CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Science may be described as the art of systematic oversimplification-Karl Popper

5.1 The Objectives of the Study

As discussed in the literature review, existing research has hardly given any attention to this area. In addition to this, practically all existing research has been conducted in the West.

In view of the above observations, the broad objectives of the thesis are to explore, develop and empirically test the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption. To achieve the above the specific objectives of the study are set as:

• Expand and establish a working definition concerning what constitutes conspicuous consumption.

• Assess the multidimensional constructs of conspicuousness in the given socio-economic structure of India.

• Develop a comprehensive scale to measure the consumers' individual differences in conspicuous consumption tendencies.

• Examine the selected antecedents of conspicuousness

• Test the applicability and implications of the study in marketing context.

5.2 Design of the Study

The study was done using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research techniques for the purpose of understanding the major aspects of the research. Thus three distinct methodologies were utilised at the three stages of the research (See Table Below).

5.2.1 Explanations of the Stages
The stages are unique in terms of their data requirements. The methodologies adopted, hence, were selected for their suitability to encompass the research imperatives.

**Stage I:** Drawn from the theory developed, this envisaged the generation of the items of the proposed scale. The new Conspicuous Consumption Scale is developed on the definition of the Conspicuous Consumption as forwarded by the author. According to established scale development process (see Churchill 1979) this is destined to be the initial process for the same.

To generate necessary items three major techniques were used:

1. Literature survey.
2. Expert opinion.
3. Qualitative research—TAT.

The first are regular steps adopted almost in all usual scale development processes (Netemeyer and Bearden 1999). However, the third technique, as followed by the present author needs elaboration.

TAT or the Thematic Apperception Test This projective tool offers much to the behavioural researcher, especially in areas thought to involve substantial potential for defensive reactance—this was initially expected given the nature of the study because consumers mayn't be willing to divulge the their spending pattern due to cultural inappropriateness commonly seen among Asians (Wong & Ahuvia 1998).

The visual material consisted of a vernacular print advertisement which highlighted the conspicuous use of leather goods. This advertisement was selected particularly because of its assumed closeness to the hypothesised definition of CC as devised by the author. Along with the photocopied material a few questions were posed to the respondents. The responses were codified; items
generated and judged by the experts to assess the suitability of the same for the purpose of their inclusion in the proposed scale.

In addition, to generate further items secondary sources in form of other published scale were used. After rejection of the items that are considered to fail to ‘capture’ the said construct, a primary scale having 40 items were generated along with the primary conceptualisation about their membership in hypothesised dimensions (see Annexure-Conspicuous Consumption Scale Version 1, pg A1). The details of the refinement are given in the next chapter.

Stage II: Using inputs from the Stage I, the next level of the study proceeded toward actual validation of the proposed scale. The scale was further validated using a student sample and a general consumer sample.

Stage III: Once the scale has been validated the antecedents were tested using standard, verified measurement instruments. PG & UG Students were selected for the purpose of this study.

Stage IV: Specific conspicuous purchasing behaviour of mobile phones and home furnishing were explained. Students were recruited for this study.
5.2.2 Sampling Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Research Objective</th>
<th>Total number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Generation of Scale Items</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Reliability &amp; Factor Structure Assessment</td>
<td>51/55/120/400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Validity &amp; Test of Antecedents</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Test of Marketing Implication</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-1: Summary of Sample Size for Different Stages of Research

Sample size determination is largely guided by guidelines provided by Peter (1979). He suggests that for any type of item analysis there should be at least 10 times as many subjects as items, or in cases of large number of items, at least five subjects per item.

Data for the purpose of the present study was collected from

- Students
- ‘General Consumers’

The student respondents were selected from engineering and management departments of institutes located in thriving urban centers of the state of W. Bengal——Kolkata and Durgapur. This selection of location was made largely due to their accessibility and convenience to the researcher and with an aim to
‘capture’ urban character. However, the respondents were chosen randomly (using random sampling process) —— the random cm numbers being generated by the online software available at the website www.random.org.

The generation of data from ‘general consumers’, who make up a heterogeneous population, involved a more complex process. The selection of this section of the respondents can be justified, especially in the Indian context, by their relative social positions. The students don’t ‘earn’ and may have a limited say on and capability of purchasing different products. Moreover, literature also follows this particular method where two or more sample types are selected to cross validate the result (See Netemeyer and Bearden 1997) The details of the stratified random sampling process are enumerated as below:

**Total sample size:** 400

**Geographical extent:** Kolkata (Under KMC & divided into North, South and East) and Salt Lake

**Sample Selection:**

**Stage A:** From each part of Kolkata, 4 Wards were selected. The ward descriptions were made available from the Kolkata Municipal Corporation-website. Care was taken to select localities in ways so as to reflect heterogeneity among the targeted respondents. This heterogeneity is required because in Kolkata the locality characters have some differences e.g. Garden Reach vs. Alipore vs. Garia.

**Stage B:** In each Ward selected,
household listing was done in a locality

**Stage C:** 25 Households in each ward were selected using random sampling method, using random numbers, as generated by www.random.org.

**Stage D:** Adult, eligible respondents were selected from the households using Kish Method of Sampling (1949).

In total 400 respondents were interviewed of which 50 had to be rejected because they were incomplete and/or unusable in other respects. The final usable sample size was 350. The Kish method involves some sequential steps in which A. the interviewer is to record the name, gender, age of all the eligible persons & their relation to the housewife (because she is the one who is mostly available). B. Then the candidates are arranged according to their increasing age and C. Using a random number table (see the questionnaire in the Appendix-CC Scale General Consumer Survey) the respondent is chosen.

5.2.2.1 **Sample Description**

The respondents were defined as people in the age group of 25-50 years of both sexes in the middle and the upper middle class; with a minimum bachelor-degree level of education, either earning or with access to expendable income. In this part of research, no students were considered. In determining the age, months were not taken into consideration. The respondents were classified according to the scheme provided by the NCAER (See Table 4-5) and MHI of Rs. 10,000 was set at the minimum cutoff for the selection of a household.

All data were collected by the Investigator. In both the cases, however, tests were administered individually. First, the aim of the investigation was explained to
the selected subject. S/he was then requested to fill up the questionnaire (instruments), including personal information. After this the subject completed the various instruments, which mostly were self-explanatory. However, help was given when required. On the average a subject took no more than 15 minutes to complete a particular instrument.

5.3 Description and Operational Definition of the Tools Used

The tools used in the present study have been taken from reliable, published sources and are designed to measure diverse aspects of consumer behaviour. All these have been selected for their role in guiding an individual toward the path of consumption. These tools, in various forms, relate to the phenomenon of Conspicuous Consumption. The scales are exhibited in the Appendix, and are arranged according to their respective serial numbers.

1. Self Concept Clarity Scale: This construct is defined as the “extent to which the contents of an individual’s self-concept (e.g., perceived personal attributes) are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent and temporally stable” (Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavallee, and Lehmann 1996). SCC is a perpetual, belief based variable. The SCC scale developed by the above authors, has 12 items scored on 5-point Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Item scores are summated to form an SCC scale score that ranges from 12 to 60. Original studies have estimates of the internal consistency, measured by the Cronbach Alpha, as .86.

2. Self-Schema Scale: This construct is believed to be reflecting an individual’s self-perception in relation to others. A “separated” person has a sense of independence and perceives him/herself as an individual who is distinct from others and the “connected” person has a sense of interdependence and sees himself/herself as a continuation of others. Conceptualised to be measuring individualism, this instrument is designed (Wang and Mowen, 1997) to contain
nine items scored on 5-point scales ranging from does not describe me at all to describes me very well. The item scores are summed to obtain the measure of “separated” schema. The reported Alpha value is .73.

3. Social Visibility Scale: The Social Consumption Motivation developed by Moschis (1981, 1978) was adopted to measure the importance consumers place on what others think or are doing before buying a product. The scale is a four-item, five point Likert-type summated ratings scale. The total score is calculated by adding the score for each statement. A high total score on the scale indicates a high sensitivity to the social visibility of their consumption. The reported Alpha value is .82.

4. Voluntary Simplicity Scale: This instrument is adopted from the Use Innovativeness Scale developed by Price and Ridgeway (1983). This construct can be described as the degree to which an individual selects a lifestyle intended to minimize his consumption and dependency on material items. Voluntary Simplicity is assumed be a dimension of the above, and is incorporated as a subscale having 5 items. Each item is operationalised using a 7-place. The items can be summed to obtain the overall score. The authors reported the Alpha value as .64.

5. Desire for Unique Consumer Products Scale: This instrument is designed to measure the extent to which consumers hold as a personal goal the acquisition and possession of consumer goods & services and experiences that few others possess (Lynn and Harris 1997). The scale consists of eight items. Each item is operationalised using 5-place bipolar scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Item scores can be summated to create arrive at the final score. The Coefficient alpha estimates were .78.

6. Materialism Scale: Richins (1987) describes materialism in terms of its role in consumer culture as the idea that goods are a means to happiness; that
satisfaction in life is achieved by possession and interaction with goods. Among many other competing measures of this construct this particular instrument was chosen keeping in mind its conceptual strength and perceived closeness with the proposed definition of CC which underlines possessiveness centrality and the ‘joy’ of possession. Moreover, this definition is also consistent with extant writings on materialism, in general (Netemeyer and Bearden 1987). Coefficient alpha was reported as .73.

7. Miskimin’s Self, Other Scale (1973): This is a scale to measure the selfconcept and reports reliability of .78. It has three sub-scales to measure the Real, Ideal and Social selves. Each scale is a 15 item, 9 point semantic differential. This scale has been already used in studying Indian consumers (Mitra 2000) and has been reported to possess high reliability (.72) and suitability in the given socio-cultural context. From MSGO test, it is possible to calculate a number of discrepancy measures of which only the self-ideal discrepancy is of importance in the present study.

8. Need Construct and Manifest Needs Questionnaire: Developed by Steers and Bernstein (1976), this instrument contains 4 need measurement scales-Needs for Achievement, Need for Affiliation, Need for Dominance, and Need for Autonomy. Each scale is a 5-item, 7-point Likert-type scale. The alpha values of the scales have been reported to be .66, .56, .61, and .83.

9. Need for Uniqueness Scale: The scale is designed to measure that characteristic of the individuals who are predisposed to expressing their uniqueness (e.g., Snyder and Fromkin 1977) and prefer reasons that are novel. Individuals with high need for uniqueness (NFU), are not concerned about others’ criticism, and tend to make unconventional choices. The scale consists of 32 items which are scored along usual 5-point Likert-type response format.

10. Consumer Need for Uniqueness Scale: Consumers’ need for uniqueness
reflects individual differences in counter-conformity motivation that is achieved through acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's personal and social identity. The scale is hypothesized to have three dimensions namely, Creative choice Counter-conformity, Unpopular Choice Counter-conformity, and Avoidance of similarity. The scale contains 29-items and is reported to have a very high alpha value of .93. For the purpose of this study the second dimension sub-scale has been used.

11. Consumer Innovativeness Scale: (Leavitt and Walton 1975) Innovativeness is assumed to be a personality trait underlying the adoption of innovativeness. The construct describe innovators as individuals open to new experiences and novel stimuli; as possessing the ability to transform information about new concepts, ideas, products for their use. The instrument contains 30. Each statement is evaluated in terms of "how well it fits the respondent's own views". The 5-place scales associated with each statement are labeled as: 1, not well at all ....5, extremely well. The reported alpha was .72.

12. Aesthetic Response Scale: As Holbrook and Zirlin (1983) have noted, aesthetic response to a stimulus is suffused with emotion, but additionally extends beyond emotion to include evaluative reactions to an object e.g., as being beautiful. The adjective pairs composing the three criterion dimensions were used as anchor points on seven-point rating scales. A "7" was used to indicate the positive end of each adjective pair and a "1" to indicate the absence end of the pair. It should be noted that the semantic structure of the scales represented a continuum from high presence of a characteristic to its complete absence and not high presence of a characteristic to high presence of its opposite.

13. Self-Esteem Scale: it as a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self (Rosenberg 1965). Self-esteem is generally considered the evaluative component of the self-concept, a broader representation of the self that includes cognitive and behavioural aspects as well as evaluative or affective ones (Blascovich &
Tomaka 1991). The most popular and well utilised measures of self-esteem is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965). It includes 10 items that are usually scored using a four-point response ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The items are face valid, and the scale is short and easy and fast to administer. Extensive and acceptable reliability of .86 and validity information exists for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (see Blascovich & Tcmaka 1991).

14. Marlow-Crown Socially Desirable Response Scale: A shortened form of this scale, designed by Strahan and Gerbasi (1972), has been. This form (Type 2) contains 10 items to be scored using a True/False dichotomous format. The K-R reliability measure has been estimated to be .75.

15. Marcoux et al. Conspicuous Consumption Scale (1997): Devised as an instrument to measure meanings of conspicuous consumption, it has 16 items divided into 5-dimensions, namely 1. Materialistic hedonism, 2. Communication of belonging to/dissociation from a group, 3. Social status demonstration, 4. Interpersonal Mediation and 5. Ostentation. The responses are collected via a 5-point Likert-type format. The reliability values range from .49 to .89. For the present research, the scale needed to be modified to a great extent. As because of its total unsuitability to match the present requirement, the term “Western Products” had been replaced by “Some products” and “Polish products” by “Indian Products”.

5.4 Hypotheses

Based on the findings reviewed and the Framework proposed the following 15 hypotheses could be stated as per standard practice of social science research in India:

H1: The CC scores will not differ across genders

H2: The CC score will show no change across chronological age

95
$H3$: Those who have higher academic qualification will differ significantly in CltCC than those having lower academic qualification

$H4$: The CC-orientation would differ across income groups

$H5$: Self-esteem is directly related to CC tendencies

$H6$: Those who have higher CC tendencies will have still higher self-esteem

$H7$: Self-concept Clarity is directly related to CC tendencies and vice versa

$H8$: Narcissistic Vulnerability will be inversely related to CC tendencies

$H9$: CC tendencies will be directly related to the degree of innovativeness

$H10$: CC tendencies will be directly related to Need for achievement (nACH)

$H11$: CC-orientation will not be related to Need for Dominance (nDOM).

$H12$: CC tendencies will be directly related to Need for uniqueness

$H13$: CC tendencies will be directly related to Materialism value

$H14$: Those who have higher CltCC will show higher
aesthetic orientation than those having lower CltCC tendencies

$H15$: Those who have higher CltCC will have higher hedonic orientation than those having lower CltCC tendencies