**Consumer Identity and Marketing Implications: Indian Urban Youth**

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**Introduction**

The consumption pattern of various generations of Indians has undergone a sea change over a period of time. From the generation that rationalised consumption in the times of scarcity that existed immediately post independence in 1947 to the generation that has consumption friendly ideology as they witnessed sufficiency from 1980 onwards. India opened up to Globalization in 1991. The current generation that can be termed as the ‘Liberalization Children’ is born with colour TV, multiple satellite channels, Internet and mobile phones. They have a full platter and yet demand a gourmet spread. This phenomenon can be well described by the tagline of a soft drink ad that was launched in the early years of liberalization. It said, *‘Yeh Dil Mange More’* (The heart asks for more). Similarly, the tagline of a youth accessories brand a few years later said, ‘*How many you have, man!*’ - clearly indicating that one is just not enough.

The post liberalization studies on Indian youth have covered important research areas. Venkatesh and Swamy (1994) have studied India as an emerging consumer society with reference to globalization and how youth impacts the economy, Cross-cultural study on material possession has been done by Ger and Belk (1996), on consumer involvement (Khare and Rakesh 2010), study on consumption resistance (Eckhardt and Mahi 2012), on Cultural politics of Globalization (Lukose 2009) and societal perspective of Globalization, with a small section on consumption (DeSouza, Kumar and Shastri 2009). De Pyssler (1992) has studied use of two wheelers among Indian youth. However, no study has been done so far on establishing the consumer identity typology of the post liberalization generation of India. That is where this study becomes significant.

**Indian Youth Population**

Besides being the world’s largest democracy, India has the unique distinction of having a very large youth population. 150 million young people, in the age group of eighteen to twenty three became eligible to vote for the first time in 2014 General Election of India. If this is looked at from the population perspective, this number is close to the total number of registered voters for the 2012 presidential election of the United States of America (169 million) and the sum equivalent of voters in several European countries (Rai, 2014).

The census of year 2011 shows that 53.81% of India’s total population is below the age of twenty-five and thus India ‘is a young country in an ageing world’ (Nilekani 2008). Liberalization is only twenty years old in India and the sheer experience of having the world market now at its doorsteps has made Indians youthful (Sinha 2011). The total disposable income in India is rising and in 2010, it was US$1.3 trillion. This was only behind Japan and China in Asia Pacific region. There is also a considerable increase in demand for non-essential goods. (Euromonitor Country briefing, June 2011).

**Liberalization and its impact on India**

Liberalization has often been linked to consumption. Theorists and researchers

acknowledge that the culture of modern day consumption, which started in the west, has subsequently spread and taken roots across the world (Belk 1996; Venkatesh 1994). For India, that remained a protected economy since its independence in 1947, liberalization was compared to second independence (Das 2000).

One definite impact liberalization had on India was that making money was no longer considered a bad thing. Das (2000, *xiii*) puts this in a perspective by linking it to the caste system, “Indians have not traditionally accorded a high place to the making of money. *Vaishya* or *Bania* (Merchant/Trader caste) is placed third in the four-caste hierarchy, behind the *Brahmin* (priest, teacher) and the *Kshatriya* (warrior, land owner) and only a step ahead of the labouring *Shudra*. Since the economic reforms making money has become increasingly respectable.” Mazzarella (2003) notes that immediately post independence, the ethic of Gandhian austerity became the guiding principle for middle class in India. Conspicuous consumption was not a norm in a country that was poor. Economic liberalization ushered India in to a new era where guilt associated with consumerism started rapidly disappearing.

Bijapurkar (2007) distinguishes between the pre-independence generation and the first post-independence generation. While the normal generational differences existed, they had ideological similarities. The pre-independence generation’s worldview was shaped by Gandhian values of simplicity, abstemiousness, self-reliance and frugality. This was a generation of unhappy consumers who constantly rationalised their spending. People born in the 60s, saw difficult times such as wars, famines and food rationing. That led them to be guilty consumers. However, “liberalization marked the ushering in of a non-socialist, consumption friendly ideology. The post-liberalization generation is coming of age – the first non-socialist generation of India… (That) have grown up without any guilt about consumption, even as they have never seen anything like the bad times” (Bijapurkar, 2007, p.50).

Mathur (2010) attributes this change to the rise in consumerism that is fuelled by increasing disposable income, especially in the middle class and availability of a variety of international commodities not available prior to liberalization. Consumption now has become a way of life in a manner that it seems to shape the identities.

**The global perspective on youth consumption**

Consumption, when looked at from historical perspective, had links to production and income. In the post-modern view, consumption is described as ‘the vanguard of history’ and the consumer as ‘global dictator’ (Miller 1995). Belk (1995) adds that it was only when ‘production, communication, sales and consumption became mass processes involving large institutions did behavioural investigations of these activities begin’.

Consumption and youth have been linked for many years now. The term ‘Teenager’ was coined primarily for marketing, advertising and manufacturing purpose to reflect the newly visible spending power of the adolescents (Savage 2007). Fowler (1995) suggests that young people were beginning to sample the attractions of consumer culture prior to the Second World War. It is argued that young people experienced a higher standard of living than the rest of the family, even among working class families, experiencing poverty.

Many studies describe the youth as careless spenders (Miles, 2000; Wilska, 2003; Palladino, 1996; Wyn & White, 1997) and this could be true of youth in any generation (Savage, 2007; Fowler 1995). However, the focus on consumption that the current youth display is what makes this as an interesting area of study.

Dittmar (2008) describes the current times as ‘mass consumer society’ where consumption is an obsession with the view that ‘to have is to be’, and adds that the reason why consumption is becoming a critical area of concern is that the traditionally stable form of identity construction, such as community, class, religion are eroding in urban areas. Identity is not ascribed but is achieved by consumption. Quart (2003) and Dittmar (2007) share serious concern over children growing up in a consumer culture.

**Youth Consumption Studies in other parts of the world**

Studies on youth consumer behaviour have been an area of interest across the world. Some of the studies done in recent years are by Dittmar (1992, 2007) with focus on how material possessions shape identity. Van Gorp (2005) has worked on a research model of youth, identity and consumption in which he has looked at how ‘identification’ and ‘distinction’ through consumption become pillars of identity formation. Koeman (2008) has researched identity formation through branded clothes among multi cultural youth in Belgium. Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) have studied Glocalization of youth culture in Greenland and Denmark. Autio (2004) has documented Economical, Rational/Reflective, Hedonist, Squanderer and Environment friendly consumer identities among Finnish Youth. Brusdal and Lavik (2005) have taken forward Autio’s classification to understand the consumer identity of youth in Norway. All the above studies (except Dittmar’s) are from developing economies of Europe.

In Asia, studies on impulse purchase and other aspects of consumption have been done by Chen-Yu, J. H. and Seock, Y.K. (2002) who have studied gender differences in impulse purchase of clothes. George and Yaoyuneyong (2010) have studied impulse purchase among students in USA. India oriented consumer behavior studies have been noted earlier in this article.

**Research Design**

This research aimed to explore the Consumer Identity Typology of the Indian Urban Youth in the light of qualitative empirical data. This study was inspired by Autio (2004) who had chosen Essay Writing through schools for her study on Consumer Identity of Finnish Youth. The method seemed appropriate for a younger age group (16 to 19 year olds in this case) because essay writing is part of school curriculum. In this research, essay writing and its analysis was not a viable option because of three reasons. 1. The age group is older (18 to 23 year olds) and no longer in schools and therefore organised essay writing was not possible. 2. Language barrier would make it difficult for the students to express themselves freely in essay writing as English is not their mother tongue. 3. Essay writing does not leave further scope for probing and getting deeper insights in to not just the process of buying but also that of consumption and disposal.

Therefore, the researchers used depth interview method because it allowed them to probe further and narrow down to one dominant consumer identity of the respondent based on his/her narratives of purchase, consumption and disposal of personal use items. The method allowed the respondents free expression, use of some vernacular words and phrases where they felt the need to express themselves better. The method helped over come the language barrier as English is not the native or the first language of the respondents. The research was carried out on a convenient sample. Each interview lasted for sixty to ninety minutes and it was essential for the respondents to devote such time and feel comfortable discussing personal matters of shopping, consumption and disposal. Therefore, the respondents known to the researchers through various educational institutes and family/ friend circles were contacted. None of the respondents were direct students of the researchers so as to avoid any hesitation that the respondents might feel in expression due to the perceived power equation between a teacher and a student. Of the forty respondents, twenty-five were females and fifteen were males, in the age group of eighteen to twenty three years. All the respondents were students with nine of them pursuing postgraduate studies and thirty-one pursuing undergraduate programmes. The respondents belonged to various states of India and represented thirteen distinct linguistic identities.

**Narrative Analysis**

All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Key findings on each theme explored were allowed to emerge from the data with the use of Grounded theory method (Strauss and Corbin, 1988). Iterative approach was used and line-by-line analysis was done of each narrative, with constant comparison between similar and distinct cases to come up with finer distinction between consumer identity types. At the next level of analysis the dominant identities were established on the basis of the theme that occurred repeatedly and consistently in the narrative. Primary coding led to specific coding and then thematic coding clearly establishing distinct consumer identity type. It was evident from the analysis that even though buying behaviour of two or more consumer identity types may be similar, it is the complete narrative of buying, consumption and disposal habits that makes for a clear consumer identity type.

The key consumption areas explored in the interviews that were used for establishing consumer identity typology were:

A. Consumer Socialization of respondents through narratives of childhood purchases. This was a necessary point of distinction because the transition in the pattern of consumption of Indians post independence has a reflection on how the parents of the current Liberalization Generation view consumption and disposal.

B. Purchase behaviour of personal use items such as clothes, footwear and accessories. These items are mostly bought independently by young people from the money given to them by their parents.

C. Purchase behaviour for gadgets such as mobile phone, MP3 player, camera, Laptop, Tablet. These are high-ticket items and almost always bought in consultation with and many times accompanied by parents.

D. Over all narrative on consumption and disposal of the above items.

**Major Findings**

**Consumer Socialization:** Ward (1974, p.2) links socialization to consumption by stating that “Consumer Socialization” is a process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitude relevant to their functioning as consumers in the market place. Since the liberalization children are a different generation of consumers it was essential to understand their consumer socialization while exploring their consumer identities.

The narratives brought out four clear Consumer Socialization categories:

1. Parents as disinterested shoppers

2. Indulgent Parents

3. Parents focused on spending to ‘educate’ children.

4. Parents focused on avoiding ‘instant gratification’.

**Purchase process of Indian youth**

Independence to spend money seems to be closely linked with the concept of ‘pocket money’, a fixed amount given to child/ youth, which he/she can spend at will.

Furnham (2001) has done extensive study on parental attitude on pocket money and has cited from studies on the regime of pocket money in different countries such as UK, Germany and USA. The article clarifies how in many western countries, parents start giving pocket money to children from the age of six onwards. There is an agreement between parents and children on what the pocket money should be spent on and children are encouraged to save as well. Many times, additional amount is given to children when they help in household chores. Some children also have small earning by doing part time jobs.

In India, however, the concept of pocket money is very loosely structured. Most of the needs of young people such as clothes, footwear, accessories and gadgets are financially supported by parents. Any addition to the above is bought independently by the youth, either by asking for extra funds from parents or by ‘managing’ from a regular amount that is given to them for commute and refreshments. Children or youth are not encouraged to work outside home to earn before they finish studies. Work done at home to help parents is never monetized. Therefore, most purchases of Indian youth are accompanied purchases and in many of them, the role of the parent is that of a financier as well as an adviser on what to buy.

**Disposal Narratives**

In the context of consumption and identity, disposal has mostly been looked at from the point of view of green consumption (Autio 2005, Autio et al 2009), environment friendly consumption, simple living with ‘desire for emancipation’, and ‘sacrificing the surplus’ (Cherrier 2009) and also voluntary simplicity (Alexander and Ussher 2012) among others.

Phillips and Sego (2011) have linked disposal closely with identity and examined it further to provide a distinct perspective. This further highlights the views on how Disposal is an integral part of consumption and identity. Gregson et al (2007, p.187) define disposal as ‘the separation of people from their things’. Roster (2001) calls it a physical and psychological process that separates the object from its possessor. Disposal can also be viewed as the final stage of the consumer behaviour stages of acquisition, consumption and disposal (Hanson 1980; Jacoby et al 1977). Chanel of disposal has been another area of research (Gregson et al. 2007; Hibert et al. 2005; Jacoby et al. 1977).

In this research, the focus is both on the channel of disposal as well as attitude towards disposal.

The researchers carried out a detailed analysis of the shopping, consumption and disposal narratives of the respondents and could identify seven key consumer identity types.

1. **Reluctant Consumer Identity**

Studies on Intentional and In-eligible consumptions have been done by Cherrier, Black and Lee (2011) with focus on sustainability. Ecological and Ethical consumptions have also been well documented. However, the Reluctant Consumer of this study is simply ‘not in to shopping’ and is not interested in buying. The Reluctant narrative clearly comes from consumer socialization with parents who have been disinterested shoppers.

As eighteen-year-old SK puts it, “We were never too much in to shopping. Shopping was always something you had to do as a last resort.” Or as DB, eighteen year old says, “I am not much of a shopper. If you tell me, I have to go for shopping, if I have to buy something I will come.”

For the Reluctant Consumer, shopping is not a priority, but a chore that must be left to someone else. “I don’t need to buy as such because my parents buy it for me. They surprise me because, I seldom ask for things,” says eighteen-year-old AD.

There is such a lack of involvement in the process that when confronted with the task of shopping, the Reluctant makes it very quick. SK narrates his buying as, “I try to make it very quick. So there is one *Champion* *Sports*, right down the road. So I try to go there and once in six months buy everything. So I am safe.” For DB, it is a task to be finished off. She puts it as, “I am undecided, we are going to *Westside*, will go there… and we will finish it off… I really don’t like shopping.” Lack of involvement also leads to brand apathy. This wouldn’t mean that the Reluctant consumer ignores branded stuff. It simply means that the brand has no specific association in their minds. They would pick up branded stuff for quality and durability but not for the intangible attributes associated with it. AD says, “I am not exactly a brand freak, but I prefer brands because you have that assurity that it’s going to be a good product and it lasts long.”

Though globalization has led to widespread consumerism and materialistic drive is no longer limited to urban India, there are still some young people who are not in to wanting or buying things. The Reluctant Consumer is conditioned in to thinking that buying, wanting, shopping are frivolous activities and should not have a priority in one’s life.

Yet, the Reluctant is a careful buyer. There is a definite value consciousness with buying, consuming and disposal of the items bought for personal use. Lack of interest in buying makes the Reluctant a conscious consumer, with a clear, no wastage policy.

The Reluctant consumer is so averse to buying that nothing can lure him/her to buy and therefore not a lucrative target for marketers. As SK puts it, “Even if the advertisement is there, there is an incentive to buy, there is a discount, you know there is 80% discount on a phone, if I don’t need a phone, I am not going to pay the 20% either.”

1. **Dependent Consumer Identity**

Studies on youth consumer identities done in other countries in Europe have not come across Dependent Consumer Identity. This may have a connection with the tradition of pocket money, which is found in those countries (Furnham 2001), and is not so well defined in India. Not having access to a certain specific amount as pocket money and managing one’s expenses from that could be one of the reasons for developing a Dependent Consumer Identity. As the concept of pocket money is not well developed and in many cases parents decide what children should buy, a Dependent Consumer Narrative is not surprising.

The Dependent Identity does most purchases with parents. As AP says, “I usually decide that (what to buy) on my own. But if it is something my mom really doesn’t like it then I don’t get to buy it.” If there is an occasion to shop alone, the Dependent Consumer will take a friend along to make sure that he/she doesn’t make a wrong choice. As SS says, “In college it is more of luxury shopping. Like friends would give advice and we can shop.” The Dependent Consumer trusts the judgement of others over her own. As SS puts it, “I ask my brother… he has a lot of knowledge. I would normally ask him to pick up gadgets for me.”

The Dependent narrative is cautious, and by and large, they are responsible consumers. Because they are not confident about their own choice, they are careful about buying. They return or exchange what they don’t like or end up using what they have bought. They enjoy buying things and possessing them, but are not confident about buying independently.

The Dependent Consumers will buy familiar brands, as the prior associating would make it easy for them. As SS says, “Very sceptical buyer… I like very fixed products so I know which brands to buy. Toiletries and all is not a difficult thing. But when it comes to choosing for clothes, electronics and all I don’t like to make a choice.” Marketers would have to direct their efforts accordingly.

1. **Economical Consumer Identity**

In Autio (2004)’s context of Consumer Identity of Finnish Youth, to be an economical consumer means non-consumption and the denial of needs, or the deferral of their satisfaction. Autio’s Economical Identity narrative is about saving money and reluctance to waste money.

In the context of the Indian Urban Youth, however, the Economical Narrative is not about denial of needs, or non-consumption. This identity emerges from the childhood narrative where parents did not indulge them and delayed buying things. The Economical narrative is certainly about buying, but being extremely conscious about buying. It is about delayed gratification, and as Autio (2004) puts it as ‘saving for some purpose’. The Economical Narrative is also about need based buying, maximising the value sought from what one has bought. As PA, a twenty year old puts it, “Whatever is necessary I tend to spend on it. But other than that I am kind of *'Kanjoos'* (miser) about spending. But when I do, I just can’t stop.” As far as possible, they buy during sale from the malls or buy from local and flea markets, mix and match clothes and footwear to maximise the utilization. Twenty two year old AS says, “It depends how many pocket money I have. But otherwise, it depends on your necessity. Suppose I require a pair of jeans, or two pairs of jeans, then I would buy one of them with a top or things like that. Or if I am buying a *kurta*, (top) so I will buy one *pajami* (bottom), which matches with other *kurtas* (tops) also. So that way.” In some cases it is buying non-priority items with a tinge of guilt and not spending parents’ hard earned money for indulgence. As a respond puts it, “I am in to clothes a lot, these days. I love clothes and bags {LG}, so I am always saving money to buy a new bag or that sort of a thing… I am not in to spending a lot, mostly because I have to be accountable for the things I buy and my parents disapprove when I spend too much. I would probably go once in four months, when I make like a big expense sort of a thing.” The Economical Consumer does enjoy buying but is largely oscillating between the desire to buy and the need to be responsible about spending.

As DM, a nineteen year old says, “I usually try to make judicious use of money they gave me, so… my mom gave me four grand recently… so one grand, I would like put it separately in my locker and try not to touch it so that the next time… I want to buy something …I have a grand left.”

This narrative is about maximum utilization of things bought and avoiding any wastage and improper disposal. The Economical Consumer displays sensitivity in the process of disposal of things no longer in use.

The Economical Consumers make for a good potential market as they have deep desire to buy and will do so when they start earning. As PA says, “I have a potential to be a shopaholic but I am really trying to withhold myself. And trying to go ahead with what I can afford. But given the opportunity I might become a shopaholic.” DM further supports this, “I can’t afford Aldo. I just look at the shoes and am like I am going to get rich and buy one of these someday.”

1. **Rational Consumer Identity**

Autio (2004) related Rational Consumer Identity with green practices such as recycling, composting, economizing on electricity, water, buying organic food, fair trade practices and avoiding unnecessary consumption. Brusdal and Lavik (2005) term it as Political Identity, backed by a certain ideology of buying certain type of goods and boycotting certain other types.

The Rational narrative, in this research is about planned, careful purchases. It is about knowing one’s budget, waiting for the right sale and buying the best national brands at a good price. Consumer socialization of this narrative has been with parents who were non indulgent and educative in most instances. This is also the only narrative where the respondents spoke about having a specific amount as pocket money and managing within that.

This narrative is not about economising or buying when need arises. It is about recognising one’s needs in advance and planning to buy when the right opportunity comes by. As RC, twenty-one year old says, “I am a very rational buyer. I want value for money. I want my class in the lowest price.”

As the Rational consumer does planned buying, disposal is limited and sensitive. As RC puts it, “Gadgets, I replace them. I give them in return, I sell them before they trash. I sell them in working condition so I can get, you know, two years, a phone is in a good condition. So I get it exchanged. Get it reduced (rate) on my new phone. Head phones, head phones is like one thing that keeps rotating in a group.” Another respondent, YL says, “Clothes I end up either recycling and making something out of them. At home like I make little bags and stuff. But I still use it. Or I convert it to something else…Gadget wise, nothing really. I haven’t experienced it so far. None of my possessions have gotten spoilt or anything.”

The Rational Consumer narrative is constrained by limited resources and will not stretch for buying even though with parental support it is not difficult. However, they do have desires to buy and possess things, which are likely to materialise when they start earning. If not for themselves, they are likely to be buying for their children, what they could not buy for themselves. Over indulgence and splurging still may not be their style of consumption. From a marketer’s perspective, they will still remain rational consumers and look for quality stuff with in their budget. RC summarises it well, “They say, instead of buying three, you buy one, but buy a good quality… in our budget, it should fit me, the cloth should not be like that that after two or three wash it fades. Or it gets loose or it shrinks… it’s better to buy sensible than throw your clothes. It’s wasting money, time and effort.”

1. **Squanderer Consumer Identity**

Autio (2004)’s article on Consumer Identity describes Squanderer as someone who spends money on everything that is nice and spends money as quickly as it comes in. But as all narratives are cultural and the interpretations of these narratives are also culture specific, the Squanderer narrative in this research is also deeply rooted in the culture. Unlike in Autio’s study, the Squanderer in this study does not identify himself/herself as one. It is the interpretation of the researchers, based on the analysis of the narrative.

The childhood purchase narratives of Squanderer clearly relates to indulgent parents who supported instant gratification. The Squanderer narrative is about passionate buying. They are never satisfied with buying just one thing at a time and buy many of the same items at one go. This buying is coupled with no feeling of remorse or guilt and it also witnesses mindless disposal.

The stuff bought may or may not be branded or high quality. As SN puts it, “It’s on my whim… Like if I am going to college, I will buy a new backpack. Otherwise I just pick up stuff from wherever I see.” Many of their purchases may not even be useful but they would buy all the same, just because things are available. As TJ says, “I, at the starting of every season, whether I am having twenty or thirty t-shirts, I will buy. I will go for shopping.”

Craze, fetish, weakness are some of the words that form key part of Squanderer narrative. RB says, “My weakness is footwear actually. In a month, I purchase three to four pairs definitely.” The Squanderer buys with feverish passion and is in a hurry to satiate the urge to possess. She/he will find justification for this behaviour. There is limited or perhaps no research done before buying high value items. Consumption and disposal are equally hasty and thoughtless. As SK puts it, “If I end up with something that I don’t like I don’t use it. I just don’t use it. It ends up getting donated to… I do that a lot. I actually, just a few weeks back, I went crazy like I am going to college and I am growing up so let me clean my closet. So I ended up throwing 60% of my clothes.” Or as SN, a twenty-two year tells the researcher about her mobile phone, “I have a Galaxy…it’s a long story. I lost three in a row…One fell in the bucket, so it got wet and it stopped working. The other one, I lost, like somebody stole it from my bag. So that and the first one also, it stopped working. I don’t know something happened. So three in a row. And so I ended up with this.” Squanderer buys on impulse and then does not use most of what has been bought. It is not just their passionate, continuous buying but also their quick dissonance of things bought and careless disposal that makes them ‘Squanderer’.

Squanderers are forever eager to buy and are the kind of customers that would make marketers happy. As SN says, “I don’t really keep track of money. It’s kind of, my parents are very cool about that… I spend a lot… I save a lot as well. But then I end up spending it all…”

1. **Hedonist Consumer Identity**

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) in their seminal study define Hedonism as the consumption that designates those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multi sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one’s experiences with the products. Campbell (1987) describes a Hedonist as someone who is continually unsatisfied and dreaming and longing for new things. While it is true that Squanderer and Hedonistic narratives are focussed on indulgence in consuming in greater degrees than any other consumer identity narratives, what sets apart the Hedonistic from the Squanderer is the focus of the former on ‘maximising pleasure’ through the process of consumption. Autio (2004) distinguishes Hedonistic narrative in her article as ‘refusal to take moral burden for indulgence in consuming’. A singular distinction this research makes is that while shopping and consumption are an addiction for the Squanderer, it is therapeutic for the Hedonist.

Hedonism essentially means that ‘pleasure is good’ and this ancient philosophy was introduced by Indian philosopher Carvaka around 600 BCE (Heathwood, 2013).

Hedonists love shopping because for them, it is a pleasurable experience. It involves both - impulsive and planned purchases. Some love the service one gets in organised sector, others love the process of bargaining and getting a good deal in street shopping. Some love both. As KB, twenty year old puts it, “Mostly I do have this thing about planning my shopping visits, because I want time. I am a very picky person. I would probably shop, look around for like three hours and come back with like may be a dress or something... I am very slow with my shopping and I am not unsatisfied because I spend so many hours and I got what I wanted.”

Hedonists are involved in the process of shopping, bargaining, trying out, finding a good deal and finally buying and consuming. They are picky buyers. Price is not very important, but value for money certainly is a factor for consideration. When it comes to choosing, they are wiser and when it comes to disposal, they are more sensitive than Squanderers. They are careful shoppers, because they like to avoid any pain and dissonance associated with shopping.

The marketers need to give space to the Hedonists. They are dream consumers because they won’t need assistance but buy at leisure and spend time in the shops. As AS says, “For anything, I want it to be so very different that I cannot go buy things at a go. I have to think, I look at it with all the perspective and buy the thing. So I take a lot of time.”

1. **Aspirant Consumer Identity**

The Aspirant Consumer endorses Dittmar (2007)’s view that Identity is not ascribed but is achieved by consumption. ‘Brands make an individual a member of the elite society’ is a view held by the Aspirants. The Aspirant narrative is about ‘belonging’ to an elite class, to find one’s place in the society, in the newly created caste system that comes from the brands one flaunts. Their purchases are more about what others would think of them rather than what suits them or what is comfortable for them. HM talks about his purchases and what a logo means to him. “Logo means that when you are buying those shoes, people will see that these are Puma shoes or Nike shoes.”

The Aspirant consumer is a keen buyer and is on look out for things to buy.

Influence of the peers is a strong reason why young people move in to the brand sphere. When one sees everyone around him/her flaunting brands, it is difficult to neglect it. As NK says, “I am brand conscious. I want to buy good brands. Higher brands. I want to live in high society.”

The Aspirant Consumers are not confident shoppers as they depend largely on others to decide which brands to buy so that they get accepted in the right circles. Owning the best brands, staying updated are the key narratives of the Aspirant consumers who have a very clear view that brands provide status and position among peer group, teachers and members of the society and therefore must be obtained by an individual. They would buy from sale, factory outlets, first copy and even fake - as long as it is a brand that is recognised and clearly displayed on the item purchased. They continue to aspire for bigger brands.

When it comes to disposal practices of Aspirant Identity, more than clothes and accessories, wastage or disposal happen in the category of gadgets. The Aspirant consumer has a strong need to keep updating, and as a result passes off the used stuff to someone else and moves on to the latest.

The Aspirants are the dream target consumers for marketers. They always want to update and higher brand offerings will want them to buy. AT defines his buying by stating, “If I have some around seven to eight thousand, may be I could go for something interesting like iPods. Or any new gadget which has entered the market.” NK sums up the Aspirant Consumer identity very well, “I am brand conscious. I want to buy good brands. Higher brands. I want to live in high society.”

**Consumer Identity Matrix and Marketing Implication**

Based on the research, a consumer identity matrix was developed for a quick distinction of each identity type and its marketing implication.

Table 1: Consumer Identity Matrix

**Conclusion**

Late C K Prahalad (in Bijapurkar, 2007, *x*), Distinguished University Professor of Corporate Strategy, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan noted, “In India, consumption is not a factor of income alone, but also of demographic, psychographic and social determinants (which) may have as much relevance as expenditure data in segmenting and sizing the Indian Market.” He further adds, “India is like a kaleidoscope. Every time you turn it, you get a different perspective – enticing, different, and ‘real’. The basic requirement for understanding consumer India is to recognise that there are no simple algorithms to segment it… Indian consumers are very value conscious. They may be poor but are not backward.”

In the light of the above statement, thisstudy has helped define the dominant consumer identity typology of urban Indian youth of the post liberalization generation. While some consumer types such as Economical, Rational, Squanderer and Hedonist remain fairly similar to other studies, identity types such as Reluctant, Dependent and Aspirant are unique to Indian Urban Youth and must be acknowledged. This study also reflects that consumer socialization plays a role in developing consumer identity and as a result Reluctant and Dependent type of Consumer Identity are possible in a cultural context. While each of the Consumer Identity Type is distinct, Marketing efforts must match them.

It must be noted that considering the population of Indian Urban Youth, the qualitative in-depth interviews are inadequate for generalising consumer identity typology. However, this research defines what the consumer identity typology of Indian youth can be and this can be further strengthened with quantitative study to triangulate the results and come up with the final consumer typology of Indian Urban Youth. As Autio (2004) has concluded that even though convergence of aspirations and behaviour are seen, not all consumers are the same. This study identifies the diversity within young Indian consumers and should be taken forward to firmly establish these differences.

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| **Consumer Identity Matrix** | | | | | | | |
| **Categories** | **Reluctant** | **Dependent** | **Economic** | **Rational** | **Hedonistic** | **Squanderer** | **Aspirational** |
| **Consumer Socialization** | Shopping as frevelous, non priority activity | Not pleasant. Wanting to buy things but wishes not fulfilled. | Instant gratification avoided. Educative process. | Educative purchases, no instant gratification. | Indulgent parents. Pleasant childhood purchase narratives. | Indulgent parents. Instant gratification at all times. | Indulgent parents, helping the child ‘stand apart’ by material possessions. |
| **Process of buying** | Quick, uninvolved purchases. Brand apathy. Shopping is a chore. Money is not a problem, willingness to spend is missing. | All purchaes done with parents or friends. Not confident of buying independently. Money is available, confidence is lacking. | Cautious buying, delayed gratification. Concern about spending. Followed by guilt. Money in limited supply. | Well planned. During sale. Quality matters. National brands. Few but good quality stuff. Money is a constraint, but must be used well. | Very elaborate, involved. Will spend time, look at leisure, try out, go from shop to shop and then buy. Money is not a concern. | Frenzied, hurried, passionate. Quantity buying. Not necessarily branded or quality stuff. Money is not a constraint. | Brands for social recognition. Look for bigger international brands. Logo must be visible. Money is not a major constraint but their aspirations make it a constraint. |
| **Value Consciouness** | Carefully planned purchase and consumption. Using things till they last. | Responsible, non impulsive purchase. Using things bought | Buys basic, economy stuff. Price always a major consideration. Careful use. No wastage. | Planned, researched, quality purchase. Very careful use and disposal. | Buy to maximize pleasure. Careful buying to avoid dissonance. Will use and dispose reasonably. | Very limited. Impulse buying. Careless use and quick disposal. Things keep piling up. | Constant update makes it for non researched buying and quick disposal or hand over. |
| **Marketing Implication** | Difficult Consumers. Will not buy even when discounts are offered. Not worth putting too much marketing effort to lure them. | Boring consumers. Not in a hurry to buy. Will plan, consult, take someone along and then buy. May become independent when they start earning and develop more confidence. Worth investing in them. Supportive sales staff and known celebrities as endorsers will work well with. this identity. | On the brink consumers. Will buy when they start earning. Good potential market. | Responsible Consumers. Will always look for value for money. Will not splurge even when when they start earning. | Willing Consumers. Willing to spend time and money. Soak in to the expereince. Marketers to provide good shopping experience with helpful but not too eager sales staff to help them buy. | Eager Consumers. Always ready to buy. ‘New-in’ will get them quickly in to the stores. | Dream Consumers. Eager to buy brands. Willing to spend for tag. Brands must work on creating intangible benefits. Popular celebrity endorsers will help them choose. |