

CONSUMPTION OF BRANDED FASHION APPAREL: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BEHAVIOR

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In this case study conducted in North Cyprus we examined differences according to gender in behavior with regard to consumption of branded fashion apparel products. The objective was to understand gender-based consumer behavioral differences in the setting of a developing country. Our quantitative research comprised asking 600 people (300 men and 300 women) 24 questions to identify the demographic and behavioral segmentation differences, and our qualitative research was carried out through in-depth interviews during which we asked 18 people 22 structured questions to obtain more detailed information on how to identify the personality and behavioral changes occurring. Results showed that there were both similarities and differences according to gender regarding media usage, brand personality perception, and attitude toward fashion apparel.

Keywords: consumer, brand personality, fashion apparel, gender.

Technological innovation has created what is considered a global village of the world market, whereby brand names of all consumer goods play a more prominent role in consumers' purchase decisions and named brands are no longer difficult to obtain (Kaya & Ayman, 2012). Consumers can make purchases either nationally or internationally through numerous avenues. Hence companies try to maintain a market share for their brands composed not only of consumers in their home country but also of consumers from all parts of the world. This makes targeted consumer research crucial for businesses producing goods in both developing and developed countries. As a result, companies have begun

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to design and position the brand personality of their product according to target market analysis. According to Hsu and Burns (2012), awareness of the values that consumers possess could assist marketers and retailers with the integration of their products' characteristics with consumer needs and wants. Hence, brand personality plays a role in the consumer's self-expression and is considered one of the types of marketing communication.

Marketers use certain brand personalities that reflect a lifestyle and that are compatible with an individual's personality. *Brand personality* has been explained as "the set of human personality traits, associated with, applicable and relevant to brands" (Aaker, 1997; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). According to Aaker (1997) there are five types of brand personality:

- a. Sincerity = honest, cheerful, wholesome, and friendly
- b. Excitement = daring, spirited, up-to-date, young, and cool
- c. Competence = reliable, intelligent, successful, and confident
- d. Sophistication = upper class, charming, and feminine
- e. Ruggedness = outdoorsy, masculine, and western

In accordance with the above brand personality traits, companies develop positioning themes for their brands, such as functional, symbolic, and experiential benefits directed at fulfilling the desired needs of the consumer regarding the brand (Keller, 1993). The functional benefits feature rational attachment to the brand to fulfill the need of functionality. Symbolic benefits involve status and prestige to fulfill the need for self-esteem. Finally, experiential benefits provide experiences and create usage imagery designed to enrich the consumer's life (Shimp, 2003).

Given that most products have a lifecycle, the adoption stage for new brands is also related to the product lifecycle. Product lifecycle and the rate of brand and product adoption take into consideration the following five adopters' categories (Etzel, Walker, & Stanton, 2001; Lamb, Hair, & McDaniel, 2004):

- a. Innovators represent about 3% of the market. They are the individuals who are the first to adopt new items and brands at the introduction stage of the product's life cycle.
- b. Early adopters represent about 13% of the market. These individuals will adopt new items after the innovators and after the brand's growth stage.
- c. The early majority represents 34% of the market. These consumers rely more on advertisement and sales. This demographic is slightly above average in social and economic measurements and tend to adopt new brands in the early maturation stage.
- d. The late majority also represents 34% of the market. These consumers tend to be skeptical individuals who adopt new items or brands either to save money or by pressure from the influencers and during the brand's late maturation stage.

- e. Laggards represent 16% of the market. They are the group of people who are last to adopt new items or brands or refuse to use them. If they purchase, it is during the brand's decline stage (Etzel et al., 2001).

We formed the following hypotheses regarding the adoption and consumption of branded fashion, based on the previous research on brand personality and gender.

Hypothesis 1: There will be differences between male and female consumers regarding levels of carefulness during the consumption period of branded fashion apparel.

Hypothesis 2: There will be differences between male and female consumers in regard to their enjoyment of shopping for branded fashion apparel.

Hypothesis 3: There will be differences between male and female consumers in regard to their information processing about types of branded fashion apparel

Hypothesis 4: There will be differences between male and female consumers with regard to their use of media such as television, the Internet, and magazines in shopping for branded fashion apparel.

Hypothesis 5: There will be differences between male and female consumers regarding the influences on their behavior as consumers of branded fashion apparel.

Hypothesis 6: There will be differences between male and female consumers regarding brand involvement for consumption of branded fashion apparel.

Method

We conducted our study using a sequential explanatory design. We gathered qualitative data to enrich our quantitative research (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). Initially, in the quantitative stage of our research, we asked 600 people (300 women and 300 men) to answer 24 questions to gain understanding of their demographic and behavioral segmentation differences. In the qualitative stage of our research we conducted in-depth interviews (22 structured questions for 18 participants) to gather more detailed information on identifying how personality and behavior influences the individual preference of branded fashion apparel. We used the SPSS program to analyze the collected data. We calculated Pearson chi square in our analysis to test the hypotheses of the research.

Results

The findings in the quantitative stage of our research are set out in Table 1.

According to our results, for the respondents in our study catalogs, magazines, television, Internet and word-of-mouth were the principal ways to receive information about branded fashion apparel items. Our results showed there was

a positive correlation between gender and all aspects of consumption of branded fashion apparel, which supported all our hypotheses (see Table 2 for results of hypotheses tests).

Table 1. *Respondents' Attitudes Toward Branded Apparel*

Respondents between 17 and 19 years old	11%
Respondents between 20 and 25 years old	70%
Respondents between 26 and 31 years old	19%
Marital status (not married)	59%
(married)	41%
Respondents tend to buy what they need	70%
Respondents like a lot of luxury in their life	49%
Respondents take care when they buy something	60%
Respondents shop quickly and buy a good enough brand	43%
Respondents perceive shopping as "just for fun"	52%
Respondents prefer to buy advertised clothing brands	52%
If celebrities wear a new fashion brand respondents are more inclined to buy the item	65%
Respondents spend more than 3 hours a day on the Internet	60%
Respondents listen to the radio for no more than 1 hour a day	69%
Respondents read magazines for no more than 1 hour a day.	73%
Respondents read the newspaper for no more than 1 hour a day	74%
Respondents watch television between 1 and 3 hours a day	48%
Respondents receive clothing information by word-of-mouth communication	14%

Table 2. *Gender Differences on Aspects of Branded Fashion Consumption*

Hypothesis – differences between male and female consumers of branded fashion apparel	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Levels of carefulness during the consumption period	12.147	4	.016
Enjoyment of shopping	10.586	4	.032
Information processing	78.678	16	.000
Use of media			
• television	7.107	2	.029
• the Internet	13.110	2	.001
• magazines	9.571	2	.008
Behavior as consumers	22.984	11	.018
Brand involvement	21.063	11	.033

Table 3. *Education Level and Income of Respondents*

Male respondents	50%
Female respondents	50%
High school graduates - public sector	25%
High school graduates - private sector university students	50%
	25%

Table 3 continued

Earning more than 3000TL(US\$1507)		33%
This was composed of	(women)	67%
	(men)	33%
Earning between 2000 TL and 3000TL (US\$1005-1506)		22%
This was composed of	(women)	67%
	(men)	33%
Earning between 1000 and 2000TL (US\$502-1004)		45%
This was composed of	(women)	38%
	(men)	62%

As seen in Table 3, among the group who took part in our study, the average income was higher for the women than it was for the men. According to our results 56% of the participants were influenced by marketing communication efforts in making consumer decisions about branded apparel products (60% of the participants who were influenced by marketing communication efforts were female and the rest were the male). Also, 39% of them were influenced by social and cultural factors, which included informal environments such as friends, family, and peer groups (43% women/57% men). Finally, 5% of them were influenced by psychological factors, which included needs/wants, attitudes and values, perception, and satisfaction with apparel product selections (men made up 5% of this group). These results indicated that the men who took part in our study were more influenced by social/cultural influences than by other factors, but females were influenced most by marketing communication efforts such as television, advertising, magazines, catalogs and celebrities, and by both personal selling and direct marketing.

In response to the question regarding the reasons for buying branded apparel, 56% of respondents said that they purchased branded apparel products for functional reasons such as quality, price, and product features (40% of those who bought for functional reasons were women, 60% were men). In addition, 22% of respondents said they bought for symbolic reasons such as status, prestige, affection, and to show off. Of this group 50% were women and 50% were men. From the total group of participants, 22% said they bought branded apparel products for experiential reasons such as past experiences, satisfaction, and brand perception, with 75% of this group being women and 25% men.

Our research results showed that 83% of the participants in our study attributed significance to purchasing branded apparel products (60% women/40% men); out of the 83%, exactly 50% of them (33% female/67% male) attributed some importance to wearing branded apparel products and 33% (all women) reported that it was most important to them to wear branded products. The 17% who had not attributed any significance to purchasing branded products were all men.

This showed that the female participants, either partially or fully, considered the purchase and wearing of branded clothing as important.

Our analysis showed that of the participants who reported a partial preference for wearing branded products, 66% of them were quality-oriented (44% women/56% men) and of the participants, who fully preferred to wear branded apparel, 33% of them were status-oriented and 33% of them were quality-oriented. On the other hand, 78% (43% women/57% men) of the participants felt that other people choose branded apparel products because of ego needs such as status, prestige, and accomplishment. Among the women who took part in our study, 11% of them believed that others wear branded apparel because of the need for belonging, such as for friendship and group acceptance.

Results of our survey showed that 83% of the participants felt that their clothing styles directly reflected their personality, with 17% feeling that their clothing styles did not reflect their personality. Furthermore according to the participants' personality explanations there was a correlation between the individual consumer's personality and brand personality categorization. Of the participants, 27.8% (40% women/60% men) considered themselves as honest, friendly, cheerful, and family-oriented, which corresponds to the sincerity brand personality, a group that has been identified as preferring the brands adidas, Fred Perry, and Journey. Another 27.8% (60% women/40% men) of the participants considered themselves as fashionable, up-to-date, spirited, trendy, and daring, which corresponds to the excitement brand personality and they mostly prefer the brands US Polo, Zara, Bershka, and Top Shop. The orientation of another 17% of the participants - all of whom were women - was reliable, confident, and successful, which corresponds to the competence brand personality, and those in this group mostly prefer the brands Zara and Ipekyol. Another 17% - all of whom were men - considered themselves as outdoorsy, sports-loving, and masculine types, which corresponds to the ruggedness brand personality, and these men mostly prefer the brands adidas, Pull&Bear, and Reebok. Finally, 12% of the participants, made up of 50% women and 50% men, considered themselves to be charming, attractive, and as having a high income, which would correspond to the sophistication brand personality, and these individuals mostly prefer the brands Fred Perry and Zara.

However, the participants in our study reported their most desired and loved brands as follows (listed here according to their brand personalities as identified in our study):

- a. Sincerity brand personality (mostly late majority consumers) - adidas, Fred Perry, Burberry, Koton, and Herry.
- b. Excitement brand personality (mostly early adopter consumers) - US Polo, Burberry, Bershka, and Louis Vuitton.
- c. Competence brand personality - Ipekyol and Zac Posen.

- d. Sophistication brand personality (either innovator or early adopter consumers) - Fred Perry and Burberry.
- e. Ruggedness brand personality (late majority consumers) - adidas, Pull&Bear, and Armani.

Our analysis showed that 94% of the participants claimed long-term brand loyalty, with 6% stating that they had no brand loyalty. Also, in our analysis, 11% of the participants were classified as innovators, 28% were early adopters, 17% were early majority, and 44% were late majority consumers. There were more women than men in the innovator and early adopter groups, but most of the early majority and late majority consumers were men.

In order to better understand how our participants experienced shopping for branded apparel, we asked them what they felt during the shopping process and 50% (67% women/33% men) of the participants responded that they felt happy and 11% (all women) reported feeling successful when they wore name brand apparel products. Another 39% (14% women/86% men) said that their feelings were not altered by shopping for branded apparel. Therefore, when buying name brands, the mood of female participants was influenced more by their product selections than was the mood of the males. According to the in-depth interviews that we conducted, 67% (58% women/42% men) of participants felt that the reason for other people wearing either branded or expensive products was for the emotional experience and 33% (33% women/67% men) felt that other people chose name brand products for functional reasons.

All of the participants reported that, besides clothing, accessories are a significant consideration. Accessory preferences were reported as follows: shoes for 39% of the participants (14% women/86% men); sunglasses for 17% of participants (67% women/33% men); handbags for 17% of participants (all women); and 17% of them (67% women/33% men) considered accessories to be important in conjunction with the selection of clothing.

We found in our analysis that 22% of the participants (all women) named their first choice brand as Zara (because they considered it fashionable and chic), and the first choice for 17% of participants (all men) was to buy adidas (because of its style), however 11% of the male participants' expressed a preference for Fred Perry (because of its quality and style), and for 11% of the women participants their first choice preference was to buy Ipekyol (for style and quality).

Shopping was regarded as a fun activity (i.e., entertainment) for 56% of the participants, of whom 67% were women and 33% were men, and as therapy for 75% of the women and 25% of the men. For 45% of the participants shopping was viewed as an ordinary activity (i.e., as an exchange for 100% of the men in the group who classified it as ordinary activity and as an ordinary activity that was compulsory for 33% of the women and 67% of the men). Therefore, these results showed that the women enjoyed shopping activities more than the men did.

Conclusion

Both consumers themselves and the education of the consumer have very important roles to play in influencing the power of the economy. A well-educated consumer is able to make decisions regarding purchases that take into account their personal budget, that utilize and protect the family income, and that identify potential financial disadvantages. Consumer education creates a pathway for the public (adults, young adults, and students) to become more conscious and economically functional during their decision-making process.

In this research, we found that the symbolic reasons for consumption were seen to be highly preferable for both the men and women in North Cyprus who took part in our study. Therefore, consumer education in North Cyprus can be considered crucial in terms of providing the people who live there with practical reasons for consumption.

Limitations and Further Research

Our research was conducted exclusively among young adults who live in the north part of Cyprus. As there are cultural similarities in, as well as differences between, the north and south of Cyprus, it will be necessary to conduct further research using the same study method in the south part of Cyprus.

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