

CONSUMER BASED PREFERENCE REASONS FOR TURKISH LUXURY BRAND
VAKKO: IZMIR CASE

LÜKS TÜRK MARKASI VAKKO'NUN TÜKETİCİ TEMELLİ TERCİH EDİLME
SEBEPLERİ: İZMİR ÖRNEĞİ

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Abstract

With the economical shifts rising everyday people are able to afford luxury or premium goods. Turkey is among the fastest growing markets for the luxury goods in the world.

In accordance with the Lu &Pras's hypothesis about the reasons of the customer preference of choosing luxury brands and the luxury products as a compound of emerging sectors at Turkey formed the background of this research. A rooted Turkish luxury brand Vakko will be focused on at this research from Izmir perspective, based on the customers.

The aim of this research is to put forward the preference reasons of Turkish luxury brands by Turkish consumers in this fast growing market.

Vakko is a well known Turkish luxury brand which was established in 1962 in İstanbul, Turkey. In this study in order to investigate, consumer based preference reasons for Turkish luxury brand, Vakko brand is analyzed through a case study in İzmir. İzmir is the third biggest city by means of income level in Turkey. The field survey was carried out in Karşıyaka, Alsancak and Güzelyalı districts of Izmir where middle and high income groups live. A total of 130 respondents completed the online survey questionnaire done by SurveyMonkey; a secure online data gathering website server. The result indicate that Turks are willing to purchase Turkish luxury goods in order to express brand awareness, materialism, social comparison, fashion innovation and fashion involvement.

Keywords: Luxury Brand, Consumer Preferences

Jel Codes: Y4, Y8

Özet

Tüm dünyada güçlenen ekonomi ile tüketicilerin lüks ve üst segment ürünlere erişimi kolaylaşmıştır. Lüks ürünlerin, Türkiye de geleceğin gelişen sektörleri içerisinde yer alması, Lu ve Pras 'ın 2011 yılında lüks markaların tüketiciler tarafından tercih edilme sebeplerini ortaya koyan hipotezleri doğrultusunda İzmir ili bazında köklü olan Vakko üzerinde Türk tüketiciler bazlı bir çalışma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, hızla büyüyen bu sektörde Türk tüketicilerinin Türk lüks markalarının tercih nedenlerini ortaya koymaktır. Vakko, 1962 yılında İstanbul'da kurulmuş, tanınmış bir Türk lüks markasıdır. Çalışmamızda markanın tüketici temelli tercih nedenlerini araştırmak amacıyla İzmir ilinde bir anket uygulaması gerçekleştirilmiş, İzmir'in orta ve üst gelir gruplarının yaşadığı Karşıyaka, Alsancak ve Güzelyalı ilçelerinde saha araştırması yapılmıştır.

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Güvenilir veri toplama sunucusu Surveymonkey aracılığı ve 130 katılımcı ile gerçekleşen anket sonuçlarına dayanarak lüks marka tüketicilerinin marka bilincini, materyalizmi, sosyal karşılaştırmayı, moda yenilikçiliğini ve modaya katılımını ifade etmek için Türk lüks mallarını satın almaya eğilimli oldukları saptanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Lüks Marka, Tüketici Tercihleri

Jel Sınıflandırması: Y4, Y8

1. INTRODUCTION

Turkey is among the fastest growing markets for the luxury goods in the world. The luxury goods market is 257.26 billion dollars in the world in 2020. According to the Turkey's Investment office, growing sectors for upcoming years are agriculture, infrastructure, luxury goods, etc. ([https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/turkey/reaching-the-consumers.](https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/turkey/reaching-the-consumers)) Luxury market is mainly located in Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir where population income is higher with respect to other cities around Turkey.

The aim of this research is to put forward the preference reasons of Turkish luxury brands by Turkish consumers in this fast growing market. In order to obtain information about potential luxury brand purchasers, third biggest city İzmir's Vakko stores customer purchasing patterns are investigated. İzmir is in the third place by means of GDP. In this study, Vakko brand is chosen since it is one of the oldest and the most powerful representator of Turkish luxury and has been investigated particularly for the city of İzmir.

İzmir is developing city and suburban areas are becoming new settlements for high-income citizens. In these developing areas, they also built luxurious shopping centers like Point Bornova. On the other hand, Forum Bornova, Hilltown Karşıyaka and Agora shopping centers are other places in high-income districts where Vakko stores are located. Today in İzmir, Vakko has six main, six boutiques, one outlet and one wedding store. The oldest Vakko store was opened in 1979 in Alsancak district where population income and social status is higher with respect to other districts and Vakko clients have a habit of purchasing from this store.

The research studied by Lu and Pras (2011), put forwards six major hypotheses that affect Chinese consumer's attitude towards purchasing luxury goods and purchase intend. The present research intends to prove that these six hypotheses are also valid for Turkish luxury consumers. Data was collected through an online survey company Surverymonkey².

² www.surveymonkey.com

2. THEORETICAL REFERENCES AND LITERATURE

As investigated in China by Lu and Pras, (2011), the six hypothesis are as mentioned below;

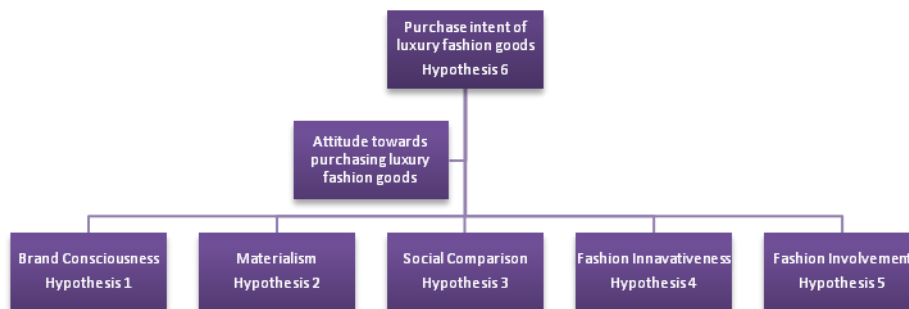


Figure 1: Proposed Hypothesis Modal Composed by Lu and Pras, 2011

Sources: Zang and Kim, (2013)

Hypothesis 1: Brand awareness

“Brand awareness is positively related to attitude towards luxury fashion good purchasing” (Lu and Pras, 2011)

According to (Sproles and Kendall., 1986) brand consciousness is psychological awareness towards famous brands. However, the consumers associate price, quality and brand together and utilize the brand as a quality factor. (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2000, pp.43-58) Brand awareness affects the consumption. Symbolic factors determine the value of the products and its perception. (Liao and Wang, 2009, pp.987-1001) Consumers with high brand awareness are aiming to purchase luxurious goods from prestigious brands with high reputation. Brand name plays a crucial role for prestige shopping. (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2000)

Luxury consumers link their self-image with the luxurious brands that match with their desired prestigious look. It’s also a psychological affect that clients buying that luxurious brand also associate themselves with other elites having the desired self-image. (Husic and Cicic, 2009, pp. 231-254).

Hypothesis 2: Materialism

“Materialism is positively associated with an attitude towards luxury fashion good purchasing” (Lu and Pras, 2011)

Materialism means giving more importance to possession rather than intellectual and spiritual things (<http://www.merriamwebster.com>). Materialist consumers try to increase their social

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status by consuming products expressing wealth to the public (Liao and Wang, 2009, pp.977-1001).

Hypothesis 3: Social comparison

“Social comparison has a positive impact on attitude towards luxury fashion good purchasing” (Lu and Pras, 2011)

Individuals have a tendency of comparing themselves with others. Especially when individuals cannot find ways to express themselves socially, they try to compare him/herself with others to evaluate their abilities (Festinger, 1954, pp.117-140). Individuals make both downward and upward comparisons with others slightly lower or slightly higher by means of social status. It is observed that upward social comparison has a positive impact on higher demand for possessions and higher consumption intention (Ogden and Venkat, 2001).

Hypothesis 4: Fashion Innovativeness

“Fashion innovativeness is positively related to attitude towards luxury fashion good purchasing” (Lu and Pras, 2011)

“Innovation theory is proposed in 1983” (Rogers, 1995). Fashion adaption is defined with two terms; imitation and differentiation. Fashion innovators differentiate themselves from others by being in search of new styles while fashion followers have a tendency to imitate (Beaudoin and Lachance, 2006, pp.312-331). According to Muzinich et al. (2003) fashion innovators are well-educated, young, socially adaptable, risk taker with the leadership characteristics.

Hypothesis 5: Fashion Involvement

“Fashion involvement is positively related to attitude towards luxury fashion good purchasing” (Lu and Pras, 2011)

Individuals' involvement in to the fashion is measured by their inner needs, interest and values. According to Tiger et al. 1976, there are 5 different adaptation behavior to engaged with fashion involvement; (1) “fashion innovativeness and time of purchase”, (2) “fashion interpersonal communication”, (3) “fashion interest”, (4) “fashion knowledge”, and (5) “ fashion awareness and reaction to changing fashion trends”. That is mentioned that high fashion involved consumers are more likely to adopt and experiment the trends faster than low fashion involved consumers. Consumer's purchasing preferences are related with their fashion knowledge and their level of involvement. The level of involvement plays a crucial role to explain the consumer behavior (Summers et al., 2006).

Hypothesis 6: Attitude and Purchase Intent

“Attitude towards purchasing luxury fashion goods is positively related to purchase intent of luxury fashion goods” (Lu and Pras, 2011)

An individual’s decision period is highly affected by their attitude towards a behavior is a direct factor on behavioral intention. (Finlay et al., 2002) For an example, Bellman et al. (2009) mentions that fashion accessories buying among young female purchasers are affected by their attitudes towards buying fashion accessories.

3. METHODOLOGY

Survey study is the most-applied data collecting technic that includes data collection from various resources about the same variables (De Vaus, 1990) The survey study was taken place in the research due to the fact that it collected quantitative data from wide range of samples and evaluated the data statistically and generalized the findings in order to examine the pre-set hypothesis.

Survey questions were prepared as close-ended questions, alternative answers were offered to the answerer. Some questions were prepared as open-ended questions as well as seeing the comments of the answerer and learning the ideas of the users were aimed. Survey study provided the subject to be approached with an objective perspective and to be proposed solutions. The research reveals demographical and socio-economical structure of the user mass, tendency of the user mass to buy luxurious products and Vakko products.

Data was collected through an online survey company Surverymonkey. Surverymonkey is a secure online data gathering website server and used by all of the fortune hundred for their market research surveys and by numerous academic journal, articles.

The research prepared by one hundred thirty people, but received feedbacks from ninety-one, and thirty-nine people did not present any feedbacks. Seventy-three of those answering the questionnaire were female and eighteen were male. First section of research aims at determining the demographic structures of users. In the first section addressed to determining such structure, the questionnaire asked about the gender, age, and monthly income of the respondents while the second part asked about user preferences, frequencies, and their purpose of visit to Vakko stores, how much they are willing to spend in Vakko stores for specific products and client’s product preferences such as ready to wear, haute couture, chocolate, home design, beachwear. (Table 1, 2, 3, 4)

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Withstanding to the six hypothesis on factors affecting attitude and purchase intent adapted to Turkish luxury fashion consumers. In the light of data obtained from this research, consumer based preference reasons for Turkish luxury brand Vakko is analyzed.

4. RESULTS

According to the research results obtained from literature scanning, Lu and Pras, (2011) found out that there were six positive factors affecting the tendency of purchasing luxurious fashion items and supported this thesis by means of survey with Chinese population living in Republic of China. The survey prepared for Turkish society and Vakko brand by abiding these designated hypotheses with six positive factors affecting the tendency of purchasing has also indicated that these hypotheses are valid.

The synthesis of the data obtained as a result of the survey by comparing with the pre-defined six hypotheses are as follows:

Table- 1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Clients.

Answer Choices	Responses (%) (%)		Respondent (#)
Sex			
Female	80.22		73
Male	19.79		18
Total			91
Age			
18-25	9.89		9
25-39	52.75		48
40-59	36.26		33
59 +	1.10		1
Total			91
Monthly Income			
1.000-5.000 TL	38.89		35
5.000-10.000 TL	28.89		26
10.000-15.000 TL	13.33		12
15.000 +	15.56		14
Other	3.33		3
Total			90

Source: Author's survey, 2016

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As indicated in Table-1, the age average of Vakko customers is between twenty-five and thirty-nine years old with the rate of 52.75 percent. As mentioned by Muzinich et al. (2003), fashion innovators are young, well educated, social, and adaptable and risk taker with the leadership characteristics. Especially innovative personality is considered as necessary to develop an innovative approach. As the majority of Vakko customers consist of an adult group having innovative personality within the age group between twenty-five and thirty-nine, this mass approves the hypothesis number four “Fashion Innovativeness” for Vakko.

Table-2 Vakko Store Visiting Frequency of Clients.

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Respondent (#)
Frequency of use		
Once in a week	3.30	3
Once in a month	34.07	31
Once in a year	42.86	39
Other	19.78	18
Total		91

Source: Author’s survey, 2016

Table-2 indicates the visit frequency of visitors to Vakko stores. According to this, the majority is constituted from those, who visit Vakko stores once in a year at the rate of 42.86 percent, and those, who visit Vakko stores once in a month at the rate of 34.07 percent. As mentioned in hypothesis five, Tiger et al explained the interest on fashion with 5 different adaptation behaviors under the title of “Fashion Involvement”. Interest on fashion, fashion knowledge and usage of fashion as a personal communication tool were presented as positive factors efficient for purchasing more luxurious fashion brand. The obtained results indicated that the majority was interested in fashion and that they exhibited five different adaptation behaviors by visiting Vakko stores.

Table-3 Clients’ Preference Reasons to Visit Vakko Stores.

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Respondent (#)
Offers luxury brands	51.11	48
Adequate goods for level of income	6.67	6
Store ambiance	20.00	18
Other	22.22	20
Total		90

Source: Author’s survey, 2016

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Table-3 indicates why Vakko stores are preferred by customers purchasing luxurious branded items. According to this, more than half of the respondents with the rate of 51.11 percent mentioned that they preferred the brand due to the fact that it sold luxurious products and presented qualified items as stated in the open-ended questions (22.22 percent). As indicated in hypothesis one, the brand recognition is directly proportional with consumption and customers identify the brand with quality by evaluating price, quality and brand together.

According to Deeter-Schmelz et al. (2009), the customers, who have brand consciousness are tend to purchase products from prestigious companies. The obtained results show that the majority knows the brand well and prefer for high quality. Hypothesis two supports that materialism comes into prominence as a positive factor in tendency to purchase luxurious trend products. According to Liao and Wang (2009), materialist customers try to support their social status by using objects perceived as symbol of richness for society. As indicated in Table-3, most of the customers prefer the products sold in Vakko stores due to the fact that the luxurious brand products presented in Vakko stores are perceived by the society as a symbol of statue.

Table-4 Clients' Willingness to Spend in Vakko Stores.

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Respondent (#)
1.000 TL and less	41.76	38
1.000 TL – 5.000 TL	38.46	35
5.000 TL- 10.000 t1	6.59	6
15.000 TL and more	3.30	3
Other	9.89	9
Total		91

Source: Author's survey, 2016

* 1 Euro (€) is approximately around 3.37 Turish Lira.

Table-4 indicates how much the customers spend in Vakko stores at most. According to the research, majority is constituted by those, who spend 1.000 TL or below with the rate of 41.76 percent, and those, who spend 1.000 – 5.000 TL with the rate of 38.46 percent. When considering the monthly income per capita of 4.500 TL³ in Turkish society, it is seen that the budget for luxurious trend consumption is significant to ignore. As mentioned in hypothesis

³ <http://www.tuik.gov.tr>

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six, the decision stage of individuals to purchase luxurious brand is directly proportional with their wish to purchase a product. In this regard, when individuals desire to have any product due to various reasons, they force their income limits.

Table-5 The Main Reason for Clients to Visit Vakko Stores.

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Respondent (#)
Apparel, shoes, accessories	83.52	76
Home decoration	4.40	4
Chocolatier	1.10	1
Other	10.99	10
Total		91

Source: Author's survey, 2016

Table-5 indicates what product the luxurious brand customers, who purchase from Vakko stores, visit to supply. According to this, it is observed that most of them with the rate of 83.52 percent visit the store to purchase apparel, shoes and accessories. According to Festinger, (1954) when individuals are forced to express themselves especially, they compare their skills and abilities with other people. It has been determined by hypothesis that comparing themselves with the individuals, whom they consider as the ones in higher social status, has positive effect in their tendency to purchase. As mentioned in hypothesis two, preferring products such as garment, shoes and accessories having high possibility to be seen by more people proves that materialism has positive effect in purchasing luxurious brand.

Table 6. Clients' Vakko Store Preferences Among 3 Big Cities Of Turkey.

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Respondent (#)
Istanbul	31.11	28
Ankara	0.00	0
Izmir	60	54
Other	8.89	8
Total		90

Source: Author's survey, 2016

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Table-6 was prepared in order to indicate the preference rates of Vakko stores in three biggest provinces in Turkey. While Izmir takes the first rank with the rate of 60.00 percent, Istanbul settles in the second rank with the rate of 31.11 percent. However, when considering that the survey is made by the people living Izmir, the high proportion of Izmir is a natural result. In the survey evaluated by customers of Izmir, while the preference of purchasing in Vakko stores in Istanbul is 31.11 percent, Vakko stores in Ankara is not preferred. This is not surprising. The reason is that individuals compare themselves especially with the ones having higher social status as mentioned in hypothesis three. The individuals living in Ankara and Izmir are tend to compare themselves with the individuals living in Istanbul and having higher social status and income level, and this tendency creates a positive purchasing behavior on the Vakko customers in Izmir.

Table 7. Clients' Vakko Store Preferences in Izmir.

Answer Choices	Responses (%)	Respondent (#)
Vakko Alsancak	70.00	63
Vakko Point Bornova (in a suburban shopping mall)	4.44	4
Vakko Outlet Optimum	2.22	2
Other	23.333	21
Total		90

Source: Author's survey, 2016

Table-7 explains this situation in more detailed way by indicating the preference rates of Vakko stores in Izmir. While Vakko store in Alsancak, preferred for long years, is preferred at the rate of 70.00 percent, the preference rate of Vakko Point Bornova store by Vakko customers is just 4.4 percent. The reason is that individuals compare themselves especially with the individuals, who have higher social status and whom they consider as role model, and that they adopt their preferences. Vakko Alsancak store and its loyal customers together constitutes a perfect sample for Izmir. The store located in a place where the brand's potential customers have the motivation of elevating their social status by identifying themselves with the Vakko brand. Results justifies that Turkish consumers' preference reasons of Turkish brands are supported by factors such as social comparison, fashion involvement and attitude and purchase intent of Lu and Pras.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to put forward the preference reasons of Turkish luxury brands by Turkish consumers in this fast growing luxury market. Turkey is such an opportunity for market growth. Even though a nation of 85 million people constitutes just a small portion of global luxury consumption, Turkey is among the fastest growing markets for luxury goods in the world.

In the first stage, the literature was scanned and a survey was prepared by making use of the hypothesis of Lu and Pras, (2011) about six positive factors (brand awareness, materialism, social comparison, fashion innovativeness, fashion involvement and attitude and purchase intend) affecting the tendency of purchasing in China for the purpose of supporting our research, and the tendency of Turkish luxury brand consumer's preference reasons are examined by means of the survey. According to Lu and Pras, (2011) six positive factors which affect these purchasing tendency are "Brand Consciousness", "Materialism", "Social Comparison", "Fashion Innovativeness", "Fashion Involvement" and "Attitude and Purchase Intent". In the survey study prepared by being benefited from these hypotheses and in the light of the data obtained as a result of the research, the purchasing tendency of Vakko consumer from Izmir have been revealed. The results are in validation with the results of the survey done by Lu and Pras, (2011) with the luxurious brand users in People's Republic of China. The results obtained from the survey confirms that Turkish luxury brand consumers' Turkish luxury brand preference reasons are also positively related by the six hypothesis. Findings of the survey in support of the hypothesis are as mentioned below;

Consumers with high brand awareness are aiming to purchase luxurious goods from prestigious brands with high reputation. Brand name plays a crucial role for prestige shopping. The survey verifies that 83.52 percent of Vakko clientele prefers to buy apparel, shoes and accessories from Vakko stores since high quality product range enables prestige and reputation to the user.

Materialism means giving more importance to possession rather than intellectual and spiritual things. Materialist consumers try to increase their social status by consuming products expressing wealth to the public (Liao and Wang, 2009). The survey puts forward that 51,11 percent of Vakko brand consumers prefers the luxury brands for product familiarity.

The fact that users prefer luxury brand products instead of products that suits with their income level shows that their desire to have these products is very strong, even though it is compelling.

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It can be said that they tend to show their high social status in their social circles by using luxury brand products.

Individuals have a tendency of comparing themselves with others. Especially when individuals cannot find ways to express themselves socially, they try to compare him/herself with others to evaluate their abilities (Festinger, 1954). Hypothesis three; Social Comparison is supported by the survey that due to the elite district of Vakko Alsancak store, 70.00 percent of Vakko clientele still prefer to visit Vakko Alsancak retail shop. Social status has a positive impact on potential clients who would like to associate themselves with the brand and with other “elite considered” individuals by visiting the store

According to Muzinich et al. (2003), fashion innovators are well-educated, young, socially adaptable, risk taker with the leadership characteristics. An innovative personality seems crucial for construction of an innovative fashion approach. In the survey done about Vakko, 52,75 percent of Vakko consumers are between the age of 25-39 while 36,26 percent of them are between the age of 40-59. Looking at the age groups, it can be analyzed as that Vakko clientele in the 40-59 age range could of have more savings or income respect to the 25-39 years old age group. However, the higher demand of the young group for new and luxury products supports that they are more open to innovations and they have a tendency of spending more for their self-image.

High fashion involved consumers are more likely to adopt and experiment the trends faster than low fashion involved consumers. Consumer’s purchasing preferences are related with their fashion knowledge and their level of involvement. The level of involvement plays a crucial role to explain the consumer behavior (Summers et al., 2006). 34.07 percent of the users visit the Vakko stores once in a month are not higher as 42.86 percent visiting the store once in a year but these are still substantial datas to express that fashion involved consumers have a tendency to visit the stores more often. 30.11 percent of the respondents prefers to visit Istanbul stores of Vakko. Istanbul is the capital of fashion in Turkey and some Vakko clienteles prefer İstanbul stores to İzmir stores since they believe these stores are more trend-oriented and innovative respect to other cities’ Vakko stores.

80.22 percent of Vakko brand consumers are female and 52.75 percent of the clientele are between the age of 25-39. On the other hand, apparel, shoes and accessories buying among Vakko clients are 83.52 percent. These findings might be interpreted as that young working females are dynamic group with high income and an active social life. It also brings the need

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for a fresh and adequate image together. As a need of their social status, they are willing to spend more for their look.

Vakko is highly perceived as a luxurious brand and it could be matched with the high quality standards and its pricing. The mass that it addresses is young adult group in the age range between 25-59 as well as survey data reveals that even the customers, whose monthly income level is between 1000-5000 TL⁴ tend to spend nearly 1000 TL in Vakko stores. Turkish luxury users are willing to spend high amounts for the luxury products. This is also an indicator that, the market is also alluring for other Turkish luxury brands and more retail stores of Vakko itself since the luxury users are ready to spend at least twenty percent of their income.

The survey is also based upon the stores of Vakko brand which are located in Izmir. A different survey done for Istanbul or other cities' Vakko stores, could come out with different results. Obtained results could include limitation. According to these different results dissimilar consumer preferences can be developed for the Vakko stores.

This research contains basic information about consumers. This paper can be evaluated as the basic monitoring about Vakko İzmir.

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⁴ 1 Euro (€) is approximately around 3.37 Turkish Lira.

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