In this chapter, the observations from this study, significance of such observations and the implications of such findings are discussed. Attempts are made to provide reasonable explanations on these research outcomes. Finally the major contributions through this study, limitations related to this study and recommendations for future research are presented.

7.1 Findings on the Association between Materialism and Self-esteem

Primarily this study examined the relationship between materialism, self-esteem and social pressure. Strong association was observed between materialism and social pressure while no significant relationship could be established between materialism and self-esteem. Hence an attempt was made to identify the factors that cause social pressure and materialism. Though a large number of studies indicated that low self-esteem is the major causative factor of materialism, the preliminary studies taken up by this researcher could
not find out any substantial empirical evidence to support the existence of such relationships between materialism and self-esteem, and it was decided to test this again here.

The results of the correlation tests taken up as part of this study, between materialism and self-esteem showed that there exists no significant relationship between self-esteem and material values \( (r = -0.033, P > 0.05) \). These results actually conform to the results from a number of studies carried out recently and these findings actually dispute the conventional belief that materialism is caused by low self-esteem. The claim that materialism is caused by a set of childhood factors that leads to low self-esteem, is also disputed.

The study is also indicative of the existence of higher self-esteem measures \( (m = 31.61, SD = 3.90) \) among the respondents. The mean value percentage of the maximum possible score was 79%, which clearly indicates the existence of high self-esteem among individuals, when compared to similar results from other studies across the world. A comparison on the materialism values of low self-esteem group \( (m = 32.00, SD = 11.14) \), medium self-esteem group \( (m = 49.89, SD = 8.12) \) and high self-esteem group \( (m = 51.69, SD = 10.10) \) with ANOVA values \( (F = 10.89, p < 0.001) \) showing high significance shows that materialism increases with self-esteem in our environment. This is contrary to the results from the correlation exercise which showed low negative but not significant relationship between materialism and self-esteem. Yule-Simpson effect or Simpson’s paradox say that such reversal is possible when data from different groups are aggregated.

This leads us to the inference that it is the high self-esteem prevalent among the population that create the lack of association between materialism and self-esteem.
Existence of strong family links and the high importance given by individuals to their family are the major factors that could be attributed towards the existence of high self-esteem among individuals in our society. This was tested in the study and it was observed that people who gave importance to family had higher self-esteem \((M = 32.09, \text{SD} = 3.80)\) compared to those who did not give such high priority to the family \((M = 30.42, \text{SD} = 5.53)\). Further the materialism measured with a mean score of \(M = 51.97\) and \(\text{SD} = 9.25\), clearly indicated the existence of high materialism and the existence of pathways other than the low self-esteem linked pathways. Family links enhances self-esteem as it helps in building up the individual’s confidence that the family is there for support during any adversities. The strong priority to one’s family arises from the fact that the individual’s needs were well taken care of when he was young. This matches with the findings of Banerjee (2008), Kumar and Gupta (2003) that in India traditionally high priority is given by people to family relationships.

### 7.2 Findings on Social Pressure as a Contributor of Materialism

In contrast to the findings on the lack of association between materialism and self-esteem, the study could establish a significant relationship existing between material values and social pressure \((r = 0.464, \text{p} < 0.001)\). Significant relationships exist between social pressure and the four contributors of social pressure, considered for this study, such as the attitude to television \((r = 0.507, \text{p} < 0.001)\), peer pressure \((r = 0.571, \text{p} < 0.001)\), social comparison \((r = 0.581, \text{p} < 0.001)\) and attitude to debt \((r = 0.468, \text{p} < 0.001)\). Correlation scatter plots developed showed linear relationship existing between these four contributors and social pressure. Partial regression plots between these contributor...
variables and social pressure also showed linear relationships confirming the premises set by the researcher.

A first stage regression analysis showed that 50% variations in social pressure can be explained by these four contributors. The regression model given below indicates that social pressure could be predicted by the equation:

Social Pressure = 1.149 + (0.520 Attitude to TV) + (0.236 Peer Pressure) + (0.330 Social Comparison) + (0.220 Attitude to Debt). Model predicted values were compared with actual measured values of social pressure and the scatter plots showed large significant linear overlap.

Based on these findings, one can draw inferences that attitude to television, peer pressure, social comparisons and attitude to debt causes social pressure in individuals. The second stage of regression analysis attempting to establish a predictive model between social pressure and materialism showed that social pressure alone could predict 21.5% variation in materialism and that materialism can be predicted by the equation: Material values = 36.014 + 1.37 (Social Pressure). Once again regression predicted values were compared with measured values of materialism and it confirmed the existence of linear association as predicted through the model.

Combining the output from these two regression exercises, the social pressure–materialism model as shown in fig 6.20 was developed. Accordingly, materialism can be predicted by the equation: Material values = 37.59 + 0.72 (Attitude to TV) + 0.32 (Peer Pressure) + 0.45 (Social Comparison) + 0.30 (Attitude to Debt). This output indicates that materialism can be predicted by the combined effect of social pressure and its contributing factors.

The partial correlation exercise shows that when social pressure is controlled, the correlation coefficients of materialism (dependent variable)
with the contributors of social pressure (independent variables), showed substantial fall in the values, with a 94% marked fall in the coefficient for attitude to debt variable. Pearson correlation values for social comparison, peer pressure and attitude to television also fell by 42%, 59% and 56% respectively. Such substantial fall in the correlation coefficients clearly shows the impact of social pressure in the relationship between these four contributor variables and materialism. This proves that social pressure plays a moderating role between materialism and the factors such as attitude to television, peer pressure, social comparison and attitude to debt.

The model developed through regression analysis was tested first using a discriminant analysis. A discriminant function (Material values = 0.39 social pressure + 0.06 attitude to television + 0.14 peer pressure + 0.52 social comparison + 0.21 attitude to debt) was used to estimate the materialism in the respondents. Centroids were estimated for high and low materialism and based on the discriminant function estimates of material values the respondents were categorized as materialistic and non-materialistic. The ‘social pressure-materialism Model’ predictions for materialism were found to match with 70% of the classifications using the discriminant analysis proving the validity of the model developed in this study.

The confirmatory factor analysis using structural equation modelling output, shown in fig 6.23 supports the social pressure – materialism model. Regression factor loadings obtained were 0.45 for attitude to television, 0.77 for peer pressure, 0.87 for social comparison and 0.51 for attitude to debt. According to this, social comparisons and peer pressure are the dominant factors in the development of social pressure and materialism in individuals. The prominence of possession defined success among materialism factors
Richins and Dawson (1992) indicates the status consumption behavior of the target population [Eastman et al. (1997)].

These outcomes are concrete enough to prove the hypothesis that attitude to television, peer pressure, social comparisons and attitude to debt play a causative role in development of social pressure. Hence this study also establishes the role of social pressure as an important factor in the development of materialistic values and also the moderating role played by social pressure.

7.3 Establishing the Social Pressure Pathway of Materialism

The question that is now pending for discussion is whether the study revealed a new pathway of materialism, different from the low self-esteem based pathways of materialism as proposed by Kasser et al. (2004).

The analysis of the data collected showed that there exists a negative correlation between social pressure and self-esteem \(r = -0.260, p < .01\). Attitude to television \(r = -0.224, p < .001\), peer pressure \(r = -0.245, p < .001\) and social comparison \(r = -0.149, p < .01\) were found to have significant negative correlation. Thus it can be stated that low self-esteem is generated by social pressure. The study also supports the established notion that internalization of values projected through television media, influence of peers and getting into upward social comparison lead to building materialism.

No significant association was observed between attitude to debt and self-esteem. Similarly, as it was observed while testing hypothesis-1, this study could not establish any significant relationship between materialism and low self-esteem. Though attitude to television, peer pressure and social comparison are found to cause low self-esteem, the findings are not conclusive
Summary of findings, discussion and conclusions

enough to come to the decision that low self-esteem cause materialism in our environment.

Looking at things from this perspective, it can be said that findings from this study are indicative of the existence of another pathway of materialism which is not linked to the currently believed self-esteem based pathway of materialism. It is the social pressure driven pathway of materialism caused by factors such as attitude to television, peer pressure and social comparison, which were common to the socialization pathway. Attitude to debt is an additional factor the role of which in the development of social pressure is established through this study and hence considered part of the social pressure pathway.

The substantial fall in the Pearson coefficients of the four social pressure contributors, during the partial correlation shows that social pressure actually moderates these variables. This makes us to conclude that the attitude to television, peer pressure, social comparison and attitude to debt causes social pressure which in turn drives individuals to materialism as envisaged in the model shown in fig. 6.14.

7.4 Discussions on Materialism and Status Consumption

The confirmatory path analysis indicates the prominence of ‘possession defined success’ with a regression factor loading of 0.698, in comparison to ‘acquisition centrality’ and ‘acquisition for pursuit of happiness’ with a regression factor loading of 0.46 and 0.36 respectively. The high dominance of ‘success’ factor in this study clearly indicates the incidence of status consumption involved in social pressure driven materialism. Supportive evidence for this can be seen in the studies by Wong (1997), Eastman et al. (1997, 1999), Kim (1998) and Wan-Jusoh et al. (2001) which establish the
strong association between status consumption and ‘success’ factor of materialism across many nations. Individuals in their attempt to fulfill their inherent need to appear successful in the eyes of others do get into buying of status related products. This matches with the findings of Packard (1959) and Dawson and Cavell (1986) that people consume products to demonstrate their superior status level. Thus people under social pressure end up being materialistic and indulge in high status consumption behavior.

The structural equation modelling shown in fig. 6.17 provides factual evidence to prove that social comparison and peer pressure (regression factor loadings of 0.87 and 0.77) play a larger influential role among the factors of social pressure in the development of materialism. The observed predominance of ‘success’ factor of materialism and the prominence of social comparison and peer pressure among the social pressure components can be easily linked. Belk (1980), Rosenfeld and Plax (1977) have established the fact that in today’s society people make inferences about others based on the products that they own. Upward social comparisons force people to compare what they own with what others own [Frank (1985)]. Studies by Calder and Burnkrant (1977), Schenk and Holman (1980) and Solomon (1983) have shown that more and more people buy such products which could fetch them the success tag. Thus it can be concluded that our target population do engage in high status consumption behavior driven by their materialistic need to appear successful in the eyes of their peers and others.

Works by Josselson (1991) and Clarke (2001) have proved that the influence by social comparison and peer pressure leads individuals to acquire and display status possession in-front of others and all such instances point towards an individual’s need to develop a favorable identity. Acquisition of products or brands endorsed by celebrities in the hope of gaining a favorable
Identity is well established in the works by Woodruff-Burton and Elliot (2005), Swann et al. (1992) and Erickson (1968). Thus it can be deduced that social pressure creates ‘possession defined success materialism’ leading individuals to high status consumption behavior developing out of an individual’s need for overcoming the identity crisis. The concept of second individuation process put forward by Bloss (1967) and studies by Rochberg-Halton (1984), Erickson (1968), Tabin (1992) and Blos (1967) support this finding.

7.5 Discussions on Other Key Observations

An observation that came up during this study is that one out of every four credit card owner (27.2% of the sample) maintained revolving credit, a high cost debt instrument. Such respondents were found to be having significantly higher level of social pressure scores (m = 12.14, SD = 3.62) when compared to those who did not maintain revolving credit (m = 11.09, SD = 2.94). As anticipated all the credit card owners (51% of the sample population) had higher attitude to debt measures and those with revolving credit had higher attitude to debt scores (M = 9.14, SD = 2.81) over those who did not have such loans against them (M = 7.81, SD = 2.55) and it was found to have significant variance (z = 3.783, p < 0.001).

Those who maintained revolving debt showed significantly higher acquisition centrality (M = 20.56, SD = 4.58) compared to those who did not maintain any revolving credit (M = 18.99, SD = 4.24) and the z-test showed significant variation between the two (z = 2.72, p = 0.01). This more or less points out the fact that it is the indulgent shopping habits of these individuals that has led them to revolving credit card debt and is indicative of the financial trap they would fall into if they prolong with such behaviors. It should not be
forgotten that a large majority of our target group is professionally qualified people.

During the study, the author tried to check the notion that people from larger metropolitan cities are more materialistic. This observation by Chan (2008) was found to be true in our environment also. Among the three cities from where the data collection has been carried out, Bangalore (Mean = 53.29, SD = 11.23) had higher levels than Hyderabad (M = 51.25, SD = 8.97) and Kochi (M = 49.86, SD = 10.49). The one way ANOVA results showed that this observed variation in materialism values is statistically significant (F = 5.386, p < 0.05). This supports our premise regarding the role of identity crisis triggering social comparison in causing ‘success factor’ of materialism. The chances for an individual to feel the identity crisis is higher in bigger cities.

To tally this with our major observation on the prevalence of success factor of materialism among our target population, the researcher initiated a comparison of the measures for the success component of materialism values. ANOVA carried out showed significant variation for ‘success’ factor (F = 3.830, P < .05) with measures for Bangalore (M = 18.00, SD = 4.66) higher than Hyderabad (M = 17.09, SD = 3.81) and Kochi (M = 16.81, SD = 4.45). This supports our finding that people from larger cities are more materialistic as there is more pressure on them to prove that they are successful in comparison with others. This hints at the higher levels of status consumption that happen in larger cities.

This study could generate empirical evidence to support the general notion that materialistic tendencies are stronger among younger age group when compared to the older lot. Results from this study showed that younger age groups had higher materialism. Age-wise classification of
scores showed that 20-30 age group (M = 52.77, SD = 11.15) had higher scores than 30-40 age group (M = 50.48, SD = 9.73) and 40-50 group (M = 47.03, SD = 8.38). One way ANOVA supported this observed variation (F = 5.101, p < 0.01).

### 7.6 Major Contributions of this Study

1) The study could establish the role of ‘social pressure to consume’ as a contributor of materialism.

2) It identified factors such as attitude to television (internalization or believing what you see on television as reality), peer pressure (susceptibility to peer influence), social comparison (susceptibility to get into upward comparison with rich and affluent referents and celebrities) and attitude to credit (propensity to take consumer finance or credit facility to support one’s buying behavior) as contributors of social pressure.

3) The study also helped in establishing the role of social pressure in moderating the four contributors mentioned above in the formation of material values in individuals.

4) It also indicates the existence of a new pathway which is different from the currently established low self-esteem pathway of materialism. This work could prove that it is not low self-esteem triggered by a set of internal child hood factors or socialization factors that causes materialism, in our environment. Rather it is a set of external factors that causes materialism here. The need to overcome an identity crisis seems to be the factor that leads them to develop materialistic values. This is evident from the dominance of ‘success’ factor of materialism among our target population.
5) The effect of variables such as attitude to television, social comparison and peer pressure has been borrowed from the socialization pathway of materialism and has already been studied by many as a causative factor of materialism. But the body of literature practically carries very little evidence to show the link that attitude to debt has with materialism. Hence this study can be treated as a pioneering effort in establishing the role of attitude to debt as a causative factor of social pressure and materialism.

6) Practically very little empirical work has been carried out in the area related to materialism and high status consumption behavior in India. So this work may act as one of the early works which could trigger further research in the related areas and would help in building documentary support of facts related to the causative factors of materialism in India providing a documentary base for other studies initiated in this area.

7.7 Limitations of this Study

Several limitations exist with this current research study. First limitation can be related to the sampling process used. Multistage sampling was adopted for this study, first deciding on the geographical locations and then the organizations and the data was collected from the persons who were present on that particular day when data collection was carried out. This leaves us with the question whether all the strata or segments that comprise the selected target population has been included in the sample group selected.

Secondly there are the limitations that go along with the survey method. One shortfall while adopting the survey method is its inherent disability to control the influence of other environmental factors while trying to assess the
causative relationships. Attempts have been made to reduce this limitation by developing scatter diagrams and partial regression plots which could indicate the existence of linearity in observed relationships. Further we have used confirmatory factor analysis using structural equation modeling where provisions for controlling the effects of such external factors are provided.

There could be various shortfalls related to the questionnaire in its design and structure. Though the questionnaire used has been developed by the researcher for this study, wherever possible, standardized and widely accepted instruments have been used. The questionnaire was lengthy which could have affected the accuracy in the answers provided by the respondents.

Further there could be issues related to the scales used in this study. Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale and materialism scale by Richins and Dawson are already used in a large number of studies across the globe and have established their validity as instruments to measure the respective constructs. Further we have established the reliability factor of these scales in our study. However the same reliability may not go with the social pressure scale developed, though we have taken precautions to see that the scale is valid and reliable. One major drawback was that a test-retest reliability checking is not done for this instrument.

Based on the available studies in literature we have limited the social pressure components to television viewing, social comparison, peer pressure and attitude to debt. There could be other factors which play a role in the development of materialism and social pressure. Though movies and print media also could act as influencers in developing materialism, we have limited our work with the attitude to television as this is an area where there has been literature support available.
Finally the timing of the data collection also could have its impact. The data was collected during October and November 2011. These months are typically festive periods in India when there is a general euphoric mood about shopping or consumption in general.

7.8 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should target on building more empirical evidence on the role of social pressure in triggering status consumption and high consumption behavior. Focus of this study was limited to establishing the relationship between materialism and social pressure and in identifying the contributors of social pressure and materialism. Though the existence of an alternate pathway of materialism driven by social pressure could be traced, the study could not check on the forward linkages to status consumption and compulsive consumption. This could be evaluated and illustrated through future research.

Future researches can attempt on improving the social pressure scale by initiating test-retest and also exercises to establish the validity and reliability of this instrument. Moreover the adaptability of the scale to other socio-cultural and national environments needs to be looked at.

This study was conducted primarily targeting educated or professionally qualified youth working as executives with some of the leading employers in South India. From the data collected it could be observed that most of the respondents belonged to the middle income groups. These groups place high emphasis on children’s education and family’s financial security. They generally take good care of their children and most of their basic level needs are well met. This study could be extended to the lower socio-economic groups where some of the children may be deprived of all those niceties that children from middle and upper classes have. A research targeting groups
from lower socio-economic backgrounds can ensure whether there is incidence of materialism caused by low self-esteem in our environment also.

Prominence of social comparison and peer pressure among the factors that cause social pressure leads to the belief that need to make up for an identity crisis that is leading people into developing materialistic values. This is another area where future research can focus on. The question to be probed is whether it is an underlying need to develop a favorable identity that is luring people into buying and having a conspicuous usage of status items. The answer would only substantiate the existence of social pressure route as an alternate route of materialism.

7.9 Conclusion

Though prior research had indicated the existence of materialism and associated high consumption behavior in our environment, much work has not been carried out to understand the reasons for such behavior in India. This study shows that materialism in our environment is not triggered by low self-esteem but a host of other factors more related to our socio cultural environment. So the most notable contribution of this study is that it has been able to empirically show the association between social pressure and materialism. The social pressure-materialism model outlined an alternate pathway of materialism which is not connected to the conventional low self-esteem pathway. Attitude to debt is a factor that has been included in addition to the socialization factors such as attitude to television, peer pressure and social comparison. No previous study has empirically traced a relationship between attitude to debt and materialism.

The proposed social pressure pathway of materialism could explain how different socialization factors interact and how the combined effect of such
interaction leads people to materialistic tendencies. This study has successfully built evidences to show such association and also to show the moderating role played by social pressure. It looked at materialism as a cultural value as envisaged by Richins and Dawson (1992). Banerjee (2008) had stated that in a collectivist society like that of India the identity of the individual depends on his or her social identity and status. This becomes evident from the findings of this study. Individuals are getting into social comparisons and status consumption as a means to build a favorable identity.

The predominance of ‘possessions defined success’ among the components of materialism, is a clear indication of the existence of status consumption drives among such individuals. They believe that by acquiring status possessions, they would be seen as successful individuals by other people. Little do they realize that they are getting into an endless trap, where they have to endeavor continuously to maintain such status built through material objects. This finding gains credence as there exists higher levels of social comparison and peer pressure among the respondents. Individuals are on a constant search by comparing what they have with what others have, because they feel that not owning such things make them perceived as not successful.

The literature provides enough evidences to prove that it is the need to develop a favorable identity that motivates people to get into status consumption. This desire to build a positive identity eventually leads them to materialism. This study has been able to develop this premise which could be taken up by future research to build more substantial evidences to show the existence of the identity crisis driven social pressure pathway of materialism.