ABSTRACT

In the 21\textsuperscript{st} century India witnessed a new format of stores which became a place to visit and see, allowing customers to drive a significant hedonic experience out of shopping. In today’s scenario, shopping has taken a new meaning. It has embedded the leisure time of people in itself. These retailing activities also ensure product availability to customers, reduced waiting time, provide them desired lot sizes, and enhance variety of the merchandise mix available to them (Bucklin, 1966).

With the advent and success of new policies of economic reforms, a change in the life style of people, their attitude towards life and an increase in demand for consumable goods by the new middle class, because of their improved wage structure, has been witnessed in the consumer behaviour. The middle class in India is estimated as 350 million in public communication, which makes them a lucrative market for marketers, whether from India or multinational business groups. The Indian middle class occupies 55\% (and growing) of India’s household income and is placed at almost US$ 4000 per capita (Bijapurkar, 2014).

The recent studies on middle class are focused on their consumption and the role of advertising in modifying their identities (Juluri, 2003; Mankekar, 1999; Mazzarella, 2003). The studies also focus on the impact of media which analyzes the public culture and identity awareness of middle class (Appadurai, 1996; Breckenridge, 1995). The studies in Indian culture on middle class focus on their public culture and link it with middle class practices which are further connected to their consumption and everyday practices (Donner, 2004; van Wessel, 2004). The consumption of middle class might be individually based on subjective set of practices (Fernandes, 2009).

This study broadens the concept of middle class and tries to understand their role in store choice. An effort is made to understand middle class consumers through their subjective ethnicity and the
The influence of latter on store choice and shopping behaviour. The subjective ethnicity is measured through five determinants (cultural intelligence, emotional intelligence, practical intelligence, culture self and ethnic identity), store choice is measured through three determinants (pragmatic legitimacy, perceived self congruity and perceived sensitivity to ethnic culture) and shopping behaviour is measured through three determinants (Need for touch, companion opinion, status consciousness). The study considers the store choice pattern of six ethnic groups (Brahmins, Rajputs, Mahajans, Muslims, Sikhs, and Kashmiri Pandits) which indicates that there is no difference among any of the ethnic groups in their store choice behaviour because of composite culture in India. Consumers from different communities always prioritize social acceptance from in-group and out-group members. The store selection activity is considered as a social phenomenon where consumers gather information from others (people from in-group or out-group) and through social and symbolic interactionism. But the behavioural differences exist between genders, which might have been caused because of their biological or cognitive differences.

In the spheres of socio-cultural and religious interaction caste plays a major role but in shopping activities it plays least significant role. It has been projected that by the year 2027 India will become the largest middle class group in the world. The economic growth and education will overcome social barriers and consequently, the caste division is expected to become insignificant in coming years in the minds of middle class. When a retailer opens the shop and a customer enters for shopping neither the retailer nor the customer asks about the caste of the other (Limaye, 2013).

In the present study the selected sample is of middle class and their identity is based on their position in the society. The study reveals that once people achieve some position in the society, their psychological behaviour gets more influenced by social norms and social acceptance. Their subjective ethnicity influences the store choice and shopping behaviour and the relationship between the two is moderated by gender and not by ethnic groups. This further shows that in composite multicultural society different ethnic groups interact with each other in their daily life; adopt practices of, share a sense of harmony with and also learn from each other to develop a composite culture in which every member of different ethnic group fits himself well.