

CONSUMPTION IN URBAN SPACE/S: A CASE STUDY OF MARKETS IN GURGAON AND DELHI

Dr. Ritu Sharma*

Abstract

Consumption frames a natural part of subsistence from time immemorial. There are specific choices, values and practices encompassing indigenous communities in post traditional times. Modernity, so far debated in intellectual circles, has pervaded the 'self' through array of lifestyle choices confronted by them; constructing self-identity as an organized endeavor (Giddens). Moreover, surfeit of images and signs influence people across classes subject to purchase of commodities of everyday use. In other words, mediated experience of these choices negotiates culture and their social relationship with goods in urban spaces. The change in their consumption patterns is often dominated by primary want to move from their stratum to another level. Therefore, the use of goods is more appropriate in lieu of commodities to communicate their assimilation. In this regard, symbolism refers to recognition vis-à-vis its utility. Objects primarily act to distinguish a lifestyle from its use-value to its exchange value by demarcating social relationship across all realms of personnel lives of individuals. However, even though the consumption patterns are restricted, it certainly accelerates the process of changing culture. The study is followed by an intensive appraisal of consumer's vis-à-vis affordability in cultural space of markets.

Keywords: intellectual Circles, lifestyle Choices, Social Relationship, Cultural Space of Markets.

Introduction

The metropolis is indeed the site of modernity: the essence of the modern spirit, a spirit which is formed ...urban environment¹. My paper attempts to address the meanings associated with consumption and its practices around the market space in select areas of Delhi and Gurgaon with the help of following questions: (1) to investigate 'consumerism' from consumption patterns vis-à-vis to the differential income, social- class, age and gender categories(2) the influence of the objects, symbols and images in everyday public places that determine the consumerist ideology and finally, (3)to what extent the use and effectiveness of the advertising information helps the consumer in interpretation of 'consumerism'. The field area of this study is differential market spaces chosen particularly for the spread of consumerism. Hedonistic consumerism has replaced the traditional consumption. Though, this is supported and encouraged by the high-income quintiles and a specific socio-economic class. Yet, the meaning and nature of consumption has altered the capacity to want in comparison to its need and differential tastes.

* Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India.

¹ Miles Steven and Paddison Ronan.1998. Urban Consumption :An Histriographical Note in Urban Studies,Vol.35, Nos 5-6.pp815-823

The market is seen as an *impersonal* mechanism or means of coordination that allows social order to emerge from the anarchy of diverse individual desires. Consumption acts as a bridge for the self vis-à-vis the social self being recreated at the market place. "The truth about consumption is that it is a function of production, and not a function of pleasure, and therefore, like material production, is not an individual function but one that is directly and totally collective" (Baudrillard 1988:464). Moreover, consumption has been represented in modern discourse, as an antithesis of production and underprivileged in its negative images. Even Marxism faced problems delineating production-which is deemed to be paramount determinant of human success-from consumption-which came largely to be considered a necessary evil (Mill 1929; Say 1964).). And, yet to one's dismay, after all, that there was no production without something being consumed, and vice versa. Commodities converge at the same time and place, as a centre of distribution¹. Sounding anew, a similar Marxian alarm over alienation and domination by use of one's own commodities and is also like a bad science of fiction novel"(Opcit Baudrillard 1988: 450). Such spaces, said to be constructed in ways that enclose and separate activities from wider spheres to the extent that they represent 'a complete world, a kind of a miniature city' (Jameson 1991:40). These spaces are organized around grandeur, leisure, and the spectacle that becomes the cause of consumption, popularly known as 'markets'. The word 'market' refers both to the act of trading between buyers and sellers at prices decided by supply and demand, and to the place, where buying and selling of goods occur. The investigation was pertinent in the twentieth century, partly because of growing materialistic needs vis-à-vis the change in the overall system of values, beliefs and culture of consumption. Europe and America were the epicenters of exaggerated consumption of household items and apparels, which later got dispersed all over the globe. The functional aspect revolving around these spaces were distribution and exchange, and their activity was not limited to material goods alone. Whilst, these markets brought people together in the same place at the same time, leading to exchange between people along with exchange of information.

Another validation is that the global balance is shifting to Asia with everything from cars to software, with consumers for luxury goods more in numbers than adult population of several countries; the Indian luxury retail market is estimated to leap-frog from around US\$ 3.5 billion to US\$ 30 billion by 2015.

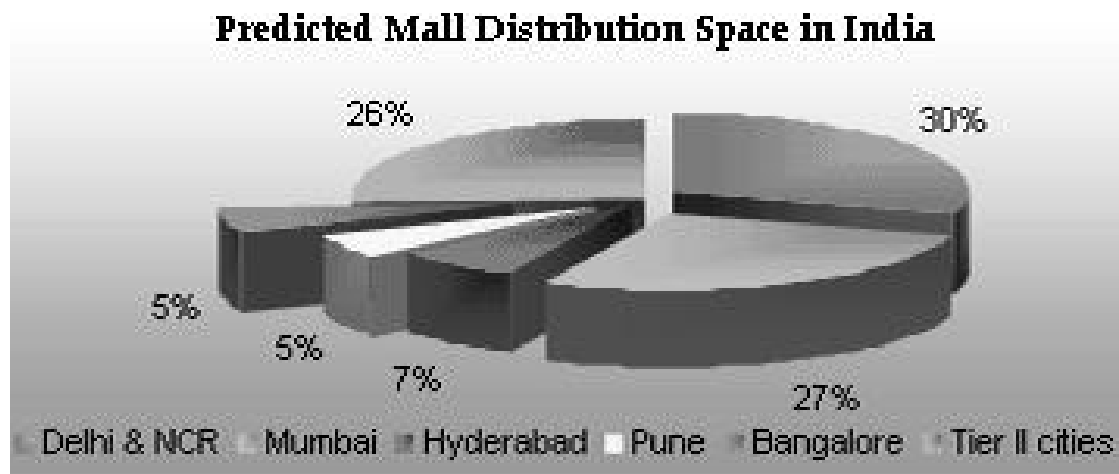
Modes of Consumption

Consumerism leads to spiritual impoverishment and hedonistic selfishness with its 'live now pay later' syndrome... and thrift with religion in general and puritan heritage in particular². Also, clearly manifest in the a TV advertisement : "*Money cannot buy everything but for everything else there is Master Card*. Credit is a demand on *future* production, but it functions

¹ Chung,Seung-Mo 2006 (ed) by Ted Chan *Markets-Traditional Korean Society* translated by Cho- Yoon-Jung, Min Yun -Young. Korea Ewha Woman's University Press. Note:The following thing has been described in the chapter-1*The Market Scene* pg-11.

² Kopytoff, Igor: "The Cultural Biography of Things" in A. Appadurai (ed.) 1986.*The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.p-56

as money (exchange value) in the present. Therefore, the income and expenditure are the most pertinent parameters to measure the consumption index of any country. Consumption is highly unequal, richest 5 percent of the world's population has 114 times the income of the poorest 57 percent (Migone 2004:178). In this study, consumers are analyzed on the basis of their income groups rather than traditional identities (castes, social, culture etc). Hence, deliberately a universal questionnaire was made to study consumption on the basis of the consumer preference unaffected by their income group in the market place. This helped to strengthen the hypotheses of research i.e. consumption as all pervasive irrespective of the income group vis-à-vis the consumers. The average age was taken to be 18 years and above. The income classification in this study has been borrowed from the NCAER market demography report (1998). Categorized into five strata defined per annum (1) Less than 35,000 (2) 35,000-70,000 and (3) 70,000-105,000 (4) 105,000-140,000 (5) above 140,000. (NCAER.1998). The diagram depicted below is the mall distribution provided space provided in India. The maximum number of malls is in *Delhi & NCR* followed by *Mumbai*; and the lowest in *Bangalore* and *Pune*, in spite, of the maximum spending power of younger generation in these particular two cities¹.



The Indian retail market, which is the fifth largest retail destination globally, according to industry estimates is estimated to grow from the US\$ 330 billion in 2007 to US\$ 427 billion by 2010 and \$637 billion by 2015.² Those living in northern India particularly Delhi and Ludhiana are predominantly driven by herd mentality and as social emulators are constantly trying to keep up with Joneses. Thus this herd mentality is well elaborated in this research as the chosen field area in NCR. Besides, consumers' expendable income has grown by an average of 11.5 per cent over the past decade³. The term "Indian consumer market" is a

¹ <http://www.fundoodata.com/companies/42/market>

² AT Kearney's annual Global Retail Development Index (GRDI www.atkearney.com, 2006) Indian Retail: on fast track bridging the capability gaps, www.kpmg.com, 2006

³ ASSOCHAM, www.lcsc.org, 2006

misnomer: it would be more accurate to describe it as a collection of different consumer markets(NCAER)¹.The above statement is a valid reason to pick these heterogeneous markets as base for this study on consumerism.

The research was conducted in the market place of two zones - New Delhi and Gurgaon. This field work was held at intervals of the festival season, discount as well as normal seasons which covered almost a year. India's two largest cities Delhi and Mumbai, will continue to be biggest markets (Mckinsey report 2007). *Gurgaon* contributes over 50% of Haryana's income tax revenues along with Faridabad (wikipedia). Though, it lagged behind *Delhi* in terms of purchasing ability for high-end consumer durables like colour televisions, scooters, refrigerators and mopeds and other durables costing over Rs 6,000². Empirically, study resides in the fact that consumption has been studied from a consumerist perspective in markets (hyperspace)³ of India.

The categories of central market are *south extension*; and *munirka* and *vasantkunj* in the category of local markets; and *Ansalsand select city walk* in malls for the zone of *Delhi*. *Gurgaon* was little restricted due to its location- *sadarBazaar* as central market; *Sector market* for the local market; and *MGF Metropolitan* in the category of mall;was chosen randomly. Following markets were randomly selected on the basis of accessibility, location, convenience and substance as mentioned above The methods ensured that the sample was representative of those present in *Delhi and Gurgaon* market places. These three were the representation of interpersonal relationships (local); formalized disembodied self's(malls) and old forms of bazaars (central market).

Market Category and the number of Respondents (Field Survey 2008-09)

New Delhi	No.	Gurgaon	No.
Select City Walk-Saket	25	MGF Metropolitan mall	25
South Extension I & II	25	Sadar bazaar	25
Munirka	25	Sector market 4	25
Total	75	Total	75

150 rear samples were taken as respondents were randomly picked 50 from each market category : 75 each from *Delhi* and *Gurgaon*, i.e. Malls, 'Bazaar' and Local markets. The framework of the research are both open ended questions for the analysis of the advertisements and close ended questions for the questionnaire. This study was held at intervals of the festival season(discounts), as well as regular times to observe discrepancy in sales during discounts. Around 15-20 malls were initially visited to finally discover the functional field area for the research. Initially, it was difficult to frame a questionnaire, hence, FGD's were conducted to avoid misinterpretation, and to explore additional information for

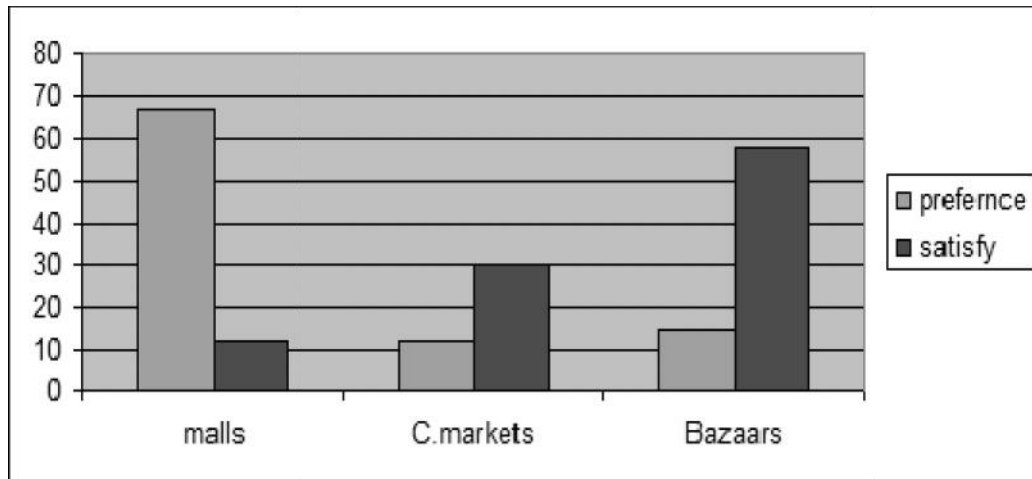
¹ National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER). 1995-96.The above has been slightly modified by IndiaOneStop.Com

² According to the latest survey by advertising agency *R K Swamy BBDO* called Guide to Urban Markets <http://www.rediff.com/money/2004/apr/15survey.htm>.....April 15, 2004 14:49 IST

³ Jameson.

the direction of questionnaire at the initial level of interview. Nevertheless, The non response rate was 3% because of several reasons such as: Consumers expressed not to waste time, as they were too busy in visualizing and acquiring information's of their need and want. There were several questions asked such as:

Q. Which category of markets do they prefer and feel satisfied for consumption?



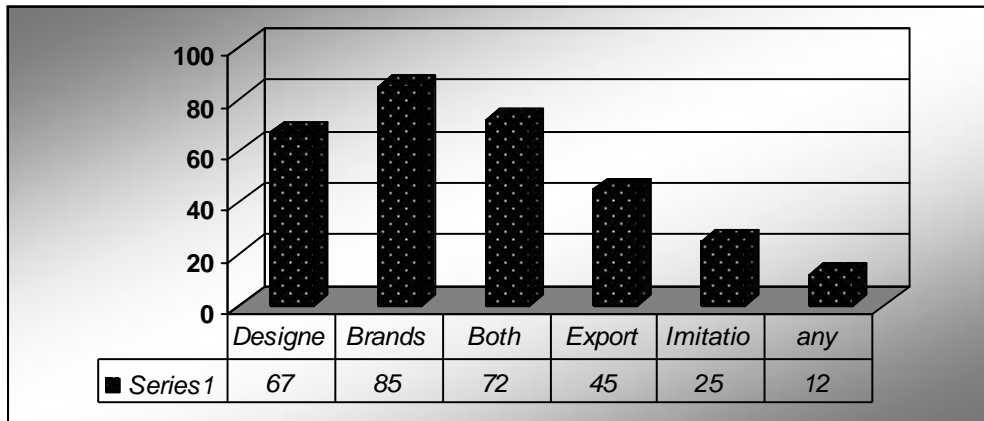
The Level Preference and of Satisfaction in Markets. (Field Survey 2008-09)

The diagram above represents the figures quite very well. Consumer goods have significance that goes beyond their utilitarian character and commercial value (how the exchange value takes over the use-value). As 67% of the respondents wants to go to the mall but when it comes to virtual shopping 58% prefers to shop from a local *Bazaar*. Out of this only 15% and 12% of the respondents of all the age, income groups prefer to go a local *bazaar* and the central market as of priority. And 30% get satisfied in the central market as compared to that of the 12% in the malls. Therefore, consumers are wise however, pretends otherwise to gain advantage. Most importantly the operation of such measures takes place in a localized coherent spaces-markets.They are the wider social spheres to the extent that they represent 'a complete world , a kind of a miniature city'-and the the particular type of crowd practice or flanerie as the hypercrowd' (Jameson 1991:40). At the same time the needed goods can be bought which make consumption as an event¹. These were the following expressions randomly picked by few respondents: "*life comes only once*" ;"*Money is sand it comes and it goes*"; "*Live today as if there is no tomorrow-who knows what happens tomorrow-I should have no regret*"; "*Take Easy man*"; "*what if I earn less money, once in while I can splurge*"

Q. What is your preference if you intend to buy apparel?

Q. What is the preference degree of consumers?

¹ Miller, Daniel. 1987. Material culture and Mass consumption. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.p-35



Preference of clothes (Field Survey 2008-09)

Here, there was lot of discrepancy found in the choices filled in the questionnaire versus preference and how they feel empowered and liberated in the markets such as:

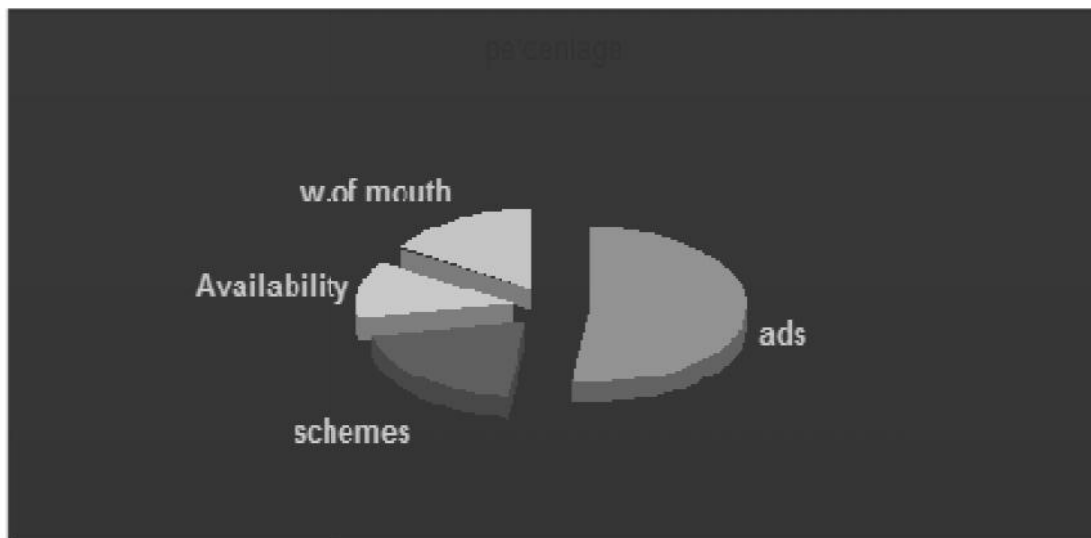
- **Response I** "Shopping is a great high for me, after all you congratulate yourself for the great job done well. It is a way to pamper myself even if no one does isn't it then all empowering in itself" (**working women**)
- **Response II:** *Even if I go bankrupt then also I will try and make it to the brands due to the association and loyalties involved. As once if I've started wearing a sports brand then I would not like to be those stupid feminine kinds by not using it. The brands have also provided me a niche in my office and other places; they recognize me by my brand association. People very well know that I don't compromise and my assets should be apart from the crowd. As I am a modern girl and an equal.(Employee in call centre)*
- **Response III:** "I forget everything once I am out for window shopping as it's a complete leisure time for me with no disturbance form anyone else. I feel at peace man even if only for a while doesn't matter". (**A Bank executive**)

The above statements are certainly not to read out objectively as it carries subjective connotations more than what it states clearly. Their engagement with the urban fabric is disinterested as it lacks grounding in the pragmatic regimes of the everyday life. Lifestyle is usually understood as some sort of material expression of the consumer's identity. The above emphasizes the role of lifestyles in maintaining the ontological insecurity and the coherence of self (Giddens 1991:81). Thus, there were expressions where they even refer to each other as *Nike girl* or *Armani boy*. There is a considerable distance between the physical properties of a product and its powerful meanings of influence (Adidas, coco cola). To buy a particular style of jeans (say, Levi's) or newspaper (say, Times of India) suggests the kind of image and status one wants to portray to others. In this sense, all commodities have their own *symbolic-value*, as well as their particular use-value (utility) and exchange-value (price). The above is only relevant when one has a referral point to display one's ostentatious consumption to others. Market is not created by outsiders but instead reflect the social and political construction of each society. Therefore, the focus is to analyze markets as a social category to unravel the nuances of consumerism in modern age. The consumption of goods and services has an

important role to play. As a result, the need to express a particular lifestyle then creates desires for particular consumer goods. 'Lifestyles are fragmented, stylized practices that are in constant state of agitation without necessarily assuming any particular order. In a postmodern world 'everyone can be anyone'. Real life has turned into the art of living, reality into the aestheticization of everyday of life' (Featherstone 1991:65-78).

It was an amazing experience as after interviewing to some, the way these labels, endow them with a unique sense of identity in their habitus (Bourdieu,1977) this can be traced to the roots of capital logic (Bourdieu), and structures of meanings (Baudrillard) rationalizing the commodity logic manifest in the sphere of consumption. The values and belief systems filters through the everyday life of culture industry and dominates the logic of production of consumption. Traditional forms of enjoyment and leisure transforms its meaning into a new form of 'wanting and recurrently wanting' needs created by commodities¹. Surprisingly one of our respondent also revealed statement as:- *"Small shop owners know better than the big shop owners and are updated on the discounts and schemes. Hence,are more profitable for our budget and also provides a second opinion of test and trial methodology on themselves"*.

Q) Which mode of advertising influences you most in consumption?

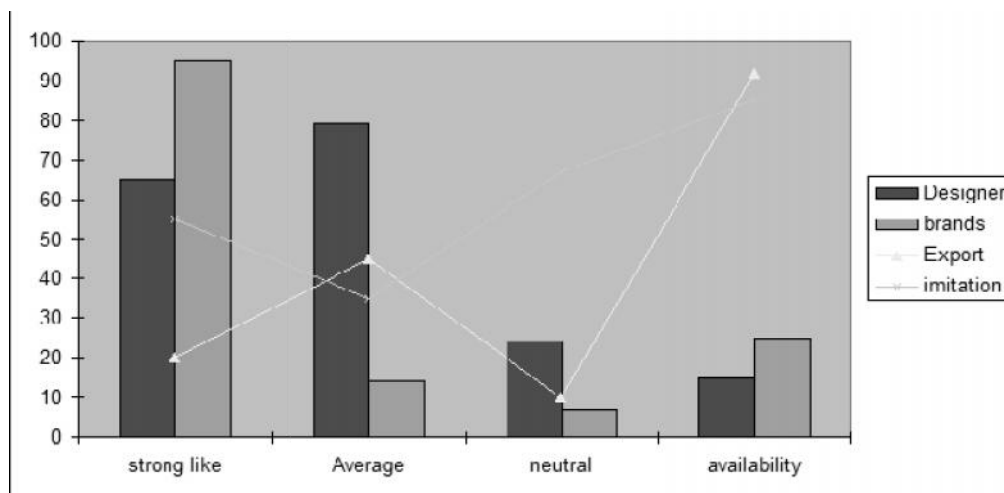


The Mode Influencing the Consumption. (Field Survey 2008-09)

On the basis of advertisement is 52%, form word of mouth and optimum usage is 20% each and simply purchase on the basis of availability was 12%. Therefore the strategic influence effecting the sales was still word of mouth 16%,which again shows the wisdom of the consumers.

Q. To put their priority as per the scale of likeness?

¹ Content analysis of the popular culture whereby the culture shrinks to the propagated commercials inspired by their very own traditional needs and wants.they are best described as the reflections of the society in a stipulated time slot in between the programmes.



The Preference degree of the Consumers (Field Survey 2008-09)

The results can be studied through a close contrast from the above diagram providing preference of imitation almost equivalent to that of either of the brands or designer s)

Q.) When I asked them what is their preferable car?

They named *Mercedes E class!* the reason they gave was definitely not logical but had subjective connotation of Bourdieu's habitus. *Ludhiyana* is a live example of hosting the maximum number of sales of *Mercedes* cars in India-probably functions on the principle of competition of conspicuous consumption.(Veblen,1899.).Similar is the case with Rolex watches-as the most likeable brand amongst watches. Consumers are least bothered of the price as they are deconstructed to the 'other self', directed by the laws of the consumer society. Similar to that of Bourdieu distinction (1977) and the round steel rim on the bonnet of Mercedes similar to that of Baudrillard's sign (1970) to communicate their status in the society. As discrepancy was observed between the choice of preference and their purchase a correlation was made as part of the study. In this study the most amazing fact was that 75% of low income group along with that of the super rich have shown an equitable interest in their preference of cars. Thus the entire exercise was deliberately implemented to articulate their consumerist attitude as an ideal type of their consumer preference.

Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the rationale for the logic of consumerism. The rationale is that consumers will increasingly want, and desire goods for innumerable reasons as a means to identify and satisfy themselves. All choices in everyday life are not always to want for need rather it creates more false needs. Moreover, it is both integrative and disrupting to the access for resources. There are certain observations made such as: Meanings are socially constructed so they confer the feeling of dependence on references; Relationships are established through the meanings endowed within a complex of cultural and social network amongst people; consumption is unconscious part of their identities and so their true representation reflects and emerges out in the market place. Consumption is seen as a material

process based upon human biological needs mediated through its symbolic value urban spaces. The central tenet is the selfish altruism that consumers uphold- with their cause and effect of the purchase that benefits them rather than wider world. This 'inseparability' of consumerism and consumption offers the potential to promote more desires. As a corollary, there can be a cautious acceptance of the research thesis that consumerism has the potential to promote consumption. However, consumerism is not to be seen in negative light rather it adds new dimension apart from its utility. Consumption strongly linked with desires besides its functional utility is consumerism. Yet, in contrast, if the consumer becomes less interested in the brand and draws away from its impacts, then so will the advertising and their likelihood of taking action will be commensurately less. Regardless of whether consumers act individually or collectively, their market choices reflect an understanding of material products as embedded in a complex social and normative context. This can be called the culture of consumption in everyday life.

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