

## Market as Contested Space for Consumption

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**Abstract:** The central crux of this study is the underlying alliance of legal provisions vis-a-vis all-inclusive socio-economic development. The inherent relationship of gender inequality can be measured in terms of disadvantages accrued during pregnancy in process of amalgamation in labour market. This reasserts a gendered division of labour creamed with the governing principal of femininity (motherhood)—compelling women to surrender to full-time domesticity to fulfil their “primary” traditional gender roles of caregivers (mothers). These working women lack social and psychological support needed in postnatal medical conditions and at the same time feel guilty of not being competent for higher wages, promotions and bonuses even after return to work. This internalizes postpartum depression along with failure struggling with different self (early child care) and other household chores as reflection of dominant social norms in everyday life. Maternity rules are instrumental in skirting socioeconomic and political disparities in ever emerging gender parity. Therefore, a socio-legal enquiry is conducted in order to investigate the dubious role of Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017, otherwise introduced and enacted to discourage withdrawal during pre and post reproduction by strengthening economic and physical health of mother and child guaranteed by the Constitution. Simultaneously, discouraging attitude of employer and families to support young mothers to increase their participation in work force is yet to be registered. As employers are reluctant to recruit them due to extended leave (26 weeks paid leave) and on the flip side prioritizing family (new born) over work compels them to withdraw participation and loose vigour. Thus, this is an exercise to contextualise gender parity within the legalized frame of inequality.

**Keywords:** maternity, laws, feminist, gender parity, article, gender roles.

The metropolis is indeed the site of modernity: the essence of the modern spirit, a spirit which is formed ...urban environment.<sup>1</sup> There is a desperate need to address the materiality associated with consumption and its mediations within the market space. This imagery is the interpretation to provide us the understanding of the unreal world. As much as it is socially constructed, it is nonetheless the dispossessed reality of a consumerist discourse. There is bombardment of the flow of information to be filtered and scanned with limited capacity in postmodern times. The social reality thus encompasses people with its multiple communications channeled via its spectacle in the democratic market space. Although it can be narrated as a self-evident idea, it raises contradictions such as real and imagined identities and how pseudo takes charge of otherwise the obvious reality. The whole dialectics transcends and innovates an individual with robust sense of choices and decisions about everyday life. Therefore, the formation of consciousness within the ambit of ever evolving identities through the use of commodities becomes the basis of social relationships. The area of this study is differential market spaces chosen particularly for the spread and practice of consumerism of National Capital Region. The central tenet is to interrogate an enquiry in to market space (a) to investigate ‘commodity’ from commodification vis-à-vis the differential income, social class, age and gender categories; (b) the influence of the objects, symbols and images in everyday public places that determine the consumerist ideology; and finally, (c) to what extent the use and abuse of the advertisements facilitates the prosumer (consumer and producer). In this study, consumers are analyzed on the basis of their income groups rather than traditional identities (castes, society, culture). 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 study i.e. consumption as all pervasive, accelerating irrespective of the income group vis-à-vis the consumers. The income classification in this study has been borrowed from the NCAER

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<sup>1</sup> Miles Steven and Paddison Ronan, 1998, “Urban Consumption: A Historiographical Note”, *Urban Studies* 35, Nos 5-6, pp. 815–823.

market demography report. 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). Hedonistic consumption has replaced traditional consumption. Though this is supported and encouraged by the high-income earning groups and a specific socio-economic class, the meaning and nature of consumption has altered the capacity to want in comparison to its need and differential tastes. There would be market space seen as spectacle accommodating altering images as a unifying principle of its body. Empirically, study resides in the fact that mediations have been studied from a consumerist perspective in markets (hyperspace) of India.

### **Revisiting market space**

Traditionally this space has a historic character from the middle ages to the laissez-faire of nineteenth and twentieth century. Literally, the markets are 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 within the confines of this market space. “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). These spaces are organized around grandeur, leisure, and the spectacle that becomes the cause of consumption, popularly known as ‘markets’. However, 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 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, yet to one’s dismay, there was no production without something being consumed, and vice versa. Commodities converge at the same time and

place, as a centre of distribution.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, consumption has been represented in modern discourse, as an antithesis of production and underprivileged in its negative images. Marxism has faced similar problems delineating production from consumption to be paramount determinant of human success, which came largely to be considered a necessary evil (Mill 1929; Say 1964). Sounding a similar Marxian alarm, “over alienation and domination by use of one’s own commodities is also like a bad science of fiction novel” (Baudrillard 1988, 450). Hence, the above mentioned spaces are 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). 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 recent change in the paradigm shift of the global attention being diverted to Asia with everything from cars to software, to apparel and electronics. The information is widely distributed across generation via electronic or print media, yet the dialectic from populism to consumption realism is robust and interrelated in many ways.

### **Method of study: consumer patterns and ideologies**

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 particular.<sup>3</sup> As is clearly manifested in a popular TV advertisement: “Money cannot buy everything but for everything else there is

<sup>2</sup> Seung-Mo Chung, 2006, in *Markets-Traditional Korean Society*, edited by Ted Chan, translated by Cho-Yoon-Jung, Min Yun -Young, Korea Ewha Woman’s University Press.

Note: The above has been described in the chapter 1, “The Market Scene”, pg 11.

<sup>3</sup> Igor Kopytoff, 1986, “The Cultural Biography of Things” in A. Appadurai (ed.) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, p. 56.

Master Card.<sup>4</sup> Credit is a demand on future production, but it functions as money (exchange value) in the present.

Those living in northern India, particularly Delhi and Ludhiana, are predominantly driven by herd mentality. Thus, these herd mentality is well elaborated in this study as the chosen field area in NCR. The term “Indian consumer market” is a misnomer: it would be more accurate to describe it as a collection of different consumer markets (NCAER).<sup>5</sup> 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).

The study was conducted in the market place of two zones – New Delhi and Gurgaon. This fieldwork was held at intervals of the festival season, discount as well as normal seasons, which covered almost a year. Gurgaon contributes over 50% of Haryana’s income tax revenues along with Faridabad. Markets are the representation of interpersonal relationships (local); formalized disembodied selves (malls) and old forms of bazaars (traditional central markets). The above statement is a valid reason to pick these heterogeneous markets as base for this study on consumerism. There were 225 respondents, randomly picked from each market category, 125 each from Delhi and Gurgaon. The framework of the study was 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

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<sup>4</sup> Master Card is a leading global payment and technology company that connects consumers, businesses, merchants, issuers and governments around the world.

<https://www.mastercard.us>

<sup>5</sup> National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER). 1995-96. The above has been slightly modified by IndiaOneStop.Com

functional field area for the research. Initially, it was difficult to frame a questionnaire, hence, FGDs were conducted to avoid misinterpretation, and to explore additional information for the direction of questionnaire at the initial level of interview. There were several questions asked such as: which category of markets do they prefer and feel satisfied for consumption; what is the preference and intention to buy apparel; what is their degree of preference, etc. Nevertheless, the non-response rate was 3 per cent, reason being that consumers expressed the desire not to waste time, as they were too busy in visualizing and acquiring information of their needs and wants.

Market category and the number of respondents (Field Survey 2008-09)

New Delhi	No.	Gurgaon	No.
Select City Walk, Saket	50	MGF Metropolitan mall	50
South Extension I & II	50	Sadar bazaar	25
Munirka	25	Sector market 4	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

### Real versus imagined practices

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 want to go to the mall but when it comes to virtual shopping 58% prefer to shop from a local bazaar. Out of this only 15% and 12% of the respondents of all the age and 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 in decision-making; however, they pretend otherwise to gain advantage in their spending capacity. Most importantly, the operation of such measures takes place in 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 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 event.<sup>6</sup> 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 it easy man"; "what if I earn less money, once in while I can splurge". Here, there was lot of discrepancy found in the choices filled in the questionnaire versus preference and how the respondents felt empowered and liberated in the markets. Some longer responses were:

"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 woman)

"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 back office)

"I forget everything once I am out for window shopping as it's a complete leisure time for myself with no disturbance from anyone else. I feel at peace even if only for a while doesn't matter". (a bank executive)

The above statements are certainly not to be read objectively as they carry subjective connotations more than what they state 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

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Miller, 1987, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 35.

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), hence cannot be juxtaposed into a single argument.

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 reflects 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 the 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 aestheticization of everyday of life" (Featherstone 1991, 65-78). This is unique to the extent 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 commodities.<sup>7</sup> Surprisingly one of our respondents also revealed statements as: "Small shop

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

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 provide a second opinion of test and trial methodology on themselves.” The question such as mode of advertising influences them most in consumption? Are the most sought after in this study: 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. And to put their priority as per the scale of likeness the results can be studied through a close contrast providing preference of imitation almost equivalent to that of either of the brands or designers. For instance, they named Mercedes E class! the reason they gave was definitely not logical but had subjective connotation of Bourdieu’s habitus. Consecutively, Bourdieu’s distinction (1977) of the round steel rim on the bonnet of Mercedes is 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 automobiles similar to the likes of brand names of clothing. This analysis was a benchmark to establish the intimate relationship with the constructed reality of modern times. Thus, the entire exercise was deliberately implemented to bring forth their loyalist consumerist ideology as their preference more than their need. For the above argument, Ludhiana can be cited as live illustration of possessing maximum number of Mercedes cars in India-probably functions on the principle of competition of conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1999). Similar is the case with Rolex watches-as the most likeable brand amongst watches. Consumers are less bothered about the price as they are deconstructed to the ‘other self’, directed by the laws of the consumer society.

## Conclusion

The thematic concern 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 in a market space. This paper has attempted to identify the rationale for the spectacle of the hyperspace for the logic of consumerism. Consumption is seen as a material process to fulfill human biological needs mediated through its symbolic value in urban spaces. The rationale is to want, and desire goods to establish identity amongst peer groups. All choices in everyday life are not always to want for need, rather it creates more false needs and is accentuated in a commodified market-space. 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. Moreover, it is both integrative and disrupting to the access for resources by internalizing the external forces. 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 mediated as consumption in a contested space of markets.

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