

**EXAMINATION OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VARIOUS BALKAN IMMIGRANTS' AND TURKISH CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS MARKETING ACTIVITIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONSUMERISM**

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**Abstract**

*With the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, some significant changes in the the consumer behavior patterns may be observed in these Balkan countries. The consumer culture in these countries has changed as in the Western countries as the number of the products has remarkably increased in these markets. This increase in the number of the products and services that the Balkan consumers are encountered with has also led to an increase and development in the variety of the marketing activities. As in the Western societies, consumption has become one of the crucial constructs of the personal and social identity in these societies as well.*

*All these developments and changes in the Balkan markets bring the concept of consumerism in mind. Consumerism defined as “an organized movement of citizens and government to strengthen the rights and powers of buyers in relation to sellers” is an important movement in developed countries.*

*In this study it is aimed to explore the attitudes of different Balkan immigrants living in Istanbul, Turkey towards marketing activities (consumerism).*

**Keywords:** *Consumerism, Balkan Immigrants, Consumer Behavior*

**Introduction**

Consumerism played an important role on the decision-makers in the business world in the 1990s and the 2000s. Today the role is on the increase, too. The fact that the laws concerning consumerism are increasing to cover more in scope has great effects on the marketing activities of the businesses. Businesses have a variety of new responsibilities owing to the consumer rights and interests protected by the law. This study will look at the literature on the concept of consumerism to include definitions and explanations thereof.

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## Literature Review

Consumerism was unknown to a great extent until the efforts made by the president Kennedy in order to protect the consumer rights or the study done about it by Rachel Carson and Ralph Nader (Day and Aaker, 1997). Kennedy considered the consumer rights as the security right, the right to have information, the right to choose and the right to be informed (Ede and Calcich, 1999).

On the one hand, the rights in question remolded the corporate strategies of many businesses and the buying habits of the consumers and on the other hand, they protected the consumer rights. Therefore, consumerism can be regarded as a force to maintain stability in society by fighting against the bad effects of the markets (Middleton, 1998).

In general, consumerism consists of a number of activities carried out by the government, businesses and free organizations. These activities are designed to protect individuals from the practices of both the government and the businesses, and to prevent the consumer rights from being violated. From this point of view, consumerism emphasizes the direct relation between the consumer and the business. In other words, it is a bi-directional concept based on the relation between the consumer and the business (Day and Aaker, 1970).

The concept of consumerism can be discussed in two ways. First, protecting consumers and the environment and introducing consumer rights, and second, encouraging consumers to buy more (Kucuk, 2002).

First and foremost, consumerism was defined by Kotler (1972). He defined consumerism as a consumer movement in order for consumers to enhance their rights and powers against sellers. Kotler divided the factors which contributed to the rise and development of consumerism into 6 categories. These are as follows (Kotler, 1972):

- the factors fostering consumerism structurally and the events taking place in society. For instance, increase in the level of income and education, increase in the complexity of the technological and marketing activities, increase in the standard of living, increase in the awareness of life quality, alertness to environmental pollution, increase in the awareness of environmental pollution, etc.
- the structural hardships. For instance, inflation, pollution, faulty products, misleading ads, etc.
- the changes in the general belief of the society. For instance, social criticism leveled by prominent writers, the effect of consumer organizations on the society, etc.
- the hastening factors. For instance, the consumers expressing dissatisfaction about the practices and activities of the businesses, etc.
- the use of resources to start up. For instance, the contribution made to the activities of consumerism by such powers as media, etc.

- social control. For instance, political systems enforcing laws contrary to the consumer expectations, etc.

Kaufman and Channon (1973), and Straver (1977) divided consumerism into 4 stages. These are as follows:

- the initial stage of consumerism movement (crusading),
- the stage where consumerism began to increase, recognized and embraced by all (popular movement),
- the stage where consumerism grew organizational and managerial (organizational/managerial),
- the stage of bureaucracy where there were governmental laws and regulations

There are different countries at the different stages of consumerism. There are a variety of criteria by which countries are measured to determine which stage a country is at. The quality and the quantity of information given to consumers, the scope and the degree of the protecting laws, the authorized units of the governments, and the public funds allocated to the education of consumers are just a few to cite as part of the basic criteria (Varadarajan and Thirunarayana, 1990).

### **Previous Studies Relating to Consumerism**

Barksdale and Darden did the first or pioneering study into the attitudes of consumers toward marketing (Barksdale and Darden, 1972). They repeated a lot of similar studies in the 1970s. They measured consumer attitudes against consumer responsibilities, governmental regulations, consumerism, and marketing mix. Then, Gaski and Etzel altered the Barksdale Scale and developed the “Index of Consumer Sentiment Toward Marketing (ICSM)” Scale (Gaski and Etzel, 1986).

Many studies were carried out in developing countries as well as developed countries. (Chan, Yau, and Chan, 1990), ( Chan and Cui, 2004). Barksdale and Perreault found that the consumer attitudes toward producer-sellers were negative during the years 1971-1979 (Barksdale and Perreault,1980). Hustad and Pesemier (1973), Lundstrom and Lamont (1976) reached similar findings for the same period.

The studies into consumer attitudes toward the elements of marketing mix showed that there were significant changes in consumer attitudes (Lysonski, Durvasula and Watson, 2003). In particular, Gaski and Etzel showed these changes clearly through a study covering the years 1984-2001 (Gaski and Etzel, 2005).

The swift advances in globalization made it compulsory to make international comparisons among countries in measuring consumer attitudes toward marketing. Many studies produced different results concerning consumer attitudes in different countries (Varadarajan and Thirunarayana, 1990), (Wee and Chan, 1989).

Barksdale and his friends studied consumer attitudes toward marketing as compared to the developmental stages of consumerism (Barksdale etc., 1982). The researchers placed the countries into the different stages of consumerism in a study conducted in 6 countries including Israel, England, Australia, the USA, Canada and Norway.

In the end, they couldn't find certain or convincing evidence into the fact that the differences at the developmental stages of consumerism affected consumer attitudes toward marketing.

### Methodology

The objective of the study is to relate the Balkan immigrants living in Turkey to the attitude of the Turkish consumers toward marketing in terms of consumerism. A study was conducted using a questionnaire in Istanbul during July and August through the convenient sampling method. Out of the 173 questionnaire forms, 28 were eliminated due to the missing or incorrect answers. Of the remaining 145 forms, 70 were immigrants and 75 were Turkish consumers. The distribution of the sampling is as in Table 1.

**Table 1: Sample's Characteristics**

		Frequency		Percent	
Group		Turkish	Immigrants	Turkish	Immigrants
<b>Gender</b>	<i>Male</i>	20	20	26,7	28,6
	<i>Female</i>	55	50	73,3	71,4
<b>Age</b>	18-24	24	4	32,0	5,7
	25-31	16	14	21,3	20,0
	32-38	15	20	20,0	28,6
	39 above	20	32	26,7	45,7
<b>Marital Status</b>	<i>Married</i>	29	43	38,7	61,4
	<i>Single</i>	46	27	61,3	38,6
<b>Education Level</b>	High school or below	23	25	30,7	35,7
	University or above	52	45	69,3	64,3
<b>Occupation</b>	Employee	1	1	1,3	1,4
	Shopowner	0	2	0	0
	Retired	2	1	2,7	2,9
	Housewife	1	0	1,3	0
	Unemployed	1	0	1,3	0

	Student	18	2	24,0	2,9
	Employee in the public sector	8	8	10,7	11,4
	Employee in the private sector	37	49	49,3	70,0
	Others	7	7	9,3	10
<b>Income(monthly)*</b>	Low income	26	6	34,7	8,6
	Average income	41	49	54,7	70,0
	High income	8	15	10,7	21,4

### Research Design

The study had a questionnaire form consisting of two parts. In the first part, the scale “Consumer Attitudes Toward Marketing and Consumerism” developed by Barksdale and Darden (1972) was used. The scale which had 40 variables was translated into Turkish by the teaching staff at the department of Production Management and Marketing at the Faculty of Political Sciences at Istanbul University. As part of the translation strategy, the statements considered inconvenient for the Turkish working structure and culture were adapted accordingly. Three statements unable to do so were taken out of the scale. The remaining 37 statements were tested through back translation. The statements on the questionnaire form were measured on the likert scale ( on a range of 1=completely disagree and 5= completely agree). In the second part of the questionnaire, there were such questions as occupation, education, income, marital status, age (open-ended) and gender measuring the demographic attributes of the consumers.

The “independent sample t-test” was used to determine if there was a difference between two different consumer groups concerning their attitudes toward marketing activities.

**Findings**

To test the internal consistency of the data, reliability analysis was conducted for consumer groups separately. The Cronbach’s Alpha score achieved for the scale for the Turkish consumers was  $\alpha=0.814$  and for immigrant’s was  $\alpha=0.774$ . The findings of the reliability analysis can be said to be satisfactory for both consumer groups.

**Table 2: Distribution of Statements& Independent Sample T-Test Results**

	Immigrants		Turkish		.sig
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
<b>Statements- Attitudes Towards Philosophy of Business</b>					
Most manufacturers operate on the philosophy that the "consumer" is always right	2,84	1,124	2,96	1,108	,529
Despite what is frequently said, "let the buyer beware" is the guiding philosophy of most manufacturers.	3,35	,963	3,24	1,011	,477
Competition ensures that consumers pay fair prices.	3,40	,938	3,44	1,081	,813
Manufacturers seldom shirk their responsibility to the consumer	2,81	,937	2,69	,900	,429
Most manufacturers are more interested in making profits than serving consumers.	4,02	,947	4,13	,990	,517
<i>Mean for Attitudes Towards Philosophy of Business</i>	<b>3,29</b>		<b>3,29</b>		
<b>Statements- Product Quality</b>					
In general, manufacturers make an effort to design products to fit the needs of consumers.	3,57	0,88	3,69	0,80	,384
Over the past several years, the quality of most products has not improved.	3,07	0,94	3,11	0,99	,827
From the consumer's point of view, style changes are not as important as improvements in product quality.	3,54	0,97	3,39	1,05	,356
Manufacturers do not deliberately design products which will wear out as quickly as possible.	3,01	1,08	3,12	1,17	,575
Manufacturers often withhold important product improvements from the market in order to protect their own interests.	3,53	1,15	3,83	1,01	,098
The wide variety of competing products makes intelligent buying decisions more difficult.	3,30	0,84	3,39	0,94	,561
<i>Mean for Product Quality</i>	<b>3,34</b>		<b>3,42</b>		
<b>Statements- Advertising</b>					
Most product advertising is believable.	2,83	1,09	2,68	1,19	,435
Manufacturers' advertisement are reliable	2,60	0,98	2,33	1,03	,114

IBAC 2012 vol.1

sources of information about the quality and performance of products					
Generally, advertised products are more dependable than unadvertised ones.	2,60	0,98	2,51	0,99	,571
Manufacturers' advertisement usually present a true picture of the product advertised	2,40	0,81	2,35	0,89	,707
<b><i>Mean for Advertising</i></b>	<b>2,61</b>		<b>2,47</b>		
<b>Statements- Other Marketing Activities</b>					
Generally speaking, the products required by the average family are easily available at convenient places.	4,24	0,55	4,40	0,70	,136
In general, the quality of repair and maintenance service provided by manufacturers and dealers is getting better.	3,24	0,84	3,32	0,87	,589
Generally, products guarantees are backed by the manufacturers who make them.	3,44	0,90	3,48	0,92	,806
The games and contests that manufacturers sponsor to encourage people to buy their products are usually dishonest.	2,93	1,01	2,69	1,00	,161
<b><i>Mean for Other Marketing Activities</i></b>	<b>3,46</b>		<b>3,47</b>		
<b>Statements – Consumer Responsibilities</b>					
The problems of consumers are less serious now than in the past.	3,46	0,93	3,53	1,07	,649
The information needed to become a well-informed consumer is readily available to most people.	3,50	0,88	3,63	1,02	,427
The average consumer is willing to pay higher prices for products that will cause less environmental pollution.	2,76	1,03	2,48	0,96	,096
The problems of the consumer relatively unimportant when compared with the other questions and issues faced by the average family.	3,14	1,08	3,19	1,12	,811
Many of the mistakes that consumers make in buying products are the result of their own carelessness or ignorance.	2,73	1,01	2,65	0,97	,647
Consumers often try to take advantage of manufacturers and dealers by making claims that are not justified.	2,50	0,91	2,49	0,99	,967
For most types of products, consumers do not find it worthwhile to shop around to find the best buy.	3,61	0,86	3,65	0,97	,798
Concern for the environment does not influence the product choices made by most consumers.	2,67	0,93	2,71	1,02	,829

<i>Mean for Consumer Responsibilities</i>	<b>3,05</b>		<b>3,04</b>		
<b>Statements – Consumerism</b>					
Manufacturers seem to be more sensitive to consumer complaints now than they were in the past.	3,39	0,87	3,44	0,99	,727
When consumers have problems with products they have purchased, it is usually easy to get them corrected.	3,21	0,96	3,20	1,07	,933
Most business firms make a sincere effort to adjust complaints fairly.	2,84	0,99	2,87	1,06	,889
From the consumer's viewpoint, the procedures followed by most manufacturers in handling complaints and settling grievances of consumers are not satisfactory.	2,79	0,96	2,61	0,94	,278
Consumerism or the consumer crusade has not been an important factor in changing business practices and procedures.	3,59	0,86	3,75	1,05	,317
The exploitation of consumers by business firms deserves more attention than it receives.	4,06	1,02	4,13	0,98	,647
<i>Mean for Consumerism</i>	<b>3,31</b>		<b>3,33</b>		
<b>Statements – Government Regulation</b>					
The government should test competing brands of products and make the results of these test available ro consumers.	4,06	1,08	4,12	0,97	,712
The government should set minimum standards of quality for all products sold to consumers.	4,20	0,88	4,29	0,88	,524
The government should exercise more responsibility for regulating the advertising, sales and marketing activities of manufacturers.	4,09	0,81	4,08	1,01	,970
A Federal Department of Consumer Protection is not needed to protect and promote the interests of consumers.	4,27	0,85	4,47	0,83	,163
<i>Mean for Government Regulations</i>	<b>4,15</b>		<b>4,24</b>		

In Table 2, the distribution of the consumer responses and the results of the independent sample t-test can be seen. There is no statistical difference at the significance level of 0.05 concerning the marketing activities between the Turkish citizens who are Balkan immigrants or not in Turkey. Therefore, the attitude of the consumers brought up in a culture of a different country and resident in Turkey, and of Turkish consumers toward marketing activities is quite similar.

When the answers of the consumers are looked at, it can be observed that both groups evaluated the variables relating to the government regulations with a quite



high mean in the marketing activities. So, the regulatory role of the government can be said to be of importance to both Turkish and immigrant consumers in trade. On the other hand, when looked at the means of the variables under the heading of advertising, it can be said that the consumers in both groups are negative in attitude. In this respect, the businesses active in the area at hand should take into account the element of credibility in advertisement campaigns as means of communication and be more careful with advertising activities.

In general, the heading of consumer responsibilities was found to be close to the neutral point of the scale. In other words, it can be asserted that consumers are not at the desired level in terms of awareness and responsibilities. In parallel to the developmental stage of the countries where the consumers live, it is possible to say that they still haven't developed a desired level of awareness in close relation to the concept of consumerism. In terms of the means observed, it can be said that the consumers have started to develop a positive attitude toward the variables under the heading of consumerism and other marketing activities.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of consumerism defined in this study as a consumer movement in order for buyers to enhance their rights and powers against sellers was studied taking into account the Turkish consumers who are Balkan immigrants or not.

The results have shown that the attitudes of the consumers brought up in a culture of a different country and resident in Turkey, and of Turkish consumers toward marketing activities is quite similar. For this reason, the Turkish consumers and the Turks from the Balkan countries can be said to share a common set of cultural values in their attitudes toward marketing activities. On the other hand, the results don't look surprising given that the Turkish immigrants live in Turkey. In other words, the immigrants can be said to have adapted themselves to the Turkish culture in their attitudes toward marketing activities. Nevertheless, businesses planning to operate in the area may need to have detailed accounts of the shared cultural pattern in the Balkan countries.

The study is not able to produce generalizable results as it has such restrictions as the sampling size and the use of one of the non-probability sampling techniques. However, the study can be expanded to include consumer samples with or without a shared cultural background in different Balkan countries as of further studies. In addition, the developmental process of consumerism can be studied on a basis of sampling using the scale in certain periods with the same consumer groups.

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