CHAPTER X
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

One of the main objectives of the study was to verify whether social class is a more reliable determinant of consumer behaviour than income classification. In order to segment the sample respondents into various social classes, a social class index was developed based on expert opinion. Hence the first part of the study is devoted for developing social class index for social stratification.

The other objectives of the study pertain to consumer behaviour with respect to the purchase of selected consumer durables. Specific hypotheses have been developed in relation to the process and persons involved in need identification, purchase motives, information sources used by consumers, structure of decision making unit, reference group influences on consumers, characteristics of opinion leaders and innovators and behaviour of consumers with respect to reducing perceived risk and post-purchase dissonance.

A sample survey was undertaken among 300 households selected from different districts in Kerala based on judgmental sampling. The data were analysed using appropriate statistical techniques.
FINDINGS

1. Relevance of social class in consumer behaviour

One of the objectives of the study was to identify whether social class of the consumers is a more reliable indicator of consumer behaviour than income. Regression analysis based on possession of durables as well as social class and income as independent variables indicate that social class has relatively more influence in consumption of durables than income. The relationship between the possession of durables and level of education of the head of the family was not, however, established. Based on the index developed, consumers covered by the household survey have been grouped into four classes: upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class and lower class.

2. Need Identification for Consumer Durables

The predominant need identifier for consumer durables is the male head of the household. The need identifiers for various categories of products, however, differ. For instance, with regard to kitchen appliances the need identifier in most of the families is the wife.

For entertainment items the dominant need identifiers are children, particularly male children. The husband is the major need identifier with regard to vehicles. In the case of furniture and cleaning devices, it is the wife who plays the role of problem recognition. Product-wise analysis of need identification further
indicates that need identification is done for different products by different family members.

Social class-wise analysis relating to need identification for consumer durables indicates that the male head of household is the prominent need identifier among families in all classes except the upper class. Among upper class families the female head of household is the prominent need identifier.

3. Occasion for Need Identification

With regard to the occasion for need identification of consumer durables, the occasions considered were dissatisfaction with present solution, replacement for old products, change in financial status, change in life cycle, novelty and construction of new house. The most important occasion for need identification is dissatisfaction with existing solution to satisfy needs. The next in importance is change in financial status. Product category-wise analysis also indicates that dissatisfaction with the present solution is the most significant occasion, except in the case of entertainment items where change in financial status and novelty create occasions for need identification. There is no significant variation among the different social classes with regard to occasion for need identification, although there are variations in relation to individual products.

1.4. Purchase Motives for Consumer Durables

The most important purchase motive for consumer durables relates to the satisfaction of social needs. Apparently, these
products are purchased not because they have become very essential for the family. Product category-wise analysis and social class-wise analysis also lead to the same conclusion.

5. Sources of Information

Analysis of the sources of information actually used for consumer durables reveals that friends are the most important source of information. This is true in the case of all the categories of products, except furniture and cleaning systems where the commercial sources have been used more than the personal sources. Further analysis, however, shows that more commercial sources of information have been used by upper and upper middle classes, whereas personal sources have been relied on more by lower middle and lower class consumers.

With regard to the preference for commercial versus personal sources of information, preferences for personal sources is true for all categories except furniture and cleaning devices where both personal and commercial sources have almost equal preferences, while preference for personal sources are more among the lower classes and it is relatively less among the upper class families.

6. Media Exposure

Media exposure is very high among the respondents with respect to all the media considered, i.e., television, radio, magazine and newspaper. However, with regard to the frequency of
exposure to advertisements in different media, wide variations exist. Television advertisements have the maximum exposure while radio advertisements the least.

7. **Product and Brand Decisions**

For majority of the durable products under study, the husband is the key product decision-maker. Data relating to individual versus joint product decisions reveal that when all consumer durables are considered, individual decisions are more frequent than joint decisions. The data do not support the hypothesis that product decisions for consumer durables are joint decisions by family members. However, product category-wise analysis reveals that there are variations. While the wife is the major decision-maker for kitchen appliances, husband is the dominant decision-maker for entertainment items and vehicles. Joint decision-making is quite high with regard to furniture and cleaning devices. In the upper, upper middle and lower classes, the major product decision-maker is the husband, while in the lower middle class joint decisions between husband and wife are more frequent.

The family member who takes the brand decision most often is the male head of household. Joint decision by husband, wife and children is next in frequency. In contrast to the product decision-making situations, it is noted that the involvement of the parents is relatively less in brand decisions for all relevant products by all the families. Data reveal that the more frequent situation is that of joint decisions than of individual decisions,
though the difference is not much. Further, the involvement of children in brand decisions is quite significant.

8. **Conflict and Compromises in Family Decision-Making**

Conflict arises among family members most often with regard to the brand selection. More frequently it is the husband and children who get involved in the conflict and the wife acts as the mediator. Discussion among the family members is the most frequently adopted conflict resolution method. Additional information search is usually undertaken for the purpose of conflict resolution.

9. **Buyer for Consumer Durables**

The purchaser role, in the purchase of consumer durables, is taken by both the husband and the wife. Among the various product categories, the husband does the shopping for entertainment items, while in other product categories it is the husband and wife together who perform the shopping.

10. **Social Influences on Durable Purchase**

Social group influences in the purchase decisions with regard to consumer durables are very significant. The reference groups influencing purchases include friends, relatives and other small groups. Consultation with personal sources while purchasing durables have been reported by almost all the consumers. This indicates high level of social influence in the purchase of durables. This was evident among all social classes.

Relating to product attributes, data reveal that while
colleagues are the most depended sources for consultation on
details of brands and models, relatives are the most trusted
sources for price discussion. Similarly, neighbours are consulted
with respect to performance. Relatives are asked about quality.
Friends are consulted more for the selection of stores.

1.11. Opinion Leadership and Innovativeness

Opinion leadership relates well with education, occupation
and income but not with age.

Innovativeness is inversely related to age. The level of
income is directly related to the level of innovativeness. The
relationship between occupation and innovativeness is also evident.

1.12. Risk Reduction Behaviour

Consumers rely heavily on brand image in order to reduce
perceived risk. Buying brands satisfactory to friends and
neighbours is the second important risk reduction behaviour. The
upper class and upper middle class consumers resort to buying well-
known brands in their effort to reduce risk, while more of the
lower class consumers buy brands reported satisfactory by friends
and neighbours. Buying brands which offer guarantee does not
figure as a significant risk reduction method.

When a purchase is found risky the common strategy adopted
is discussion with relevant others.

1.13. Post Purchase Behaviour

The significant post purchase behaviour of consumers is
that when dissatisfied with products, they reveal their
dissatisfaction to others. Consumers in the upper class and lower middle class reveal their dissatisfaction more than the lower class or lower middle class. The data further reveals that it is the upper middle class consumers who advise others not to purchase the product more than the other classes.

However, when the dissonance reduction behaviour is analysed, it becomes evident that when dissatisfied with products, consumers think more about the positive aspects of the products in order to reduce dissonance. They also seek more information relating to the positive side. The different social classes, however, behave differently. Majority among the lower middle class think more about the negative side of the product, while others think more of the positive aspects. Further, additional information search as a method of dissonance reduction is adopted more by upper middle and lower class consumers.

1.14. Contribution by the Researcher

The findings of the study will be useful to manufacturers and marketers in the consumer durable sector. Since the study is the first of its kind of particular significance are the findings related to influencers and decision-makers of various products and the distinctions in this regard among different social classes.

More important, perhaps, is the contribution in terms of research methodology. The technique used for social stratification through development of social class index is unique. The application of perceived value rating technique, which is a more
precise and superior method, has never been attempted for social class stratification anywhere so far. The technique could be used for a precise determination of social classes in any society, perhaps, with appropriate changes, particularly in relation to the variables considered.