

HEDONISM, A CONSUMER DISEASE OF THE MODERN AGE: GENDER AND HEDONIC SHOPPING IN TURKEY

Ayça KIRGIZ

Yeditepe University Faculty of Communication

Advertising Design and Communication

Istanbul

ABSTRACT

One of the most distinctive features of today's modern consumption societies is the fact that the emotional side of consumption is becoming prominent. Brands' symbolic meanings and the emotional values they add have become one of the most important means of securing a competitive advantage. Consumers in the modern age seek to derive pleasure from the experience of consumption and at the same time meet their needs. Hedonism, which has been defined as "an understanding that prioritizes delight as the ultimate goodness, a life doctrine focused on the pursuit of, and addiction to, delight," comes into being as emotional satisfaction in particular preferences concerning taste, smell, sound, sight and touch, and these constitute the essential motives behind such consumption. In this study, hedonism is described within a theoretical framework that is based on the concepts of consumers and consumption, and consumers' shopping habits are assessed in terms of the pleasure derived from shopping. In particular, the study attempts to bring to light any existing differences between female and male consumers in terms of the pleasure they get from shopping. Face to face survey methods were carried out in the city of Edirne in Turkey, the results of which were then analyzed to reveal and evaluate the hedonic attitudes and behaviors of consumers in terms of demographic characteristics.

Keywords: Hedonism; consumption; hedonic consumer; consumer behavior; hedonism and gender

Modern Çağın Tüketici Hastalığı Hedonizm: Türkiye'de Cinsiyet ve Hedonik Alışveriş

ÖZET

Bugünün modern tüketim toplumlarının en belirgin özelliklerinden birisi tüketim olgusunun duygusal boyutunun öne çıkmasıdır. Markaların sembolik anlamları ve kattıkları duygusal değerler rekabet avantajı sağlamada en önemli araçlardan birisi haline gelmiştir. Modern çağın tüketicileri ihtiyaçlarını gidermenin yanında tüketim deneyiminden haz almaya çalışmaktadır. "Zevki en üst iyilik kabul eden anlayış, zevkin peşinde koşma ve zevk düşkünlüğüne adanmış bir yaşam doktrini" olarak tanımlanan hedonizm, tatlar, kokular, sesler, bakışlar ve dokunmaya ilişkin olan kişiye has tercihlerdeki duygusal tatmin, bu tür tüketimin temel motifleri olarak gösterilmektedir. Bu çalışmada hedonizm tüketici ve tüketim kavramları temel alınarak teorik çerçevede anlatılmış ve tüketicilerin alışveriş yapma alışkanlıkları, alışverişten haz alma ekseninde değerlendirilmiştir. Özellikle kadın ve erkek tüketiciler arasında alışverişten haz alma arasında fark bulunup bulunmadığı araştırılmıştır. Edirne ili baz alınarak yüz yüze anket yöntemi kullanılmış ve tüketicilerin demografik özellikleri açısından hedonik tutum ve davranışları ortaya konulmuş ve değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hedonizm; tüketim; hedonik tüketici; tüketici davranışı; hedonizm ve cinsiyet

Introduction

Consumer behavior is affected by numerous variables, and these variables have a direct impact on how the behavior of consumers differs. While some consumers prefer to live abstemiously through the effect of the values they possess, the products purchased and consumed by a consumer living in a materialist environment may become a symbol for him/her. Similarly, consuming certain goods and services can be a means of differentiating oneself from others. Consumers for whom the enjoyment of product consumption represents a way of thinking have been defined as hedonic consumers, and the behavior of repeatedly deriving pleasure from consumption or shopping has also been referred to as a form of hedonism.

Hedonism: Consumption and Consumer

Hedonic consumption is an important field in consumer behavior, and it represents a pattern of consumption related to emotional qualifications and a focus on complementing emotional satisfaction. In these terms, hedonic consumption can be defined as a dimension pertaining to the emotional, sensorial and fantasy aspects of product usage (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, p.100). At the same time, the concept of hedonism can be described in brief as the pursuit of pleasure or a form of dedication to delight, particularly sensorial delights, or as a doctrine defending a behavioral style motivated by the desire to seek pleasure or avoid pain in the psychological sense. Hedonism has also been defined as a state of mind in which “pleasure is the highest beauty, [and] pleasure-seeking is a doctrine that is a life-style devoted to pleasure-seeking” (Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999, p.273).

Consumers prefer not only the best one, but also the thing that make them happiest. It is seen that the consumer preferences are in line with the strategy aiming to increase the hedonic experience at the end of the consumption. As specified by Levi, “people buy products not only for the capabilities of products but also for their meanings”. This way of thinking was converted into the suitability concept among the symbolic meanings of the products being purchased and the life style chosen by consumers during the 1960s. These factors are defined as “hedonic consumption” (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, p.93).

Hedonic consumers make shopping for various uneconomical reasons such as playing role, entertainment, individual satisfaction, learning new trends, physical activity, sensorial stimulation, social experience, communication with people who have similar interests, attractiveness of the reference group, status and authority, bargaining enjoyment. Moreover the consumers, who perform instantaneous buying and selling, are as constant customers of

shopping centers and supermarkets which carry out purchases at unplanned high numbers. They are inclined to wear the latest fashion clothes by choosing among the famous brands for demonstration of their interest in fashion. Even they place importance on the decoration of shop, shop window design when choosing the stores in which they will make shopping (Chang, 2002, p.68).

The hedonic consumption is related with mental images and fantasies. General reasons of the hedonic shopping are enumerated as “social experiences, sharing of common interests, inter-personal attractions, ready status and race excitation” (Odabaşı, 1999, p.79-92). In Odabaşı and Barış’s opinion; upon appearing of a need the consumer begins to seek two kinds of benefits as providing tangible benefits and hedonic benefits. Hedonic benefits include emotional, physical delights, dreams and aesthetic features. Traditionally, it is being talked about two kind of hedonism as philosophical and psychological. The purpose in philosophical hedonism is to maximize the delight. The purpose of the life is to satisfy the needs. The second type of hedonism is psychological and it is described with motivation.

Each product has a meaning for the consumers and therefore feelings and thoughts directing to buy a product are different. It is important to understand and explain the purchasing reasons composed of these unique emotions and thoughts inside of the consumers. In the traditional sense, the items which enabling the consumer to take pleasure from the products are; satisfaction of the senses, protection, recreation, spending good times, being successful, curiosity and gaining new experiences, ease of use, use for long duration, ease of maintenance, affordability, being healthy, to be liked, to gain prestige, falling in line with the fashion, being different, making others happy, acquiring new knowledge (Soysal,1999, p.105).

If we take up the shopping of consumers in two headings as emotional and rational, “price, quality and value” appears to be the actual determinants in rational shopping behaviors and product selections. The consumers, who show shopping and consumption behavior under the influence of these determinants, act under the effect of these rational factors and behave economic and utilitarian thoughts without taking pleasure. These determinants don’t change also for the consumers showing emotional shopping behavior. Product/service’s price, quality and value affect the choice of the consumer but it also satisfies and provides pleasure.

Purchases of the consumers are strongly affected by cultural, social, personal and psychological factors. Although large part of the company managers knows that they can’t control such factors, they don’t ignore these factors. Because consumers’ behaviors are mostly determined by external factors such as demographic, economic, social, situational and

technologic subjects. At the same time consumer behaviors are influenced by internal factors such as beliefs, attitudes, learning, motivation and needs, personality, perception and values (Wu, 2003, p.38-39). The hedonism, which is an important field of the consumer behaviors, appears as to be a consumption way focusing on the completion of emotional satisfaction and associated with emotional qualifications. In Torlak's opinion (2000, p.45-46), to take pleasure from the consumption is a normal conclusion as being satisfied, to behave hedonist (hedonist) is excessiveness. The hedonism contains negativities due to it will weaken the sense of responsibility when it is considered for the overall society. Hedonism and utilitarianism concepts are treated as opposite to each other in the studies performed on hedonic behavior at consumer behaviors literature (Babin and Attaway, 2000, p.46; Childers et al, 2001, p.68; Owerby and Lee:2006, p.121; Jones et al, 2006, p.59; Paridon, 2004, p.70). Geiger (2007, p.26) is mentioning about hedonic and functional shopping in the study wherein night shopping was taken up and says that hedonic dimension is low due to visibility is low at night shopping. Stoela et al. (2004, p.41) have identified that in the event of the customers are satisfied who come for shopping with hedonic or utilitarian approach, they incline towards to make shopping again at the same place. From this standpoint, the company managers who want to gain constant customer pay also great attention to the customers making hedonic shopping. For example, company managers and shopping center owners are trying various ways in order to make the consumers' shopping more entertaining. There are events in the shopping centers, actually not being sold, but attracting the consumers just with their image, sound, smell or texture. They are developing and experiencing methods in order to render enjoyable even the shopping made via internet and to enable consumers taking pleasure from this shopping.

The basic difference distinguishing modern hedonism from traditional one is explained that modern consumer behaves as more "excitement centered". There are many field researches in which consumers' feminine and masculine behaviors were taken up. In these researches, it is expressed that the dimensions like "to love shopping, to prefer befitting products, learning curiosity, to feel different" are felt at higher degrees by female ones. Women and men's format of participation to shopping are also different. For example, women are more effective as a mother on the decisions of purchasing women's clothing, women care products, children's clothes, cleaning products and furniture, and at shopping made for the house. The common feature firstly seen at first glance of such goods is being preferential goods. Likewise the men in the capacity of a father of the family are more effective for automobile, house, bank selection, insurance, men's apparel and men's grooming products.

Underhill (2004, p.132) argues that it is not possible for a man to love shopping. Because the design of shopping malls and bazaars are completely oriented towards the women in his opinion. He expresses that men love to make shopping at comfort spaces by setting a linear relationship between being comfortable of the shopping mall and to love there. In the same way, Dholakia (1999, p.152) expresses that married men have committed themselves to meet house needs without enjoyment. Babacan (2001, p.33), who examined buying behaviors prior to special days, has found that women behave more hedonic than men while shopping. In our country, female consumers have been participating into the life increasingly in more forms and different ways. As a result of this situation, women prefer to purchase as ready-made the productions (sewing, cooking) in the field of their expertise in the past and therefore they reflect their discriminations on their shopping.

Research Model

The research has been done in Edirne in September, 2013. Face to face survey method has been utilized for data collection method. The survey form used in collection of data is composed of 6 demographic questions and 30 expressions prepared in 5-Likert scale. Arnold and Reynold's (2003, p.69) study has been utilized largely for generation of the expressions.

The universe of the research is the consumers living in Edirne city. The data, collected from 301 individuals who were selected with random sampling method among these consumers, was subjected to analysis.

It won't be proper to generalize the research conclusions for all consumers. However the importance should be emphasized that in terms of giving an idea on general and serving as an example for the future researches. The reliability of the questionnaire form used in the research has been tested and found as reliable (Cronbach Alpha=0,89). T test and variance analysis has been utilized in the analysis for measuring the attitudes of the participants and comparing the attitudes of consumers with different characteristics. T test has been applied in comparison of dual groups, gender differences has been investigated.

Findings and Considerations

Demographic Characteristics

There is a strong relationship between the age with attitude and behaviors. Especially consumers' age ranges vary about consumption. For this reason the information regarding the ages of the participants have been gathered and they have been assessed in five categories.

When looked upon the age distributions in the table, 37,5% of the consumers' ages are between 21-30, 27,2% of them are 20 and under.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Consumers

Age	Number	%	Gender	Number	%
20 and under	82	27.2	Woman	118	62.5
21-30	113	37.5	Man	113	37.5
31-40	53	17.6			
41-50	33	11.0		Marital status	
51 and above	20	6.6	Married	132	43.9
	Income		Widow	8	2.7
300 and under	73	24.3	Single	161	53.5
301-500	48	15.9		Occupation	
501-750	71	23.6	Officer	100	33.2
751-1000 tl	66	21.9	Free	13	
1001 and above	43	14.3	Worker	20	
	Education		Housewife	39	
Primary	21	7.0	Retired	5	
Secondary	23	7.6	Student	124	
High school	160	53.2	Total	301	100.0
University	97	32.2			
Total	301	100.0			

The income is one of the important factors determining the consumption behaviors of the people. The income groups composed of five categories have been created with the intent to identify the power and existence of the relationship between attitudes and the income. While the income of 24,3% of consumers in scope of the research is 300 YTL and under, the income of 23,6% of them ranges between 501-750 YTL.

As well as education level is the essential status evaluation tool in modern societies, it is also an important determinant in hedonism. The research scope consists of 53,2% high-school graduates, and 32,2% university graduates. The participants' genders should be known in order to examine the fundamental question of the research. The consumers involved in this study consisted of 62,5% female consumers, and 37,5% male consumers. 53,5% are single,

43,9% are married, 2,7% are widow among the consumers. When considered in terms of occupational group, 33,2% of the consumers are officers, 41,2% are students, 13% are housewives.

Hedonic Consumption and Gender

The differences among the degrees of participation as they relate to expressions of consumers according to the gender variable in Table 2 were investigated by a t test.

Table 2: Relationship Between the Gender and Expressions

Expressions		N	Average	Standard Deviation	T values	P values
1. Shopping is an excitement for me. *	Woman	188	4,10	1,03	6,16	,000
	Man	113	3,24	1,35	5,77	,000
2. I feel free myself when make shopping.*	Woman	188	4,05	1,09	6,58	,000
	Man	113	3,10	1,37	6,22	,000
3. I go to shopping places in my leisure times.	Woman	187	3,67	1,25	3,54	,000
	Man	113	3,12	1,38	3,45	,001
4. I look at discounted items while shopping.*	Woman	188	4,46	,83	3,22	,001
	Man	113	4,08	1,16	2,97	,003
5. I like to bargain in shopping.	Woman	188	3,83	1,19	,14	,888
	Man	113	3,81	1,33	,13	,891
6. I shop for others. Because I feel myself good when others feel themselves good. **	Woman	188	3,67	1,32	5,34	,000
	Man	113	2,81	1,37	5,30	,000
7. I feel myself good when I buy something together with people special to me.*	Woman	188	4,62	,73	5,60	,000
	Man	113	3,96	1,31	4,91	,000
8. I take pleasure from shopping for my friends and family.*	Woman	188	4,55	,82	5,58	,000
	Man	113	3,89	1,24	5,06	,000
9. I go out shopping so not to lag behind the fashion. **	Woman	188	2,70	1,39	2,54	,012
	Man	113	2,29	1,34	2,56	,011
10. I like to be acquainted with new people while shopping.	Woman	188	2,82	1,25	-1,41	,158
	Man	113	3,03	1,24	-1,41	,158

11. To go shopping is a social need for me. *	Woman	188	4,02	1,04	2,80	,005
	Man	113	3,64	1,23	2,69	,008
12. I go shopping to feel better about myself when I become low-spirited. **	Woman	188	3,62	1,27	8,95	,000
	Man	113	2,30	1,19	9,09	,000
13. In my opinion shopping is one of the ways to relax. **	Woman	188	3,82	1,22	8,57	,000
	Man	113	2,57	1,24	8,52	,000
14. Cheapness is important at shopping.	Woman	188	4,20	1,04	1,26	,206
	Man	113	4,04	1,14	1,23	,217
15. Quality is the most important matter for me at shopping.	Woman	184	4,27	,89	-1,00	,317
	Man	113	4,38	,92	-,99	,321
16. I follow campaigns at shopping.	Woman	188	3,87	1,10	,27	,787
	Man	113	3,84	1,20	,26	,791
17. I prefer the shops which I know for shopping.	Woman	187	4,11	1,01	,45	,648
	Man	113	4,05	1,19	,43	,661
18. To go shopping makes me happy.*	Woman	188	4,32	,91	7,48	,000
	Man	113	3,35	1,32	6,84	,000
19. Unable to find items which I am looking for makes be unhappy.	Woman	186	4,08	1,09	1,07	,283
	Man	112	3,93	1,14	1,05	,288
20. When a product's price is cheaper at a different place, then my enthusiasm for shopping is lowered.	Woman	188	3,46	1,39	-,25	,798
	Man	113	3,50	1,32	-,25	,796
21. Being continuously interested by sales staff makes me uncomfortable.*	Woman	188	3,79	1,22	1,44	,149
	Man	113	3,56	1,45	1,38	,167
22. When the layout of goods and services in a store is bad, it lowers my spirits for shopping.	Woman	188	3,97	1,12	-,06	,948
	Man	113	3,98	1,18	-,06	,948
23. Being away of the store from my location doesn't lower my desire for shopping.*	Woman	188	3,71	1,25	3,44	,001
	Man	113	3,17	1,39	3,35	,001
24. It is important for me to be that the sales staff is close by for getting	Woman	188	4,15	1,01	3,16	,002
	Man	113	3,73	1,26	3,00	,003

information about the product while shopping.*						
25. Gift tokens and raffle coupons encourage me for shopping. **	Woman	188	3,48	1,34	2,95	,003
	Man	113	3,00	1,42	2,91	,004
26. Shopping together enhances my heartfelt feeling with this person.	Woman	188	3,45	1,26	1,21	,227
	Man	113	3,27	1,27	1,20	,228
27. I prefer to shop by seeing the products rather than shop in a virtual environment.*	Woman	188	4,51	1,03	2,58	,010
	Man	113	4,15	1,30	2,43	,016
28. I go shopping when I feel want to feel special.**	Woman	188	3,62	1,20	6,30	,000
	Man	113	2,69	1,26	6,23	,000
29. I go shopping for experimenting new things.*	Woman	188	3,26	1,25	3,86	,000
	Man	113	2,68	1,30	3,82	,000
30. I go shopping for not missing new trends.*	Woman	188	2,84	1,37	2,71	,007
	Man	113	2,40	1,27	2,77	,006
1.I don't agree absolutely, 2. I don't agree 3. I haven't got an idea, 4.I agree, 5. I agree completely.						
* The expressions wherein significant differences are present at 0,05 importance level among the groups with equal variance						
** The expressions wherein significant differences are present at 0,05 importance level among the groups with unequal variance						

As seen in the table, a significant difference was identified in terms of gender in 13 of 30 expressions. These differences are as follows:

- Shopping is perceived by women to be more of a form of “excitement” compared to men.
- For the most part, female consumers prefer to shop as a means of passing leisure time more so than male consumers.
- While, shopping, female consumers look more at discounted items compared to male consumers. Female consumers indicated that they are more sensitive to discounts in comparison to men.
- Female consumers feel freer when they shop in comparison to male consumers.
- Female consumers feel better when they buy something for people who are special for them.

- Female consumers derive more pleasure from shopping for their friends and family compared to male consumers.
- Female consumers consider shopping to be more of a social need than male consumers.
- While some consumers are annoyed by sales staff during the shopping experience, others find it satisfying. Female consumers tend to feel more unease about the attentions of sales staff compared to male consumers.
- Living in a place distant from a store reduces the desire to shop to a greater extent for female consumers than for male consumers.
- Female consumers want sales staff to provide information about items they would like to buy to a greater extent than male consumers.
- Although shopping in virtual environments is becoming increasingly common, female consumers are less prone than men to engage in forms of shopping in which they cannot directly see and touch the product they wish to purchase.
- Compared to male consumers, women are more likely to shop with the aim of keeping up with new trends.

Statistically significant differences have been identified with the assumption of the absence of equal variance in the following five expressions:

1. Shopping is a way of relieving stress in women's opinions.
2. To a greater extent than male consumers, female consumers go shopping when they feel that they are special.
3. Female consumers go shopping in order to feel better when they are feeling low spirited.
4. In contrast with men, women go shopping with a particular focus on keeping up with trends.
5. Female consumers tend to go shopping to try new things to a greater extent than male consumers.

Analysis of Gender in terms of Demographic Characteristics

The Scheffe test was used to determine whether or not there is a difference between women's hedonic shopping behaviors and the other demographic characteristics indicated above. According to the results obtained, hedonism in female consumers' shopping behaviors doesn't vary in terms of education levels, age groups, income status, marital status and

employment. In other words, women constitute a homogenous group in these regards. The Scheffe test was also used to determine if there are significant differences according to the demographic characteristics given above for male consumers. It was found that hedonic behavior was also homogenous for male consumers during shopping just as it was for women in terms of age and income, as well as marital and education status.

Differences were identified among the groups when tests were conducted at the significance level of $P \leq 0.10$ for some variables, both for male consumers and women. However, these findings have not been included because a significance level of $P \leq 0.05$ was stipulated as the basis in this study.

Conclusion

In this study, the relationship between hedonism, which has been referred to as a sickness in modern consumer culture in the consumption era of the 21st century, and the factor of gender factor was examined. The shopping attitudes of female and male consumers were comparatively analyzed in terms of the motivation to derive gratification. Towards the end of the analyses, the arithmetic averages of expressions directed towards the consumers were compared and it was found that in 19 of 30 expressions female consumers derive more pleasure from shopping than male consumers. Female consumers have justified their behavior based on the claim that they derive excitement from shopping, it offers a sensation of freedom, it is a kind of leisure time recreation, buying items at a discount is gratifying, shopping is a means of gratifying others, it is perceived as being an aspect of socialization, there is a desire to shop as part of personal outings, and they don't want to lag behind new trends. A statistically significant difference was not found for any of the 30 variables demonstrating that male consumers behave more hedonistically while shopping. Consequently, it has been determined that female consumers derive greater pleasure from shopping than male consumers in a sample framework.

The current literature states that extreme forms of shopping behavior are thought to be seen as a remedy for depression or boredom in terms of excessive (compulsive) consumption. Likewise, individuals who are addicted to shopping in a way similar to drugs have been referred to as "shopaholics." In this research, it was found that female consumers tend to be more "shopaholic" than men.

The main motives underlying hedonic shopping may be either internal or external and as such pertain to communal or individual factors. The personal reasons for hedonic shopping include the desire for physical activities, entertainment, a desire to buy goods or services

cheaply, sensorial stimulation, deflecting annoyances and the desire for personal gratification. The communal reasons for hedonic shopping have been enumerated as a desire to gain societal experience, communication, the effect of prominent people in society, the impact of reference groups and patterns of negotiation.

According to this research, it can be said within the framework of the study conclusions that hedonic shopping which is considered to typically arouse excitement in the consumer is more predominant among female consumers in comparison to men. So in the study, outside the known consumer behaviors, it has been concluded that hedonic shopping behavior differs according to gender. The reason for this difference is constituted through female consumers' conceptualization of shopping as a means of gratification. This state of affairs, in which shopping is a source of pleasure is directed more towards rational purchasing behavior among male consumers in comparison to their female counterparts.

This situation, which suggests that women are relatively more emotional and men are slightly more rational, indicates that the methods used to increase the satisfaction levels of female consumers should primarily appeal to the emotions, unlike those geared towards men.

It has been asserted that hedonism may be an underlying cause of diseases, as "the origin of the affliction of obesity, which is becoming widespread in western countries, is the molecular side of hedonism," as stated in one study which took hedonism as a neurologic fact. Gonzalez-Pinto et al. (2003) indicated that hedonism was one of the five fundamental causes of excessiveness in their studies, in which they attempted to discover the reasons behind psychological extremisms. Additionally, they found that hedonism is not perceived as excessiveness due to its near-normal distribution among consumers. Taking hedonism as an unusual consumer behavior, the conclusion of the study indicates that female consumers behave more unusually in comparison to male consumers in terms of shopping. Likewise, our study has identified gender as a differentiating factor in hedonic shopping. However, joint studies which overlap in the fields of neurology, social psychology, psychology and society culture, and sociology are needed to clarify the relationships between the reasons for hedonism and its dynamics in terms of genetics, human physiology and society culture. Such studies will help determine whether increasingly hedonic patterns represent a normal form of consumer behavior, and if not, then what can be done.

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