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## Title

**“I am what I consume”**

### **Consumption and Identity in Indian Teenagers**

**Publication Summary:** This paper studies the existing writings on Consumption and Identity and explores the scenario of ‘Consumption and Identity in Indian Teenagers’ in post liberalization (1991) India. As the markets get flooded with more and more goods, do identities of people alter with consumer culture? How do teenagers find their affiliation with the brands and what happens to their core culture in the times of multiplicity of everything. Does the material world take over the real world that existed in the time of their parents? And can paradoxes like ‘sugar free sweets’ and ‘plus size clothing’ co-exist?

**Abstract:** As India moves swiftly in to Globalization, the new generation of Indians experience multiplicity of formats, brands and media. In a country that has 560 million people below the age of twenty five, certainly has the ‘demographic dividend’. Therefore this is the right time to explore and understand how consumption and identity are linked in the Indian teenagers.

**Key Words:** India, identity, consumption, teenagers

**Introduction:** “Identity is as unfathomable as it is all pervasive. It deals with a process that is located both in the core of the individual and in the core of communal culture. As the culture changes, new kinds of identity questions arise” writes Erik H. Erikson in ‘Identity: Youth & Crisis’ (1968).

Identity, youth and globalizations are three highly interlinked terms. Not one can be discussed without reference to the other two. The time of globalization and therefore the issues related with it may vary from country to country, however, some lessons can be taken forward from each of this learning.

## Literature Review:

As we go through the literature on the subject, the belief that the contemporary society is first and foremost, consumer culture Giddens(1991), Firat and Venkatesh(1994) .is strengthened.

Gabriel and Lang (1995) state that consumption has moved from a means towards an end – living – to being an end in its own right.

But the most interesting one is the view expressed by Tuan (1980, Pg 472) that states that “Our fragile sense of self needs support, and this we get by having and possessing things because, to a large degree, we are what we have and possess”.

Taking the line of thought forward are view of Giddens (1991) who states, “Self identity for us forms a *trajectory* across the different institutional settings of modernity over the *duree* of what used to be called the ‘life cycle’ – a term which applies much more accurately to non-modern context than to modern ones.”

Extending his view to the current scenario, he adds, “Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, ‘how shall I live?’ has to be answered in day-to-day discussions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat – and many other things – as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self identity”.

Interestingly enough, William James (1890) thought and wrote about how possessions are part of our selves a century before Giddens. His view was, “man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands, and yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down,—not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all.”

However, Giddens views on ‘modernity and plurality of choices’ and ‘the prevalence of mediated experience in modern times’ is critically relevant to current times.

Even with the arena of research available at hand, one first needs to define the way ‘identity’ is to be measured or understood in terms of consumption. A notable aspect of Identity, with reference to the topic, is ‘self esteem’ (Adams 1998, Deaux 1993, Eiser etal, 1995,

Wichstorm 1998). Self presentation is another aspect of identity relevant to consumption and also reflects the extent to which one wants to feel unique. One's body and body image can be of extreme importance in mapping a part of one's own identity (Thompson J.K. 1995).

The definition of identity involves two main ideas: Absolute sameness and lasting Distinctiveness (Craib, 1998). Identity plays an important role in ideas about identification and distinction and consumption plays an important role in the expression of it (Holt, 2000).

Products in the contemporary society have a sign value, also known as the symbolic value. As Campbell (1997) suggests, "It has become quite usual for sociologists to suggest that when individuals in contemporary society engage with consumer goods they are principally employing them as 'signs' rather than as 'things', actively manipulating them in such a way as to communicate information about themselves to others".

While people do use consumption to communicate something about themselves to others, product are being transformed to signs of distinction (Bourdieu, 2003{1986}).

'Being different from others or becoming distinctive among a larger group often results from signals conveyed by material objects that consumers chose to display' (Tian et al, 2001).

On one level is the exploration of globalization and formation of cultural identity, on the other is the exploration of linkages between identity and consumption. Lene Arnett Jensen, USA (2003) in her paper 'Coming of age in multicultural world: Globalization and Adolescent cultural identity formation' explores the extent to which the source of multicultural identity is important (direct v/s indirect exposure to other cultures); impact of the cultures involved and gains and losses of a multicultural identity as against identity formed by a primary culture.

While this is a large area of exploration as the media proliferation has increased and connectivity among the youth of the world is almost real-time, the impact of various cultures on youth identity formation and consumption habits is emerging as an area of exploration in various countries.

Dittmar (2008) states the importance of consumer culture, "Economic, socio-cultural, and psychological transformations, which have accelerated since the 1950s, have produced mass

consumer societies characterised by mushrooming credit facilities, overwhelming consumer choice, and a central role for consumption in everyday life.”

Jackson (1998) discusses the ‘cultural politics of shopping’ within the larger purview of ‘Consumption and Identity’. The paper draws theoretical constructs from work of anthropologists Daniel Miller and Mary Douglas, with empirical study in North London. The study examines the relationship between consumption and identity in more relational and socially contextual term, rather than taking a completely pessimistic view on the subject.

Catalano & Sonnenberg (1993) have a little drastic but a fairly pertinent view. They write, “The danger, however, is that you yourself come to believe in these material signs of identity. You begin to confuse image (how other people see you) with self-image (how you see yourself). You begin to confuse self-image with self-worth. Ultimately, you may think you are only as good as the car you drive or your newest pair of shoes.”

Belk (1988) takes a more academic view on the discussion on identity and consumption and states, “Our possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities. A variety of evidence is presented supporting this simple and compelling premise. Related streams of research are identified and drawn upon in developing this concept and implications are derived for consumer behaviour. Because the construct of extended self involves consumer behaviour rather than buyer behaviour. It appears to be a much richer construct than previous formulations positing a relationship between self-concept and consumer brand choice.”

As the Globalization reaches out to the developing countries, there is a view that ‘identity confusion may be increasing among young people in non-western cultures’(Arnett 2002). This article ‘Psychology of Globalization’ focuses on adolescent as they have ‘enough maturity and autonomy to pursue information and experiences outside the confines of their families’ and ‘unlike adults are not yet committed to a definite way of life’. The article recognises the increase in connectivity and therefore frequency and intensity of global cultural influences as defined by free markets, consumerism and individualism.

But as globalization spreads in to more developing countries, the focus of research naturally shifts to its impact and similarities in various countries and of course issues of cultural identities linked to it. Dannie Kjeldgaard and Soren Askegaard (2006) in their paper titled, “The Glocalization of youth culture: the global youth segment as structure of common

difference” examine the mythology of global youth culture. This study was conducted in urban and rural localities of Denmark – developed consumer society – and Greenland – which has strong links to Danish society but is yet socioeconomically on the periphery of global cultural economic development. The analysis illustrates ‘how these patterns and practices acquire distinctive meanings within the context of young consumers’ discourses of identity and consumption practices”.

Koeman, J (2008) in her paper titled “Branded clothing and identity management among youth in multicultural context” examines the relationships between identity orientations and attitude towards branded clothing among Belgium youth, both of majority and ethnic minority. The filters used by her are of individual, social and collective identity orientation; attention paid to similarity and differences in consumer behaviour; and relationship between identity orientation and attitude towards branded clothing.

An interesting research model on ‘Youth, Identity and Consumption’ is developed by Jeremy Von Gorp of University of Antwerp, Belgium. Van Gorp (2005) states, “Contrary to traditional societies, identity in contemporary societies is almost permanently under construction and nearly unlimited possibilities of vertical and horizontal mobility seem to exist.”

The research model aims to explore three aspects of consumption, identity and influences. First, the various aspects of identity that try to grasp how a teenager sees him/herself. Second, aspects of peers that try to get a hold of the social surroundings of a teenager that might influence his or her identity and consumption patterns. Third, other possible mediating factors (parental influence, income, school and media influence) are also integrated in the model.

What comes fairly close to the Indian economic scenario is the study conducted in Finland by Minna Autio. In her paper titled, “Finnish young people’s narrative construction of consumer identity” she describes how children born in the 1980s have not seen the difficult period of scarcity and shortage and are the first generation accustomed to affluence from childhood. Interestingly enough, Finland is still far behind Western Europe and the USA in terms of consumerism and consumer society and hence a little more comparable to Indian society only from this perspective.

Autio uses narrative techniques to understand the consumption patterns of Finnish young people and the narrative analysis helps define young people's style of consumption. The key narratives described in this paper are: the rational or reflective narrative, economical narrative, hedonistic narrative, squanderers narrative and responsible narrative.

Brusdal and Lavik (2005) use Autio's framework to study the consumer identities in Norway. Their key objective in the study is "to identify different consumer identities as types in a typology and to investigate whether consumer identities are stable over lifetime or whether they tend to change". In their paper titled "Yong Hedonist and rational grownups?" Brusdal and Lavik describe the key difference between shopping and consuming. Consuming is an activity that has many meanings, from the most instrumental action to the most expressive (Brusdal and Lavik 1996). Shopping on the other hand was the latent function containing personal motives like walking around, experiencing new things, socializing etc. They look at various consumer typology models before arriving at the model of Minna Autio that they use for this study. They also look at the variables like age, education and gender in shaping consumer identities.

The relation between youth and consumption has been a subject of studies all over the world and is becoming much more relevant to India now.

**Objective:** Is to explore how identities are shaped - not by ones family, nor by education or by social class alone but by what one consumes and what one flaunts.

**Indian Context:** As we sat discussing the topic of this paper with some friends from academia, in the serene environs of the canteen of the Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode, India, a learned member said," In our times, it used to be the brand of cigarette one smoked. In any case, what else was branded then?"

For most of us, in India, born in the times of scarcity and struggle, identity came from the family one belonged to. 'India is not a country for anonymous' writes well known Indian Journalist Sunanda K. Dutta-Ray. 'In India a person's self worth is almost exclusively determined by the rank he (alone or as part of a family) occupies in the profoundly hierarchical nature of Indian society.' (Kakkar & kakkar, 2009)

Furthermore, identity also came from the kind of educational institute one went to and most certainly the type of profession one was getting in to. Post liberalization in 1991, the scene has changed drastically and the researchers have explored how it impacts identity among teenagers, mostly from a commercial view point than academic one.

For the new generation of Indians born in ‘the Age of Sufficiency’, and rightly called the ‘Children of Liberalization’, there is a wide choice for consumption. This is the first time that the country is witnessing multiplicity of formats, categories and brands. There is an overall sense of well-being and rise in the levels of aspirations. Consumption has become a way of life in a manner that it seems to shape the identities.

Indian society - that was governed by the caste system which determined one’s place in the social hierarchy - is now witnessing a new social class. The class of ‘consumption’.

It is evident, through multiple avenues, that the most prominent culture around us today is the ‘Culture of Consumption’.

### **India in 2009 echoes Giddens premise of ‘modernity and plurality of choices’.**

In the part that follows, we see what contemporary young India is like and how consumptions shapes Identity among Indian teenagers.

Reading from a business magazine titled ‘USP Age’ (Nov 2008) that had a Youth Special issues, we came across this interesting paragraph: “The new American Generation Y, the generation born after the launch of MTV (1981) and the commercialization of internet (1996). There are over 60 million of them in the US; 140 million similar consumers in Europe and 20 million in Japan. These Gen Ys, also known as Millennials, or Echo boomers, behave very differently from their parents.”

Gen Y cannot be marketed to; they are too astute in the ways of marketing.

India has 560 million people below age 25. That is home to almost 20% of world youth population. (USP Age November 2008)

Nandan Nilekani, Chairman of India’s National Identity Authority and author of ‘Imagining India’ (2008) comments on the current status of India stating that India has a demographic dividend for next 30 years. Owing to better health care, infant mortality rate has decreased; life span has increased, thus making India the only young country in the aging world.

## **Post Liberalization Indian Youth**

According to the Indian Readership Survey of 2003, there are 160 million teenagers in India currently. This is the generation, born in and after 1991 – the year of commencement of Liberalization.

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Rama Bijapurkar, India’s leading Marketing Consultant writes, ” 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.”

The previous generations were mid-night’s children (Born around the time of India’s independence in 1947), or Gen X (people born between 1960s and 1970s) who witnessed slow development, struggle, scarcity, era of angst against system and rebellion. Their sense of identity came mostly from the family they belonged to or the education they had. The premier educational institutes like IITs (Indian Institute of Technology) and IIMs (Indian Institute of Management) were being set up. Medicine and engineering education were respected and gave an instant recognition to the student. Caste asserted one’s ‘belonging to a certain type of family, the newspaper one read asserted one’s political leanings and ideologies. Branded goods were few and far, but as stated earlier in the paper, the brand of cigarette one smoked, also gave a certain ‘identity’ to the person.

The children of liberalization are born with colour TV, multiple satellite channels, internet and mobile phones are a restless, impatient, multi tasking lot. This generation is born with a full platter and demands a gourmet spread!

Many urban teenagers today are part of the nuclear, single child and double income families. This is the age when they get regular amount as pocket money from their parents as they travel/commute independently to school and classes. Concept of ‘pocket money’ is very

loosely structured in Indian context and parents normally 'provide for' their children till such a stage that s/he is earning and ready to set up his/her own family.

Born with multiplicity of choices and wide exposure to media messages offered by liberalized markets, the young generation in India today has the purchasing power to indulge consequent to receiving progressively increasing sums of pocket money. This to some extent assuages the guilt which parents feel consequent to lack of having adequate time from their own employment, to address the needs of their teenage children. That is why it makes understanding the purchase and consumption pattern of these teenagers an interesting study for marketers and behavioural scientists.

**Method:** The present research is exploratory in nature and was carried out among Indian teenagers (13 to 19 year olds) in the city of Ahmedabad in Western India. However, the respondents came from various parts of the country.

The researchers carried out depth interview, among sixteen teenagers. Eight girls and eight boys, using convenient sampling. One of the researchers also used ethnography research, by staying with a teenager for eight months to understand his life pattern, consumption habits, issues of identity and self image.

### **Some excerpts from depth interviews:**

#### **Tarunn, the youngest respondent**

Tarunn is a fourteen year old boy, who loves to debate. He has a great sense of humour and enjoys sports like swimming and squash. His best moments in life so far have been, winning first prize in debate, his dog, Magic and his new school. He loves to travel but believes that flip side of travelling is that 'along with your mind it also broadens your waist line'.

Only child of his parents, Tarunn has all material comforts he can ask for. Yet, his biggest apprehensions are not doing well in studies, his mom sending him away to a boarding school or losing his dog, Magic.

Tarunn is more fond of watches than clothes or other accessories. His current favourite is his G Shock and his aspiration is a Tom Cruise watch. Leather strap, simple dial, analogue or no function watches bore him. A watch that he can't interact with is not his type at all.

Tarunn has over 60 friends, including his mom, dad and cousins, on Facebook. He loves to play games, try different applications and chat with friends. He likes to take pictures of others and uploads them on Facebook.

Tarunn has changed his school from a traditional one to a more modern one that has international board curriculum and methodology. Change in school and therefore related changes in overall acceptance of him by his teachers and peers is helping immensely in building his self confidence. Tarunn derives his sense of self worth from debate competitions. His recent acceptance in school magazine editorial team has also boosted his self esteem..

Though he doesn't mention it all, Tarunn is apprehensive about staying short (he is below average height for his age and is plump) and 'not being accepted' by peers worries him a lot. A poster of his 'aspirations' in his room has his photo-shopped picture looking lean and tall.

### **VS, the chirpy young girl**

VS, nineteen year old young lady was the second respondent. She is chirpy, talkative, and very expressive. A single child from an affluent family, VS has everything she asks for. She, too, has fascination for technology. She has few select friends and is choosy about her friends even on Facebook, where she is present '24X7'. Her friend lists consists only of people she has interacted with couple of times. She blocks those of her existing friends she hasn't interacted for a while.

Updating Facebook status is VS's hobby. Her Facebook status has to reflect her mood and it must be cryptic. Not having anything specific for status is also converted in to an interesting status line. Privacy on social network is a major concern and hence she has stopped using Orkut.

VS has recently bought a new cell phone. She now uses a Samsung that costs Rs.8500/- (Approximately 120 euros). She broke her Motorola V3i some time back. She then bought a Nokia Super Nova as it had a mirror finish, changeable covers, pink and blue, and 'Priyanka Chopra (a well known Indian actress) was endorsing it and she is pretty'. However, this phone has key pad problems and was more in service centre and less with her, so she sold it

off to buy her current Samsung multimedia phone. She did some research before buying and also used process of elimination to come to a decision. Her current phone has steel finish, has music, games, camera, very good web browsing facility. VS said the 'phone looks good and has the functions I look for' and after her previous experiences of breaking a phone and a wrong purchase for second one, she did not want to spend too much on a phone.

VS prefers her music on the phone as she doesn't like to carry a separate device for music as it is 'too tiring'. VS uses the phone camera mostly to picture herself when bored. She keeps taking pictures of herself to 'get the best angle' and hardly takes pictures when she is with friends. VS is also enamoured by Mac and is wondering 'how do I get my dad to buy one for me'.

A long term career goal is a major cause of concern for VS. She, like most others in her age group, is confused about what she will ultimately do. She is clear that she doesn't want to do MBA or any management related course as it involves maths.

Her other worry is about getting fat. She says she is a lazy person and doesn't exercise. She tries to compensate by skipping a meal or sometimes both the meals. VS says, "when I put on weight, the complex intensifies and affects my self confidence. I feel that people are looking at me 'that way' and I feel very low." VS feels that if one is not 'fit', one doesn't have too many friends. This comes out of her experience in school when she was fat and her friends commented on her and said that 'we can't hang out with you because you are fat'. Now things are different but she still feels 'when you are thin, it makes you feel good'.

VS loves shopping for clothes and accessories. Her choice of clothes is more about 'what suits her' and not 'what is in fashion'. She detests stone washed, torn, flared, boot cut jeans. So much so that she wouldn't even wear it if someone 'gave her a million dollar'.

VS would never be seen wearing a fake or some common brands. Or the 'dirty roadside stuff'. A tight T shirt, a short t shirt, showing off the butt when one sits is a major 'no no' for self and friends also.

VS shops with friends who have a similar taste or with her mom. She doesn't like stuff that looks 'cheap' and is shiny. Her friend had lent her cell phone to her when VS's phone broke. VS says that she was grateful to her for the gesture but the phone had colourful lights all over that started shining every time the phone rang. Even if she kept it in a cover, they showed.

VS's sense of identity clearly comes from two major factors. One, her body image. She wants to look good and yet is lazy to do much about it. Second, her clarity of what she does NOT want to use. The kind of clothes, phone, accessories, friends that are NOT her type, do not fit her self image.

Her consumption is not about brands alone, but about a clear choice of what is 'like her'.

### **AC. The fire and ice dude**

Nineteen year old, AC, studying Psychology in city college was the first respondent. AC plays basketball – doesn't watch any sports on TV -, loves music and movies. Unlike his peers, he is not hooked to a cell phone at all, but whenever he is on internet, he uses Facebook to chat, get updates on his friends, upload pictures and stay connected. AC uses a Lenovo mini laptop with face recognition feature, something that is not available on any other devices in that line of products. AC spends most his pocket money in buying stationery items, mostly pens. He loves the idea of being organized and makes elaborate time tables. He loves to read beyond his current syllabus, much more about his future aspirations. He loves to argue and certainly enjoys winning.

AC has many friends and is well connected. His friends are all real and love him dearly. Though not very outwardly expressive of his emotions, AC loves deeply. Though physically far away from her, AC's world is his mother and however much he might dream, mom is the final word in his life.

AC was looking forward to buying a personal portable music device in a given price range. His first choice was an iPod shuffle. But soon he got informed about the new Sony Walkman, wireless headphone 2GB MP3 player. He chose this because it was 'cool, functional and suits my personality'. He also went on to predict that this device will give a tough competition to iPod Shuffle.

AC has worked out to reduce his weight from a little over 100kg. Since then, he has started uploading his pictures on Facebook more regularly. He loves being photographed and taking his own pictures. From wearing 'anti-fit' clothes, AC is slowly moving on to clothes that show his well toned body.

AC is a dream downloader. He dreams of a new career every week, dreams of possibilities and constantly questions about various roles and responsibilities and most importantly the remuneration that will come with it. His material aspirations, in near future, is to get a Cross pen. Long term aspiration is a dream job in one of world's best consulting organization, a BMW for himself and a VW for his wife.

It would be wrong to say that AC's sense of identity and self esteem related to it comes from the MP3 player. It comes from the fact that he is working out to look fit, has a crew cut that makes him stand out and the MP3 adds to the 'overall persona' that now he is. The MP3 also gives him distinction as it is a cool, new product, unlike an iPod which most of his peers have.

### **Konki, in search of serenity**

Eighteen year old Konki is simple, serious minded, well spoken young lady. In the final year of college, this bright young girl, chose humanities over science. A not so common thing to do in India.

Her family consists of people with in her 'emotional frame' and not just her physical surrounding. She is a friendly person and loves to stay in touch with her friends, who are 'also like a family', through Facebook.

Konki loves chocolates but is 'tremendously worried' about putting on weight. She loves reading, junk jewellery and clothes. She is not very technology savvy and can live without her cell phone for three to four days. Internet is for information and entertainment and primarily for keeping in touch.

She uses Facebook mainly to keep in touch, upload pictures so 'cousins in US can see them' and for private messages. She enjoys applications like fortune cookies and which celebrity you are like. She enjoys a heart to heart conversation with her mom every evening and watches some funny reality shows with her mom.

Konki uses a basic, no frill cell phone, which is her fourth one after three lost ones. She enjoys soothing music in normal times and peppy music at exam time to perk her up.

Having stayed in a close-knit family through out, Konki's saddest moment was her dad's transfer to other town. They could not accompany her due to her and her sister's studies. Konki's aspiration is to be a good journalist or a manager in corporate sector. She wants to have a more disciplined life. Comfortable, not luxurious, simple and not complicated life is what she looks for. She worries about being inadequate and letting down her family. What kind of family she will get in to, after marriage and what life will be later is what she keeps wondering about.

Though Konki is not really over weight, she feels bothered about her self- image. She says, "I care a little but people around me are so well dressed that inferiority does creep in. If you look good, you feel confident."

Konki likes Indian ethnic clothing and is not much in to brands. Her aspiration is to have a LV bag which she had seen with a friend who came from US. She doesn't use much make up and despises metallic colours in make up and heavy jewellery or very floral perfumes.

Konki is far from the world of brands and a deep sense of possession for material things. Her comfort level comes from her family and being away from her family is the greatest apprehension of her life. Her world revolves around her current, future and extended family. This also comes largely from being in a relationship she is not very sure about and is worried that her family may not accept it.

**Findings:** Identity - among Indian teenagers – comes from following sources.

- A. The class of consumption. It is more about 'people who are more like me' in terms of the way they dress, the gadgets they use.
- B. The teenagers are equally clear about the 'distinctness' and what is NOT like them. They stay away from things and people who do not fit in to the same consumption class as them.
- C. Identity comes from 'original' stuff. Fakes are a big NO.

These three findings clearly indicate that possession and consumption do not have merely a functional value but a whole lot of psychological value attached to it.

Possession of certain type of product provides distinctiveness to an individual which

they are seeking here. The identity sought here is associative and by 'not buying' certain products (fakes, eg) one is also creating a dissociative identity.

Consumption pattern in these teenagers also shows a clear understanding of the resources available to them. The scarcity of resources and paucity of choices that the previous generation had witnessed does not even come close to a hint in the possession and consumption pattern of these teenagers. This reflects in their frequently losing and changing their mobile phones (something that is really not very cheap and thereby impulse purchase item), debit cards and other valuable items, buying but ultimately not using expensive things. This kind of luxury of squandering possessions did not exist in the earlier, middle class children.

Interestingly, among the teenagers researched for this study, the associative identity does not come from branded products alone. Style, peer-connect and created self image seem to play a higher role in their context.

- D. Body image is an equally important part of shaping their identity. Working out, wearing what suits one, taking one's picture and uploading them is the way to assert one's identity.

Again, body image concern is of a recent origin in India. Size '0' figure, ultra thin models and film actors, glorification of media and a hype created around films where both male and female actors have sculpted bodies is on a high. Leading male actors showing off six and eight pack abs, flaunting muscles; women actors slimming down to size 0 and fainting on the film sets create a sense of awe.

More than ever before, fitness centres and health food joints have started coming up in Indian cities. Male grooming is on a rise and specialised fairness products, gels, sun screens in an exclusive men's range adorn the shelves now.

All these have a huge impact on the self image of teenagers. It was interesting that each one of these teenagers I spoke to did express a great amount of concern about their body and their looks. Though none of them is size '0', except two of them, no one was particularly fat or obese to get overly concerned about body image. But gone are the days of voluptuous Indian beauties and tall and dark being called handsome!

- E. The teenagers consume media continuously. Being the first to know and first to get enhances one's self image. Therefore, being the first to use 'Bing', 'Clusty', trying out a new application on Facebook, being the first to get of download the songs of a new release, all are part of this.

For the 'Screen-agers' in India, this is the Era of instant gratification. They are constantly in front of one or the other screen. Internet, television, mobile phone, MP3, movie and sometimes it is multiple screens simultaneously. Though Facebook has higher popularity among urban teens, Orkut rules in smaller towns. Television viewing is still very high and it helps in being 'first' in many information arenas. Internet is used to stay connected with friends and downloading music and movies, watching videos and playing games. Very few Indian teens write blogs or upload content. They are happy commenting on others' content. (MTv youth survey 2008).

- F. With most things currently available to them, they aspire for things that seem a little further off their reach currently. Their aspiration list consists of Armani, LV, Cross, a very high end music system.

Interestingly, for most teenagers these are just brand names and hence a sense of aspiration. They look at these brands with a higher sense of possession than any great apparent psychological benefit like success or happiness. The deeper sense however remains that at that stage in life, they would have made sufficient money or would have achieved certain status and therefore these possessions will announce their 'arrival' in life.

- G. They have a fairly rational and philosophical view about relationship and are not stressed out by them. Having a girl/boy friend is important for one's self image, but a break up is quite comfortable.

Having a girl/boy friend, being in relationship starts much earlier in the lives of the teenagers and at this stage, it is close to stabilizing with the fact of having one or breaking up. However, not having been in a relationship till one is 18, would be quite a set back and would affect one's self image. They are almost in to the philosophy in lines of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all".

- H. With all due need for material possessions, aspirations of a life of comfort, leaning towards luxury, a deep sense of self image came from one's achievement. Whether it was second place in a dance competition or first prize in debate, losing weight to look good and gaining social approval.

This sense of achievement has now got many outlets. Media proliferation is an important component in it. India is currently in a media high wave with over 300 satellite TV channels, several private FM radio stations, booming film industry. All these provide a great opportunity to the young people. Talent shows, reality shows, beauty pageants, comedy shows, film industry – all provide a new opportunity to the young people to achieve something.

- I. Parents are in a supportive role. The teenagers shop with them, have been given sufficient independent spending power and are trusted with money, gadgets, friends and so on.

In India, children stay with their parents till they have finished their education and are ready to take up a job. In many cases this extends till they get married and set up their own family. Thus family provides a strong sense of identity and comfort.

- J. However, the most important thing that came out in the discussion with all the respondents is a strong sense of 'dependence' on the family. Being separated from one's parents or just the thought of it was a major setback or apprehension for them. The family is a strong support. As Kakkar & Kakkar (2009) put it, "If we exclude the rising middle class and very small upper-class elite, it is the family that provides the only life insurance most Indians have." And it is not just life insurance, but also one's sense of being and becoming that comes from the family.

This view is not so common in the western world as King, Yip, Fuligni (2008) state, "The family constitutes another salient social context in the lives of young adults (Parke, 2004). Although research regarding family identity is still emerging, it appears that the family signifies an important social identity in and of itself (Fuligni & Flook, 2005). One's family can even be seen to represent one of the more proximal social groups that are relevant in individuals' lives, in particular, adolescents' lives."

In India, one takes the family for granted for everything! Specially for one's identity. Many a times, one disguises the family name to hide one's caste or region but the support from family is always assured.

**Conclusion:** Getting in to the heart and the minds of teenagers, understanding their deep desires of possession and things that give them a sense of identity, was an enriching experience. This exploration can be summed up as, "Identity is not a role, or a succession of roles, with which it is often confused. It is not a garment that can be put on or taken off according to the weather outside; it is not 'fluid' but marked by a sense of continuity and sameness irrespective of where the person finds himself during the course of his life." (Kakkar & Kakkar, 2009)

**Limitations:** This study was conducted in one city of India. However, as mentioned earlier, the respondents came from various parts of the country and thus provided immense variety of region, social class, language and gender to the study. Even though with seamless connectivity, chances are that there are more similarities than differences among teenagers in metros. The results are likely to be different in smaller towns.

**Further Research:** Further researcher is intended to be carried out on a larger scale covering four metros and four towns, covering all four regions of the vast, culturally diverse country.

**Managerial Implications:** Globalization has brought with it new marketing opportunities to India. A new culture of consumption is sweeping through India and it is an important aspect of consumer behaviour to understand where these changes are coming from. Can a country, that has a huge diversity of caste, region, language, urban and rural, occupations, education be united by the culture of consumption? Many multinational brands have entered Indian markets, out of fascination for this huge market potential and have failed miserably as they failed to understand the cultural significance of this vast country. Will things change now as the real time connectivity and continuous global exposure prepares the new generation for the world markets at a much younger age? Marketers will perhaps have to explore the fine line

between the core culture and the material culture and see what ticks with the Indian youth that blissfully lives among the paradoxes of ‘sugar free sweets’ and ‘plus size clothing’, online wedding portals and off line dating adventures and products and brands that seem to define who they are and who they wish to be.

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