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Word of Mouth, Brand Loyalty, Acculturation and the Turkish Ethnic Minority Group in Germany

Aypar Uslu^a, Beril Durmuş^b, Sina Taşdemir^c; a*

^{a,b} *Marmara University Istanbul, 34180, Turkey*

^c *Bahçeşehir University, Berlin*

Abstract

This paper sets out to provide an evaluation of population characteristics and historical trends for immigrant Turks within the mainstream German population with a view to informing target marketing strategies aimed at this growing and important segment. The intent of this project is to explore whether there is a difference between German consumers and consumers with Turkish ethnic background in Germany in the use of brand loyalty and word-of-mouth in the mobile phone purchasing process. Additionally, the article aimed to reveal if there is any difference among Turkish consumers in Germany due to acculturation levels in terms of brand loyalty and word-of-mouth behavior during the mobile phone purchasing phase. The study shows that ethnicity plays a significant role in the mobile phone purchasing decision regarding brand loyalty and word-of-mouth behaviors. The acculturation level is an important indicator of those behaviors. The findings showed that there is a difference between Turkish and German consumers in Germany in the use of brand loyalty. In addition, low acculturated Turkish consumers tend to use word-of-mouth more compared to high acculturated Turkish consumers.

Keywords: Brand loyalty, word-of-mouth, acculturation, ethnic marketing, Germany

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1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that culture plays a significant role in the customer decision making process. Hofstede (1984) defines culture as the collective programming of the mind which includes systems of values and distinguishes the members of one group from another. In this respect, culture determines the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +90 212 507 99 25; fax: +90 212 505 93 32.
E-mail address: auslu@marmara.edu.tr

identity of a human group. Culture is comprised of language, traditions, customs, shared meanings, and institutions, including such factors as knowledge, laws, religion, food customs, music, art, technology, work patterns, products, and other artifacts that give a society its distinctive flavor (Wallendorf and Reilly 1983). However, societies do not have a single culture shared by all members, but consist of various layers as subcultures. A subculture is defined as a distinct cultural group that exists as an identifiable segment within a larger, more complex society and can be categorized by nationality, religion, geographic locality, race, age and sex (Schiffman and Kanuk 2010). Thus, it becomes increasingly important to study within-country cultural heterogeneity (Steenkamp 2001).

When a group of individuals emigrate from one nation to another, they carry their cultural aspects to the host country and may create a minority ethnic group within a society as a subculture. Pires and Stanton (2000) define minority ethnic groups as individuals belonging to a group that share one ethnicity distinct from that of the mainstream population.

In the consumer behavior literature, ethnicity as a subculture has attracted significant attention in the academics since the 1960s. Early researches focused on shopping habits and buying behavior of different ethnic groups such as black consumers (Sexton 1972), American Jewish consumers (Hirschman 1983) and Hispanics (Wallendorf and Reilly 1983; Valencia 1985). However, recent studies examined ethnicity by focusing on in-depth fields such as target marketing (Holland and Gentry 1999; Run 2007), couponing (Green 1996), high and low involvement product purchases (Kara and Kara 1996), ethics (Pires and Stanton 2000), brand loyalty and word of mouth (Podoshen 2006; Podoshen 2008). Only after the late 1990s, the number of studies examining ethnicity as a consumer subculture gradually increased in Europe, mainly in the UK. Nwankwo and Lindridge (1998) defined their paper as a preliminary attempt at exploring the state of ethnic marketing in Britain. In recent years, the minority ethnic groups have just started to be examined in Germany and in other European countries as a consumer segment (Hochman 2010) and only a small number of studies have focused on Turkish consumers as an ethnic minority group (Erdem 2006; Ozturk et al. 2010).

It is estimated that approximately 3.8 million Turkish immigrants live in Europe making them the largest foreign population (Kılıçlı 2003) while approximately 3 million of them are living in Germany (Hoßmann and Karsch 2011). Therefore today, the Turkish community in Germany is an identifiable subculture with distinct language, traditions, customs and institutions.

Much of the early literature that looked at Turkish minority ethnic groups in Germany focused on preferences and consumption patterns of generations of Turkish immigrants. Erdem (2006) identified the special characteristics of Turkish immigrants in Germany and their perceptions and judgments of ethnic marketing according to the strength of ethnic identification. Ozturk et. al. (2010) focused on the shopping and consumption preferences of Turkish immigrants in various categories including food, media, bank and entertainment. Both researches revealed the differences between the generations of Turkish immigrants due to acculturation and supported that Turkish minority ethnic groups in Germany have a distinct way of living and consumption behavior which makes ethnic marketing campaigns an important aspect to be considered by companies operating in Germany. However, the recent researches have paid almost no attention to the in depth details of consumption behavior of Turkish immigrants. In addition, none of them compared the consumption behavior of German mainstream consumers and Turkish immigrants. To fill this gap in the literature, this paper will provide a comparison of Turkish consumers

and German mainstream consumers in Germany regarding the use of brand loyalty and word-of-mouth within the context of mobile phone purchases. Additionally, this paper aims to find out the effect of acculturation on Turkish immigrants regarding the use of brand loyalty and word-of-mouth when purchasing mobile phones. In this respect, online and offline surveys have been conducted in Berlin where approximately 200.000 people with Turkish migration background live. This makes Berlin the biggest Turkish city outside of Turkey.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Acculturation

Acculturation is defined as the process of acquiring the customs of an alternative society. Seitz (1998) and Miserez (1987) state that as a result of acculturation many changes occur. Firstly, physical changes may occur: a new place to live, a new type of housing, urbanization and the like are all common with acculturation. Second, biological changes may occur such as a new nutritional status and new diseases. Third, political changes occur, usually bringing the non-dominant groups under some degree of control, and usually involving some loss of autonomy. Fourth, economic changes occur, moving away from traditional pursuits towards new forms of employment. Fifth, cultural changes necessarily occur: original linguistic, religious, educational, and technical institutions become altered, or imported ones take their place. Sixth, social relationships become altered, including inter-group and inter-personal relations, and new patterns of dominance may appear. Finally, numerous psychological changes appear in the individual level such as values placed on individualism, personal freedom, motives to achieve or to dominate.

Marketers who are planning international expansion should consider acculturation as an important marketing viewpoint and should not fall into the trap of believing that if its products are liked by local or domestic consumers, then the fellow citizens living abroad will like it. On the other hand, local companies should not target minority ethnic groups the same way they target domestic mainstream customers. In this respect, marketers should examine unique social, cultural and environmental characteristics of minority ethnic groups.

Acculturation of Turkish Minority Ethnic Groups in Germany : Especially after the Family Unification in 1973, the Turkish community in Germany realized that they are no longer temporary workers but permanent residents. The major factors that affected Turkish settlement in Germany were the negative experiences of those who re-migrated to Turkey, the ongoing education of children, lack of experience to start a business in Turkey, concerns regarding the adaptation to the daily life in Turkey and cultural and social alienation from Turkey (Sen 2002). With this law, as the German government changed the point of view for immigration, the debates focused on “integration policy”. Sahin (2010) concluded that there are significant differences between the first, second and third generations in terms of continuing the ethnic culture and adapting to German society. The generation variable has a negative effect on continuing Turkish culture and positive relation with internalizing German culture. Moreover, the research found that integration policies applied in Germany have a considerable effect on the acculturation levels.

Consumer acculturation level for this particular study was measured by using one of the most common ethnicity and acculturation scales developed by Valencia (1985). This scale has been developed in order to measure the acculturation level of Hispanic consumers in the United States and has been used in much

of the acculturation literature that deals with the diverse American population. It is used to measure a number of specific factors such as language ability, strength of ethnic identification, length of residence and miscegenation. In this respect, to have a better understanding of the acculturation levels of Turkish minority groups in Germany, a closer look to these variables is required.

2.2. Word of Mouth Behavior and the Turkish Minority Ethnic Group in Germany

Word of mouth communication is a type of informal channel of communication which involves direct (face-to-face) contact among individuals and groups concerning evaluations of goods and services. It is widely accepted that consumers often rely on word-of-mouth in making purchase decisions because it is perceived more credible compared to traditional media (Belch & Belch 2009). In this respect, as the consumers are highly empowered in the area of communicating products, a brand should market itself as a subject for everyday conversation among consumers. This involves marketing the corporation and its products as subjects of recommendations.

A word-of-mouth encounter starts by one party offering advice or information about a product to another party. However, this opinion leader who gives advice may become an opinion receiver later on (Schiffman and Kanuk 2010). Opinion leadership occurs when individuals try to influence the purchasing behavior of other consumers in specific product fields. Opinion seeking happens when individuals search out advice from others when making a purchase decision. Therefore, opinion leaders give advice, while opinion seekers ask for it (Flynn et al. 1996).

Inexperienced ethnic consumers, particularly those with communication difficulties are likely to experience significantly greater difficulties than mainstream inexperienced consumers in the selection of products basically because of a reduced ability to receive and convey risk-reducing information. Understanding of these greater difficulties and their implications requires the recognition of the role that ethnic groups may play as references for inexperienced ethnic consumers. In this respect, word-of-mouth emerged as the most important source of risk reducing information due to clarification and feedback opportunities (Pires and Stanton 2000).

Turkish immigrants carried their unique behaviors and faced many social and cultural problems. In order to overcome these issues, they mostly moved in the places where they could be close to their acquaintances and fellow Turkish citizens. (Sen 2002) and Turan (1997) states to overcome housing problems Turkish immigrants asked advice from their fellow Turkish acquaintances in Germany.

2.3. Brand Loyalty and the Turkish Minority Ethnic Group in Germany

Brands can signal a certain level of quality so that satisfied buyers can easily choose the product again. This brand loyalty provides predictability and security of demand for the firm and creates barriers of entry that make it difficult for other firms to enter the market (Keller 2008).

Brand loyalty consists of two components: (1) Behavior – the frequency and consistency of buying a given brand and (2) attitude – the consumer's feeling of commitment to the brand (Schiffman and Kanuk 2010). Behavioral measures are based on observable, factual behaviors regarding the brand such as quantity purchased, purchase frequency and repeated buying. Attitudinal measures are concerned with the

consumer's overall feelings about the product, the brand and purchase intentions which are related to the symbolic brand concepts that fulfill internally generated needs for self-enhancement, group membership or ego-identification (Schiffman and Kanuk 2010). Brand loyalty is affected by various factors such as social group influences and peer's recommendations, personal degree of risk aversion or variety seeking and the brands reputation (Schiffman and Kanuk 2010).

In unfamiliar environments, without knowledge of products, expectancies cannot be calculated and preferences may be unclear. To the extent that outcomes are uncontrollable and occur purely by chance, risk is higher than in situations in which outcomes can be influenced, even modestly, by the decision maker (Stkin and Pablo 1992). Hence, lack of knowledge increases the uncertainty and the risk associated with the purchase decision. The lack of knowledge in unfamiliar environments leads immigrants to become risk adverse consumers who may refrain from trying new products and brands and they tend to stick with the well-established brands to avoid possible losses of trying unknown brands. It has also been found that risk averse consumers reduce risks by choosing higher-priced brands, especially in markets where it is hard to find objective quality information (Matzler et. al. 2008). Thus, the brand loyalty of low acculturated immigrants increases due to lack of knowledge and uncertainty as they become risk-adverse.

In order to understand the underlying concept of brand loyalty within the Turkish minority ethnic group we must first attempt to understand identity shaping relationships that this group has with brands. For many years, Turkish people in Germany were in the lower socio-economic groups. As the first group of immigrants who came to Germany as labors, they were outsiders and were planning to stay in Germany for a short term. They aimed to save enough money to start a business in the homeland. As a result, they avoided spending money on high end products (Öztürk et al. 2010). In this respect, they had to make do without many consumer goods taken for granted by their mainstream German contemporaries. After the family reunification as the second and third generation came out, the saving desire of Turkish immigrants disappeared and the products that were once avoided by the first generation are preferred by the younger generations as they are more acculturated. Second and third generation had the opportunity to better integrate to the society as they had education in Germany and interacted more with the local society. In this respect, they closed the social, economic and cultural gaps between Turkish and German communities. They embraced consumerism to avoid their parents' past "spartan way of life" (Erdem and Schmidt 2008)

3. Research Method

3.1. Instrument

The aim of this study was to explore the difference between German consumers and consumers with Turkish ethnic background in Germany in the use of brand loyalty and word-of-mouth in the mobile phone purchasing process. Additionally the research aimed to reveal if there is any difference among Turkish consumers in Germany due to acculturation levels in terms of brand loyalty and word-of-mouth behavior during the mobile phone purchasing phase.

A multi item questionnaires was used in this study to measure the dimensions of word of mouth, loyalty and acculturation. The questionnaires have been prepared separately both in German and in Turkish. The scales used to measure word-of-mouth and brand loyalty were taken directly from the scales for these constructs found in the Handbook of Marketing Scales (Beardon and Netemeyer 1999) and

acculturation level was measured by Valencia (1985) scale. In order to measure Turkish and German consumer's brand loyalty and word-of-mouth behavior mobile phones have been chosen. Firstly mobile phones are durable goods that require a great deal of involvement in the purchase decision. Additionally mobile phones are advertised heavily and are usually purchased with the intent of daily use. Moreover mobile phones are used by many consumers regardless of education, income, age or marital status. Also the mobile phone industry is highly turbulent and is characterized by a rapid technological change. In this respect, consumers tend to talk about mobile phone brands in order to avoid risk and confusion involved in the purchase decision. In addition, mobile phone brands build up strong brand images and brand reputations which are significant reference points for consumers in the purchase decision. Mobile phones are visible products and are status symbols for those who seek recognition in the society. The questions have been modified to the use of mobile phone purchasing behavior and acculturation questions were adjusted for consumers with Turkish ethnic background living in Germany.

3.2. Sampling and data collection

Data for the study were collected from Turkish and German consumers who are living in Germany. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. All respondents who have an immigration background from Turkey directly or through family are included in the Turkish sample regardless of their subcultural ethnic identity. German citizens with different ethnic background are excluded from the German sample. Only German people who have German parents and are living in Germany participated in the survey. 100 questionnaires were distributed to each group and samples of 76 and 77 were obtained from Turkish and German consumers respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive Informations of Samples

		TURKISH		GERMAN	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	34	44.7	39	50.6
	Male	42	55.3	38	49.4
	Total	76	100	77	100
Education	Primary School	2	2.6	-	-
	Secondary School	18	23.7	27	35.1
	Bachelor	30	39.5	28	36.4
	Master or PhD	26	34.2	22	28.6
	Total	76	100	77	100
Income	Less than 1000 Euro	21	27.6	48	62.3
	1000 Euro - 2000 Euro	36	47.4	15	19.5
	2001 Euro - 3000 Euro	14	18.4	3	3.9
	3001 Euro - 4000 Euro	5	6.6	2	2.6
	Total	76	100	77	100
Marital Status	Single	42	55.3	64	83.1
	Married	27	35.5	11	14.3
	Widowed	1	1.3	-	-
	Divorced	6	7.9	2	2.6
	Total	76	100	77	100

3.3. Analyses

3.3.1. Factor Analysis

To identify and test the underlying structure of the scales exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were employed to word-of-mouth and brand loyalty measurements as the initial step.

Word-of-Mouth: To determine the dimensions of word-of-mouth an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Principle Component Factoring and Varimax Rotations was conducted. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett test of sphericity tests were performed to test the appropriateness of data for conducting factor analysis (Sharma, 1996). Result of the tests (KMO=0.818, χ^2 Bartlett test (10)=361.894, $p=0.000$) were satisfactory. The diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix were all over 0.50, supporting the inclusion of each item in the factor analysis. Factors with eigenvalues over one were retained and items with factor loadings below 0.50 and items with high cross loadings were excluded (Hair et. al., 1998). As a result of the analysis one dimension were found. Five items converged into one factor with 63.46 % explained variance. Cronbach's coefficient alpha reliability was 0.852.

Table 2. Factor Analysis result of word-of-mouth

Factor Name	Factor Items	Factor Loading	Reliability
Word-of-mouth	I generally regard my family, friends and neighbors as a good source of advice about mobile phones	0.875	0.852
	I seek advice from my family, friends and neighbors when deciding to purchase a mobile phone	0.848	
	I frequently gather information from my family, friends and neighbors about a product before I buy it	0.827	
	If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my family, friends and neighbors about a product	0.823	
	When it comes to mobile phones, I trust the information I receive from my family, friends and neighbors more than I trust information from media sources (radio, television, magazines, etc)	0.571	

Brand Loyalty: To determine the dimensions of word-of-mouth an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Principle Component Factoring and Varimax Rotations was conducted. The results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett test of sphericity were satisfactory (KMO=0.734, χ^2 Bartlett test (6)=140.435, $p=0.000$). The diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix were all over 0.50, supporting the inclusion of each item in the factor analysis. Factors with eigenvalues over one were retained and items with factor loadings below 0.50 and items with high cross loadings were excluded (Hair et. al., 1998). As a result of the analysis one dimensions were found. Five items converged into one factor with 57.49 % explained variance. Cronbach's coefficient alpha reliability was 0.749.

Table 3. Factor Analysis result of brand loyalty

Factor Name	Factor Items	Factor Loading	Reliability
Brand Loyalty	I would rather stick with a brand I usually buy than try something I am not sure of	0.812	0.749
	I rarely take chances by buying unfamiliar brands even if it means sacrificing variety	0.777	
	I would rather stick to well-known makes when deciding to purchase a mobile phone	0.728	
	I buy the same brand of mobile phone even if I think it is of only average value	0.711	

3.3.2. Independent sample t test

Independent sample t test was applied to get more insight about consumers word-of-mouth and brand loyalty behavior in the mobile phone purchasing, we analyzed factors with respect to German consumers and consumers with Turkish ethnic background in Germany.

As a result of the independent sample t test no significant differences were found between German and Turkish consumers' word-of-mouth behavior in the mobile phone purchasing. However, there is a significant difference in brand loyalty. It can be commented that German consumers ($\mu_{\text{German}}=3.14$) are more brand loyal to their mobile phone companies than Turkish consumers ($\mu_{\text{Turkish}}=2.39$) ($t=-6.281$, $df=151$, $p=0.000$). To get more insight about Turkish and German consumer word-of-mouth and loyalty profile, we conduct Independent sample t tests for each questions. Significant results of the t-tests were given in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent sample t test results for WOM and Brand Loyalty

		Turkish		German		t	df	p value
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation			
Word-of-mouth	I seek advice from my family, friends and neighbors when deciding to purchase a mobile phone	2.64	1.26	2.43	1.27	N/A	N/A	N/A
	I generally regard my family, friends and neighbors as a good source of advice about mobile phones	2.68	1.26	2.53	1.17	N/A	N/A	N/A
	I can think of at least two people I know who have told me something about mobile phones in the last six months	2.61	1.38	2.00	1.22	2.874	151	0.05
	If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my family, friends and neighbors about a product	2.13	1.08	2.26	1.02	N/A	N/A	N/A
	When it comes to mobile phones, I trust the information I receive from my family, friends and neighbors more than I trust information from media sources (radio, television, magazines, etc)	2.70	1.10	2.60	1.04	N/A	N/A	N/A
	I frequently gather information from my family, friends and neighbors about a product before I buy it	2.71	1.21	2.95	1.15	N/A	N/A	N/A
Loyalty	I would rather stick with a brand I usually buy than try something I am not sure of	2.04	0.99	2.77	1.04	4.441	151	0.000
	If I like a brand, I rarely switch from it just to try something different	2.55	1.24	2.56	0.98	N/A	N/A	N/A
	I always introduce new brands and products to my friends and family	3.17	1.18	3.74	0.97	3.265	151	0.001
	I rarely take chances by buying unfamiliar brands even if it means sacrificing variety	2.58	1.04	3.40	0.86	5.347	151	0.000
	I buy the same brand of mobile phone even if I think it is of only average value	2.80	1.18	3.87	0.94	6.209	151	0.000
	I would wait for others to try a new make of mobile phone than try it myself	2.75	1.42	3.23	1.12	2.334	151	0.021
	I would rather stick to well-known makes when deciding to purchase a mobile phone	2.14	1.05	2.51	1.01	2.169	151	0.032
	On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being Strongly Committed and 5 being Strongly Uncommitted, please state how committed you are to purchasing your preferred make of mobile phone	2.63	1.02	2.17	0.73	3.231	151	0.002

3.3.3. One way ANOVA

All answers to acculturation questions are assigned a score. After assigning proper scores for each question, total scores were obtained from each respondent. Those who scored below the average score are included in the low acculturated group and those who are above the average score are in the high acculturated group. To compare both acculturation level groups and German consumers for the word-of-mouth and brand loyalty behavior, One way ANOVA test was applied. As a result of the ANOVA test no significant differences were found between German and high/low acculturation Turkish consumers' word-of-mouth behavior in the mobile phone purchasing. However, there is a significant difference in brand loyalty ($F=19.842$, $p=0.000$). It can be commented that all Turkish groups differ from German consumers. German consumers ($\mu_{\text{German}}=3.13$) are more brand loyal to their mobile phone companies than high acculturation Turkish consumers ($\mu_{\text{High_Acculturation_Turkish}}=2.46$) and also more brand loyal than low acculturation Turkish consumers ($\mu_{\text{Low_Acculturation_Turkish}}=2.29$).

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Turkish consumers living in Germany is an important ethnic group for firms operating in Germany. Considering this fact, this article focuses on this ethnic groups' consumer behaviors. It aims to reveal if there is any difference among Turkish consumers in Germany due to acculturation levels in terms of brand loyalty and word-of-mouth behavior during the mobile phone purchasing phase.

The results of the study shows that there is no significant differences between German and Turkish consumers' word-of-mouth behavior in the mobile phone purchasing. However, there is a significant difference in brand loyalty pointing out that German consumers are more brand loyal to their mobile phone companies than Turkish consumers. Another result of the study shows that there is no significant differences between German and high/low acculturation Turkish consumers' word-of-mouth behavior in the mobile phone purchasing. However, there is a significant difference in brand loyalty. It can be commented that all Turkish groups differ from German consumers. German consumers are more brand loyal to their mobile phone companies than high acculturation Turkish consumers and also more brand loyal than low acculturation Turkish consumers.

In summary, the study shows that ethnicity plays a significant role in the mobile phone purchasing decision regarding brand loyalty and word-of-mouth behaviors and also the acculturation level is an important indicator of those behaviors. For instance, local companies should not target minority ethnic groups the same way they target domestic mainstream customers. Therefore, the results of the study may shed light on the marketing activities of global and national firms in Germany especially in terms of brand loyalty and word of mouth activities.

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