in consuming often as a product of complex cultural and social network i.e. brands of mobile phones, laptops, cars etc. They are then followed by forming social relationships on the similar grounds of class parity.
- Consumption provides somewhat similar levels of satisfaction on an individual level in asserting a identity. After a certain limit there is less influences of peer pressures, family and so on and so forth.
- Meanings are socially constructed so consumers are not independent at the same time they confer the feeling of interdependence.
- Moreover, the symbolic aspects may be highly functional with respect to attaining and maintaining necessities. For instance, a stylish sleek mobile phones not only makes communication easy but also are capable of downloading information from internet.
- In addition, certain consumption activities reflect or construct a false consciousness that is a credible measurement of self confidence in present age.

However, debatable, the subject is relevant. The study is based on the fact of treating consumerism as inevitable and the ‘other self’ as part of the contemporary times. The research aims at contesting these categories with the help of theoretical framework to analyse
consumption in practice. Nonetheless, the observations of Bourdieu and Baudrillard, and some social anthropologists have been discussed and holds prime importance in this study. To gauge upon the fact that the moral discourse about false consciousness and diatribes against the creation of needs but not absolute false needs is emphasized. The consumer culture in metropolitan setting is in a transitional stage. Thus, to assert the findings of this research the study recapitulates the findings in detail that will lead to 'the way forward'.

6.1. Differential Response towards Consumption Preference and Practices:

Consumption practices are prominent parameters to study consumer culture or not is a secondary subject? The discrepancy between respondents answering a questionnaire and interview schedules reveals the fact that consumers control their desires rather than being enslaved by them. Nevertheless, the result of the findings discussed that their preference for a commodity often varied with their purchase. The most interesting finding was that the respondents always exaggerated their preference, probably for their desire to possess the commodity some day. Not surprisingly, singles, students, and several adults clearly spent the most on leisure-time pursuits as compared to older people, families and households. For instance, inspite of their high preference desire for a particular brand of car or automobile; they actually purchase something more for its functionality or a brand for its sign as well as use-value. This proves the fact that they are careful or atleast try to keep a balance between their income, social class and demographical sensibilities. In relation to the above there were certain problems faced while undertaking the study such as:

Consumption is a wide subject overlapping economic sociology as well as cultural anthropology. Thus, diverse theoretical framework along with historical background to study its mechanisms of institutions and agency was undertaken as structure of the study. The whole research was somehow divided into sections subject to the need of consumption preference and practices, consumer goods and services, advertisement as agency and markets to structure active consumption.
To devise a single analytical framework, a single questionnaire was devised not to divide the consumers on the basis of preconceived notions but as per their consumer category irrespective of income class so on and so forth. The findings of this study reveal that consumer preferences were not subject to the income constraints of an individual. However, as they say exceptions cannot be generalized. This clearly suggests that it is cliché to limit oneself of ones ascribe status as a modern consumer. For a middle class consumer may possess a high end object, whereas a high consumer class may choose for a low end product. In a post modern world ‘everyone can be anyone’. Real life has turned into the art of living, reality into the aestheticization of everyday life(Featherstone 1991:65-78) This established an empirical outcome of their inappropriate behaviour to new goods and services subject to use value vis-a vis sign-value.

The research was not designed as a household survey however, was conducted right at the heart of consumption area i.e. the markets. The survey was conducted in intervals due to several reasons such as rush, high sale seasons and discount periods not to miss both the preference and practice of consumers. Thus, the findings are based on qualitative as well as quantitative study.

A universal questionnaire is used for all the classes, age and income groups unlike other relevant studies. This was deliberately attempted to bring forward the hypothesis that consumers are treated equally irrespective of their social position in the society. This helped in finding the correlation between their income class and consumer class on the basis of their income scales. ‘All choices related to consumption and everyday life are not simply decisions about, how to act’, but also ‘who to be’(Giddens 1991:82). As a result, there was not much difference in desiring and possessing the commodities as our finding of this research. Though, the results showed variations which later differed from the information attained from the unstructured interviews. While writing their responses for the questionnaire, besides providing an excuse ‘for the want of need’ respondents conveniently portrayed to be consumers of high end goods and services to boast their consumer status in the marketplace.
Therefore, the study suggests that consumers are in constant search of self expression. The external influences though not imposing are yet compelling. This implies that the inappropriate choices consumers choose are the result of lifestyle changes, however a multiplicity of factors (socialization, peer pressures, rituals and conventions) and above all the income parameter are into play. Moreover, consumption decisions are highly controlled and a potentially creative activity. Though, there have been underlying assumption of middle class taking the lead. Consumer do not anymore belong to the rigid constraints of traditional categories yet are rooted in the transitional phase of the third world standards.

Even in a cosmopolitan setting like Delhi and Gurgaon, Indians are rooted and do not undertake the risk disguised in hedonistic consumption. The findings revealed that Consumers are consciously aware of their spending patterns. The patterns of consumption are also qualitative rather than quantitative. At a certain (socio-economic) level or life-course stage one no longer devotes growing amounts of time and money to recreational shopping or buying new cars ever more frequently. There are some desires that arise at a certain income level. Thus, it looks as though the consumer is (at least unconsciously) quite capable of adjusting not only his/her patterns of consumption in sync with the changing socio-economic situation. This analysis helped us to break the myth of consumption being labeled as frivolous subject to postmodern space (market) and its agency (advertisement).

6.2. Theoretical Framework used as a Support to the Study:

The ambit of theoretical framework is needed to discipline within the constraints of academic understanding of economics as well as sociology. Consumption is taken as granted and denigrated by classical sociologist of the nineteenth century. Although, they acknowledge the minimum physical need for clothing, food and shelter, but the rest of the needs are treated as ‘animal functions’ (Marx 1972:60). The desire to need was conceptualized by Marx, as induced by capitalism, leading to “commodity fetish”. Whereas, Weber, considered consumption as trivial and instrumental, something that does not carry its own meanings; and, was reduced to a mere key to salvation in the service of religious beliefs and a mode of accumulation for more wealth. This ‘Protestant Ethic’ (1958), reduced the
significance of consumption and carried forward the negative connotations as well. Durkheim, also provided a darker shade relating consumption with the morality debate of social order. Thus, in his opinion, if economy unleashes consumers infinite desires then it will lead to the destruction of order of society. The first classical sociologist to discuss novelty and mass consumption was Simmel (1997). He suggested that consumers’ inconsequential behaviour i.e. paying attention to fashion and shopping was an outcome of the city dwellers lifestyle. Even, Veblen (1959), who tried to see it from the consumption side and not from production side laid too much emphasis on status competition. Moreover, they have held research on consumption based more on immorality and gendered connotation than in its totality.

However, none of the above classical sociologist objectively discussed consumption in the light of its socio-cultural context. Thus, an attempt has been made in this study to use sociology, in a broader sense than a disciplinarian sense. Theoretical framework was discussed extensively to systematically draw an understanding of consumer culture. Essentially, this was to analyse the subject in two ways, first to trace mass consumption historically and, second to study the changed values and behaviour of an individual as a result of the consumer culture. According to the structuralist view, social identities are expressed through symbols and sign systems. Here, the study also dealt with the transition to consumer society, specifically the shift from modernity to post-modernity. To put it simply, modernity legacy is a mass crises of identity: we are faced with the need to ‘become what one is’ (Bauman 2000:32). Issues of identity and consumption converge in the concept of ‘taste’ and ‘lifestyle’, i.e., systems of practice through which individuals classify themselves by their classification of ‘consumer goods’ are more or less desirable, acceptable, or valuable (Bourdieu 1984:169-75). However, unlike Bourdieu, Baudrillard argues that the symbolic signs people consume do not express any preexisting meanings, but the meanings are created within the process of consumption. Therefore, postmodernist regard the formation of an individual’s identity as a life-long process that requires endless reconstruction and re-evaluation. In order to assert the above basis of our research, Giddens supports, the maintenance of self-identity, as a coherent narrative of the self, and demands that complex choices continuously be made under all manner of circumstances. Given this attitude of
making purchases and choices are integral for identity building in consumers. In addition to all this, economic resources underplaying in the consumption decisions play an important role as well. However, the most important findings of this study is that the classical as well as the post-modernist theories overemphasize the immaterial aspects over material aspects of the subject. To gauge the above fact, the study proved that consumer class and income had a direct proportional relationship in modern society.

To assert the above stated fact, Bauman(1991) stressed on the material side of consumers and their economic well being as the concern of modern consumer. He calls those in the consumer society who cannot freely decide upon their consumption owing to economic restraints, ‘the repressed’(1987); ‘the excluded’, ‘the failed consumers’(19880); ‘the new poor’ (1998).

6.3. Advertisements as a Social Agency:

These printed texts and images are extremely important in socializing people to be consumers even before the goods are widely available. They colonize the imagination with "visions of lifestyle," creating "a theater of familiarity in which readers may envisage themselves at home" Thus, content analysis of advertisement shows how marketers target a broad public across most income levels while conveying the sense of familiarity in which each class finds its place. Thus, the study aims at advertisements as stimulating the desire to buy things in order to live a good life. This changes with respect to the changing notions of desirability to buy goods as commodities are readily available. This is particularly true in Delhi and Gurgaon, as a proper example of the above for consumer culture in India. Moreover, quantitative growth of mass consumption reflects changes in trends of social and cultural intermediaries as a result of the affect of advertisement. The extra information may create conflicts relating to buying decisions over symbolic value over virtuous functionality. Nonetheless, in developing countries, people are still in control over their economic aspects as part of their conscious social criteria. This supports the idea that they are a bunch of empowered consumers who are educated regarding the ill effects of the same.
The research aimed at the parameters of influence and its effect on the local population as well. Though the findings proved that content analysis of certain advertisements is a form of symbolic communication of anticipatory socialization amongst consumers. In reality, there were few examples discussed with the respondents however, could not be analysed. The in-depth interviews with respondents presented the analysis of different ages, ethnicities and social classes. The respondents when discussing the advertisement were quite excited and most of the times kept talking about the advertisement rather than showing any signs of getting affected by the product. This particular finding strengthened my study that consumerism is all about a blend of symbolic consumption merged with functional aspects.

6.4. Markets Used as an Institutional Field:

Market is visualized as an urban space for exploring the possibilities for social interactions. They were seen as institutional field by the innovation in mass consumption in shopping areas that corresponds to the shift in social structure and consumer culture. The findings of this study provide the fact that markets has helped sociologically to broaden the thought process over time and democratized access to consumer goods. To elaborate, people (from all classes, creed, gender, age, caste) realize their significance as consumers during making purchases and hence; practice consumer sovereignty. As a result, the objective of the study succeeded in involving them as a homogeneous entity. They embody a regime of ‘looking at things’ as much as ‘buying them as has been discussed in detail in the fifth chapter.

The aim was achieved conducting a field work at a market place. As a sociological actor is seen as embedded in a network of social relations at the time he or she engages in market transactions. Hence, the sociological view affirms two elements, first the individual actor is decisively influenced by social ties and second that the individual’s actor dependence on social ties is necessary in order for him or her to accomplish a given goal1.

This supports the finding that the market is seen as an *impersonal* mechanism or means of coordination that allows social order to emerge from the 'anarchy of diverse individual desires'. Moreover, the attempt to find particular outcomes is self-defeating: no authority can know and control the infinite individual self-interests. In brief, Markets provide a compressed display of an area's economy, technology and society —"the local way of life". Thus, the findings of this study supported the markets to be an agent reflecting the behavioral patterns of consumption in relation to their socio-cultural connotations. This also holds true as no one can escape forces of market as well as those of the audio-visual imagery.

6.5. The Way Forward:

Lifestyles are likely to be complicated mixtures of different kinds of consumption as they are material expressions of people’s identity. However, the perceptions about actual consumption patterns on certain goods and services provide reliable insights into the lifestyles. For this, there is need to examine the subject in detail as analyzed by background variables. Consumption patterns and ideologies can be studied as a result of proper blend of economy vis-à-vis socio-cultural factors. Typical of modern consumerism is to spend qualitatively on social life and different leisure-related items, such as eating and drinking out, travel, sports and culture. Contrary to the popular belief that they spend more than average on elaborate goods and services conceived as hedonism. The study helped to evaluate the above mentioned as myth.

However, it would be a misconception to evaluate India’s growth through its IT/BPO which accounts to only 2.5% of total GDP today. India has begun to develop into an important consumer market with over 16.9 trillion Indian rupees($370 billion) in spending in 2005(Mckinsey 2007). Thus, the core assumption is that consumer culture alone is not what connotes consumerism. However, there is a need to study modern cultural practices which changes gradually. Although this methodological approach is not sufficient, it certainly can

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2 Herbert M. Edler 1976 *Markets as Mirrors " in Markets in Osaco.(ed.).* Scott Cook and Martin Diskin. Austin University Of Texas Press p-76.
act as a yardstick. There is also ample literature on traditional categories which should be kept in mind to understand the modern connotations of consumption. It is more likely that many individuals are not fully aware of their transformation and therefore they assume that they control their practices. What is obvious, here, is that consumers are not particularly individualistic. The modern practices are influenced by different social and demographic as well as ‘generalized others’. They are restrained economically. Though mass media creates a picture of digitalized era, much emphasis is indeed on the crowd behaviour of Jameson’s *hypercrowd* (1991) and the socio-psychological determinants.

Finally, future research is part of interdisciplinary study of social sciences and should be treated as one unit. The appropriate method is qualitative as well as quantitative, so as to uncover the conscious vis-à-vis conscious decision making of the individuals. In the beginning, I was thinking in terms of separate questionnaire as well interview schedule, however that would have segregated consumers before the findings of the study itself. Thus, I chose to categorize markets as a unit on which agencies of mass media influences and shapes our consumption practices. Initially, there was little understanding of the discrepancy that resurfaced later between interview schedules and questionnaire. Moreover this acted as a precursor to initiate a study that corrobated the hypocritical necessity of modern times. The significance of this lies in the fact that the responses written in questionnaire differed with the informal discussion represented the dilemmas of the urban life that comes into play as well.