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WHAT AFFECTS YOUNG PEOPLE IN BUYING BEHAVIORS AIMED AT DIFFERENT PRODUCT GROUPS?

Abstract:

When consumer-wise buying behaviors are examined, we often encounter the concept of opinion leader. Opinion leaders can be defined as persons or institutions that help convey various messages to different sections of society, raise awareness in them in this way, lead to behavioral or attitudinal changes or reinforce existing attitudes. When Gabriel Tarde, who attempts to explain social developments and changes based on the individual, first proposed "Social Imitation Theory" (Çebi, 2012, p. 4), it was hard to imagine that it could evolve into the concept of opinion leader, but as years have passed by, it has become inevitable that opinion leader should become an institution that both guides and explains individual and social developments.

In a process where communication opportunities have become greatly advanced and the messages generated through these opportunities increased in the sense of both volume and sharing, it seems unavoidable that buying habits should undergo a change in form. Whether or not the influence of opinion leaders as a power that guides consumers in this process of change has grown independent of the face-to-face communication environment, and in the buying of what kind of new products the concept of "opinion leader" is effective constitute the fundamental problems of this study.

The study will be conducted on young people who receive undergraduate education. An attempt will be made to understand the buying behaviors of young people for three different products falling in the categories of high involvement and low involvement, and the role of opinion leaders in the formation of these behaviors.

Keywords:

Social Imitation, Opinion Leaders, Buying Behaviors, Consumption Habits

INTRODUCTION

For the first time in the year 1940, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, in a study they conducted on how voting behaviors were formed in the USA, introduced the concept of "opinion leader" by constructing and testing the hypothesis of "two-phase/step flow of communication". According to the two-step flow of communication, information exerts its influence through both mass media and opinion leaders who affect society (Retold by Sabuncuoğlu-Gülay from Erdoğan, 2014).

The concept of opinion leader refers to person or persons who have a powerful role in mass communication, convey the dominant ideology or an intended message to the society directly or indirectly, have a say in matters, are reliable and relatively superior to the group they dominate. Opinion leader, who is based on a psychological concept, is a person who ensures layered conveyance and perception of the message. Confused with the concept of gate keeper in many senses, opinion leader is, unlike the gate keeper, responsible for spreading the message or the idea to the various layers of the society rather than for forming the news, message or the idea in accordance with a certain goal or ideology. When viewed from this angle, the concept of gate keeper refers to editors and publishers as the basis within today's mass media, whereas opinion leaders can be composed of person or persons who people find close to themselves, follow of their own volition, criticize from time to time and overlap with their individual norms (Kaymaz-Özlem, 2013, p. 357–358).

Gabriel Tarde, a communication sociologist who emphasized the role of social imitation and opinion leaders in the spread of innovations, gave the lead role to key personalities called opinion leaders in processes of repetition and spread of innovations. According to Tarde, these key figures that are taken as role models are persons, groups, communities or institutions that possess the power to form magnetic fields of influence. Whether they are humans or non-humans, these owners of magnetic influence exert their effect not through an external force but by allowing our pre-existing states of mind which enable us to feel well to emerge in appropriate conditions. Creators of magnetic influence first enable us to notice who we are. Tarde's creator of magnetic influence is a figure that is far from many community leaders, is a very important and respectable figure and is, probably for this reason, very convincing. The power of the magnetic influence creator depends on its unexpected emergence in a way that will take up a specific form in the presence of the public. In a sense, the creator of magnetic influence is forming its own sovereignty. Even its slightest act is enough for it to turn into a charismatic leader that is persuasive and to whom loyalty and reverence is shown (Çebi, 2012, p. 14).

1. The changing medium of the opinion leader and its function in the buying process

Although opinion leaders continue their functions as opinion leaders in a traditional sense through face to face communication or conventional media, with the advent of today's increased communication opportunities, social media and the internet, the concept of opinion leader has undergone transformation and created "new" opinion leaders. According to Kaymaz, opinion leaders are defined as individuals followed in social media who have views, ideas, social and economic statuses that are the same as or similar to other individuals and whose views and ideas are shared to the very end. In this context, opinion leaders of social media do not just convey the message and the information by adding their comments, present the society with a new point of

view and guide it but at the same time leads to the formation of a new system that is open to sharing, as well as being interpretive and responsive. Thanks to these new opinion leaders, the two-step communication flow gives way to a four-step flow. In other words, this flow involves the original message, the opinion leader that conveys and interprets it, the reader-follower that receives and re-interprets the message, and the group that likes and re-shares it (Sabuncuoğlu-Gülay, 2014, p. 4).

As far as marketing communication is concerned, it is an important issue to identify opinion leaders that have the power to influence and guide (manipulate) opinions and behaviors especially with respect to products and brands. When viewed from this perspective, in addition to their other qualities, opinion leaders are expected to have abundant information about the class of products they are interested in, be individuals who establish social contacts easily, are innovative and keen to provide information about products. However, the generalizable characteristics of opinion leaders may display variation depending on the types of products. For example, opinion leaders in the field of fashion may exhibit qualities that are different from the qualities of opinion leaders in the field of automobiles (Odabaşı and Barış 2007, p. 279). Silverman (2006) emphasizes the importance of "word-of-mouth communication", which opinion leaders use as a method in the buying process as follows; now, an information age is underway and there is enormous amount of information flow. Due to the fact that there is not enough time to investigate and think it over, traditional advertising is on the decrease and TV channels are losing viewers. On the other hand, magazines are suffering from financial problems, Radio-TV and print media advertisements are getting costlier and are not creating the desired results. On the other hand, traditional artists are having difficulty keeping up with the times and the developments. People do not have adequate time to distinguish the useful information from useless information owing to information overload. Therefore, word-of-mouth communication saves time. Other people's stopping the information, distilling, refining and filtering it, and then giving us the benefit they have obtained from it becomes a very easy process (Marangoz, 2007, p. 396). "Word-of-mouth advertising" practices, which are defined as one of the oldest types of advertising, have now assumed a brand new form with the rise of the internet. While "word-of-mouth advertisement" has always played an important part in the formation of consumer opinions, they have become an even more powerful means during the past ten years. (Öztürk, 2014, p. 6261).

2. High-Involvement Low-Involvement Buying Models

Involvement is the level of personal importance and interest which a specific consumer feels towards a stimulus (like a product, service, department store, advertisement or message). Briefly, it can be defined as the relationship that an individual establishes with a product or a brand (Odabaşı and Oyman 2002, p. 342).

Involvement, which has to be seen as one of the most important determiners of consumer behavior, is defined in a general sense as consumers' level of participation in different aspects of the consumption process such as products, advertisements or buying behavior (Broderick and Mueller, 1999, p. 97).

Since the early 1980s, new models have begun to be developed that include novel ideas and new information processing theories such as that consumers decide to buy under the influence of their emotions, buy certain products purely for their symbolic value and the decision to buy is influenced by the level of involvement. The first of the models that bring together these new ideas is the FCB Grill. (Franzen, 2002, p. 175)

According to the Vice President of FCB Grill; Inc. Advertising Agency Richard Vaughn, a single process is not enough to explain how an advertisement exerts its influence and this process is shaped up by the nature of the consumer and the category of the product at different stages. In this context, Vaughn formed the FCB Grill, combining the traditional effects hierarchy model, high and low involvement models and right-brain left-brain thinking theory (Sabuncuoğlu, 2006, p. 70). According to this model, which Foot-Cone-Belding advertising agency used in determining its advertising strategy, whether consumers have high or low involvement with product categories and whether they make the buying decision on the basis of the think or feel dimension leads to the emergence of four different strategies. In other words, in this model, product categories can be divided into four categories on the basis of whether they are high involvement or low involvement products and whether they are products of think or feel (Çakır, 2006, p. 142).

RossıterPercy Grill; RossiterPercy Grill is an alternative model that further improves the FCB Grill but it differs from the FCB Grill in three respects. The first of these is that brand awareness is regarded as a prerequisite for attitude towards the brand. The other two are concerned with the involvement and motivation dimensions of attitude towards the brand. While FCB Grill views consumers' attitudes towards products within the framework of involvement, think and feel, RossiterPercy Grill views consumers' attitudes towards the product and the brand on the basis of types of involvement and motivation According to the view which underlie these approaches, when consumers buy high involvement products (computer, house, automobile), they usually act cognitively, but when they buy low involvement products (detergents, toothpaste, toilet paper) they behave emotionally.

3. Buying behaviors of young people

When the buying process is seen as a whole, it is possible to say that this process is shaped up under the influence of various factors. Socio-cultural factors such as the family, consultative groups, social class and culture, Psychological factors such as motivation, perception, learning, attitude and beliefs and personality, and demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, education and level of income play an effective part in buying decisions. Above all, a person's age and age period influence what kind of goods, and what models and styles they will be attracted to (Örücü-Tavşancı, 2011, p. 3). Brands which are aware that buying attitudes that are formed in this period will continue during the adulthood period try as much as they can to attract the attention of this young group in order to strengthen their brand values in the global arena (Odabaşı, 2007, p. 265).

4. Methodology

The concept of opinion leader has today undergone a process of change with the technology coming at the service of communication, but it still maintains its function in the process of buying. In order to investigate on what kind of buying decisions it is more effective, the following question was used: "Are opinion leaders more influential on young people's buying decisions of low involvement products or high involvement products?" In addition, attitudes towards the television and internet advertisements were also questioned through the survey as they were included among the factors that influenced the buying factors.

Since the buying process is composed of stages such as identification of the problem, emergence of the problem, evaluation of choice and buying decision, the questions were prepared in accordance with the steps of this process (Odabaşı-Barış, 2007, p.

333). In this study, it was intended to make a comparison with television and internet advertisements in regard to the influence of opinion leaders on young people's buying behaviors. The weights of the questions on the questionnaire form were distributed accordingly. The study, which was prepared to seek answers to all these questions, was analyzed through survey questions administered to 100 undergraduate students in the age range of 20-25.

5. Findings and Comments

Table 1: Factors Influencing Young People's Buying Behaviors and their Levels

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Opinion Leaders	100	3,1644	,57849	,05785
Television Advertisements	100	2,9725	,67799	,06780
Internet Advertisements	100	3,5177	,71631	,07163

In the analysis that was conducted by taking all product groups into consideration together, opinion leaders and internet advertisements are, as can be seen in Table 1, significantly more influential than television advertisements on young people's buying decisions. When an evaluation is made in regard to the degree of influence, the following order appears: Internet Advertisements (3,5177), Opinion Leaders (3,1644) and Television Advertisements (2,9725).

Table 2: The Relationship between Opinion Leaders and Product Groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cleaning Products	100	3,0671	,96088	,09609
Convenience Food	100	3,2000	,76676	,07668
Beverages	100	3,0843	,78143	,07814
Clothing and Accessories	100	3,4414	,74663	,07466
Amenity Space	100	3,3557	,71226	,07123
Alcohol and Tobacco	100	2,1000	1,22748	,12275
Electronic Goods	100	3,5514	,70806	,07081
Social Activities	100	3,5043	,74617	,07462
Test Value = 2.10				

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Cleaning Products	10,065	99	,000	,96714	,7765	1,1578
Convenience Food	14,346	99	,000	1,10000	,9479	1,2521
Beverages	12,596	99	,000	,98429	,8292	1,1393
Clothing and Accessories	17,967	99	,000	1,34143	1,1933	1,4896
Amenity Space	17,630	99	,000	1,25571	1,1144	1,3970
Alcohol and Tobacco	,000	99	1,000	,00000	-,2436	,2436
Electronic Goods	20,499	99	,000	1,45143	1,3109	1,5919
Social Activities	18,820	99	,000	1,40429	1,2562	1,5523

	Test Value = 3.5514					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Cleaning Products	-5,040	99	,000	-,48426	-,6749	-,2936
Convenience Food	-4,583	99	,000	-,35140	-,5035	-,1993
Beverages	-5,978	99	,000	-,46711	-,6222	-,3121
Clothing and Accessories	-1,473	99	,144	-,10997	-,2581	,0382
Amenity Space	-2,747	99	,007	-,19569	-,3370	-,0544
Alcohol and Tobacco	-11,824	99	,000	-1,45140	-1,6950	-1,2078
Electronic Goods	,000	99	1,000	,00003	-,1405	,1405
Social Activities	-,631	99	,529	-,04711	-,1952	,1009

Various consumption goods belonging to low and high involvement groups are separately shown in Table 2, which was prepared to distinguish the effect of opinion leaders on the buying process of different product groups. As can be seen in the table, the effect of opinion leaders on buying decisions regarding the electronic goods group, which is regarded as belonging to the high involvement group, appears as the highest frequency (3.55) in the table, but no significant conclusion could be drawn concerning the effect of opinion leaders on buying decisions concerning alcohol and tobacco products (2,10).

Table 3: The Relationship between Age and Factors Influencing Buying Behaviors

	Age	Opinion Leaders	Television Advertisements	Internet Advertisements
Age	1	-,155	-,240*	,032
		,124	,016	,751
	100	100	100	100
Opinion Leaders	-,155	1	,530**	,435**
	,124		,000	,000
	100	100	100	100
Television Advertisements	-,240*	,530**	1	,352**
	,016	,000		,000
	100	100	100	100
Internet Advertisements	,032	,435**	,352**	1
	,751	,000	,000	
	100	100	100	100

As can be seen in Table 3, a negative correlation is observed between age and Television Advertisements in young people's buying decisions. As age decreases, the rate of being influenced by Television Advertisements increases. On the other hand, Opinion Leaders and Internet Advertisements do not exhibit a significant variation with regard to age.

Table 4: The Relationship of Factors Influencing Spending and Buying Behaviors

	Spending	Opinion Leaders	Television Advertisements	Internet Advertisements
Spending	1	,274[**]	,272[**]	,111
		,006	,006	,270
	100	100	100	100
Opinion Leaders	,274[**]	1	,530[**]	,435[**]
	,006		,000	,000
	100	100	100	100
Television Advertisements	,272[**]	,530[**]	1	,352[**]
	,006	,000		,000
	100	100	100	100
Internet Advertisements	,111	,435[**]	,352[**]	1
	,270	,000	,000	
	100	100	100	100

As far as factors influencing spending and buying behaviors are concerned, one can talk, as can be seen in Table 5, of a positive correlation. As the level of spending increases, so does the importance attached to Opinion Leaders and Television Advertisements but as the level of spending decreases, so does the importance attached to them. No significant correlation could be found between Internet Advertisements and spending levels.

Table 5: The Relationship between Gender and Factors Influencing Buying Behaviors

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Opinion Leaders	Female	49	3,1840	,54956	,07851
	Male	51	3,1455	,60985	,08540
Television Advertisements	Female	49	3,0799	,59844	,08549
	Male	51	2,8693	,73768	,10330
Internet Advertisements	Female	49	3,5906	,63942	,09135
	Male	51	3,4476	,78308	,10965

When the relationship between gender and buying behaviors is examined, as can be seen in Table 5, a significant difference does not appear, but when the results of the descriptive statistics are considered, it is observed that women attach more importance than men to Television and Internet Advertisements (arithmetic mean tells us so). However, no such thing can be said of Opinion Leaders.

Table 6: The Relationship between the Emergence of the Need for Buying and Opinion Leaders

		Frequency	%
Question 1	I do not agree at all	3	% 3
	I do not agree	12	% 12
	I am undecided	35	% 35
	I agree	42	% 42
	I totally agree	6	% 6
	Total	100	100,0

The number of participants who agree with the statement "The views of people whose opinions I rely on are important in the emergence of my need for buying", which was designed to learn the role of opinion leaders in the stage of "the emergence of the need for buying", which is one of the initial steps of the buying process, is 48 in total, which accounts for 48 % of those who responded to this question. On the other hand, the rate of those who do not agree with this statement is 15 % in total.

Table 7: The Relationship between Evaluation of the Choices in the Buying Process and Opinion Leaders

		Frequency	%
Question 3	I do not agree at all	5	% 5
	I do not agree	15	% 15
	I am undecided	50	% 50
	I agree	25	% 25
	I totally agree	5	% 5
	Total	100	100,0

The rate of those who agree with the statement "During the process of buying, the views of people whose opinions I rely on are important in the evaluation of the choices", which was designed to learn the views of opinion leaders in the stage of evaluation of choices during the buying process is 30 % in total. On the other hand, the rate of those who do not agree with this statement is 20 % in total. Based on these data, it can be said that opinion leaders are more influential in the stage of emergence of the need for buying than in the stage of evaluation of choices.

Table 8: The Relationship between Buying Decision and Opinion Leaders

		Frequency	%
Question 4	I do not agree at all	14	% 14
	I do not agree	39	% 39
	I am undecided	35	% 35
	I agree	11	% 11
	I totally agree	1	% 1
	Total	100	100,0

The rate of those who agree with the statement "I put my buying decision into its final form after taking the views of people whose opinions I rely on", which was designed to see the relationship between the buying decision and opinion leaders, is 12 % in total. On the other hand, the rate of those who do not agree with this statement is 53 % in total.

It can be said on the basis of the findings in Tables 6, 7 and 8 that consumers are more susceptible to the influences of opinion leaders in the initial stages of the buying

process but they are less susceptible to such influences in the stage of the final decision to buy.

CONCLUSION

In this study, which was conducted to see the comparative effects of opinion leaders, TV advertisements and internet advertisements, which are regarded as factors influencing young people's buying decisions, opinion leaders and internet advertisements are, as can be seen in Table 1, more influential than television advertisements on young people's buying decisions. Another finding of the study is that in gender-based analyses, women seem to be more susceptible than men to television and internet advertisements. This situation is in parallel with the analyses regarding age, where as age decreases, the importance attached to television advertisements increases.

In analyses made on the basis of high involvement and low involvement products, it is observed that opinion leaders are more influential on the buying process of high involvement products.

On the other hand, in analyses made on the basis of the steps of the buying process, it is seen that opinion leaders are predominantly more influential on the stage of "emergence of the need for buying" but their influence decreases in the last stage where the final decision is made.

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