CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Consumption is a complex phenomenon. Like many aspects of human behaviour, consumption also defies rational approaches that are successfully used to study phenomena from the physical sciences. Studies of consumer behaviour have used inputs from a variety of academic areas like economics, psychology, anthropology, to name a few, to understand consumption from a macro as well as a micro viewpoint. Typically research in consumer behaviour seeks to answer questions like who, what, where, when, how and why? The first five are relatively easy to answer and the modernism or positivism is the theoretical approach followed. However, the answer to the question why is rather difficult to find out. There may be any number of reasons that make an individual purchase a product and many of the reasons collectively influence the purchase decision. Often the consumers themselves may not consciously understand the true reason or even if they do, may not always be prepared to disclose them. There is also a lot of error inherent in measurement and clear patterns may not be obtained in the analysis. However even with these limitations, immense strides have been made over the last few decades in understanding consumer behaviour especially the consumer decision making.

There are several typologies suggested to conceptualise the variety of decisions making seen in consumer behaviour. It is understood that there
is no single one explanation but many depending on the context of decision. Howard and Sheth (1969) distinguished between extended problem solving, limited problem solving and routinized response behaviour and linked the schema to psychological schema of concept learning, concept attainment and concept utilization. Baumgartner (2002) suggested that a variety of reasons may be there for consumption which may be classified into eight distinct form of purchase behaviour. Extended purchase decision-making is purchase based on objective, logical criteria and for utilitarian reasons. Symbolic purchase behaviour is buying a brand to project a certain image or because it meets with social approval. Repetitive purchase behaviour — this is making routine purchase or buying some thing since one is habituated and may be loyal to that. Hedonic purchase behaviour is buying some thing just because one likes it. Promotional purchase behaviour — this is buying some thing because it is available on sale or some sales promotion schemes are available. Exploratory purchase behaviour is buying some thing out of curiosity or because of a desire for variety. Impulsive purchase behaviour is the last category, which is purchasing some thing on impulse. These eight purchase types are based on three underlying dimensions. The first dimension is thinking versus feeling depending on whether a purchase motive is functional or psychosocial. The second dimension is understood as low versus high purchase involvement depending on the degree of care required by a purchase or the amount of time and effort expended in the purchase. The
final dimension is spontaneous versus deliberate based on how much prior planning goes into the purchase and how much previous experience the consumer has with the purchase.

All this demonstrates the variety of reasons, motives and processes associated with the consumer decision to purchase and use a product. There cannot a simple scheme that explains consumer behaviour. In every purchase, several motives and reasons can be there, some rational some not and modelling the consumer decision is enormously complex. It is in this context that the findings of the study are interpreted.

The research was undertaken to study the individual differences in the consumption of personal care products and relate them to personality variables to come up with an understanding of the links between the personality factors that determine the decisions to purchase and use these products.

A personal care product may be defined as any of several preparations (except soap) that are applied to the human body for beautifying, preserving, or altering the appearance or for cleansing, colouring, conditioning, or protecting the skin, hair, nails, lips, eyes, or teeth. The products were talcum powder, shampoo, fairness creams, moisturizing cream, moisturizing lotions, deodorants and perfumes. What makes one consume these products? There can be several reasons and motive, but one
common characteristic of personal care products is that they are applied externally to the human body for beautifying, preserving or alerting the physical appearance. What is important here is the appearance of the body. The society emphasizes the importance of appearance and there are ideals of beauty, which is internalised by people. The media also plays a major role here by propagating idealized images of human body.

The researcher tried to explain the use of personal care products with the help of personality variables and used social comparison theory as a frame of reference. All people compare themselves with ideal images (in this case with regard to their physical appearance and beauty) and these upward comparisons put them at a disadvantage. People as a result tend to undervalue themselves and feel anxious and this might lead them to take actions to bridge the gap between their perceived self and the perceived ideal. Use of personal care products can be a specific behavioural outcome resorted to bridge this gap. But this need not be the only strategy available or used by the individuals who suffer from unrealistic comparisons with the social ideal with respect to their appearance and beauty. There can be self-defensive or self-protective strategies adopted (Cast and Burke 2002) by reasoning that appearance is not important, working to create an impression, which is more positive about them, or distorting the comparison by comparing to people who are worse off. Some may also show a learned
helplessness or may attribute the cause to external and uncontrollable factors like destiny.

It will be wrong to assume that all people who suffer from the upward comparisons with respect to their appearance and beauty resort to the use of personal care products. Again not all people who are users of personal care products can be assumed to suffer from upward comparisons leading to feelings of anxiety and insufficiency. However, some people are more likely to have poor evaluations about self and some of such people are likely to seek personal care products as a method of improving their appearance. What are the personality-correlates of such people? Several personality variables were included in the study based on dimensions of the self and their relationships were explored both among each other as well as with the dependent variable. Here two aspects of the self were considered namely the self-evaluation and the self-awareness and personality factors related to these two aspects were included in the study. Further persuasibility was another concept, which may be related to consumption of low involvement products such as personal care products. In today's market place, all commercial organizations are trying their best to persuade the consumers and their success depends on how well they are able to persuade the consumers. It will be reasonable to assume that people who are more perusable are likely to buy more of personal care products. Variables that are from the conceptual domain of persuasibility were also therefore included in the study. In
addition, data was collected on demographic variables and consideration was given to the effect of such variables in the analysis.

5.1 Summary of Findings

1. Significant differences were observed in the use of personal care products across gender. Females were found to consume more of personal care products.

2. Income was not found to have any significant effect on the consumption of personal care products.

3. The factor analysis produced a three-factor solution and the factors were interpreted as self-evaluation, self-awareness and persuasibility.

4. Self-esteem was found to be associated with an internal locus of control and high risk taking.

5. People of low self-esteem were found to have higher social anxiety, higher appearance anxiety, lower consumer self-confidence and lower body esteem.

6. People of low self-esteem scored higher on social embarrassment

7. There was no relationship between self-esteem and consumption

8. High public self-consciousness was found to be related to higher appearance motive and higher consumption of personal care products.
9. Low self-esteem and high public self-consciousness subjects were found to consume significantly more of personal care products compared to all others.

10. The correlation between public self-consciousness and use of personal care products was found to be highest and significant only in the case of moderately low self-esteem.

11. Susceptibility to television advertising was found to be related with use of personal care products.

12. Binary logistic regression using factor scores corresponding to self-evaluation, self-awareness, persuasibility and gender predicted almost 75% of the cases correctly and all the parameters of the regression were significant.

5.2 Discussion

A large number of specific findings were obtained in the work many of which are supported by the earlier research. They are concerning the independent variables among each other and with the gender. However, the emphasis in the research was on the interaction of personality factors that may explain differences in consumption. Several theories were reviewed and a theoretical model was proposed with three constructs self-evaluation, self-awareness and persuasibility posited to be linked to consumption of personal care products. These constructs were measured indirectly by personality
variables and factor analysis revealed expected structure among the variables being grouped into three clusters as posited. Surrogate variables were used to test relationships between the factors. The discussion of findings is done with a specific focus on the model and the basic personality factors.

It was posited that three factors are likely to influence the consumption of personal care products. They were self-evaluation, self-awareness and persuasibility. Several individual difference variables were included in the study related to these factors. An exploratory factor analysis revealed a three-factor structure as expected. The interpretation of the factors was done based on the relative factor loadings.

The first factor was interpreted as the component of the self dimension that include evaluation of oneself. Self-esteem, consumer self confidence, body esteem and locus of control show positive factor loadings to this dimension whereas the anxiety variables, both social anxiety and appearance anxiety show high negative loadings. A person who score high on this dimension will show high self esteem, high self confidence, and an internal locus of control while scoring low on appearance anxiety and social anxiety. This reveals that that the person has high self worth, consider himself a master of his destiny, is confident of his decisions while less susceptible to anxieties. This can be interpreted as evidence of autonomy in behaviour and decision-making. In addition, this is the dimension to which three of the variables self-esteem, body esteem and consumer self-confidence
as positively loaded. All the three variables are indicative of self-evaluation. Therefore, factor one shows the characteristic of self-evaluation.

Factor two is a composite of Public Self Consciousness and appearance motive. An individual who score high on this dimension is conscious of his public image -what others perceive about him. He is also motivated to improve his public persona that is particularly his or her appearance. Here the individual’s personality is more oriented to the impressions he forms about what he thinks others perceive about him. This dimension is conceptually very similar to the public-self dimension described in the self-perception theory. Public self-consciousness is a construct derived in the self-awareness domain and appearance motive is a concern to improve the self since one is consciously aware of the self. Factor two was therefore interpreted to be the self-awareness, which may be defined as the awareness of the self as a social object.

Three variables namely normative and interpersonal dimensions of Customer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence and the Susceptibility to Television Advertising showed high positive loadings to the third factor. This is to be expected since all the three are different aspects of the susceptibility to influence construct. McGure (1968) had posited a general trait of influencibility and the current findings are consistent with the theoretical view that measures of this construct may show consistent relationships. Factor three was interpreted as persuasibility.
Therefore, the three factors were interpreted and named as self-evaluation, self-awareness and persuasibility.

5.2.1 Self-Evaluation

The construct of self-evaluation is described in research as a motive for social comparison (Festinger 1954, Martin and Kennedy 1994) along with other motives namely self-improvement and self-enhancement. The original theme of the social comparison theory referred to the tendency among people to engage in social comparisons with similar others to evaluate himself. However there are many studies reported extend this view from comparisons to similar others to comparisons with ideal models. Martin and Kennedy (1993, 1994), Richins (1991, 1992) Bearden and Rose (1990) all used this perspective and used social comparison to explain marketing phenomena. In all these studies, the emphasis was not on comparisons with similar others, but upward comparisons with better others, possibly the images of ideal propagated by the media. These comparisons on self-relevant dimensions may have an influence on one’s self-esteem and feelings (Wood, 1989) and the most likely impact of the upward comparisons are to the detriment of self-esteem (James 1989). One may develop negative self-feelings and poor self-perceptions may result. Martin and Kennedy (1993) and Richins(1991) suggested that often upward comparisons with unattainable ideal media images represented by the advertising models may result in changes of self-perception of attractiveness. Richins (1992)
suggested that social comparisons today are often unsought and is with the media images since advertising and entertainment media images are pervasive. Since most of these images are idealized, the comparisons are always upwards and the comparer finds himself deficient with respect to the comparison standard.

Richins (1992) further added that if the comparison domain is important to the individual, the deficiency resulting from the comparison with idealized images leads to negative self-feelings. Higgins (1987) and James (1989) had suggested that the negative self-feelings are motivating and people strive to eliminate the negative feelings and repair their sense of self-worth. One of the strongest responses to the negative feelings associated with a comparison discrepancy is to increase efforts to reduce the gap. Carver and Scheier (1981) and Duval and Wicklund (1972) posited this view. Richins (1992) suggested that one way of doing this is by means of consumption. Here consumption is an act to bridge the gap between self and perceived ideal.

In all these, self-evaluation is treated as a motive for social comparison and poor self-evaluation as an outcome of comparison with better others. If poor self-evaluation is the result of social comparison, then pre-existent poor self-evaluation may increase the chances of an individual suffering from upward comparisons. The pre-existent poor self-evaluation is often conceptualised as self-esteem. In the present study, also self-esteem was found to have the highest factor loadings with the self-evaluation factor.
There is a lot of evidence that pre-existent poor self evaluation manifested as poor self-esteem is an antecedent of eating disorders quite common in western cultures. Here the common explanation suggested is that people of low self-esteem are likely to suffer from upward comparisons with idealized media images and the motive to bridge the gap result in dieting and fitness regimen. Advertising and portrayal of thin body as attractive in the media are hypothesized to facilitate upward comparison. Prendergast (1998), Myers and Biocca (1992), Martin and Kennedy (1993), Stephen et.al (1994), Stice et.al (1994) supported this view.

Poor self-evaluation is also related to choice of cosmetic surgery, hair removal among women and fashion preferences (Schouten 1991, Tiggerman 1998, Rose et al 1998) all of them pointing to the phenomena by which people are trying to bridge the gap between their self and the reference standard of attractiveness.

In the study, it was found that a poor self-evaluation characterized by a poor self-esteem is related to a number of variables. People of low self-esteem were found to have higher social anxiety, higher appearance anxiety and lower body esteem. They also rated minor physical and appearance deficiencies as more embarrassing. They are likely to have an external locus of control are less risk taking and do have lower confidence as consumers. The general pattern that emerges from these relationships is that people of low self-esteem have poorer self-perceptions show more anxiety and
consider minor physical deficiencies to be socially embarrassing. This makes such a group susceptible to the use of products that are aimed at improving one’s appearance. It was also found that such people are more susceptible to the normative influence that determines the appropriateness of consumption. Therefore, it was hypothesized that people of poor self-evaluation are likely to choose personal care products. Here it was expected that similar to the phenomena by which people of low self-esteem choose dieting, cosmetic surgery and hair removal to conform with the social norm, they may use personal care products to improve their appearance motivated by feelings of inferiority.

However, the hypothesis had to be rejected since there were no significant differences observed in the consumption of personal care products between people of low and high self-esteem. This was contrary to the expectations as the researcher expected that evidence related to eating disorders, cosmetic surgery and hair removal indicate a generalizable tendency for people of poor self-evaluation to suffer in upward comparisons, develop negative self feelings that act as a motive to shape behaviour.

Though people of low self-esteem have higher anxieties, have lower body esteem indicative of a poor self-image, are more influencible and even consider minor bodily deficiencies as socially embarrassing, not all of them use personal care products as a remedy.
5.2.2. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is another aspect of the self considered in the study which refers to the awareness of self as a social object. Burnkrant and Page (1982) reviewed several studies on self-awareness in consumer behaviour and noted that self-awareness may influence product choice. Wegener and Wallacher (1980) commented that self-awareness lead to a self regulation process that controls the intensity and direction of ongoing behaviour. Specifically, self-attention is presumed to evoke a matching to standards process, whereby the person conforms to whatever he or she takes as the standard of appropriate behaviour. The greater is the self-awareness, the greater is the correspondence to behavioural standards. Therefore self-awareness also determine social comparison and people who have a high degree of self-awareness are likely to have a tendency to conform to the comparison standards they have.

Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss (1975) also studied the construct of self-awareness. They posited that that self-examination and self-awareness enable a person to recognize his conscious thoughts, motives and defences. They conceptualised self-consciousness as an individual difference variable related to the self-awareness. Self-consciousness is defined as a consistent tendency of people to direct attention inward or outward. They differentiated self-awareness as a state while self-consciousness is an individual difference.
Self-awareness not only include a personal reflection on one’s self, but an awareness of perceptions of others also. People who have heightened self-awareness are more likely to be conscious of their public self-image and would try to create a better impression on others Burnkrant, and Page (1982). Personal care products promise an improvement in appearance and has a public dimension. They are products for impression management. Therefore, individual differences in self-awareness may explain differences in consumption also. In the present study, public self-consciousness was taken as a variable representing the self-awareness (Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss, 1975)

Cheek and Briggs (1982) proved that public self-consciousness was linked to impression management or overt displays. Empirical evidence indicates that the public self-consciousness and the concern for impression management are related constructs, both involving a desire to protect one’s public image (Schlenker 1980). Therefore, public self-consciousness can be posited to be related to self-alteration or self improvement. Since personal care products are used heavily in order to effect an improvement in one’s social image, it is reasonable to expect that people of high public self-consciousness are likely to be heavy users of such products. Burnkrant and Page (1982) citing works of Fenigstein (1979) and Scheier (1980) suggested that it is very likely for some people to be more sensitive than others to the impressions called for or likely to be rewarded in social situations. These
people are more inclined than others to present an image of themselves that would lead to the desirable impression in these situations. They concluded that it is reasonable to expect, but has never been shown, that people who score highly on public self-consciousness would also be more inclined than low scorers to use consumer goods to create favorable impressions. Turner et al (1978) had also reached the same conclusion that people of high public self-consciousness are likely to be particularly concerned with their social appearance and impressions they make on others.

Turner, Guililand and Klein (1981) had posited that publicly self-conscious individuals have more well defined physical attractiveness self schema than their less conscious counterparts and they therefore respond more quickly to evaluative judgments of their appearance, This make them more attentive to their physical image. Various research studies reported that high public self-consciousness individuals engage in behaviours like extensive make up use to enhance their physical appearance (Cash and Cash 1982; Lypson, Przybyla and Byrne 1983; Miller and Cox 1982)

It is also reported that public self-consciousness particularly characterizes of appearance–schematic women who maintain strong beliefs regarding the importance of physical appearance in one’s life (Cash and Labarge 1996) and these women have displayed preferential attention towards processing appearance related information (Labarge, Cash and Brown 1998).
All this evidence point out the link between self-awareness as measured by public self-consciousness and consumption of appearance related products like personal care products.

In the study, it was found that public self-consciousness and appearance motive load positively on the same factor labelled as self-awareness. Further, they showed a strong and significant positive correlation to each other. Appearance motive was found to be significantly higher in those with high public self-consciousness.

In addition, the consumption of personal care products was found to be significantly higher in people of high public self-consciousness as expected.

5.2.3. Moderating role of self Evaluation in the relation between self awareness and consumption

Now self-evaluation and self-awareness are two orthogonal dimensions and their primary measures self-esteem and public self-consciousness were found to be uncorrelated. The researcher attempted to explain the results taking self-evaluation as having a moderating effect on the relationship between public self-consciousness and use of personal care products.
It was found that self-esteem do have an influence in the relationship between public self-consciousness and use of personal care products. People of low self-esteem and high public self-consciousness were found to use more of personal care products than all others in the sample. This may be interpreted as follows. Poor self-evaluation though leading to negative feelings of body and its attractiveness may not result in consumption by itself. But in the presence of public self-consciousness, the specific behavioural outcome is observed that is the use of personal care products. A poor self-esteem is indicative of poor self-evaluation and such people have more anxieties regarding their appearance. They value their body less as measured by lower scores on body esteem. This may be because of the social comparison. But the negative feelings are not translated to consumption. The necessary condition for such people to show specific behaviour of consumption is high level of public self-consciousness. Also the impact of public self-consciousness on consumption is more pronounced in the case of people of low self-esteem.

The important determinant of consumption is self-awareness, which is a conscious knowledge of the self as perceived by others. If people are self-aware they are likely to concerned about their appearance, and this is seen in all. But in people who have poor self-evaluation, the pattern is stronger.

It was found that the correlation between public self-consciousness and consumption was highest in people of moderately low
self-esteem and only in that group, the correlation was found to be significant. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that self-evaluation moderate the relation between self-awareness and consumption of personal care products. People who are most vulnerable to consumption is that group with poor self-evaluation indicated by low self-esteem and high level of self-awareness as indicated by high public self-consciousness.

5.2.4 Persuasibility

Persuasibility or susceptibility to persuasion is conceptualised as an individual difference variable. Some people are easily persuaded than others and this tendency is a stable behavioural disposition across situations. These were numerous efforts to measure persuasibility, but it is felt that a general construct of persuasibility do not have a great deal of explanatory power and therefore specific measures were developed in marketing for use in research. Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) and Susceptibility to television advertising are two such measures. Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989) developed and tested an instrument to measure Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence called CSII having two dimensions namely normative and informational. Barr and Kellaris (1997 and 2000) focused on the medium of television and specifically developed the construct in the domain of television advertising (STA)
One is influenced considerably from others in consumption. This may be from relevant others or even the reference group influences from the media. It was posited that people who are more persuasible are likely to use more of personal care products. But the research revealed that the relationship is only there in the case of susceptibility to advertising. People who are more susceptible to advertising were found to be heavy users of personal care products. This evidence also supports indirectly the role of media in facilitating social comparison.

No gender differences were observed in the relationships linking self-evaluation, self-awareness and use of personal care products. The similar pattern of results were obtained in both males and females.

It may be concluded that there is some evidence regarding the validity of the theoretical model suggested. The three aspects of self-awareness, self evaluation and persuasibility represented by the variables self-esteem, public self-consciousness and susceptibility to advertising explain some differences in the consumption. Here public self-consciousness is directly related to consumption and this effect is moderated by self-esteem. STA is also related but not linked to the other variables.

Using factor scores for the three factors, researcher had conducted a binary logistic regression analysis to predict the use of personal care products. Success rate of 74.9 percent was obtained which is reasonably high
in a consumption context. All the factors and the gender were found to be significant. This finding also support the theoretical model proposed that the three factors identified namely self-evaluation, self awareness and persuasibility explain and predict differences in consumption.