

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Consumerism perception in Turkey as a developing country

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**The goal of this paper is to examine the marketing managers' perceptions of consumerism in Turkey as a developing country. The major objectives of this paper are to explore the nature of managerial perception of consumerism in Turkey, to assess the impact of internationalization on consumerism, to find out the relation between the years in the business and consumerism, to see if the sector type has an impact on the perception of consumerism, to explore the perceptions of marketing managers on consumerism from the point of businesses, consumer protection associations and government regulations. According to results, the businesses have a positive attitude towards the consumers' supportive, regulatory and orientational roles of the state and the consumer organizations on consumerism issue. They have a positive attitude towards consumerism subject. They attach the biggest importance to the security of the product. The research revealed that the sectors, the dimension of the business and the demographic features of the managers have no effect on the attitudes towards the regulatory role of the state, the activities of the consumer organizations and the consumerism.**

**Key words:** Consumerism, business, government, consumer protection association.

## INTRODUCTION

As companies grow larger and increase their foreign sales, they will have to adapt their organizational structures to new consumer demand and be constantly aware of new challenges (Kayaks and Wikström, 2001). Consumer attitudes are very important that managers need to scan to understand potential forces that could curtail marketing activities. Failure to monitor these attitudes or misdiagnosis them can lead to serious problems for marketers (Lysonski and Durvasula, 2003). Proactive marketing managers are attentive to consumer problems before such problems reach crisis levels. On the other hand, reactive managers wait until these problems reach a critical stage before they react (Lysonski et al., 2003). If consumers are content with business practices, they will have favorable attitudes toward business activities and unfavorable attitudes about consumerism and government regulations (Barksdale et al., 1982; Fornell, 1992).

Consumerism has managed to stay as an influential countervailing power between the consumer and the businessman in many industrialized nations (Kaynak and Wikström, 2001). Consumerism has been defined as "an

organized movement of consumers whose aim is to improve the rights and powers of buyers in relation to sellers" (Kotler et al., 1998; Gilbert, 1999). In essence, consumerism deals with consumer issues about a range of marketing related issues (Lysonski and Durvasula, 2003).

In the last four decades, consumerism has received much attention in business and academic literature. Articles have commented on consumerism's importance, underlying consequences and implications (Darley and Johnson, 1993; Johnston, 1985; Maynes, 1990; Lysonski and Durvasula, 2003; Kaynak et al., 1993; Quazi, 2002). However, consumerism has only been a primary concern of more developed countries where consumer protection is more advanced than less developed or developing countries. In less developed and developing countries, the marketplace has been a seller's sovereignty where consumers have little or no protection, education, or information about the market (Darley and Johnson, 1993; Thorelli, 1990). Except for few studies (Peterson, 1986; Post, 1986; Kaynak, 1985; Thorelli, 1981; Hilger and

Dahringer, 1982), there seems to be a dearth of studies focusing on consumerism in developing and less developed countries.

Consumerism in developing countries differs from consumerism in developed countries. Consumerism in most developing countries is more a matter of government policy via legislation and efficient enforcement than a matter of engaged public support (Kaynak, 1985). Most research in developing countries have examined consumer organizations (Clifford, 1988; Hinds, 1988; Hong, 1989), growth of consumer movements (Kim, 1985; Newman, 1980; Peterson, 1987) and consumer problems (Moffett, 1988; Onah, 1979; Stanley, 1987). Few studies have examined consumers attitudes toward consumerism in developing countries (Thorelli and Sentell, 1982). Consumer policy makers of these countries cannot engage in policy formulation without an adequate research base, also, blind transfer of consumer policy technology from the developed countries is not what LDCs really need (Kaynak and Wikström, 2001). Less developed and developing nations tend to be dominated by physiological and security needs, whereas the more advanced countries tend to be dominated by affection and self esteem needs (Stanton et al., 1981). The consumer protection measures which have made such progress in developed countries seem less relevant for the present conditions of most of the less developed and developing countries (Kaynak, 1985).

Kotler noted that six major factors contribute to the rise of consumerism as structural conduciveness, structural strains, growth of a generalised belief, precipitating factors, mobilisation for action and social control (Varadarajan and Thirunarayana, 1990). Kaufman and Channon (1973) and Straver (1977) distinguished between four stages in the life cycle of consumerism: crusading, popular movement, organisational/managerial and bureaucracy. According to this concept, different countries of the world can be positioned along the cycle according to the extent of protective legislation, quantity and quality of information supplied to consumers, public funding of consumer education programmes and the authority of government consumer agencies.

Nicoulant (1987) examined consumerism issues at managerial views (for example, the quality of products and information provided to consumers). There have been few studies on business attitudes towards consumerism for developed countries (Johan et al., 1977; Barksdale and French, 1976; Greyser and Diamond, 1974), more few studies for developing countries (Varadarajan et al., 1991, 1994). According to Greyser and Diamond (1974), generally, the executives consider consumerism as a positive force in the marketplace and view consumerism as an opportunity for marketers. Executives will favor traditional reliance on business self-regulation to remedy consumer problems but with moderate role with government. Gazda and Gourley (1975) claim that attitudes of businessmen, consumers and

consumerists are distinctly different from each other in consumerism subject. In product information, advertising and environment subject of consumerism, consumer attitudes were closer to the attitudes of consumerists than those of businessmen.

Turkey, where the empirical study was undertaken, was chosen as an example of a progressive developing country believed to be in the institutionalization stage of the consumerism movement (Kaynak and Wickstrom, 1985). In Turkey, consumerism development, consumer complaints and some cross cultural comparison of consumerism have been examined (Kaynak, 1985; Kaynak and Solveig, 2001; Kaynak et al., 1993). Consumers in Turkey also had negative views about these issues (Ural, 1996). Yet, no study has examined managerial perception of consumerism in Turkey.

### **The development and the history of the protection of consumer rights in Turkey**

In Seljuk and Ottoman eras, there were various regulations and occupational stipulations to protect the consumers. The consumer protection in the Ottoman era was based upon keeping the balance between the producer, retailer and the consumer systems. The groups playing the major role in this system were the state, organizations and the prominent people of the cities (TÜSİAD, 1990). There were a series of regulations determining the standards to be obeyed by the craftsmen and the traders. "Hisbe" institute and "Ahi" organization are the examples of the organizations which had a big effect on the price control mechanism. The craftsmen organization established an auto control mechanism. The Lonca organizations were the initial form of the current stock markets and they were formed to establish consistency on the prices. They were responsible for their member to make honest job in the framework of their religious beliefs, ethics, occupational rules, and traditions. In other words, consumer protection is not among their primary objectives. However, their way of function provided an indirect protection to the consumers (Türe, 2000).

The fact that the state enacted regulations to which the craftsmen and the traders must comply with during the Ottoman era is very close to the consumer protection system currently employed. Some of these regulations which were in use since 1630, are related to the protection of the health and rights of the consumers and some were directed to establish quality control and standardization (Akgündüz, 2006).

The oldest standardization and the consumer protection act was enacted in 1502 by the Ottoman Sultan II. Beyazıt as, Bursa laws. This is the start of the consumer act in the Ottoman Empire. The laws included standards law, municipality law, consumer protection law, and food codex.

Ahism was a trader and craftsmen union in the Anatolia

**Table 1.** Profile of respondents.

<b>Firm (n = 94)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	51.1
Female	47.9
<b>Age</b>	
21-30	10.6
31-40	36.2
41-50	43.5
51-60	8.6
61 and more	1.1
<b>Education</b>	
Primary education	12.8
High school	43.6
Undergraduate	41.5
Graduate	2.1
<b>Year in business</b>	
1-2	27.7
3-5	33
6-10	26.6
11 and more	12.8
<b>Sectors</b>	
Jewelry	14.9
Food	31.9
Clothing	33
Mining	4.3
Household products	7.4
Electronic	6.4
Sports	2.1
<b>Type of firm</b>	
National	67
International	33

between 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries which had a tremendous effect upon the socio economic and cultural lives of the society. Its basic philosophy was to establish a mutual fairness between the relations of the producers and the consumers. The “Ahi” organization which was active during Seljuk and Ottoman eras was observed to adapt the principle of cheap and quality production and the protection of the consumers (Ozdemir et al., 2003). Ahism gave an utmost importance to consumers’ rights. The basic philosophy was to educate people in a human focused framework, furnished with ethical and occu-

pational values. “İhtisap lords” which carry out the role of municipal control police, wandered in the market places and checked the prices to protect the rights of the consumers. The representation of the consumers by their own organizations was first considered in “the enactment of the consumer protection act”. As a result of this, there were consumer council, advertisement board, and arbitration office established. The arbitration council of the retailers was established in the frame work of the retailers’ law enacted after this. As a result of these, there was act 4077 related to the protection of the consumers

enacted, which was the most important step taken in this direction during the republic era.

The aim of this paper is to examine the marketing managers' perceptions of consumerism in Turkey as a developing country, where free market economics were introduced in the 1980's. The major objectives of this paper are listed thus:

- i. To explore the nature of managerial perception of consumerism in Turkey;
- ii. to assess the impact of internationalization on consumerism;
- iii. to find out the relation between the years in the business and consumerism;
- iv. to see if the sector type has an impact on the perception of consumerism;
- v. to explore the perceptions of marketing managers on consumerism from the point of businesses, consumer protection associations and government regulations.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data were collected using a uniform and structured questionnaire. A 21-item scale was adapted from Quazi (2002). The survey instrument was developed in Turkish, but the scales items were compiled from literature in English. Therefore, these scale items were translated into Turkish, and then they were later translated back into English to avoid translation errors and to make sure that the intended meanings of the questions were maintained. The Turkish version of the instrument was pilot-tested on a focus group in order to assure the appropriateness and consistency of the scale items. Based on their suggestions, the instrument was further improved and refined. The survey also included demographic questions. Managerial perceptions were examined using a five point Likert scaling, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 represented "strongly agree".

The sample was drawn randomly from the company information in the marketing *Türkiye* magazine. Questionnaires were sent to 250 firms via postal mail and after follow up, a total of 94 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 37%. In order to increase participation, researchers sent three reminders in three weeks. The sample characteristics of the respondents of the 94 surveys are presented in Table 1. Among the participants, there were slightly more males than females. The ages of the respondents ranged from 21 to 61 years. The respondents' education were equally distributed from high school to graduate degree. There were more national firms than international firms. Among the sector, food and clothing sector was the first two sectors.

## ANALYSES AND RESULTS

First, it is important to consider the means of each questionnaire item in terms of perceptions. Table 2 shows the mean score of each item. While the statement "8" had the highest mean ( $X = 4.60$ ), the statement, "21" had the lowest mean for all the statements ( $X = 2.47$ ). In other words, the security of the product is one of the most important factors which the consumers should seriously consider.

However, they stated that they would not like the

implementation of high prices for once, in the case of emergency. In order to define the average scores for the attitudes towards the consumer organizations (s4, s5, s16, s17), consumerism (s1, s2, s3, s6, s8, s11, s12, s13, s14, s15, s18, s20, s21) and regulatory role of the state (s7, s9, s10, s19), the means of the related statements were considered. In this process, the questions s9, s12, s13, s14, s15, s16, s17, s18, s19, s20, s21 were recorded. According to this evaluation, the scores of the participants related to their attitudes toward consumerism were found to be higher than their scores of attitudes towards organizations and the regulatory role of the state.

Cronbach alpha of statements is found to be 0.676 for 21 statements. Next, the total mean scores for each three scores (consumerism, consumer organization, state) were analyzed for variance (ANOVA) to rank the years in business data. None of the score were found to be significantly different for years in business variable ( $p = 0.771, 0.508, 0.494$ ).

Business type variable (national, international) and three total mean scores (consumerism, consumer organization, state) were put into analysis to determine the relationship between business type variable and related scores. Results were not statistically significant for organization and state scores (0.631, 0.291). However, the relationship between the consumerism score and business type variable were found to be statistically significant ( $F = 5.367$ ;  $p = 0.023$ ). The mean score for consumerism of international firm (3.50) was higher than for those of national business type (3.42).

Chi square test was carried out in order to determine any relations between the scores of consumerism, organizations and the role of state and the sectors of these organizations. There was not any statistically significant relation observed for the test group (0.593, 0.562, and 0.549).

The fact that whether there was any statistically significant relation between the three scores (consumerism, consumer organizations and the state), was checked by bi-variant correlation. There was no statistically significant relation between the state and consumerism scores ( $p = 0.861$ ). However, the relations between the state and the consumer organization scores and the consumer organization and the consumerism scores were significantly correlated (0.220\*,  $p = 0.033$ ; 0.379\*\*,  $p = 0.00$ ).

## DISCUSSION

While consumerism remains a western phenomenon, the consumer movement is beginning to take on worldwide dimensions. As pointed out by Kotler (1972), consumerism is inevitable, enduring, pro-marketing and beneficial, especially in developing countries.

Business and government have both obligation to participate in this movement. Businesses should reco-

**Table 2.** Means of statements.

No.	Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Agree (%)	Uncertain (%)	Disagree (%)
1	Consumerism is really pro-business	3.91	1.0	73.4	16	10.4
2	A firm may benefit from being responsive to consumerism	3.88	0.89	84	4.3	11.7
3	What is good for the consumer is good for business	3.36	1.35	57.4	9.6	33
4	Consumer organizations render valuable services to the consumer	3.05	1.10	31.9	40.4	27.7
5	Public consumer agencies are doing a worthwhile job for the consumer	3.38	1.14	51.1	28.7	20.2
6	Consumerism leads to open dialogue with consumers	3.52	1.07	63.8	16	20.2
7	Government regulation if properly enforced can yield better results than industry self-regulation	3.69	1.17	62.8	21.3	16
8	Product safety is a genuine issue that needs due attention from the manufacturer	4.60	0.491	96	4	-
9	Most advertisements are self-regulated by the industry and therefore they should be free from formal regulation	3.87	1.12	72.3	9.6	18.1
10	Advertising and promotion directed at children should be thoroughly regulated	4.35	0.698	89.4	9.6	1.1
11	Information and nutrition labeling are essential aids to the consumer	3.88	1.24	70.2	9.6	20.2
12	Consumerism will fade away	2.58	1.23	25.5	17	57.4
13	Consumerism is created by politicians and consumer advocates	2.76	1.11	25.5	36.2	38.3
14	What is good for business is good for consumers	3.01	1.19	41.5	22.3	36.2
15	Consumerism leads to own-regulation that may restrict free choice on the part of the consumers	3.38	1.10	60.6	11.7	27.7
16	Consumerism is acceptable but the adversial situation created by consumer associations is embarrassing	2.86	1.16	27.7	36.2	36.2
17	Consumer agencies are bureaucratic, counter-productive and costly	2.63	1.31	29.8	9.6	60.6
18	Consumerism results in a conflict situation with the consumers	2.77	1.26	27.7	23.4	48.9
19	Self-regulation can ensure greater consumer welfare than formal regulation	3.35	1.25	44.7	23.4	31.9
20	Information and nutrition labeling push prices up	3.35	1.29	60.6	11.7	27.7
21	Charging higher prices at a time of emergency is justified	2.47	1.29	30.9	9.6	59.6
	Consumerism scale	3.44	0.682			
	attitudes towards the consumer organizations	3.23	0.543			
	regulatory role of the state scale	3.20	0.850			

gnize the difference between serving the public interest and pursuing their own interests. Businesses should also work to present their own viewpoints on relevant consumer issues. A gap still exists between promises and performance. But for companies working to narrow that gap, consumerism remains an opportunity rather than a threat (Bloom and Greyser, 1981). As a result of consumerism movement, business will feel increasing pressure to change behaviors and to consider consumer and government concerns.

The government should realize that consumerism is an important component of economic development. For this reason, the government should encourage the business sector to support consumerism activity or introduce the legislation to force compliance. In order for the consumers to be aware of business and have a concern towards the consumerist issues in a country, the government should take the most important and crucial role.

Independent consumerist groups in less developed and developing countries should demonstrate to government officials that consumerism activity does provide better, safer, and more efficient products and as a result of these, stimulate economic development by creating consumer satisfaction.

In general, the businesses have a positive attitude towards the consumers' supportive, regulatory and orientational roles of the state, and the consumer organizations on consumerism issue. They have a positive attitude towards consumerism subject. They attach the biggest importance to the security of the product. This may be attributed to the legal problems which are likely to cause the organizations, the adverse impression of the customers towards the brand, product, and the organization. Another interesting fact that the producers agree, is the statement that "information and nutrition labeling push prices up". In other words, they see the affords in information and nutrition labeling as the factor which increases the cost. The research revealed that the sectors, the dimension of the business and the demographic features of the managers have no effect on the attitudes towards the regulatory role of the state, the activities of the consumer organizations and the consumerism. On the other hand, in the context of the consumerism, it is expected that the international firms are more positively differentiated than the national firms.

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