Factors affecting the consumer preferences in buying technological products

Şeyda Akyol

Marmara University, İstanbul, Turkey

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Abstract

In modern age societies have changed into consumer societies. Parallel to the spread of consumption phenomenon, it has now become a must to probe into consumer behaviors. Presently consumption, which originally referred to meeting basic human needs through goods and services, has gained a distinct meaning implying prestige and differentiation from the rest of community. As the most dynamic component, consumer behaviors constitute a significant place within marketing science. Consumer behavior is one of the fundamental topics of marketing science and one of the subdivisions of human behavior. Human behavior itself represents the holistic process in which individuals interact with the environment. Consumer behaviors, within the scope of purchase behavior, treat the exclusive types of human behavior. Consumer behaviors is the individual decision making process involving which goods and services to purchase, from whom, how, where and when to or not to purchase. Bearing a multidisciplinary approach the subject of consumer behaviors integrates common aspects from a variety of scientific branches. It stands as a major subject related to the scientific branches such as marketing, psychology and sociology. In order to be better able to grasp the reasons why a consumer favors a market good over the other option, it is required to understand the mechanism urging him/her to purchase this product. That is the basic motivation behind investigating consumer behaviors. Whilst in the past producers were the determinants of our choices in purchasing what, when and where, today the power is on consumers. That is the driving point of the necessity to effectively analyze new dynamics setting consumers' choices and developing appropriate new strategies.

Technological advancements have triggered remarkable transformations in social structure. The foremost of these changes has taken place in culture which forms a lifestyle that impinges on purchase decisions. The transformed culture has provided us with new lifestyles. Technology is a component of culture. Currently people are closely intertwined with technology in particular and they consume technological products in quite a fast pace. Considering the fact that we are all consumers in today's consumption- based society it is understandable to perseveringly seek answers for when, where, how and similar questions directed to consumption phenomenon in the ever- developing marketing world. In present study concepts that analyze consumer behaviors have been discussed. In line with this framework consumption concept has been emphasized and critical approaches towards consumption concept have been demonstrated. Upon explaining consumer behavior, factors affecting consumer behavior have been mentioned. In order to illustrate the ways these concepts are changed into marketing behaviors through which practices, a research sample has been presented. It also aims to prescribe conclusions by synthesizing previous works and provide suggestions that apply to global economy as well.

Introduction

In today's world societies have turned into consumption societies. Technological advancements have introduced changes in people's lifestyles too. People are now closely hand in hand with technology in particular and making use of technological goods more than ever. In such an age we have been transformed into a consumption society, keeping in mind that each one us is an eager consumer already, there is a parallel echo in consumption-phenomenon focused researches on constantly- developing marketing world. Hence marketing communication encouraging people to buy novel products gained wider significance. Parallel to the prevalence of consumption phenomenon, it turned out to be a necessity to search consumer behaviors.

Businesses seek to shape consumer behaviors and reach institutional targets to obtain competitive advantage by creating a transformation. It is considered that consumers shape and orient business activities but marketing programs are still programmed to affect consumer behaviors. Humans are, just as

valid in many different cases, endowed with many aspects or in other terms with multi-dimensional ways concerning behavior. That is why humans, whose behaviors vary greatly with respect to needs, are a reflection of supply & demand accumulation on the market. The activation of needs via satisfaction is a consumer behavior. Activation of needs via satisfaction is a kind of consumption. At this point action is created by the consumer. Consumer is, in reality, a client in need of purchasing goods parallel to the pressure of actual need. In order for businesses to lead their marketing efforts towards population, they urgently need to grasp consumer needs and behavior patterns. The behaviors of which multi-dimensional effects and reactions are scrutinized emerge due to a variety of effects: individual needs, motivations, learning process, personality, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of consumers; cultural, social class, reference group, family and similar socio-cultural factors in the society the individual is a member of.

Based on the factors listed above present study, covering a technological goods company operating in Turkey, aims to analyze a list of factors impacting on consumer preferences on the purchase decision of technological goods. The key objective of present research is analyzing formation perceptions of consumers' purchasing behaviors on technological goods.

Consumption Society

In modern age societies have changed into consumption societies. People's lifestyles have transformed immensely. Rather than manufacturing, consumption-oriented behavior forms have started to form. With the rise of consumption phenomenon discussions have also started to escalate; do people purchase a particular good or service to meet their needs or to differentiate from other people and gain prestige? In present day consumption, rather than satisfaction of natural human needs via goods or services, brings differentiation and prestige within the society.

Consumption is literally defined as using the manufactured goods and services to meet human needs and wills (http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consumption, 2014).

Despite the heightened interest towards "consumption culture" notion, there are a number of theoreticians critically approaching to this issue. The approaches of these theoreticians are frequently presented as the criticism of mass-culture on the distinctions drawn between pseudo individualism and reality which is greatly suspected today as well as the divergence between actual and pseudo needs(Featherstone, Mike:2013)

Driven from the biological substructure and characteristics of individuals, natural impulses turn into a consumption behavior and find their equivalence in daily life. Current economic system, adverts and marketing moves fuel these impulses even higher (Saad, 2012). In present day consumption should be seen, rather than satisfaction of natural human needs via goods or services, a global and consistent system of indications organized by codes and laws. In this system the contingent world of needs and joys; the position of natural and biological sequence is replaced with social values and classification sequence. In consumption society where the distinction between actual and pseudo needs no longer prevails, the individual believes in the assumption that purchase and showing of consumption goods provide social privilege and prestige; hence the logic supporting general social differentiation surfaces.

The need is no longer a demand for any particular object but a need to differentiate from the rest. In the system based on socially-constructed rational and hierarchical needs, a consumer is motivated not to particular objects but to buy the entire system of goods and services; in this process the individual feels to have differentiated from the rest of community while at the same time feeling to have united with consumption society. In return consumption becomes a necessity for the individual since the basic societal activity and form of unification and the valid ethics is consumption activity itself. In that sense consumption is not a free activity directed by the person himself/herself but on the contrary it is controlled by production order that is manufacturing and leading needs system, as well as the authority of interpretation system identifying the relative social prestige and esteem provided by consumption goods as indicators. In the end this alienation becomes so encompassing that consumption becomes an integral part of social structure (Baudrillard, 2013)

Consumer Behavior Concept

Rising competition in modern age and constant changes witnessed in marketing world make it a necessity to probe into consumer behaviors. According to the general definition of consumer: a consumer

is the one, after detecting a particular need or desire, making an appropriate purchase and then during the three stages of consumption process, discarding the product. However a list of people can also get involved in this process. It may not be the same person purchasing and using a particular good. Consumers may be institutions or groups in which one single person gives the decision to buy a particular product which shall be used my hundreds of people. In terms of marketing it is of great significance to grasp consumer behaviors since as emphasized by a basic marketing strategy too, the sole reason companies exist is to quench customer needs and wills. The way to meet their demands is possible to the extend companies understand people or institutions using these goods and services. Having a better understating of their customers then the businesses can outscore their rivals (Solomon:1993)

Consumer behavior is an applied scientific branch examining consumer behavior on the market and the explanations lying behind this particular behavior. Pre-evaluation of consumer behaviors implies gathering the data which can exactly fit the prospected marketing blend into the needs and wills of consumers. Obtained data shall assist in strategy development and procuring desired results. Hence the differences between expected performance and actual performance slump (Odabaşı, Barış, 2013)

Consumer behavior means investigating why and how people consume particular goods and services. The entire set of consumer behaviors can be based on three classical effects: characteristics of the person, environment of the person and inherited genetic features creating the biological body of any person. Characteristics of the person involve the personality, perceptions, attitudes, needs, wills and similar codes. Environment of the person is formed by the culture, subculture, family, friends and establishments s/he belongs to. Genetic features of the person are biological codes unique to the individual; like the DNA transmitted to the offspring. The stimulant (marketing etc.) promotes the formation of emotional and rational responses on the mind and these responses in turn may be initiative in guiding the person towards a particular behavioral pattern. These emotional and rational responses are also under the influence of personal characteristics and genetic features of the individual as well as surrounding environment. On that account any advert is at first interpreted with respect to cultural features of the individual which then forms a negative or positive response on the individual who subsequently chooses to buy or not to buy the advertised product (Chaudhuri:2006)

According to a different definition consumer behaviors concept is investigating the processes of selecting specific goods, services or opinions; purchasing, using or discarding and these processes are enacted by certain individuals or groups to meet their own needs and wills. During purchase process an emphasis is rendered to the interaction between consumers and manufacturers. Marketing experts now recognize the fact that consumer behavior is a continuous process. It is not simply a process involving instantaneous act of product or service purchase a consumer accomplishes via cash or credit card. It is known that change is a vital component of consumer behavior, however a wider outlook focuses on the entire consumption process which encompasses all the issues affecting consumer during, before and after purchase behavior (Solomon:1993). In modern day we use products to define ourselves and others. Consumers' voice receives great attention which forces the companies to shift their focus from simple marketing to marketing with people. In the world of consumption companies establish business partnership with customers in order to develop their brand identity and create interactive dreams. Those which succeed are aware of the fact that consumers purchase certain goods not because they are useful but they also possess a definite meaning (Solomon, 2003)

The feedback of consumers is the primary experiment determining if any marketing strategy shall be successful. That explains why data obtained from consumers are integrated to almost each segment of a worthy marketing plan. Data obtained from consumers shall assist the marketers in explaining the market and identifying emerging domestic or foreign threats and opportunities which might leave an effect on consumers' product perceptions (Solomon:1993). A good number of consumer researchers approach to consumer behaviors from a cognitive perspective alone and almost ignore all the other alternatives but this approach is actually casting aside rich varieties impacting people's choices. Focusing on processing through mental activity relates to ignoring the role of emotions, effect of character on choices made, direct influence of environment and many other perspectives playing a role on purchase and consumption. In addition to the role cognitive theories play on modern psychology Freud's psychodynamism, Skinner's environmental shaping, examining motivation, lifestyles, social character and self-esteem are equally important (Foxall, Goldsmith, Brown, 1998)

Consumer behavior formation varies according to attitudes towards existing brands on a product classification. When the frequency of attitude is low, when the analyzed class classification is explained inadequately and consumers face challenges in making a differentiation between dissimilar market brands "extensive problem solving" emerges. Prior to purchase decision when consumers are undecided about which products to purchase, customers are highly dependent on advertisements which are quite effective methods in alleviating brand uncertainty and activating comprehensive thinking. The stage in which such consumer behaviors are met most frequently is the very beginning of product use stage, but among the consumers who have discovered the brand very recently it is also possible to be seen in the later stages(Foxall, Goldsmith, Brown, 1998). In a different stage, after trying different brands in the same product class, consumers develop relatively strong attitudes to the brands. Since there is still partial uncertainty on the characteristics and capacities of brands and wider research is required to obtain further information on the brands selection criteria are shaped, brand perception is driven higher and customers recognize quite well a few brands to which they render equal value to each one. This secondary stage that customers follow in decision taking is defined as "limited problem solving" which is generally encountered during the blossom stage of product (Foxall, Goldsmith, Brown: 1998). The third and last stage "routine problem solving" emerges when consumers, upon trying a few brands, develop significantly strong attitudes towards particular brands. Brand uncertainty is low and buyers are able to make differentiation among a wide range of brands. Within a visibly evident framework, consumers develop a passionate desire to one or two brands in some cases. There is quite limited or no research at all directed to knowledge and what they deal with is subjected to selective attention and perception. At first sight it looks like consumers perform purchase behavior only through hearkening their impulses but in reality the reason they purchase is that they cultivate deep-rooted approaches to existing brands. Routine problem solving surfaces most frequently during the maturity stage of product (Foxall, Goldsmith, Brown: 1998)

Emotions like joy and sorrow are primary human instincts and they are also fundamental factors affecting our product and service choices as well as the ways we perceive commercial messages such as advertisements. Aside from them reasoning and logic are among the factors impacting our product and service choices; in order to reach the best decision amongst other alternatives consumers analyze goods and services in terms of their features and they are processed accordingly. This implies that consumers attribute both rational and emotional values to services and goods. Hence it matters significantly to analyze both values in order to grasp marketing and consumer behaviors. Belk (1988) argues that, "We are at first expected to know the meanings consumers attribute to certain goods so that we can be able to understand consumer behaviors". These attributed "meanings" are distinct concepts helping to understand outside world better but they still coexist in the prototypical structure of emotion and logic, which are complementing means. Emotion and logic can be defined as knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by definition. "Knowledge by acquaintance" (emotion) is an immediate and subjective experience of which visibility is "known (Chaudhuri, 2006)

Relation between Design of Technological Products and Consumption

The changes witnessed in society have enabled the advancements in technology too. Technological developments have triggered a major transformation on the societal structure the foremost of which has been in culture. Culture forms a life style impinging upon a person's purchase characteristics. The new culture has met us with new forms of life. People are currently closely integrated with technology in particular and consuming technological products more than ever before.

Technology is a tool making it possible to perform a work or activity in a faster, easier and simpler manner. Technological products in retailing sector cover a wide range of goods from mobile phones, dishwashers, GSM operator tariffs to internet services(Haşıloğlu, Selçuk Burak and the others, 2013)

Technological goods have been introduced with information society. Technological goods market is likewise among the most state-of-the-art and complex markets of information society. In this market it may not be satisfactory to conduct marketing activities via current or conventional methods. Information is a vital resource to achieve an efficient production. Reaching and employing information has mattered greatly since the early days of mankind but with the advent of technology, information has now attained a wider perspective. Data is a type of information and constitutes the foundation of technological product

to be developed. Technologies having united with information and information resource are currently the most critical determinants of international competition power and economic growth thus the general welfare of a nation(Haşıloğlu, Selçuk Burak and the others, 2013)

The most effective tools of information society are science and technology. Technological goods are useful tools people manipulate in everyday life. In the earlier dates technological goods were mostly viewed as industrial products but today they posses quite a significant portion in consumer market. The increasing demand for technological goods is even more observable in consumer market. But one downside is that demand in technological goods market is unstable. Another point is that consumers buy technological products not only to meet their physical and security needs but to satisfy their sense of belonging. In some cases sense of belonging is even a stronger impulse(Haşıloğlu, Selçuk Burak and the others,2013)

A good number of new product development models end where consumption starts, or in other terms when the new product is launched on the market. On the other hand a reverse sequence is equally valid: consumption practices and components of these practices, their symbols and procedures may develop in time to create new product opportunities. Design activities and design processes are generally driven via such opportunities. Once both sequences are joined, it is feasible to arrive this conclusion on design and consumption: one argues that consumer practices trigger design; the other one argues that new products trigger new practices (Ingram, Shove, Watson, 2005)

On a general scale, design researches and practices are under the influence of concepts and methods borrowed from social sciences. Advancements in psychology and semiotics have left traces on applied ergonomics and product semantics and emotional design which are all related to researching human factors. User-focused design techniques largely include certain aspects of anthropologic methods and particularly in the field of human-computer relation significant interactions have been experienced. Since they are all connected, it became a requirement to seek design, science and technology fields and sociological dimension of consumption and practice. In order to detect their connection, differentiation and similarity with design the concepts related to sociological and anthropological concepts they evolved from have been manifested. These concepts are acquisition, scripting, appropriation, assembly, normalization and practice. All these themes offer important insight on the symbolic significance of physical objects and the relation between products and practices. Although presented one after the other, these concepts do not fit together to form a faultless theoretical whole. As a first step the reason why people acquire consumption goods shall be examined on a sociological dimension (Ingram, Shove, Watson, 2005)

It is a vital question on product designers' mind the desire of people to acquire new consumption goods. In this field the challenge in grasping "desire for the new" is related to a more comprehensive issue on analyzing and understanding trendy desire models ruling modern societies. The sociological factors driving people to acquire new products and technologies have been listed as below (Ingram, Shove, Watson, 2005)

Social Comparison argues that lower social classes aspire to imitate higher social classes. This implies that this demand will continue until lower classes possess the same goods with higher classes. At the same time high classes will constantly demand new goods to maintain a social distinction. While selecting particular goods and services people transmit messages to others, manipulate and control external look and they can in return create a "self-identity". Objects and meanings attributed to objects are the components of resources employed in defining identity. According to socio-psychological accounts of consumption experiencing a new phenomenon has its unique attractions: experiencing new goods and discovering new tastes prevent boredom; thus there is an infinite demand for novelty (Ingram, Shove, Watson, 2005)

In the method standing for ratcheting process, replacement of one element or item triggers another cycle of acquisition. As the number of activities in which individuals can take part rises, the number of specialized products targeted towards a specific group of users similarly increases. The separation of once similar activities into increasingly specialized fields fosters the production and consumption of ever more precisely differentiated goods and services (Ingram, Shove, Watson, 2005)

Scriptwriters in drama, film and television define the actions and practices of the human actors who follow their lines. The belief that designers have a similar role in scripting the actions and practices

of those who use and consume the products they make has become common currency in social studies of science and technology (Ingram, Shove, Watson, 2005)

A wide section of the literature on appropriation, customization and domestication has dwelt on material culture and consumer researches. These analyses are among the elements illuminating active role played by users in integrating technology and products into their existing lifestyles, frameworks of meaning and contexts of practice (Ingram, Shove, Watson,2005). A set of observations have been made on integration forms and efforts to integrate material and symbolic ingredients in daily life. Numerous products and technologies are designed to be compatible with others. It is the consumers performing the largest part of integrative work. To create a meaningful whole for themselves they make an appropriate choice within a range of isolated products. On the other hand designers and producers preassemble a range of products and technologies (Ingram, Shove, Watson,2005). As regards the ways to normalize new arrangements on consumption and technology field some concentrate on the "diffusion" of novel products. They argue that these products percolate through the strata of society and fashions develop as people and social groups emulate one another (Ingram, Shove, Watson,2005:)

Practices emerge from, constitute and make sense of "forms of bodily activity, forms of mental activity, things and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge". The observation proving that consumer products gain extensive meanings not by virtue of their existence alone but by the practices they enable has been verified through conducted researches (Ingram, Shove, Watson, 2005)

In designing technological goods it is of vital importance to know what consumers want and know the consumers well. Now a range of companies launch "customized" products which can also be termed as tailor-made goods. It has now turned into a necessity to track innovations and analyze the consumers.

Case Study

Number 1 technology retail chain in Europe, Media Markt sells the global brands with best price guarantee and provides excellent before and after sale customer service. Having launched its earliest store in 1979 in Germany, Munchen Media Markt spread its technology stores all over Europe sequentially Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Holland, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, Sweden, Russia and Turkey. Spread to 15 countries with around 800 stores and over 45.000 employees Media Markt is number one electronic retailer in Europe and launched its first store in Turkey in September 2007 in Istanbul, Ümraniye. Media Markt Turkey branches are 17 in Istanbul and the rest are in Adana, Ankara, Antalya, Aydın, Bursa, Denizli, Eskişehir, Gaziantep, İzmir, İzmit, Kayseri, Samsun, Malatya, Mersin, Konya, Kahramanmaraş and Şanlıurfa. The total number is 41.

In all the cities where they have a quarter store they conduct an Exit Survey. In this research they reach consumer and visitor data such as age, gender etc. According to the conducted research, 40% of our visitors are female, 60% are male. Women are frequent visitors but they shop less. Compared to visitors, the buyer ratios are 30% women and 70% men. 42% of our visitors are between 14-24 age group, 28% are 25-34 age group, 19% are 35-44 age group. 13% of visitors are aged 45+. 57% of our visitors are single, 43% are married. More than half of our customers are in AB demographic group.

According to the variety of needs, customers from a variety of age groups shop from different product categories. There is no clear-cut distinction. They have higher numbers of female visitors but male customers shop more frequently. In some cases customers come with a clear picture on their mind and having conducted an internet, newspaper or flyer scan to compare the product and price. There are also some visitors coming to receive an expert opinion and deciding on a product through the guidance of our sales assistants. In some cases parents shape their decisions with the guidance of young kids even before they visit our shop or website. Since teens are frequent visitors of our stores and website and as they are technology fans already they in a way work as the technology counselor of their parents. Openings, birthdays of our stores, seasonal campaigns and discount offers in their stores attract all our target customer groups. So there is no clear-cut differentiation.

They have no Customer Membership Club or Loyalty Program. Not the brand but product, change, return, service lengths are some of the complaint issues. They have a regular and dedicated team dealing with this issue; they do reporting, direct customer demands to relevant departments and once

repeated complaints are received, they plan a process improvement. Before coming to the store digital media (social media, blogs, advertisement, search etc.) play the most effective role in decision -making process and they make use of this media actively and efficiently. Similarly they use all our channels such as TV, newspaper, radio, flyer, outdoor, PR, CRM, activities etc. to serve marketing objectives. We provide regular trainings to our staff to give the customers the most correct and useful information. In our stores, we conduct customer satisfaction surveys every three months. For their stores and online sales channel their regularly monitor the top selling goods on monthly and seasonal base. Innovation is, for them, a vital brand power. It is quite important for them to meet very first products, even the ones that have not been launched yet with customers in our stores. For instance 3D Printer, wearable technologies, curved TVs and the latest innovations from technology world are met with the customers in their stores. Since they have no production they have no personalized products. Since they are not producer, they reflect customer demands in their stores. Factors affecting the consumer preferences in buying technological products that product comments, friend/relatives ideas, price, after-sale services, brand name, product comparison in Media Markt.

Conclusion and suggestions

Taking into account the fact that each of us is a consumer in the end, it is understandable the intense efforts exerted to find answers for the whys, hows, wheres and many other consumption –relevant questions on the constantly developing world of marketing. That is because consumption phenomenon bears importance for all of use. Within market which is a purchase –selling place it is possible to come across a variety of human beings.

There exist no social movement theories providing an integration that allows establishing a connection with the products. There are also limited researches on the ways people obtain and organize the product groups integrated into their lives. Technology designers hold discussions on the explicit or implicit ideas on actual and potential users. It is suggested that science and technology fields in the area of technological design and also the sociological dimension of consumption and practice should be further examined.

The education and employment provided to technology designers grants quite a limited information to assist them in comprehending consumption, usage and consumption culture. For that reason alone it is a must to explore technology -design-consumption cycle in greater detail. In technology markets the risks are high for both the manufacturer and retailer. The key reason is that technology loses its modernity in quite a short pace. It is possible that a new product can be launched anytime and this may be a product with higher features than the previous one. It is also quite likely that whenever a new product is marketed the price of the previous one slumps. In addition, technology market has quite a complex structure. The companies should create strategies to meet the needs rather than product development.

Media Markt conducts scientific researches to identify customer profile and customer behaviors and aims to improve these researches further. That is because Media Markt operates consumer-focused and place high priority to customer demands. Marketing department deals with this subject and conducts necessary researches. The rise in these researches shall bring further success to Media Markt and set a model for the other technology companies.

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