CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The forces of globalization influence the changing consumer culture of a society. The present societies of industrialised nations are based on consumerism and a consumer based culture is coming in the mainstream (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Consumer culture promotes materialism, resulting in development of a materialistic society. After globalization, a shift has taken place which is visible in the values and ideals of Indian culture (Eckhardt & Mahi, 2012; Suchday, 2015). The increase in per capita income in India is resulting in an increase in the demand for consumer goods. Today, the social media promotes materialism and creates the impression that an individual’s value depends on their material belongings. Thus, the fetish for materialistic possessions is increasing in today’s society (Vinayak & Arora, 2018b).

Materialistic things are slowly holding an important position in an individual’s life, especially among the urban population. There is a rise in the consumption of durable and luxurious goods (Mishra, Tatzel, Arun, & Abidi, 2014). Materialistic spending habits have become increasingly prevalent and today’s society has adopted it as a way of life.

Marketers attract the consumers to purchase both products and services by depending on their materialistic nature. Materialism is strongly identified with consumption. In today’s era, material possessions play a significant role in the lives of an individual. This makes an individual fall into the loop of materialism (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010; Pieters, 2013).

Wong et al. (2011) explained materialism as a quest for material goods intended for preservation of self as characterized by the material goods one embraces. He put forward the idea of materialism as construction of self through symbolic consumption. Materialism has been identified as the importance an individual places on accumulating material goods and wealth. Dittmar, Bond, Hurst, and Kasser (2014) ascertain materialism as continuing and long-standing appreciation for material goods in endorsements of principles, aspirations and related values that depend on the magnitude of importance one gives to obtaining money, wealth and possessions which expresses
one’s position in society. Materialism concerns with the tendency of individuals to place worldly possessions at the centre of their lives and making these possessions ‘everything’ for materialistic individuals (Lee & Ahn, 2016). Materialism is a tendency to regard material possessions as more important than spiritual values (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016).

Wong (1997) ascertained a connection between materialism and conspicuous consumption. In the modern era, materialism is the dominant consumer ideology in the present developed economies (McCracken, 1988; Kasser et al., 2014; Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, Koenig-Lewis, & Zhao, 2015). Materialism is positively related to consumption of products that are symbols of prestige and status (Goldsmith & Clark, 2012). Such material goods and possessions bring happiness that lasts for limited time. The satisfaction received from material goods is transitory (Frey & Stutzer, 2010) which grows fainter with time. At the individual level, materialistic persons feel less competent, have less purpose and have weaker connections with other persons. Individuals with materialistic tendencies rate their own social connections more negatively. Ghadrian (2010) stated that materialism is leading to weakening of morality in human societies.

Materialism negatively affects subjective well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Sirgy, Rahtz, & Samli, 2013). The happiness and satisfaction a materialistic person gets is unconstructively affected by this continuous and never-ending desire for material goods. Persons with high materialistic attitudes face higher psychological dissatisfaction as they are never happy with what they have and desire more than what they have (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Shaw, 2002; Diener & Seligman, 2004). This effect has been referred to as a hedonic treadmill or hedonic adaption (Lyubomirsky, 2011). Thus, materialism reflects the darker side of one’s behaviour.

The material goods take a fundamental place in the lives of the consumers (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012). One feature of such materialistic individuals is a desire to become rich fast even if it includes a lot of risk. The preoccupation with the material world is a vice that eats an individual from the inside out (Monbiot, 2013). Materialism is an important factor that influences consumption choices and tends to have a great

2
bearing on altering the lifestyles of people. Consumers wish for products in order to meet standards of attractiveness, compete with their peers and to fulfil security needs (Domagalski & Kasser, 2004) which results in an addiction to materialistic possessions.

In the last few years, adolescents have become avid consumers which have raised concerns about the rise of materialism in adolescents (Chaplin & John, 2007). Adolescence is a transitional period, where the emotional independence and cognitive independence plays a vital role (Maldonado et al., 2013). Adolescents begin to take definitive steps to attain their financial and emotional independence (Akturan, Tezcan, & Vignolles, 2011). During this phase, possible directions of life course are explored (Arnett, 2000) and the attitude towards money plays an important role. It is possible that the values and practices in one generation will affect the money attitudes in the next (Gudmunson & Beutler, 2012).

Materialism has become the new socially acceptable norm and has progressed to change the way the adolescents interact. In the present times, the materialistic adolescents are living a robotic life and they try to be more competitive with each other in terms of materialistic possessions. Their purpose in life is to become a part of the social elite. Excessive media exposure, shopping centers, music videos, movies and magazines are few of the factors that are contributing to rising materialism among adolescents. The impact of materialism on adolescents is a complex subject. Thus, possessions play an essential role in the life of a materialistic adolescent.

Materialism has negative consequences for individuals and for society. Thus, investigating the psychological factors that relate with materialism is important. Research has found that perceived peer influence (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008), feelings of uncertainty (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008) and low self-esteem (Park & John, 2011) contribute to a rise in materialistic values and goals in an individual.

Interpersonal influences, such as, peer pressure play a significant role in the developing materialistic tendencies among adolescents. Even though peers may be an essential coping mechanism during adolescence, the increase of peer attachment in everyday life situations results in an increase of peer pressure. Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, and Sheldon (2004) stated that the insecurity pathway and the socialization
pathway interact and together enhance materialistic tendencies in an individual. According to Akturan et al. (2011), adolescents are motivated by independence, status, power, ownership and peer pressure.

Parents and peers both are socialization agents through which consumption choices transmit to the adolescents. The significance of peer relationships is prevalent during adolescence and the peer interaction was positively correlated with social comparison with friends (Rubin, Bukowski, & Laursen, 2011). The adolescents demand autonomy from their parents that increases the socializing power of peers, resulting in more peer pressure (Crosnoe, 2000; Berndt & Murphy, 2003).

Rejection by the peer group gives rise to materialistic pursuits in adolescents by lowering implicit self-esteem (Jiang, Zhang, Ke, Hawk, & Qiu, 2015). “Coolness” is a measure of adolescent peer popularity and status and it is increasingly linked to the possession of expensive ‘branded’ goods (Nairn & Griffith, 2007).

Among several factors influencing materialism in adolescents, self-esteem has a very solid bearing. Adolescence is a very vulnerable age for influencing a person’s self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to one’s attitude about oneself. It is the evaluation we make of ourselves. It can be negative or positive. Adolescents with high self-esteem perceive themselves as competent and worthy; while those with low self-esteem see themselves as incompetent and unworthy. The level of materialism in adolescents is directly driven by self-esteem. Guindon (2002) stated that self-esteem concerns with the evaluative component and it is a criterion by which an individual evaluates her/himself, an estimate, a feeling, and an emotion.

Individuals use material goods as an instrument to compensate for doubts about their competence and self-worth (Chang & Arkin, 2002). Materialism plays an important role in enhancing the confidence and self-esteem of a consumer. A bruised ego can lead to the purchasing of high status good to help restore one’s self-esteem (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010).

Another related factor is social anxiety. It concerns with the fear and anxiety of being negatively judged and evaluated by other persons. Materialism is positively linked with negative aspects of well-being, negative emotions and social anxiety (Christopher, Lasane, Troisi, & Park, 2007).
In the present study, the aim is to view social anxiety as a normal socio-cultural and psychological process and not as a psychopathology. It has been seen that individuals have significant levels of social anxiety, but they do not formally meet the diagnostic criteria of labelling it a disorder (Fehm, Beesdo, Lacobi, & Fiedle, 2007). Such individuals experience problems at work, conduct problems in society and have less self-confidence.

Apart from other factors, locus of control can also affect the materialistic tendencies of an individual. A person's belief about locus of control is an imperative variable that acts as an antecedent to essential psychological states and social behaviours. Rotter (1966) stated that in external locus of control, an outcome is perceived by the subject as following some of his/her own action which is not entirely dependent upon his action and he/she perceives it as dependent upon luck, chance and fate. In contrast, individuals with internal locus of control perceive that an event is dependent upon their own behaviours or their own relatively permanent characteristics. There is a dependency on materialistic possessions to establish self-worth leaves people vulnerable to factors beyond their own control (Kashdan & Breen, 2007).

Vanity is a human trait that is influenced by social pressure (Durvasula, Lysonski, & Watson, 2001). Vanity plays a vital role in increasing materialistic orientations. Thus, understanding the relationship between materialistic and vanity-related consumer attitudes and behaviour could give valuable information for targeting consumer characteristics. Netemeyer, Burton, and Lichtenstein (1995) analyzed that there is a strong relationship between physical vanity, achievement vanity and possession-defined success.

Vanity has become an important pervasive factor as materialistic persons with vanity related tendencies use possessions as a symbol of success and derives happiness and contentment from them. In the present times, a significant amount of spending is being done on beauty products and treatments. Thus, deeper insight into the role of vanity was considered important to be explored for the present study.

Gender is the largest social group in which a person can be member. Gender difference deals with the discrimination of biological and physiological characteristics associated with either males or females of a species. There have been contradictory findings for gender differences in materialism as they vary across nature and the type of product (Segal & Podoshen, 2013). Both genders (male and female) remain significant
elements of the present investigation to explore influences of masculinity- femininity dimension on materialism.

Economic infrastructure shapes human cognition and behaviour. Socio-economic status (SES) has been operationalized in various ways, such as household income, or subjective feelings of relative wealth (Adler et al., 1994). Behavioural scientists are exploring reasons for understanding how socio-economic status shapes a great deal of our material lives (Snibbe & Markus, 2005). Socio-economic status is defined as people’s position on a general social hierarchy (Mueller & Parcel, 1981; Oakes & Rossi, 2003; Sirin, 2005). Level of income is one of the factors that determine the intensity of materialism of the consumers (Romero & Martinez-Roman, 2012).

Materialism is a concept which demands a lot of contextual research and exploration (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Kilbourne, Grunhagen, & Foley, 2005). Previous studies in the review of literature have shown that there is a strong relationship between peer pressure and materialism. When adolescents purchase, they solicit product information, evaluation and recommendations from peers (Gershoff, Broniarczyk, & West 2001). Luxury cars, homes, cars, clothes and jewellery manifest the value adolescents attach to objects. Adolescents are driven by a hedonistic lifestyle and an emerging consumer culture. Thus, they spend a lot to fulfill their materialistic pursuits (Vinayak & Arora, 2018b).

While conceptualizing this research, it was considered worthwhile to study the role of self-esteem, social anxiety, locus of control and vanity as moderators in the relationship between peer pressure and materialism in male and female adolescents of low and middle socio-economic status. The objective was also to understand as to how the above mentioned variables differed across gender and socio-economic status groups.

The extensive exploration of the above mentioned variables shall uncover the depths and open new arenas for research. Thus, this research proposed to study the relationship between peer pressure and materialism: role of self esteem, social anxiety, locus of control and vanity. The study was designed with a vision to help psychologists, therapists and other professionals to develop better intervention programmes and training modules for adolescents who may give too much importance to possession of materialistic goods and succumb to peer pressure.