Chapter 4

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS STUDY

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4.1 Social Pressure
4.2 Social Pressure to Consume

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4.3 Gist of Observations and Rationale for this Study
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This chapter looks into the various conceptualizations related to ‘Social Pressure’ and moves on to develop various hypotheses of the study.

Section I

SOCIAL PRESSURE

4.1 Understanding Social Pressure

Pressure means the exertion of force upon a body by an external object [Random House, Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary (1999)]. The term social pressure is generally used in the context of societal influence on individuals to direct them towards a particular end or behavior. Social pressure as a concept has been studied in various domains mostly related to social psychology and
sociology [Garicano et al. (2005), Deborah (1994), Keunho (1994), Wallace et al. (2005); Stice et al. (2002)]. Though a few authors have used it as just another term for group influences on individuals [Leslie (2009)], for most authors it stands for the sum total of the various social influences that act on any individual.

Epley and Gilovich (1999) of Cornell University consider social pressure construct as a combination of all factors that bring in pressure on individuals to conform to opinions, attitudes or behaviors of others. This could produce strong feelings of internal conflict as many a time it would be against what one thinks is right. In case one does not conform to such norms, he may get ostracized by his peers and friends. Epley and Gilovich are of the opinion that deciding what is to be done often requires considerable deliberations weighing the costs of caving in to the pressure compared to facing the stigma of being shunned by the society. A meta-analysis by Wallace et al. (2005) showed how perceived is the social pressure and the perceived difficulty level weaken the relationship between attitudes and behavior.

Stice et al. (2002) looked at the adverse effects of social pressure to be thin, on young women and how such pressures induce body dissatisfaction. The above study draws evidences to the fact that the perceived pressure to be thin comes from media, especially television, family and peers [Cattarin and Thompson (1994), Field et al. (2001), Stice (2001), Stice and Whittenton (2002)]. Heinberg and Thompson (1995) and Levine and Smolak (1996), show us that the exposure to televised thin ideal images, results in more pronounced increase in body dissatisfaction because of the internalization of values projected through television. Stice et al. (2001) have found that it is such women who have internalized what is projected on television that are more susceptible to social comparison. This study by Stice et al. (2002) clearly bring
media and television, family, peer and social comparison as the contributors of social pressure on young women to be thin, compelling them to such behavior which makes them look thin.

4.2 Social Pressure to Consume

Social pressure to consume is the variable under consideration in this study and it is defined as the sum total of different societal pressures on an individual that drives him to high consumption behavior and materialistic tendencies. This study has identified four different constructs which act as major contributors of social pressure, namely internalization of what is projected through television media, interpersonal and peer group influence, upward social comparisons and attitude to debt or attitude towards availing credit.

The idea behind social pressure to consume is borrowed from the concepts of socialization pathway of materialism as put forward by Kasser et al. (2004). Though most media channels play an important role in consumer socialization we have limited our investigation to the role played by television as it is already established that television has a much larger impact than other media in perpetuation of materialistic values and high consumption culture. Addiction to television leads to the internalization or the cultivation of the belief that what they see on television is the reality [Gerbner and Gross (1976)].

Peer and family influence are the two other key factors of consumer socialization theory which influence consumption habits of individuals. Research by Churchill and Moschis (1979) and Moschis and Moore (1979) underscore the role played by family and family communication and in comparison with the effects that peer influence has on adults. According to
them beyond adolescence, the influence of television and peers is stronger in shaping consumption behavior than family factors. Chan and Prendergast (2007) support this theory as they could not find significant relationship between family communication and social comparison and materialism. This led us to consider only peer and interpersonal influence as the social pressure factor leading to materialism.

Social comparisons, especially with upward social classes, get enough evidence in literature as a contributor of materialism and high consumption behavior [Ogden and Venkat (2001)]. People with high social pressure have higher propensity to avail debt to conform to the societal values or to inculcate the behavior that is acceptable to them [Lea et al. (1995)]. So, attitude to debt also has been included along with the three items mentioned earlier as availability and propensity to use debt financing definitely plays an important role in supporting high consumption lifestyles.
Section II

4.3 Gist of Observations and Rationale for this Study

Fournier and Richins (1991), Richins (1994), and Wong (1997) have established that individuals who engage in excessive consumption habits have high materialistic values. Studies by Kasser (2002), Belk (1985) and Diener et al. (1993) showed that for many people acquiring new possessions is something that fills a void in their lives. Such feelings are caused by feelings of inadequacy and insecurity and the literature reviewed clearly points out that feelings of inadequacy and insecurity exist in individuals due to the lack of self-esteem (Rosenberg 1998). Kasser (2002), Chang and Arkin (2002), Shroeder and Dugal (1995) asserted that people with low self-esteem turn to materialistic goals to compensate the feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. But the pursuit of materialistic goals, instead of helping them to regain their self-esteem only leads to further lowering of their self-esteem levels. Thus the role of low self-esteem as a key moderator of materialism is well established and child hood related factors also play a major role in the development of high or low self-esteem [Coopersmith (1981)].

Authoritarian and permissive parenting styles [Baumrind (1966, 1967, 1971)], and non-intact family structure or broken homes [Bynum and Durn (1996)] help the development of low self-esteem in children from such backgrounds. Kasser (2002), Abramson and Inglehart (1995) and Cohen and Cohen (1996) recorded the link between disadvantaged socio-economic environment and low self-esteem development in children. Kasser (2002) provided enough evidence to the fact that children brought up in an environment where they were made to feel insecure developed materialistic tendencies. Based on these evidences it can be deduced that there are four
factors such as authoritarian or permissive parenting, non-intact family structure, growing up in economically deprived environment and also unmet safety or security needs during childhood that lead to low self-esteem as the child moves into adulthood. This is being captured through the schematic layouts shown below.

![Schematic Layout](image)

**Childhood**

**Fig. 4.1: Childhood Factors and Low Self-Esteem [source: Thomas et al. (2011)]**

Kasser et al. (2004) conceptualized two different pathways of materialism of which the inadequacy-insecurity pathway is projected in the fig 4.1 above. The second pathway of materialism was the socialization pathway caused by the effect of media especially television, social factors such as the influence of the family, peers and social comparison with remote referents. While pronouncing this theory regarding the existence of alternate path-ways, Kasser et al. (2004) asserted that these two pathways interact, resulting in the development of materialistic tendencies. In turn it meant that people with low self-esteem are more influenced by media, peer pressure and other societal
Theoretical Framework of this study

forces. Fig. 4.2 given below is a pictorial representation of the alternate pathway theory discussed earlier.

![Diagram of Alternate Pathways of Materialism]

Fig. 4.2: Two Alternate Pathways of Materialism [Source: Thomas et al. (2011)]

The literature review on materialism has revealed to us that most materialistic persons get into acquisition and consumption of material possessions, especially status items [Richins (1994), Richins and Dawson (1992)]. The notion underlying behind such actions is that it fetches them esteem in the eyes of others and the belief that possessions make them happier [Belk (1985)]. There exists a large number of research outputs which tell us that most individuals who get into acquisition of material possessions thinking that it makes them more happy and contented find the opposite to be true. They find themselves more stressed and less satisfied with life in general [Kasser (2002), Diener et al. (1993)]. There is enough evidence to believe that many individuals who adapt to high consumption life styles end up in financial
distress and some even end up with psychologically deviant behaviors, like compulsive consumption habits [O’Guinn and Faber (1989), Faber and O’Guinn (1992)]. Fig. 4.3 below shows the forward linkages of the materialism layout indicating the negative facets connected with materialism.

Fig. 4.3: Pathways of Materialism and Forward Linkages [Source: Thomas et al. (2011)]

4.4 Findings of the Exploratory Study

An exploratory study was undertaken by the author, prior to the main study [Thomas et al. (2011)], to ascertain the role of childhood factors and low self-esteem as causative factors of materialism in our environment, in India. The study was conducted with a sample of 203 post graduate students, who were in the final year of MBA program in two institutions in Kochi, selected randomly. Materialistic values of the respondents were measured using both Richins and Dawson’s scale and Belk’s scale, while self-esteem scores were measured using Rosenberg’s global self-esteem scale.
Richins and Dawson’s materialism values scale showed a correlation of $r=0.004$ (p < 0.05) with self-esteem, which actually indicates that no significant relationship exists between the two constructs. Materialism values measured using Belk’s materialism scale was not considered the reliability coefficient, Cronbach alpha value was only 0.468 for Belk’s scale while the alpha value for Richins and Dawson scale was 0.701. Rosenberg’s global self-esteem scale was used for measuring self-esteem scores and the scale had a 0.777 alpha reliability score. On further analysis, it was noted that most of the participants (203 post graduate students) had high self-esteem (mean = 30.5 and SD = 4.08; mean value being 75% of maximum) and had happy childhood where their needs were well looked after. All the four factors which were considered causative factors of low self-esteem had no significant negative association with self-esteem. Chancellor (2003) too in her thesis observed high self-esteem levels and she associated this to the positive childhood related factors such as parenting.

The results of a few studies carried out recently to evaluate the existence of any association between materialism and self-esteem constructs are listed below.

- Study by Mick (1996) on two different sample groups saw significant but low correlations ($r = -0.19$, p < 0.01 and $r = -0.14$, p < 0.05)
- Study by Chancellor (2003) showed no significant relationship ($r = -0.12$, p > 0.05)
- Study by Meek (2007): showed lack of existence of any significant relationships ($r = -0.09$, p > 0.05)
- Benmoyal-Bouzaglo and Moschis’s (2010) study in France also showed lack of any significant correlation ($r = 0.039$, p > 0.05).
Similar results were observed during our pilot study with 48 executives in Kochi ($r = -0.104, p > 0.05$) which showed the lack of significant correlation between materialism values and self-esteem. This pilot study exercise too showed significant positive correlation between materialism and social pressure ($r = 0.597, p < 0.001$). Such results actually do bring in doubts about the role of low self-esteem as a contributor of materialism.

The results of some of the recent studies which used Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale across many nations were analyzed and are given in the table-1 below. The mean value of the self-esteem scores expressed as percentage of the total score (maximum value) shows that it ranges from 49% to 85%. On comparing this to self-esteem scores obtained in our exploratory study, the mean value to maximum score of 75% can be treated as an indicator of prevalence of high self-esteem among our respondents. Hence it can be concluded that a large part of the sample considered in the exploratory study had high self-esteem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. no.</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sample size (N)</th>
<th>Alpha Value</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean % of Maximum score</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a.</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>Barret et al. (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b.</td>
<td>-Do-</td>
<td>-Do-</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>56.25%</td>
<td>- Do-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>1782</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Richardson et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>26.23</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>Ang et al. (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>33.97</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>De-Bruin et al. (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1763</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>31.57</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>Vasconselos-Repos et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>31.77</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
<td>Hayden et al. (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>Meek (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>Conseur et al. (2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hofstede (1991) had noted that the culture prevalent in America and other western nations is more individualistic when compared to the collective cultures in Asian nations like India or Korea. Dumont (1970) showed this fundamental difference of Indians from their western counterparts in his book ‘The Caste System and its Implications’. Family ties are still very deep in India and cases of divorce are of much low compared to western nations [Kumar and Gupta (2003)]. This can be the primary reason for having higher self-esteem scores among the considered sample population, while many of them had materialistic values.

The results from the exploratory study [Thomas et al. (2011)] showed that about thirty three percentage of the population are materialistic. This showed the co-existence of high self-esteem and materialistic values which is contrary to the conventional beliefs. This made us question the prevalent thinking on the causative factors behind materialistic tendencies as low self-esteem oriented and also the premise that in our environment, materialism may not be driven by such internalized factors related to childhood, but it might be a set of externalized factors which are called the pull factors.

Conventional thinking has considered low self-esteem as the cause of violence, crime and aggression. Baumeister et al. (1996) made an interdisciplinary review of evidences and came out with the finding that high self-esteem individuals also involve in such acts of aggression and violence. They found out that high esteem individuals involved in such acts as an outcome of their threatened egotism or when their highly favorable views about self are disputed. Jordan et al. (2003) made similar observations about high esteem individuals. The aim of this study too was to investigate and see whether such factors are behind the co-existence of materialistic values and high self-esteem.

Schlenker et al. (1990) found out that high self-esteem people tend to be egotistical when evaluative social pressure is on them and this motivate them
to make good impression on others. This leads them to such behaviors including consumption patterns which make them favorable in the eyes of others. High self-esteem people always tend to internalize success by raising their self ratings. Tesser et al. (2006) showed that social pressure increased conformity and this conformity was positively associated with self doubt. These recent research works support our thinking that people of high self-esteem can be materialistic.

4.5 Social Pressure Pathway of Materialism

Those findings prompted the researcher to look at a different model other than the insecurity - inadequacy pathway based model of materialism. The socialization pathway revealed to us that socialization factors such as media (especially television), peers, family and social comparison can be the causative factors of materialism [Kasser et al. (2004)]. Most studies taken up on socialization pathway were trying to establish the relationship between television viewing and materialistic values. Research by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2003a) showed that most heavy viewers of television held materialistic values and the literature review carried out indicates the existence of such relationships. Our literature study made us come to the following conclusions.

Television channels across the world portray rich and affluent lifestyles which caters more to the fantasies and desires of individuals [William (1991), Shrum et al. (2003)]. Internalization of such values projected through television [Moschis and Moore (1982)] makes large number of individuals, especially youngsters, to get into upward social comparisons [Frank (2005), Royo (2007)] which develops in them a higher penchant for acquiring more and more material possessions [Ogden and Venkat (2001), Kasser (2002)].
In today’s society people make inferences of others based on the items they own and use [Belk (1980), Rosenfeld and Plax (1977)] and this naturally builds pressure on them, from their peers to buy and use such products which will provide them social status [Calder and Burnkrant (1977), Schenk and Holman (1980), Solomon (1983)]. This incessant desire for more and more material items brings in a cultural shift towards higher consumption standards and it leads many individuals to have greater reliance on debt financing [Richins and Rudwin (1994), Lea et al. (1995), Kasser and Ryan (1996), Nickerson et al. (2003)]. These inferences from literature clearly point out that media including television, peers, social comparisons and attitude to debt together cause social pressure on individuals and make them materialistic. Thus social pressure seems to be the cause that pushes high esteem individuals into materialism.

Attitude to television media, peer influence, social comparisons along with attitude to debt were considered to be the external factors that cause social pressure which finally create materialistic tendencies in individuals. These were together called ‘social pressure’ factors. The figure (fig. 4.4) below is an attempt to capture the new social pressure based pathway of materialism that is being suggested through this study. The shaded portions actually denote the broad areas which are being looked into through this study, based on which hypotheses are formulated.

In view of the findings from our exploratory study, the materialism model has been suitably modified to include the observed phenomenon of individuals with high self esteem but having high materialistic values. As the exploratory study has been carried out only in India, results obtained cannot be used for conclusively negating the inadequacy-insecurity and socialization pathways of materialism, believed to be cause of materialism in the western world. Instead it is
being proposed that materialism observed in Indian condition is not due to low self-esteem based pathways, rather it is caused by social pressure pathway.

![Diagram of Push and Pull Factors of Materialism (Source: Thomas et al. 2011)](image)

**Fig. 4.4: The Push and Pull Factors of Materialism (Source: Thomas et al. 2011)**

Parallels have been drawn from the Drive Theory and Incentive theories [Hull (1943)] used to understand the motivation process. Hull’s Drive theory emphasizes how internal states of tension push people in certain directions. Incentive theory emphasizes how external stimuli pull people in certain directions. According to drive theory the source of motivation is within the individual and according to incentive theory the source of motivation lies outside the organism. Drive and incentive models of motivation are often contrasted as push versus pull theories. The self esteem based pathways are internal need driven and hence can be categorized as push oriented materialism. Social pressure pathway represents the pull factors that cause materialism.
4.6 Development of Hypotheses

Self-esteem and materialism: Based on the literature and the conventional thinking it can be assumed that there should be a negative relationship between materialism and self-esteem, or in other words low self-esteem and materialism scores of individuals should have strong negative correlation. The exploratory study undertaken earlier by these researchers [Thomas et al. (2011)] had put forward findings contrary to this and hence it is decided to cross check these findings.

Hypothesis 1: Material values and self-esteem are associated terms

Self-esteem and Social pressure: In the exploratory study prior to this study we found out the lack of any relationship between self-esteem and social pressure. We undertake to cross check this finding here again and hence these hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2 : There exists a relationship between self-esteem and social pressure to consume.

Hypothesis 2a : There exists a relationship between attitude to television media and self-esteem.

Hypothesis 2b : There exists a relationship between peer pressure and self-esteem.

Hypothesis 2c : There exists a relationship between social comparison and self-esteem.

Hypothesis 2d : There exists an association between attitude to debt and self-esteem.
**Contributors of Social Pressure and Social Pressure:** It was presumed that four factors listed here, such as internalization of values spread by television media (attitude to TV), interpersonal and peer influence (peer influence), upward social comparisons (social comparison) and attitude to debt act as contributors to social pressure. The terms given within the parenthesis represent the short form of how these factors are indicated in the methodology and results part of this thesis. This assumption has led us to the development of the following hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 3:* Attitude to television is associated with social pressure to consume.

*Hypothesis 4:* Peer influence is associated with social pressure to consume.

*Hypothesis 5:* Upward social comparison is associated with social pressure to consume.

*Hypothesis 6:* Attitude to debt is associated with social pressure to consume.

**Materialism and Social pressure:** In view of the observations from our exploratory work, it is being hypothesized that social pressure factors play a major contributor role in the development of materialism.

*Hypothesis 7:* Material values are related to social pressure to consume.

**Social Pressure as a moderator** of materialism: The basic premise of this study is that materialistic values seen in our environment is not caused by insecurity-inadequacy pathway related to low self-esteem; rather it is a set of social factors that lead individuals with high self-esteem to be materialistic. The combined effect of these factors is termed as social pressure. This makes us to hypothesize as follows:
Hypothesis 8: Social Pressure to consume moderates the relationship between attitude to television, peer pressure, social comparison and attitude to debt and materialism.

The figure fig. 1.1 repeated below captures the hypotheses formulated.

Fig. 4.5: Summary of Hypotheses Formulated