Chapter One

Introduction

"Every Man builds his world in his own image. He has the power to choose, but no power to escape the necessity of choice" - Ayn Rand

The central thematic concern of this study is to highlight the interrelationship between consumerism and consumption. Consumption is a "natural" part of lifestyle. Traditionally, consumption is seen as a material process rooted in human biological needs but when its practice is mediated through symbols and signs; it is defined as consumerism. The institution and rituals have made this consumption of more elaborate goods and services possible and has assumed an overwhelming significance in modern society. The key aspect of the market era is that consumption occurs with preconceptions in mind. Firstly, in relation amongst objects (Baudrillard 1996(1960); and secondly implicit negotiations with putative consumers. The former is largely approachable structurally, the latter analytically. The thrust is to conduct a sociological study of 'consumerism' as a byproduct of social structures (market and advertisement), discourses of the 'self' and various issues within their socio-cultural and historical context.

Consumption is to 'use-up' entirely\(^1\). The ever-increasing attitude to improve one's lifestyle by possessing material goods is consumption of contemporary times. Consumerism defined here is an activity which has its own icons, objects, brand names, and marketing campaigns for the broad mass of the population. This has little to do with a spurious distinction between wants and needs, a purported creation of needs by advertising, or a moral discourse on frivolity except from a few Marxist theoretical discourses. On the contrary, it had everything to do with a reconfiguration of class politics in the contemporary era. The consumption practices are increasingly replacing class positions, in terms of relocating individuals in social order. The parameters of a 'Human development Report' is per capita consumption expenditure instead of per capita income. To capture an individual's command over resources and opportunities to facilitate in other

\(^{1}\) This is the literate definition of consumption in encyclopedia's and consumption readers as well. This has been discussed in detail in the third chapter explaining the dictionary meaning of consumption in English language.
aspects of well being. Average consumption expenditure is direct and better measure of economic well-being than per capita income. This in itself is a sufficient reason to conduct a study on consumption patterns of urban area. The process constitutes an approach revolving around notion of the self with multiple identities and group affiliations. Interestingly, society has access to the most commonest denominator to consumption i.e. money. Thus, the entire exercise is to study individual in a socio-cultural practice underlying one’s consumption practices.

1.1. Consumerism and Consumption:

Though consumption is inherent in consumerism yet it entails quite different connotations. For example to wear a pair of Levis or wearing a Rado signify status more than utility. These are useful illustrations for examining objects in relation to wider universe of meanings. Thus, the ‘use of things’ does not hold a lone importance in relation to the contemporary consumerism. The functional or use-value is transformed into a culturally significant symbolic value that assumes an economic exchange value (Corrigan 1997). Therefore, sign acts as social agency within a system of signification. Such significations turn arbitrary categories into seemingly natural elements of the material world. However, semiotics does not provide the absolute social explanations. More often it answers the ‘how’ questions of sign system but it does not answer the ‘why’ questions. To provide a social explanation, we need to connect the sign system to social structures like capitalism, consumerism and family and so on and so forth. It is suggested that consumerism facilitates individuals to express their values and make public statements about self-image, social status and personal identity.

Consumption is as ancient as human civilization. Traditionally consumption was explained by rational choices based on objective utilization of the commodity purchased. Also it was more restricted to a specific class, caste and community for their elite tastes. Primary use value of commodities was central and considered over and above. While the

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2 The above names refer to a particular kind of jeans in relation to other brands of jeans, such as other Numero uno, wrangler etc. Similarly the word ‘Rado’ signify rich, trendy, and famous which classifies the world into rich and not so rich distinctive cultures and the differential values they represent such as (‘Levis’ signifies American commercial dominance, whereas ‘Rado’ watch signifies elite culture and ‘status’ worth lakhs of rupees.)
want to consume was nothing new, "[i]t was the ability to do so, which was new" in eighteenth century England and other places (Hutchinson 1983:2) Saving and being frugal was the norm for most and spending on "luxuries" was typically the forte of a handful of people. Of course, the wealthy elite of the earlier times would spend heavily and extravagantly as they had done for centuries. However, this also acted as a one of agents of social control. The pride exhibited in consumption was on account of being able to stand apart from the rest. Whereas, modern consumerism reveals a definite distinction from traditional consumption for a number of reasons stated below:

1. The emergence of modern consumerism is linked to the provision of mass goods rather than luxury goods. Therefore, their overall impact on society is greater and not limited to a relatively limits number of elites.

2. The choice between commodities is not based on utility but on the sign or the ethos they exude.

3. Built in obsolescence is the acquired trait of consumerism. For this reason commodities have a shorter shelf life even though their utility value lasts longer.

Commodities constantly balance between individuality and interdependence. Most important are the reference groups playing an active part in the whole process. One of the significant applications of consumerism is distinction and identification. Consumption stresses these differences as crucial in the development of identity in contemporary society. Contrary to earlier times, identity is always under construction through unlimited possibilities of horizontal and vertical mobility. Consumerism has become a powerful and evocative symbol of contemporary capitalism. Subsequently, commodification dominates societal interaction through its signs and symbols diffusing across all class relations. In contemporary consumerism there are preferred reference groups that may contrast with each other. There is an apparent insecurity in young people’s lives of contemporary society by means of market that are perpetuated by the mass media in their process of mass consumption. In class category there are diverse choices available depending upon the signs the commodities evoke. The distinguishing feature is not

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3 Comodification is a process further extended by elimination of the differences between production and consumption resulting in complete alienation in the capitalist regime. And referring to it produces transformations to all aspects of objects in a wider universe of meanings. Therefore deconstructing all social relations to mere nothing but ‘material status’ as a reference is commodification.
absolute exclusivity but brand membership. This is what separates traditional consumption from consumerism. The idea even at the elite level is not to stand alone, but to have an utility through perpetuation with significant others. The use of goods is to recognize the symbolic aspects of consumption to make socially vital statements about status, deference, and the psycho-social need for humans to live beyond the classic necessities of food, shelter, clothing, intimacy, and sex.

This can be explained simply by recognizing that many objects have dual material and social functions. For instance, the latest launched Rolls Royce-Phantom Coupe\(^4\), certainly provides transportation, along with the fastest ride and considerable horsepower, but it also tells observers that the owner is ultra wealthy. The notion of frivolity in consumption has been artificially constructed by disparaging audience as an implicit inversion of its opposite (virtuous functionality). Leaving aside, the fact, that the content of what is defined as functional depends on what the maker or observer of an object intends to possess. For instance, a Maruti 800 car may be functional in terms of keeping budget intact but dysfunctional in terms of fast engine power and speed. Historians of technology could easily catalogue thousands of functionally superb devices that for reasons of material infrastructure and cultural practices have failed. For this reason, functionally better object doesn't necessarily succeed. In contrast to, meanings of things attributed to consumption and consumerism, it becomes a matter of social analysis. Moreover, it is about the ways in which meanings attributed to things add relevance to understand social relation and social order.

Consumption is part of the cultural reproduction of social relations, a concrete process carried out through social practices in mundane life. The sociology of consumption, 'translates the object from being a symbol of estrangement and price value to being an artifact invested with particular inseparable connotations'. The substantive focus of consumerism is material culture (especially mass culture) of advanced capitalist societies (Marshall 1987:112). Initially a product of western societies, it got diffused to other parts of the world as well. There can be many factors behind the spread of consumerism including commercialisation of festivals, holidays, family relationships through advertisements and product indifferentiation. Consumerism is articulated within

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\(^4\) This model of Rolls Royce, is the newly launched super luxury car in India. It is also famous for using the reindeer fur seats and its ultra sleek look as well as engine, and is also very expensive.
specific meaningful ways of life, for example, no one eats ‘food’ – they eat apples and biscuits; no one just wears – they use brands or imitations in fashion. It is through specific forms of consumption that we produce and reproduce cultures, social relations and indeed societies.

The focus of ‘consumerism’ is material culture of advanced capitalist societies is probably obvious here. However, consumerism is not to be seen in negative light rather it adds new dimension apart from its utility. Consumption strongly linked with desires besides its functional utility is consumerism. The basis of consumerism is to explore the multiple ways people engage themselves in several other aspects of their lives through their day to day consumption. Therefore generating new needs of goods and services is consumerism. In short, in certain respects we need to annihilate the distinction between consumption and consumerism, and then revive it as a specific blend. This is to show the simultaneous affirmation and denial of a link between consumerism and consumption which further helps us to understand the role in shaping material objects. So far, however, we have only tangentially recognized the social and cultural agendas over which negotiation might proceed.

Consumption and consumerism can be joined by a conceptual fashion in the ways suggested by Baudrillard, consumption is actually the production of identities— an "economic" act is simultaneously a "cultural" one. In Baudrillard's postmodernist analysis, the specific juxtaposition of image-artifacts, a meaningful conglomeration of meanings, constructs individualized meanings. By this token, the bien pensant bourgeoisie of the 1920s would construct her identity by her tea sets or cafetières, her heavy velour curtains, her subservient Breton servant girls, and her late-aristocratic gestures. Similarly, the modernist woman would identify herself by her appliances, her job, her education, her cloche hat, and her drop-waist shift-dress. The status symbols of earlier times have become increasingly meagre to convey meanings to the heterogeneous group of people in contemporary times. As initially, the objects were the family’s material belongingness which were circulated and inherited within the confines of one family. McCracken(1988) explains this through his account of a consumer in traditional times and how the binding of a commodity to a highly restricted sphere of circulation was made. Moreover, it suffers from a basic a historicism: we have no way of analyzing
change or of knowing really how such a system of objects and meanings came to be. There is, as if no evidence it.

In other words, it is likely, then, that people now buy goods from the market rather than inherit them. So the above holds true only before the creation of the modern marketplace. However, these standards do not entirely fade away, they merely lie dormant for a while until they are resurfaced. Especially, when the new benchmarks of fashion and lifestyle appear on clothing, accessory and others, often possessed by the one who is capable to buy. For example, a *Rolex* (wrist watch), though not a property per se, can be passed to the coming generation as it holds symbolic value besides the use-value of its own. The obvious use-value of a watch is to know the time, but its symbolic-value is much beyond the time frame and is that of a possession of a classy and expensive brand of a watch. Beyond exchange value and use value lies perhaps signifying value. Signifying-value is what we should call use-value, when an object has uses way beyond the obvious ones connected to its concrete form (Corrigan 1997:35). The use-value of a *Gucci* sweater is to keep one warm but its symbolic value may be tied to the fact that it belongs to the possessor as a value object as well.

Leaving aside the fact that the content of what is defined as functional depends on what the maker or observer of an object intends to optimize toward—an *SST* airplane may be functional in terms of transit time but dysfunctional in terms of fuel consumption—we know that the functionally better object doesn't necessarily succeed. What, really frames a consumers' preference, when buying something equally at par with each other (brands carrying similar symbolic value). The overall set of cultural meanings and ways of constructing the world, as well as conventional social practices, prescribe the possible meanings of objects as well as the forms they might take. Subsequently, the question is, why some buy a *BMW* and some an *Audi* (cars), though they both are newly launched technologically advanced cars. This essentially problematises the subject of this study on consumerism. At this juncture, Bourdieu's (1984[1979]) ideas can be referred. Lifestyle as a whole is a combinations of different objects and practices and different classes are characterised by particular collection or packages of specific goods and activities. At one point of time one can splurge on a pair of *Diesel* denims, when the rest of your trousers are locally made or bought from a mart. This one object might be totally out of place with the rest of your possessions but form an integral part of your desired lifestyle. Any
commodity may cease to be treated as a commodity once it is purchased because it becomes inserted into a particular world where it has its own place as an object with particular qualities (Corrigan 1997:36).

The consumer can afford a particular thing but not the whole package, it still makes one feel part of the desired lifestyle. This sort of desires exist in one’s imagination and takes the form of concrete reality only by possessing specific objects. In this perspective, objects represent bridges to these lifestyle. These bridges serve as proof of the existence of this style of life and even as proof of the individual’s ability to lay claim on it (McCraken 1988:111). The common position here is not that desires and longings (of the masses in particular) are denied but are constructed and interpreted in relationship with each other. For example, Diesal denims will not blend with the rest of your wardrobe. In order to avoid this, the longing for another object begins as part of the ongoing urge, which then suffers the same fate.

In this way, the consumption with one object after another begins, as each stands for the ideal and then drowned in the real. This holds true for the masses as they collect what is rare and different which wealthy alone might obtain to carry forward the legacy. These also act as motivation factors to possess a particular brand of clothes or a set of furniture, a Swiss watch and so on and so forth. Most of us can never find ourselves in a position, and the world of consumer goods manages to offer us an alternative. There are always higher levels of consumption to which we can aspire, and thus it never gets exhausted. The use of goods to recover displaced meanings is one of the engines of consumption in modern society (McCraken 1988:115). Therefore, the emphasis is on analysing the social, political and cultural aspects of consumerism through the lens of marketplace. The study clears the myth relating to hedonistic consumption and creation of false needs by advertising, as the sole purpose of consumerism. In addition, it has further helped to dispose of the moral discourse about the contemporary consumption as frivolous and not so quite required.

Consumption is an integral part of our day to day lives. Commodities change its form and enter a different domain of social understanding once it is purchased. Consumerism not only offers, but also continually fulfils its promise of everyday solutions to problems whose origins may lie elsewhere (Nava 1991:165). The argument here is that people are not easily duped by advertisement (of a particular
product and as claimed), rather they consume advertisement (capable to offer certain image) regardless of what is being sold. The study deals with the way these consumers play an active part by responding and providing feedback to these producers (for the latest fashion as well). Thus, the desiring and buying of things create social conformity and acquiescence. In this line what we have just said, advertising is primarily about conveying signs than utility. Though this manipulation is not the final determinant of all consumption practices, it is highly influential in most of cases. In the same way, the material aspect of consumption cannot be dismissed totally but it is superimposed and consumerist considerations relayed through signs.

The earliest and most influential sociological account of commodities is that they relate exclusively to each other hiding the fact that they are products of human labour (Marx). Instead, it is Marx's less developed ideas about the relation of 'commodity fetishism' that have laid groundwork for the twentieth century thought. In the sense, that the above prerogative affirms human beings in actuality into particular relations with each other. However, they expressed much condemnation for mass consumption in similar elitist terms. Much of the work have been drawn quite heavily upon the materiality of the symbolic, however, different in the sense referred to above. Indeed, consumerism has become a powerful and influential prototype of the contemporary capitalism and the modern world. Highly visible, its imagery permeates the physical and cultural territories it occupies. Also, in common it stresses the legitimisation of the consumer and its active consumption by them. Poststructuralist and postmodernist analyses which stress the overwhelming significance of the sign have of course been very influential here, particularly Baudrillard's work on consumption. The subject revolves around the notion of Baudrillard(1988), in which he argues a notion of the 'social' as nothing other than the play of signs which have no referent in 'reality' but only derive their meanings from themselves and each other.

By twenties, it was clear that a new social and cultural phenomenon, consumerism, had emerged. The fifties saw an unprecedented growth of consumer society, a term which signifies not just affluence and the expansion of products and markets, but also the increasing penetration of the meanings and images associated with the consumption into the culture of everyday life (Nava1991:161). More specifically, the seventies and eighties produced a different perspective in which the consumer and
consumption recognizes the potential power of consumerism. In order to arrive at this point in the theoretical narrative it becomes necessary to transverse the established textual context of consumption.

After the World War II the nature of consumption began to change dramatically. The consumption of luxury commodities was, by and large, limited to the tastes and affordability of the elites. Though it may have been possible for the elites in traditional period to buy the then expensive gold in kilos, or to wear the indigenous silks, it was generally a minority group that indulged in such behaviour. While the cultural and social aspirations of its framers were to render it emulative, it tended often, especially in the US, to be self-referential, forming the basis for a specifically working-class consumer culture. Moreover, given the income distribution and total disposable incomes in the industrialized world at the time, mass consumerism required goods that could be cheapened through mass production techniques.

The “crisis” of over-production in the nineteenth century created a platform from which consumption grew and spread to an enormous number of people and helped create mass consumerism. Since production is such an essential part of the culture of capitalism, society quickly adapted to the crisis by convincing people to buy things. By altering basic institutions and even generating a new ideology of pleasure, the economic crisis of the late nineteenth century was solved, but at considerable expense of transforming labourers as consumers.

There certainly is a difference between traditional consumption and consumerism. While consumer goods were the key mark of distinction for this social stratum and the department store was its icon. The pattern of middle-class consumption remained largely emulative, purchasing mechanically-reproduced knock-offs of elite goods, from clothes to carriages, furniture to fantasies. The emergence of modern consumerism is linked with accumulation of mass goods rather than just high end luxury goods (Weber 1958:265-267). The emphasis of luxury for a relatively small wealthy groups in the past is replaced by large number on items catering to a wider market. This implies two things:

Firstly, the goods possess a shorter life span. Secondly, Consumerism has labelled goods and services by attaching social status to these goods such as certain clothing and
accessories; certain food and drinks; certain home décor and lifestyles. Watching a particular TV advertisement also convinces the consumers that it will ensure social acceptance from their offspring, peers and so forth. Certain goods have high symbolic value, and by its possession a kind of vicarious group duty is creak. Whether the reason for consumption is emulation, indulgence, social status or a mix of all these, our society is in a constant hunt of self-expression through these consumer goods. The nature of the process is such that disillusionment sets in soon after you consume a commodity and the desire to fetch a new one creeps in your system. As such there will never be a psychological satisfaction after the acquisition of the product itself. Thus, the whole cycle of desire, achievement and desire again continuously follow each other. This pattern, whereby people consume for reasons beyond what they need in order to belong to a certain strata or a group, is the organising principle consumerism today.

1.2. Aims and Objectives of the Study:

The aim of this study is to conduct a sociological study of “markets” in relation to consumerism and not only consumption. Consumption is embedded within system of signs and symbols and of making and maintaining distinctions by establishing boundaries between various groups which is true of traditional times too. Thus, the research attempts to study consumerism and various related issues within their socio-cultural and historical context.

Consumers are those who buy for themselves or on behalf of their family, friends and others. In consumer markets, the number of potential buyers of a product is often a significant proportion of the total population running into millions. For the purpose of this study consumer markets are further sub-divided into shopping malls, supermarkets and local bazaars. Therefore, a fair estimation of the ascending consumerism and its parameters is analyzed in its various forms. The study of consumption patterns of individuals in the market place is an agency to investigate various issues confronting them. Fieldwork is carried out in a locale which is not like the traditional anthropological empirically bounded community (say a tribe, a village, or an urban neighbourhood). Advertising is also an integrated aspect of our study. In our fieldwork we ask how our respondents interpret messages conveyed through billboards, magazines, television. This will help us to chart out the role of advertisement especially, when all the commodities
are the same in relation to their utility. After all advertising is a type of cultural production too.

1.3. Methodology of the Study:

Data is collected primarily through fieldwork conducted in Delhi and Gurgaon. Other primary and secondary sources include the socio-cultural accounts and available sources of literature. The attempt is made to interpret the experience of the consumerism by scrutinizing the roles of buyers and sellers in a market economy. Techniques used to research these markets include quantitative methods based on rigorous sampling as well as qualitative techniques that explore complex consumer perceptions and motivations of consumers and the sellers in markets (bazaars, malls). This necessitated the use of both structured and unstructured questionnaires. We proposed to survey 150 consumers through questionnaires, 50 respondents in each of the market category. The study also takes the help of focus group discussions. There will be a comparative analysis co-existing heterogeneous markets and of their embedded relationships. The analysis is based on the data collected on the grounds of income levels of the consumers. We have made extensive use of exclusive access to the Market Information Survey of Households (MISH) database created from income surveys conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER1998) covering over 30,000 households, as well as the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) database created from consumer expenditure survey across thousands of villages and urban blocks. Thus, integrated the MISH and NSSO data with our own data set. This includes the identification of consumers in three categories of markets as shopping malls, central markets and the local bazaars. Alongside, the role of media and expenditure statistics will be analysed as a catalyst in buying spree, preference and the degree of influence of advertisements. Further, bringing a comparative scales of market as their preference sites for shopping in Delhi and Gurgaon, the markets are again divided as ideal types. For this purpose markets have been classified into three categories: local bazaar (nearby); central market (town); and a mall (urban)\(^5\):

\(^5\) In order to survey a sample to be the representative of the larger society, heterogeneous markets are covered in this survey. As differential categories permeating all social relations, classes, and strata of the society diffused in various forms of markets as per their need and wants.
> A Local or a Next Door Market (subject to the location selected): In developing countries like India—local market provides an opportunity not only for its sale and purchase but also for its social contact. A next door market in a suburban area is chosen to analyse the development of imitation, filtering down of brand labels through advertisements at the lowest levels. They were essentially to fulfils the limited wants of the local people. The elements of caste, class and influence of family and peer groups and other social specifications acting in making consumer decisions are manifest here. This market is based on informal relationship placed in spatial context.

> A Central Market or a “Bazaar” (the localized market accommodating the huge chunk of middle class): A ‘bazaar’ or a semi-urban market denotes more of a communitarian attitude than personalized relationship dominating the consumerist preference. This category of markets provide wholesale and retail business held regularly at certain specific places known as shopping centres or bazaars. The ‘we feeling’ is strongly persistent, and the role of market plays a crucial role in the social structure of urban lifestyle and its economy.

> A Truly Urban Market ‘Shopping Mall’: (the showcasing of products and commodities in glass showrooms as an access to the elite population): A truly urban market is appropriate to study the upsurge of the commodities of big companies, exhibiting an acculturation among diverse brands and fashion houses. In order to provide quick service these malls provide sales technique, greater attention to consumers, increased floor space, wide display of commodities to be chosen properly by the consumers. Hence, a perfect site to analyse the spectacle of the shopping fest acting as an active site for consumerism. Consumers changed from active haggler (who would only go into a shop if needed something) to acceptors of fixed prices. They can freely circulate amongst commodities without being obliged to buy. In Corrigan terms, “the democratization of luxury” (Corrigan 1987:50) commenced treating everyone equally.
1.4. Sampling of the Study:

Respondents were selected on the basis of snowball sampling. Though the entire exercise took extra time to establish the links provided in the market place as each respondent further introduced me to their acquaintance. In preliminary stage a focus group discussion was held at intervals to bring the clarity regarding the focus of the study. Thereafter, initial contacts were made with few of the respondents. After making the initial contact an informal interview, open ended and in-depth discussion was initiated. Most often such conversation lasted for about 1-2 hours per respondent. In case of the middle, upper middle and low middle income groups, the discussion stretched on middle class behavioural patterns as well. There was no difficulty while recording high and low income class respondents as both these categories weren’t interested to talk in detail. Certainly, the former portrayed to be busy and expressed displeasure whereas the lower class had nothing much innovative to share and were uncomfortable with this methodology.

Nonetheless, the respondents in general were bought at ease and were often swayed by relating their life stories in reference to their significant others as well. These life stories acted as case studies, which is further being analysed in broader context in the methodology. Consequently, these instances provided the basis of understanding the interpersonal relationship with the world of objects.

1.5. Data Collection of the Study:

Data is collected primarily from the fieldwork conducted in Delhi and Gurgaon. The samples were collected between July 2007 to February 2008. Keeping in mind the heterogeneous nature of markets, the complexity was resolved by dividing it into three substantial categories. It is necessary to take a closer look at the frequency of shopping and the preferred shopping places using different demographic (gender, age, type of education, number of good friends, social vulnerability), economic categories (income) and attitudes towards shopping (recreational, perfectionist, fashion conscious). An explanatory model on shopping frequency and locations among consumers is designed. The data is obtained from a sample of 150 respondents, (consumers), 50 from each market category. For this purpose, as we said earlier, both quantitative and qualitative
methods are used. The questionnaire comprised of 30 structured questions with 5-6 alternative answers based on the preference scale of the consumers. Keeping in mind the wideness of the study the research questions are further divided into seven sections to coordinate the consistency of the subject. They are as follows:

- Preference of Markets.
- Consumer Non Durables.
- Fast Moving Consumer Goods.
- White Goods (Electronic Goods).
- Leisure Activities (Eating out)

Furthermore, the respondents are categorized on the basis of the five annual household disposable income brackets borrowed from MISH survey of NCAER. Though they provide income distribution at a disaggregate level, they are certain adjustments based on the proportion of their social class. The five income bracket used in this research are as follows:

- Lower class less than 35000
- Low Middle class: 35000-70,000.
- Middle Class: 70,0001-105,000.
- Upper Middle Class: 105,0001-140,000.
- Higher Class greater than 140,000.

This research is conducted predominantly in local languages (Hindi and English). This involves the compilation of a thorough bibliography of published literature, data and statistics, and archival sources on consumption. Recent archival sources are also accessed through web-based links to consumption agencies. All the above results are tested on the SPSS package for accuracy and to avoid useless repetitions. Hopefully, this effort should help in producing a comparative study of markets in Delhi and Gurgaon.

1.6. Limitations of the Study:

The most problematic issue during this work was the differential findings as a result of the structured questionnaire and the unstructured interviews conducted as part of the fieldwork. The respondents gets swayed upon by the commodities when filling the questionnaire and behave logically otherwise. Another limitation was the unequal
distribution of sample in terms of age, gender and income groups. Although it was quite difficult to get the uniform sample size in the market area, we have classified the consumer groups. Fieldwork is the most significant aspect of research. But it is a gruelling task, when conducted in a metropolitan city like Delhi and Gurgaon. The research aimed at finding face to face interviews difficult to organize. The subject is complex and demands a personal briefing which was time consuming to arrange the scattered consumers in the markets. Also, there was always paucity of time with these consumers and they were least interested to assist an academic study. Most often, either the families felt intruding of me to barge into their leisure time or the young mixed group felt too useless to devote time for a survey. This is a major reason for the research to take recourse to snowball sampling.

However, interestingly, an implicit reason was the discomfort from their sides which made me exhausted at times. Also because the study took extra time and long conversations for them to get convinced to respond seriously to get recorded. This will explain why the study resulted in narration form in between the analysis. Here the number of female respondents are also more as compared to their counterparts. Hence, due to an unequal number of male and female respondents of different classes, there are bound to be gaps in the this work.

The cost of carrying out questionnaires and discussions in the markets also proved to be really high. This research had been designed to gain a better understanding of the consumer influenced by advertisement as well rather than their respective marketing strategies. Hence, respondents needed more time to consider their answers for the analysis of advertisements, logos and caption lines to present a deeper understanding of the validity of a response.

Furthermore, the quantitative and qualitative data are found to be at variance throughout. As they debated at length in the preliminary stage of the research in Focus Group discussion and helped in finding the appropriate path for the actual subject. Significantly, the interview schedules proved more fruitful because of the substantial discussion and honest confessions projecting actual values and beliefs of a respondent. Therefore, more emphasis has been laid on the qualitative data. The information gathered
from questionnaire are more generalised and presents a macro view, from the minute
details presented in the informal rounds.

Consumption occurs with certain preconceptions in mind as a result of implicit
negotiations with fellow consumers. The practices are shaped by negotiated meanings of
these objects in the market economy. The study is further divided into two processes.
Firstly, the study makes mandatory selection of these objects in a complex fashion in its
methodology. And secondly, the historical emergence of not only mediations (influences
and advertisements), but the capacities of the market to mediate in the capitalist economy
existed simultaneously. This was made possible through techniques borrowed from
cultural anthropology, the second, through economic sociology. The former is largely
approachable structurally, the latter historically in the discussed chapters.

1.7. Conceptualizing Consumerism:

Consumption is a flow of information that integrates people into an intelligible
social world. Yet goods can be used for exclusion as well as inclusion of identities (as in
‘good taste’). In addition, consumer culture creates a contemplative attitude, based on
having rather than doing or making or being. Though Aristotle and Marx understood of
commodities as having use-value and exchange-value; Baudrillard sees commodities as
possessing status or "sign" value. Objects are not merely functional (that is, they do not
exist only for their use-value), but signify certain things. An object understood in terms of
its functions has a very practical relationship to the world like sweater, for example, keeps
you warm. The fact, that object is my sweater provides a meaningful dimension. The
messages communicated to consumers is embedded in their respective acts of
consumption. They in turn are themselves the intended recipients of these messages.
Veblen (1929) sees "emulation" as a key feature of social life in contemporary western
societies of consumerist standards. Those members of the community who fall short of
this somewhat indefinite, normal degree of prowess or of property suffer in the esteem of
their fellow-men; and consequently they suffer also in their own esteem, since the usual
basis of self-respect is the respect accorded by one’s neighbours” (Baudrillard 1988:324).
In contemporary western societies those who fall short of consumerist standards suffer in
esteem How Baudrillards’ is relevant in consumer study.? How does that help to reinforce
consumer society He claims that consumption is a system of meanings and communication hence all meanings ultimately lead to a structural phenomenon.

In contemporary times some sort of image is believed to be of prime significance in the minds of individuals. In this perspective the purchased commodity reveals this impulse and acts as agents in satiating their ego. Subsequently, the modern individual’s preference may vary from his fathers’ generation. However, a pair of *Levis* jeans may not top the preference criteria for the modern generation as compared to a pair of Armani or any other famous brand. We all dream of a world which is imagined and goes well with their cultural standards. Baudrillard signifies consumption as a sense of identity (ibid: 156). In this sense, consumers attain the identity of the commodities that they consume with respect to class, status and identity.. Especially, when we quite not attain something, it can exist with us as a way of gradually attaining that lifestyle in a coarse of time. Similar to Bourdieu ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu 1979), whereby various consumer goods, ways of presenting food, eating meals, home furnishing are used by socio-economic classes to mark themselves off. The significance of Bourdieu’s work stems from his attempts to understand the cultural nature of consumption without either collapsing consumer culture into abstract sign systems (à la Barthes and Baudrillard) or reducing it to a reflection of pre-existent social order (à la Douglas). In the process, one object gets settled in the strange world of your culture. Here we can refer Bourdieus’ lifestyle as a whole combination of different objects and practises. Different classes are characterised by particular collection or packaging specific good and activities (Bourdieu 1984[1979]). In this way, objects act as a bridge to the desired lifestyle which later suffers the same fate of getting obsolete the moment it is purchased. Thus, the world of commodities again reaches its higher levels of inspiring individuals to aim higher. Whereas Daniel Bell views consumerism of the "new capitalism" as creating hedonistic sensibilities contradictory to capitalist purposes, to which Baudrillard argues in any way it is degraded by the culturalizing of culture⁶.

A consumer society signifies affluence and increasing production and expansion of markets. But it also implies the increasing penetration of meanings and images associated with consumption into the culture of everyday life (op.cit. Nava 1991:161). Are not meaning and differentiation precisely this sort of culturalizing processes? For

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⁶ The concept of being different from others often results in the segregation of a specific cultural mode of life through the mode of material objects. (Baudrillard 1988)
Marx, commodities were fetishes because, as exchange values (as opposed to as use-values), they make concrete labour abstracted. Bourdieu differs from Marxist for he is interested in how culture actively enters into the formation of class itself with the complex economic, social and cultural battles through which the classificatory systems gain or lose social legitimacy. Objects, then, are clearly not merely functional nor can their meanings be exhausted by invoking exchange-value. Thus, in the succeeding sections it is understood that objects infuse systematically and deliberately meanings other than their obvious ones.

1.8. Role of Advertisements and Dynamics of Commodities:

The commodity form is essentially the mechanism through which advertising creates meaning and ideology. Advertising is seen ‘to sell’ a consumerist lifestyle or perspective. Advertising is aimed at creating consumer perspectives by an active competition between signs. Accordingly, advertising forms a major social control mechanism that motivate and manipulates the ‘affluent worker’, and transforms the person into the consumer (Marx 1906). We can identify two interesting dimensions in this process:

First, advertisements are seen to structure wider social meanings so that they produce commodity sign value. In other words, an advertisement takes a human value or emotion, and turns it into a metaphor or symbol that can be commodified. For example, Mercedes, Ferrari, Rolls Royce and BMW cars are associated with wealth, status and sophistication. Second, advertising today increasingly incorporates feminism and ecology into the commodity culture. For instance, advertisements play on women’s group independence or sexual autonomy, presenting women with products (e.g. make-up and clothes), which can control their appearances, equating this with control over their life and future. This is commodity feminism.

The centrality of sign-value of commodities in contemporary consumption has already been discussed above. Advertisements create space and needs even when the use-value is not up front. Advertising, packaging and design mark out new desires and pleasures for the consumer that have very little to do with the utility of goods or their ability to satisfy needs. Indeed advertising or the system of sign value of commodities establishes a new dominant form of social communication in which consumers are forced to consume. There is a complex inter- lay of values playing alongside the advertisement and the desire
of a commodity. For instance a shampoo bought for necessity is consumption but *L’oreal* for advertisement is consumerism. They recurrently tap into the desire of potential consumers if sales are to be made. This is particularly true for fast moving consumer goods but includes almost all consumer products like soaps, washing detergents, clothing patterns and entertainment as well. The symbols are in line with the potential of consumer’s own way of life. The symbolic aspects of goods acquire meanings but the mode of such meanings and the role these meanings play in the lives of consumers is the basis of this study. The modern consumer marketing is termed as the engine of the consumer revolution. But does it treat everyone equally in making them buy the vicarious worlds they digitalize on TV screen? What is increasingly clear is the sense in which it targets specific socio-economic sections of the society. Hence it is contradictory to consumerism where everyone is treated equally or at least an effort is made to create a homogeneous entity of consumers. On the other hand, the economic definition of advertising varies as ‘any sponsored, paid communication placed in a mass medium vehicle’ (Keegan 1998:554).

Consumers relate to the meanings and values associated with particular commodities and the consumer lifestyles revolve around them. Advances in mass production in the consumer goods sector were linked with the developments in retailing and growth advertising and consumer marketing. Advertising, packaging and design were central in balancing the expansion of supply generated by the productivity gains of mass production of consumer demand for new mass-produced products. In the 1970s and 1980s, a crisis in mass production (or ‘Fordism’) led to a new economic era dominated by flexible manufacturing techniques, and new national and international economic regulation. Importantly, flexible specialization is more market-led than mass production. This amounts to greater focus on consumers being highly responsive to their demands. However, it fails to suggest how contemporary advertising, packaging and design are different from early industrial times.

Consumption is an age old phenomenon but as we have argued consumerism is definitely contemporary. In the 1980s, ‘creative advertising’ emerged, and led to a more ‘image-led’ style of advertising. They were producing advertisements that worked directly at the level of identity and desire constructing a vision that consumers can aspire to. Before ‘creative advertising’, ‘classic advertising’ identified the product’s unique selling point. For example, under classical advertising, a toothpaste unique feature is to
make teeth whiter and shinier than the rest. Under, creative advertising, focus is on how the toothpaste gives self-belief and confidence. Sociologists and market researchers have shown through content analysis of advertisements and articles how printed texts and images are important in socializing people to be consumers even before the goods were widely available. They colonize the imagination with lifestyle vision creating a familiarity in which potential consumers may envisage themselves at home. Thus content analysis of ads for new housing in Shanghai shows how marketers target a broad public across most income levels while conveying the sense of a stratified housing market, in which each income level finds its own "oasis" (Fraser 2000:32-33).

The modern hedonism is directly proportional to pursuit of the pleasure (Campbell 1987). Emotions are stimulated and incited and through the use of imagination consumers are drawn in by advertisements. Nevertheless, advertising conveys message that glorifies the pleasure and freedom of consumer choice. It defends the virtues of private life and material ambition. It idealizes the consumer and consumerism. It holds that freedom, fulfillment and personal transformation lie in the worlds of goods. The latest study conducted by NCAER, reveals that between 1993-94 and 1995-96, the consumption of durable items has increased at an annual rate of 9.6%, (Washing machines, T.V.s), all due to advertising (NCAER 1998). Advertising as ideology is seen 'to sell' a consumerist lifestyle or perspective. Advertisers need to know about the culture of people for whom they plan campaigns. The implication is that if advertising is oblivious to cultural peculiarities, it will be ineffective. The advertising world needs to know the cultural factors to sell to consumers, who may well be recalcitrant. Not only has it become a multi-dollar industry, engaging national and international luminaries, but also the viewers remember and discuss advertisements in the same manner as they discuss films and television serials. Studies are available on consumption as a social practice, and the changes that have surfaced in the Indian consumer markets after they were opened in the early 1990s to several foreign brands.

1.9. Market Space as a Site for Consumerism:

Consumption is indispensable for human beings. The want to consume is to sustain the human race in order to develop skills and abilities required for their survival in the society. However, consumption has evolved as people have ingeniously found ways to help make their lives simpler and/or to use their resources more efficiently. Hence,
consumption patterns have developed over time based on the influence of those who can control it. Though needs may vary from society to society, a reasonable access to food, shelter and protection is a prerequisite of every society. For this, the markets constitute an efficient medium to allocate the goods and services to satisfy the above mentioned needs.

This study is based on consumption in urban space- Delhi and Gurgaon as its field area. To begin with, the behavioral patterns of consumption and consumerism are studied by probing the interrelationship in the market place. Here the emphasis is on the analyzing modern society through the prism of culture of consumption. There is a great deal of agreements that markets are social structures characterized by social relationships. Social relations seemed to be crucial for the functioning of market actors in a myriad ways. Moreover global mass marketing easily detects consumers around the world through Internet, Music Channels, Magazines, and Satellite T.V. programs and so on. Demands are expressed within the constraints of existing market arrangement. They are the nucleus of shaping political attitudes, material cultures and identities simultaneously in this global age. The importance of commercial culture and consumption in families can also be examined through its lens of ‘consumerism’. Thus markets are the most obvious sites for observing the above discussed trends. The functional aspect of markets is not only transfer from the areas of production to areas of consumption, but also transfer into the hands of consumers.

Analysing received literature suggests that, nowadays families spend relatively more money in their children than they did before. Children have a notable although not excessive influence on household purchases. The Market is visualized as a space for exploring the possibilities for social interactions. Hence, the sociological view has two elements,” the individual actor is decisively influenced by social ties and the individual’s actor dependence on social ties is necessary in order for him or her to accomplish a given goal” (Borgatta: 525). 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. Here the markets act as an agent, to reflect the behavioral patterns of consumers and consumption in relation to their socio-cultural connotations. In brief, “markets provide a compressed display of an area’s economy, technology and society as their local way of life” (Cook & Diskin 1976:76).
In this respect, consumption is a crucial form of communication in which people build and present their identity to others. Thus 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 locus on identity. The process of the construction of the self is especially important at a younger age, when people try out different possible identities. Consumption behaviour is an important part of this experimenting process. Of course, this behavior does not occur in a social vacuum but in close interrelation with peer(real and imagined), against the personal background of values and attitudes. Therefore consumerism includes "sense of place" created by size, architecture, grandeur, ambience or the profusion of consumer goods and the stories, trend behind the brands. It emphasizes the importance of consumption in terms of commodities as feel goods rather than real good. There are certain observations regarding the market place as such:

- Consumers may not consciously consider consumption to be a major part of their identities. Hence their true representation reflects and emerges out in the market place.
- Relationships and identities are established through the meanings endowed in them often as a product of complex cultural and social network amongst people.
- Consumption may not provide similar levels of satisfaction at individual levels in asserting an identity as they do in a peer group.
- Meanings are socially constructed so consumers are not independent at the same time they confer the feeling of dependence on references.

The meaning of things matters not only as a way for people to express aspects of their own selves and identities but also as an expression of relationships between selves (friendship, familial bonds, and communal ties). There is a considerable distance between the physical properties of a product (such as alcohol or cigarettes) and its symbolic properties. Meanings of commodities are powerful, and they motivate the consumer to purchase a particular commodity (Adidas, coco cola). To buy a particular style of jeans (say, Levi’s) or newspaper (say, Times of India) suggests the kind of image and status one wants to portray to others. In this sense, all commodities have their own symbolic-value, as well as their particular use-value (utility) and exchange-value (price). The above is only relevant when one has a referral point to display one’s ostentatious consumption to others. Markets are not created by outsiders but instead reflect the social and political
construction of each society. Therefore, the focus is to analyze markets as a social category to unravel the nuances of consumerism in modern age.

Therefore, sign acts as social agency within another system of signification. Such signification's turn arbitrary categories into seemingly natural elements of the material world. However, semiotics does not provide social explanations. It answers The idea of "fashion" helps stirring up of anxieties and restlessness over the possession of things that were not "new" or "up-to-date". Fashion pressures people to buy not out of need but for style -- from a desire to conform to what others define as "fashionable". This support for individualism is seen very valuable because it is a form of subtly imposed social control, whereby it would individualise people in a way that would turn them more inwards. Everyone wants to be different in some kind of a way to give value and meanings to one's own life. The above statement has grown unique since the network of independent people has increased. This is in line with the above argument of ascending consumerism vis-à-vis increases income, affordability and availability.

1.10. Sequencing of the Argument:

Consumerism is often perceived as either the symbol of immoral and exploitative capitalism or the height of pleasure-seeking behaviour. The survey deals with various structured as well as unstructured questions relating to modern consumer. What exactly entails a modern consumer? We need to know who are the self-gratifying consumers? What are their values? What is their socio-demographic background? Indicators for conventional participation related to socio economic resources and gender, usually show a gender gap in various participation acts. The above set of questions were inquired at the market place for consumption activities. Dealing with all sorts of limitations as well as the methodological compulsions data have guided the necessary understanding of consumerism. However, advertisements, income class and cultural standard were some of the other factors responsible for consumption activities. This study broadens the concept of politics to include survey questions on less formal kinds of involvement that acknowledge the role of the market and market actors in mobilizing participation. These issues are rarely tapped in qualitative research. To avoid the problem of classifying all sporadic or even once-only events as meaningful acts we applies to criterion that consumerism acts recur frequently. The demand that shopping choices are motivated by
advertisements and societal pressure avoids the problem of including all consumer motivations as impulsive behaviour.

The second issue we will address concerns the micro-predictors of how modern consumerism is constructed. The area of inquiry examines the value orientations and social embeddedness of consumers. To argue from a theoretical perspective, draws on both the postmodernist and modernist literatures. The process of postmodernism the related shift to more materialist values (concerns for the self reference, hedonism, values of equality and personal gratification, and so on) encourage consumers to find new venues to express their private and public interests and identities. Materialist values are also increasingly linked to demands for more individual autonomy, self-expression, choice among products and services, and political action. Given the fact that this is a research study, it is meant to explore the possibility of consumerist behaviour in 'meaningful ways'.

The third set of inquiry in this study is active role played by the commodities as well as the manipulations played by advertisements. Advertising is significant as it creates products’ meanings and symbols to match consumers’ desires and wants. Also, it is a social tool to study the psychological and social benefits of commodities. Advertisers aimed to create product differentiation, whereby the products are distinguished from their substitutes. Thus significance of goods and advertisements in conceiving consumerism in this chapter is highlighted.

The fourth set of inquiry is basically revolves around the field work itself and its theoretical connotation. Regardless of whether consumers act individually or collectively, their market choices reflect an understanding of material products as embedded in a complex social and normative context. This can be called the culture of consumption. This is a critical issue for any further analysis of the concept. Acts of consumerism are less organized, less structured, and more transient than conventional consumption of basic needs. This makes any kind of standard measurement very difficult. The aim here is therefore to study consumerism in its specific socio-cultural and historical context.

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