CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT AND BRAND SENSITIVITY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THEIR CHOICE OF FASHION PRODUCTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to better understand the interest of university students in fashion products and to ascertain how different social variables explain variance in their brand sensitivity.Fashion happens to be a relevant and powerful force in our lives. At every level of society, people greatly care about the way they look, which affects both their self –esteem and the way other people interacr with them. For young adults wearing fashion brands seems to be a way of feeling adequate.

This phenomenon is studied in the context of consumer involvement and brand sensitivity of university students in their choice of fashion products by underlining influence of socialization factors and their habits in fashion adoption.

Key words: brand, brand sensitivity, consumer involvement, fashion product, university students

ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN MODA ÜRÜNÜ İLGİLENİMLERİ VE SATIN ALMA SIRASINDAKİ MARKA DUYARLILIKLARI

Özet

Bu araştırmanın amacı üniversite öğrencilerinin moda ürünlerine olan ilgilerinin daha iyi anlaşılması ve farklı sosyal değişkenlerin marka duyarlılığındaki varyansı ne şekilde açıkladığını ortaya çıkarmaktır.Moda yaşamımızla doğrudan ilgili olup,yaşamımızda kuvvetli bir güce sahiptir.Toplumun her seviyesinde insanlar kendi kendilerine verdikleri değeri ve diğer insanların onlarla ilişkilerini etkileyen görünümlerini önemserler.Gençler için moda markalar giymek yeterli hissetmenin bir yolu görülmektedir.

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Bu davranış biçimi,üniversite öğrencilerinin moda giyim eşyası seçiminde sosyalleşme unsurları etkilerinin ve moda benimseme alışkanlıklarının önemine değinilerek,üniversite öğrencilerinin moda ürünü ilgilenimi ve moda duyarlılığı kapsamında incelenmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler*: marka, marka duyarlılığı, tüketici ilgilenimi, moda ürünü, üniversite öğrencileri*

1.Introduction

Shopping for clothes involves making decisions about one's appearance and is part of an overall life pattern that reflects attitudes towards stores and fashion as well as complex values and interests such as aesthetics and materialism.[1] Fashion purchase is rich in emotional and psychological connotations.[2] Because of the multisensory imagery involved in fashion apparel,it is a consumer product that is capable of stimulating and requiring considerable mental activity.[3] Wearing clothes is one of the easiest ways of saying something about one's identity, history, aspirations and of where one wants to be in the world. In these ways, whether we are conscious of it or not, we make choices of how we want to present ourselves to the world.[4]

For young adults wearing clothes with prestigious brand names seems to be very important. Although wearing prestigious brand names is not a recent trend, it seems to have reached unprecented proportions during the last decade.[5] Of all social groups, adolescents are those that attach the most importance to fashion and beauty in general.[6] Clothing is an important means by which young adults gain social appreciation and develop positive self-esteem.

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[1] R. Otieno, C. Harrow, G. Lea-Greenwood, "The Unhappy shopper, a retail experience: exploring fashion, fit and affordability", **International Journal of Retail Distribution Management**, Vol.33, No.4, 2005, p.299.

[2] John, O'Shaughnessy, **Why People Buy**, New York, Oxford University Press,1987, p.136.

[3] J. E Workman and C. N Studak, "Relationships among fashion consumer groups, locus of control, boredom proneness, boredom coping and intrinsic enjoyment", **International Journal of Consumer Studies**, Vol.31, Issue 1, 2005, p.69.

[4] M. Winter, "Fashion Statement", **Human Ecology**, Ithaca, Vol.30, Iss.1,2002, p.11.

[5] M.J Lachance, P. Beaudoin, and J. Robitaille, "Adolescents brand sensitivity in apparel: Influence of three socialization agents", **International Journal of Consumer Studies**, Vol. 27, No:1, 2003, p.47.

[6] P.Beaudoin, M.J. Lachance and J. Robitaille, "Fashion innovativeness, fashion diffusion and brand sensivity among adolescents", **Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management**, Vol. 7, No.1, 2003, p.23.

Youth is a crucial period for consumer socialization, a process that begins at an early age and lasts throughout life. This is important because these young people are the adult consumers of tomorrow.[7]

Young adults are often influenced by a variety of outside interests while adopting their own set of self-image, life style and consumption patterns. Two models of human learning, the cognitive – psychological model and the social learning model, have been utilized extensively to explain and predict how consumers make consumption related decisions.[8]

Individual consumers develop consumption related attitudes and behaviors through learning experiences. These experiences can occur in a variety of contexts as consumers are exposed to a multitude of different influences and adventures, and are extremely important in shaping the consumer behavior of young adults.[9]

Young people's consumer socialization process is mainly achieved through communication, observation, and by learning through trial and error.[10] They are often influenced by a variety of outside interests while adopting their own set of self image,lifestyle, and consumption patterns.[11] Parents, as the main socialization agents are most often associated with the instrumental learning, that is to say, learning about consumer aspects described as rational or socially desirable. Moreover, the vigilance –or preventive and defensive behaviors- of young consumers seems to be encouraged by certain styles of parental education.[12] Consumers learn or model behaviors, values, attitudes, and skills through the observation of other individuals, or through observations of electronic or print media.[13] Individuals of outstanding achievement can serve as role models to others,motivating young adults to adopt certain self images and lifesyle patterns.[14]

[7] M.J Lachance and N. Choquette-Bernier, "College students' consumer competence: a qualitative exploration", **International Journal of Consumer Studies**, Vol. 28, No:5, 2004, p.433.

[8] G.P. Mochis and G.A..Jr. Churchill, "Consumer socialization: a theoretical and empirical analysis", **Journal of Marketing Research**, Vol. 15, No.4, 1978, p.599

[9] M.M.King and K.D.Multon "The effects of television role models on the career aspirations of African-American junior high school students", **Journal of Career Development**, Vol.23, No.2,1996, p.112.

[10] Lachance and Choquette-Bernier, **ibid**., p.439.

[11] C.A. Martin and A.J. Bush,, "Do role models influence teenager's purchase intentions and behavior?", **The Journal of Consumer Marketing**, Vol.17, Iss.5, 2000, p.442.

[12] Lachance and Choquette-Bernier, **ibid**., p.434.

[13] A. Bandura, **Social Learning Theory**, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1977, p.27

[14] P. Lockwood and Z. Kunda, "Superstars and me: predicting the impact of role models on the self", **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, Vol. 73, No.1, 1997, p.91.

During adolescence,peers are seen as being an important source of influence on clothing purchases and brands.[15]

Peers, as well as the media, are more often associated with learning about expressive and social aspects of consumption, such as the development of brand preferences, or brand sensitivity.[16]

Consumer behaviors or attitudes, such as brand sensitivity, are seen as the results of learning acquired through interaction between the consumer and the socialization agents.Brand sensitivity is a psychological construct that refers to a buyer's decision making process. Saying that an individual is brand sensitive means that brands play an important role in the psychological process that precedes the buying act.It is different from brand loyalty, which is a behavioral concept that can be measured by examining patterns of repeated buying over time. [17]

Loyalty is both a long term attitude and long term behavioral pattern which will be influenced by multiple shopping experiences over time.[18] Consumer loyalty can be described as a positive propensity toward a store or brand.[19]

One of the factors that are the most directly related to brand sensivity is consumer involvement in a specific product category.[20]

Consumers involvement in products is believed to moderate considerably their reactions to marketing and advertising stimuli.[21]

A number of important aspects of consumer behavior (choice processes, information gathering, ad processing… etc) vary across products and across consumers, as a consequence of a number of antecedents (risk, sign value, interest, pleasure).[22]

Involvement could stem from one or from a combination of the five following antecedents: Interest, perceived risk (with two subcomponents,

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[15] S. Shim and A. Koh,"Profiling adolescent consumer decision – making styles: Effects of socialization agents and social-structure variables", **Clothing and Textiles Research Journal**, Vol. 15, No.2, 1997, p.52.

[16] Lachance and Choquette-Bernier, **ibid**., p.434.

[17] Lachance at al, **ibid**, pp.47-48.

[18] N.S.Terblanche and C.Boshoff "The relationship between a satisfactory in-store shopping experience and retailer loyalty" **South African Journal of Business Management**, Vol: 37, No: 2, 2006, p.33.

[19] R. East, K Hammond, P. Haris, and W. Lomax, "First-store loyalty and retention" **Journal of Marketing Management**, Vol. 16, No: 2, 2000, p.308.

[20] Lachance at al, **ibid**, p.49

[21] J.N.Kapferer and G.Laurent, "Consumer Involvement Profiles: A New Practical Approach to Consumer Involvement", **Journal of Advertising Research**, Vol: 25, No:6, 1986, p.48.

[22] J.N.Kapferer and G.Laurent, "Further Evidence on the Consumer Involvement Profile" Five Antecedents of Involvement", **Journal of Psychology and Marketing**, Vol. 10, No:4, 1993, p.355.

importance and probability), the rewarding nature of the product (its pleasure value), and the perceived ability of brand choice to express one's status, one's personality, or identity (sign value).[23]

Zaichkowsky defines involvement as a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values and interests.Celsi and Olson believe that involvement is a function of personal importance or interest in a stimulus.Gabbot and Hogg's definition suggests that involuement is a motivational variable reflecting the extent of personal relevance to the individual in terms of basic goals values and self-concept.[24]

Kapferer and Thoening found that similarity between brands is more likely to create confusion when attention and product involvement is low.[25] Purchasing involvement of fashion change agents was spesific to shopping for fashion products as opposed to shopping for other products.[26]

In general young people's consumer behaviors are studied from a commercial standpoint, Levels and items of expenditures, preferences and buying patterns, selection criteria or influence on family consumption are analyzed. Their behaviors seem to show several deficiencies, among which the analysis of their needs before buying. They show a low level of consumer knowledge in some fields. They would be vulnerable because of their low level of experience and their strong permeability to exterior influences like fashion and the opinion of their peers.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines fashion as "The current popular custom or style especially in dress and social conduct.[27] When a new style is first introduced to the public by the fashion industry,diffusion is likely to occur mainly in the most innovative social systems.[28]

Innovators and early adopters are the most important groups in the process of fashion diffusion because of the role they play as models for later fashion consumers. To this extent, the findings tend to corroborate the idea that these two

[23] J.N.Kapferer and G. Laurent, **ibid**., p.49.

[24] C.C Bienstock., and M.R.Stafford, "Measuring Involvement with the Service: A Further Investigation of Scale Validity and Dimensionality**", Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice**, Vol. 14, No.3, 2006, p.210.

[25] A.D'Astous, and E. Gargouri, "Consumer evaluations of brand imitations", **European Journal of Marketing**, Vol.35, No.1/2, 2001, p.154.

[26] J. E Workman and C. N Studak, **ibid**., p.67.

[27] R.Otieno, C. Harrow, and G. Lea-Greenwood, "The Unhappy shopper, a retail experience: "exploring fashion, fit and affordability", **International Journal of Retail Distribution Management**, Vol.33, No.4, 2005, p.304.

[28] M.R.Solomon and N.J. Rabolt, **Consumer Behavior in Fashion**. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ. USA, 2004, p.23.

groups are the most brand sensitive.[29] Fashion innovators are younger,tend to be fashion opinion leaders,and spend more on new fashions than non-leaders.[30]

Fashion change agents compared with fashion followers tend to use clothing to Express individuality or uniqueness,are interested in fashion and are high in recognition or acceptance of visual fashion stimuli.[31]

Among demographic/socioeconomic variables,sex,age and education are found to be significant variables in profiling innovators.Innovators are younger and more educated than noninnovators, and are mostly female.[32] Fashion change agents spend more on clothing,read more fashion magazines, go shopping for apparel more often,and buy more new fashion items than fashion followers.[33] It is highly possible that adolescents acting as models for later adopters in the process of fashion diffusion-those who are the first to buy and adopt new clothing products and fashion tendencies-should also be more brand sensitive.[34]

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The sample of participants for this study are first and fourth year students from various departments in a private university. The study was carried out on 300 people who were selected using the convenience sampling method. The number of valid surveys obtained in the study was 257 (86%). Fifty-four percent of the sample consisted of female students, 58% were students between age 18 and 21, 58% were first year students, and 81% were students in the School of Commercial Sciences (42%) or the School of Literature (39%). Although 82% of the students stated that they had no job, 30% of them said that their monthly household income was 4,000 TL or more.

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[29] P.Beaudoin, M.J. et al, **ibid.**, p.29.

[30] R.Goldsmith, E.Stith and T. Melvin, "The social values of fashion innovators", **Journal of Applied Business Research**, Vol.9 Iss.1, 1993, p.15.

[31] W.I.Gordon, D.A Infante and A.A. Braun**, Communicator styles of fashion in the psychology of fashion** (ed.by M.Solomon), Lexington Boks, Lexington, MA, USA, 1985, p.167.

[32] N.Uray and A. Dedeoğlu "Identifying Fashion Clothing Innovators by Self-Report Method", **Journal of Euromarketing**, Vol:6, No::3, 1998, p.44.

[33] R.E Goldsmith, J.R. Heitmeyer and J.B Freiden "Social values and fashion leadership" **Clothing and Textiles Research Journal**, Vol:10, No:1,1991, p. 38.

[34] P.Beaudoin, M.J. et al, **ibid.**, p.24.

2.2. Data Collection Tool

The study investigates participants' interest in fashion products and their brand sensitivity.

A scale developed by Jain ve Srinivasan (1990)[35] was used to measure the level of fashion product involvement of the participants. The scale evaluated an individual's interest in a fashion product in five categories (perceived product importance, probability of a mispurchase, perceived symbolic/sign, hedonism/pleasure, and interest). All statements on the scale were arranged on a 5-point Likert scale. High scores on this scale indicate that the person's involvement in fashion is high with regard to that category, while low scores indicate the opposite. A total of 20 statements were included on the scale. Results from a factor analysis carried out for the scale confirmed that the scale evaluates five different categories (KMO=0.72; Bartlett's Test=856.81; $p<0.00$). Cronbach's alpha coefficients (varying between 0.71 and 0.84) calculated for each category of the scale indicate that the scale is internally consistent ($\alpha>0.60$).

A scale developed by Kapferer ve Laurent (1992)[36] was used to measure the brand sensitivity of the participants. All statements on the scale were arranged on a 5-point Likert scale. High scores on this scale indicate that the person's brand sensitivity is high with regard to that category, while low scores indicate the opposite. A total of 5 statements were included on the scale. Factor analysis carried out on the scale confirmed that the scale contains a single category (KMO=0.75; Bartlett's Test=355.63; $p<0.00$). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was calculated to be 0.73 ($\alpha>0.60$).

Participants in the study were asked four different questions prepared on an ordinal scale for the purpose of identifying their perceptions about the concept of fashion and their habits regarding fashion.

2.3. Collection and Analysis of Data

The survey for the study was carried out by the researcher. Results obtained from the scales used in the study have been presented as averages with standard deviation. A t-test was used to analyze the data in cases where there are two options for the participant's characteristic (gender, age, school year and employment status), while ANOVA analysis was used for variables with three options (department and income). Correlation analysis was used to identify the relationship of the variables with each other, while multiple regression analysis was used to determine how the categories of fashion product involvement affect brand sensitivity.

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[35] W.O.Bearden and R.G.Netemeyer, **Handbook of Marketing Scales**, Second Edition, Sage Publications, California.1999, p.183.

[36] W.O.Bearden and R.G.Netemeyer, **ibid**., p.182.

3. Findings

3.1. Perceptions of the Participants about the Concept of Fashion and Participant Habits Regarding Fashion

In order to determine how study participants perceive fashion, they were asked the question "What do you think fashion is?", and they were asked to rank 9 options according to the degree of importance. A review of the results obtained based on the options presented to the participants (Table 1.1.) reveals that most of the participants (73%) ranked the answer "style" as one of the top three. Two other options that were ranked in the top three by over half of the participants were "innovation" (56%) and "distinctiveness" (52%). Options that were ranked in the bottom three by most participants were "socializing" (68%) and "luxury" (65%). Accordingly, it can be said that the participants perceive the concept of fashion to be a style that is innovative and distinctive, that they do not associate fashion with the concept of luxury, and that they do not see fashion as an element that they use for social reasons.

Participants in the study were asked what sources they used to follow fashion trends and to rank 11 options according to their importance. A review of the results obtained from the choices presented to the participants (Table 1.2) shows that more than half of the participants (61%) stated that following fashion trends on TV was among their top three choices. This is followed by the internet (56%) and magazines (48%). Over half of the participants stated that they used radio (71%) and books (56%) the least for following fashion trends.

Participants in the study were asked what factors they took into consideration when purchasing fashion products and to rank 5 options according to their importance. A review of the results obtained based on the choices presented to the participants (Table 1.3) shows that about half of the participants said that price (51%), fabric (50%) and brand (47%) are among the top two factors. Most of the participants (64%) ranked stitching as one of the two least important factors.

In order to determine the participants' habits regarding fashion, they were asked when they bought fashion clothing. A review of the different answers given by the participants to this question (Table 1.4.) shows that over half of the participants (55%) buys fashion products "when everyone else does, in season." The percentage of the participants in the sample who said they purchased "fashion products after everyone else – at the end of the season" was 30%, while the percentage of those who purchased "fashion products before everyone else – at the beginning of the season" was 15%.

Table 1.1.: *Participants' Perceptions about the Concept of Fashion*

Impor-tance	Distinctive-ness F	%	Newness F	%	Style F	%	Luxury F	%	Image F	%	Socialization F	%	Functionality F	%	Brand F	%	Quality F	%
1	33	13.6	61	25.0	75	30.9	7	2.9	14	5.8	4	1.7	18	7.4	4	1.6	27	11.1
2	47	19.4	39	16.0	59	24.3	3	1.2	32	13.2	4	1.7	16	6.6	24	9.9	21	8.6
3	46	19.0	37	15.2	42	17.3	16	6.6	52	21.4	6	2.5	14	5.8	12	4.9	21	8.6
4	32	13.2	37	15.2	25	10.3	21	8.6	44	18.1	12	5.0	24	9.9	23	9.5	26	10.7
5	24	9.9	28	11.5	15	6.2	20	8.2	38	15.6	19	7.9	30	12.3	33	13.6	35	14.4
6	20	8.3	23	9.4	10	4.1	19	7.8	25	10.3	32	13.2	28	11.5	48	19.8	37	15.2
7	14	5.8	11	4.5	8	3.3	26	10.7	21	8.6	44	18.2	41	16.9	41	16.9	35	14.4
8	9	3.7	3	1.2	6	2.5	51	21.0	12	4.9	57	23.6	40	16.5	41	16.9	24	9.9
9	17	7.0	5	2.0	3	1.2	80	32.9	5	2.1	64	26.4	32	13.2	17	7.0	17	7.0
Total	242	100	244	100	243	100	243	100	243	100	242	100	243	100	243	100	243	100

Table 1.2: *Sources Used By Participants to Follow Fashion Trends*

Importance	TV		Magazines		Books		Movies		Internet		Newspapers		Radio		Word of Mouth		Opinion Leaders		Point of Purchase	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	62	24.7	25	10.0	0	0	2	0.8	40	16.0	6	2.4	1	0.4	23	9.2	8	3.2	8	32.7
2	45	17.9	53	21.3	3	1.2	11	4.4	50	20.0	18	7.2	2	0.8	42	16.9	10	4.0	19	7.7
3	46	18.3	42	16.9	18	7.3	15	6.0	50	20.0	23	9.2	5	2.0	29	11.6	12	4.9	12	4.8
4	34	13.5	31	12.4	9	3.6	26	10.5	36	14.4	43	17.3	8	3.2	24	9.6	17	6.9	21	8.5
5	21	8.4	35	14.1	12	4.8	26	10.5	25	10.0	42	16.9	13	5.2	29	11.6	29	11.7	17	6.9
6	23	9.2	21	8.4	23	9.3	26	10.5	22	8.8	38	15.3	15	6.0	29	11.6	28	11.3	24	9.7
7	10	4.0	16	6.4	43	17.3	33	13.3	13	5.2	34	13.7	29	11.6	18	7.2	36	14.6	18	7.3
8	5	2.0	15	6.0	37	14.9	50	20.2	7	2.8	25	10.0	41	16.4	29	11.6	25	10.1	14	5.6
9	3	1.2	8	3.2	58	23.4	37	14.9	5	2.0	16	6.4	54	21.6	18	7.2	36	14.6	12	4.8
10	2	0.8	3	1.2	45	18.1	22	8.9	2	0.8	4	1.6	82	32.8	8	3.2	46	18.6	30	12.1
Total	251	100	249	100	248	100	248	100	250	100	249	100	250	100	249	100	247	100	248	100

Table 1.3: *Factors Which Participants Take Into Consideration When Purchasing Fashion Products*

Impor-tance	Fabric		Stitching		Brand		Price		Color	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	72	28.5	8	3.2	76	29.9	63	24.9	36	14.2
2	54	21.3	39	15.4	44	17.3	65	25.7	51	20.2
3	52	20.6	44	17.4	34	13.4	48	19.0	75	29.6
4	52	20.6	69	27.3	35	13.8	46	18.2	51	20.2
5	23	9.1	93	36.8	65	25.6	31	12.3	40	15.8
Total	253	100	253	100	254	100	253	100	253	100

Table 1.4: *Distribution of Participants According to the Time When They Purchase Fashion Products*

	Avg.	SD
Before everyone, before the season opens	39	15.2
The same time as everyone else, during the season	140	54.7
After everyone else, at the end of the se ason	77	30.1
Total	256	100.0

3.2. Involvement of Participants in Fashion Products and Their Brand Sensitivity

A review of the responses given by participants on the scales that were used to evaluate their involvement in fashion products and their brand sensitivity (Table 1.5) shows that the highest rating for participant involvement in fashion products was obtained in the hedonism category, while the lowest value for fashion involvement was obtained in the category of 'probability of a mispurchase'. This indicates that the participants find purchasing fashion products quite enjoyable and that they are not indecisive because of the possibility of making a wrong choice when selecting fashion products. The participants gave noncommittal responses in all other categories. Participants stated that they were sometimes disappointed with their choice of fashion products; they sometimes believed that clothing says something about the person who buys it; and that they were sometimes interested in purchasing fashion products. Similar results were achieved regarding the participants' brand sensitivity. Accordingly, participants expressed that they were concerned about the brand name in some situations when buying clothing.

A review of the relationships between the variables (Table1.5) shows that almost all of the variables were significantly ($p<0.05$) related with each other, but at a low level of correlation ($r<0.40$). The hedonism and interest categories were the variables that had relatively the highest relevance. This shows that when the individual is more interested in purchasing a fashion product, s/he also finds it more enjoyable. It is apparent that other than the category of *probability of a mispurchase*, all categories are positively related to each other. The *probability of a mispurchase* category has a negative relationship with all other dimensions. This shows that when an individual experiences less indecision due to the possibility of making a wrong choice when choosing fashion products, s/he becomes more involved in fashion according to all the other categories.

Table 1. 5: *Correlation Matrix*

	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Perceived product importance	3.20	0.92	1.00					
(2) Probability of a mispurchase	2.34	0.77	-0.15[*]	1.00				
(3) Perceived symbolic/sign	3.38	1.02	0.11	-0.23[**]	1.00			
(4) Hedonism/pleasure	3.64	1.18	0.17[**]	-0.23[**]	0.25[**]	1.00		
(5) Interest	3.24	0.90	0.18[**]	-0.23[**]	0.30[**]	0.38[**]	1.00	
(6) Brand sensitivity	3.13	0.77	0.17[**]	-0.19[**]	0.24[**]	0.21[*]	0.29[**]	1.00

$*p<0.05$ $**p<0.01$

In order to determine whether or not the assessment of the participants varied based on certain characteristics, the results of the analyses were examined (Table 1.6). This review showed that with regard to the fashion product involvement factors, the factor of *perceived product importance* varied according to income level, *probability of a mispurchase* varied according to gender and class, *hedonism* varied according to gender, class and department, and *interest* varied according to department. Variance in *brand sensitivity* was statistically significant with regard to department and income level. This leads to the following observations:

▪ It is apparent that participants with higher income level (3,001-4,000 TL) find it less disappointing when they make bad choices about fashion products compared to other participants. The highest rating in this category was by participants in the lowest income level bracket (< 1,000 TL). However, it should be noted that participants of all income levels stated that they are somewhat disappointed when they make bad choices about fashion products.

▪ Male participants experience more indecision regarding the possibility of making a bad choice when choosing fashion products than female participants. In other words, it is easier for women to make decisions about fashion products than it is for men. Furthermore, female participants report that they enjoy purchasing fashion products, while men were noncommittal on this point.

▪ It is apparent that fourth year students experience more indecision regarding the possibility of making a bad choice when choosing fashion products than first year students. While fourth year students state that they are not indecisive when choosing products, first year students state that they are somewhat indecisive on this topic. On the other hand, fourth year students state that they enjoyed purchasing fashion products, first year students state that they found purchasing fashion products to be enjoyable only in some situations. Furthermore, it is notable that students in the School of Engineering and Design

found purchasing fashion products to be extremely satisfying, in contrast to students studying in other departments.

■ It is apparent that students in the School of Engineering and Design are interested in purchasing fashion products. Students in other departments say that they are only somewhat interested in purchasing fashion products.

■ Students from the School of Communications were found to have significantly less brand sensitivity than students studying in other departments. However, it can be said that students in all departments are somewhat concerned about the brand when purchasing clothing. Students from the School of Communication are less concerned about brands than students in other departments. However, brand sensitivity was found to be higher among participants in the higher income group (those with income of 4,000 TL or more) than those with less income. Accordingly, it can be said that participants with higher income are relatively more concerned about brands when they purchase clothing.

Table 1. 6: *Differences between participants according to various characteristics with regard to fashion involvement and brand sensitivity*

		N	Perceived product importance				Probability of a mispurchase				Perceived symbolic/sign				Hedonism/pleasure				Interest				Brand Sensitivity			
			O	SS	t/F	p	O	SS	t/F	p	O	SS	t/F	p	O	SS	t/F	p	O	SS	t/F	p	O	SS	t/F	p
Gen	Female	139	3.15	0.95	-1.01	0.31	2.19	0.71	-3.50	0.00**	3.49	1.02	1.90	0.06	3.80	0.82	2.33	0.02*	3.31	0.85	1.33	0.19	3.07	0.80	-1.43	0.15
	Male	118	3.26	0.89			2.52	0.81			3.25	1.01			3.46	1.47			3.16	0.96			3.21	0.72		
Age	18-21	148	3.21	0.92	0.28	0.78	2.40	0.80	1.40	0.16	3.34	1.10	-0.75	0.46	3.54	0.87	-1.70	0.09	3.24	0.95	-0.18	0.86	3.16	0.77	0.60	0.55
	22 and more	106	3.18	0.94			2.26	0.73			3.44	0.92			3.80	1.51			3.26	0.85			3.10	0.78		
Class	1st Class	150	3.18	0.95	-0.48	0.63	2.44	0.80	2.33	0.02*	3.31	1.04	-1.39	0.17	3.47	0.84	-2.81	0.01*	3.20	0.93	-0.96	0.34	3.12	0.74	-0.31	0.75
	4th Class	107	3.23	0.89			2.21	0.72			3.49	1.00			3.88	1.50			3.31	0.87			3.15	0.81		
Department	Science and Literature	100	3.28	0.94	0.37	0.77	2.46	0.72	1.68	0.17	3.24	1.01	1.09	0.35	3.51	0.79	4.91	0.00**	3.14	0.89	2.73	0.04*	3.04	0.74	4.37	0.01*
	Commercial Sciences	107	3.16	0.90			2.29	0.79			3.45	1.05			3.69	0.83			3.30	0.92			3.32	0.77		
	Engineering	19	3.1	0.7			2.0	0.4			3.5	0.8			4.5	3.0			3.7	0.5			3.0	0.6		

Category	Subgroup	N	B1 Mean	B1 SD	B1 Stat	B1 p	B2 Mean	B2 SD	B2 Stat	B2 p	B3 Mean	B3 SD	B3 Stat	B3 p	B4 Mean	B4 SD	B4 Stat	B4 p	B5 Mean	B5 SD	B5 Stat	B5 p	B6 Mean	B6 SD	B6 Stat	B6 p
	Communications	31	3.15	1.05			2.28	0.97			3.51	1.1			3.33	0.97			3.08	0.98			2.86	0.81		
Emp.	Employed	46	3.25	1.02	0.43	0.67	2.36	0.93	0.13	0.90	3.40	0.94	0.14	0.89	3.70	0.87	0.35	0.72	3.19	0.93	-0.44	0.66	3.00	0.80	-1.28	0.20
Emp.	Unemployed	211	3.19	0.90			2.34	0.74			3.38	1.04			3.63	1.24			3.26	0.90			3.16	0.76		
Income	<1.000 TL	28	3.44	1.07	3.69	0.01*	2.24	0.75	1.30	0.27	3.38	0.90	0.90	0.47	4.00	2.65	1.30	0.27	3.35	0.93	1.01	0.41	3.22	0.80	3.13	0.02*
Income	1.000-2.000 TL	40	3.08	0.99			2.53	0.89			3.18	1.00			3.37	0.92			3.06	0.90			2.87	0.60		
Income	2.001-3.000 TL	42	3.37	0.94			2.20	0.64			3.34	0.99			3.79	0.69			3.17	0.94			3.08	0.64		
Income	3.001-4.000 TL	41	2.81	0.86			2.41	0.77			3.61	0.97			3.70	0.78			3.14	0.92			3.08	0.82		
Income	>4.000	77	3.39	0.81			2.30	0.71			3.37	1.12			3.64	0.82			3.36	0.86			3.36	0.82		

*p<0.05 **p<0.01

3.3. The Effect of Fashion Product Involvement on Brand Sensitivity

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to determine the effect that different categories of fashion product involvement have on brand sensitivity (Table 1.7). In the analysis, the dependent variable was brand sensitivity, while the independent variables were all the categories of fashion product involvement. A meaningful model was obtained as a result of the analysis. According to this model, the independent variables explain 13% of the variation in brand sensitivity. However, it is evident that the only independent variables in the model that have a significant effect on brand sensitivity are the categories of *interest* and *perceived symbolic/sign*. These variables have a positive effect on brand sensitivity. The other dimensions do not have any significant effect on brand sensitivity. This shows that the more interest an individual has in purchasing fashion products and the stronger his/her belief is that an article of clothing says something about him/her, the more s/he will be concerned about the brand when purchasing articles of clothing.

Table 1.7: *Results of Regression Analysis of Brand Sensitivity*

	Beta	Std. Error	Std. Beta	t	p
(Constant)	2.08	0.32		6.35	0.00**
Perceived product importance	0.07	0.05	0.09	1.51	0.13
Probability of a mispurchase	-0.08	0.06	-0.09	-1.45	0.15
Perceived symbolic/sign	0.10	0.04	0.15	2.29	0.02*
Hedonism/pleasure	0.04	0.04	0.07	1.04	0.29
Interest	0.15	0.05	0.18	2.71	0.00**

R=0.365; R^2=0.133; F=7.634. p=0.00<0.01 *p<0.05 **p<0.01

4. Concluding remarks

The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between involvement levels and brand sensitivity among university students. In the study, the participants' level of involvement in fashion was the highest in the hedonism (aesthetics and pleasure) category. An individual's attitude toward the consumption of fashion products is largely determined by the need s/he feels to express his/her own image, style and distinctiveness. There is no doubt that marketing efforts target this behavior and attempt to increase it.

Previous studies report the observation that when purchasing fashion consumer articles, consumers do not make decisions based on choice but on whether the product's promises correspond with their own values and interests and whether the product suits their sense of aesthetics and pleasure. Consequently, companies that monitor the market and research consumer behavior patterns can more easily identify areas of consumer values and interest and, as a result, create more demand by achieving a desirable style. Market research accurately defines the symbols generated by a brand name and "loads new meaning to the symbols." This encourages promotional activities to be directed at modifying products based on requests and information coming from the market. It is evident in this study that when participants were asked their opinion about fashion, they said they looked for style, innovation and distinctiveness, respectively. This indicates that it is necessary for fashion brands to create unique styles that produce a perception of innovation and distinctiveness through their marketing communication. It is apparent that university students in the study mostly purchase fashion products that help them express their distinctiveness and their unique sense of aesthetics. Marketing efforts that are interesting make the process of purchasing fashion products more enjoyable. This makes it possible for an individual to develop a sense of fashion that emphasizes his/her own individual style, rather than be influenced by social factors.

Of the various marketing methods used as a reference point for university students, television is very effective as a channel, followed closely by the internet and magazines. Companies choose the channels for their marketing campaigns based on the target audience, so they consider the internet to be a very important channel now that e-commerce has become more widespread.

The study found that the more interested a person is in purchasing fashion products and the stronger his/her belief that a specific fashion product says something about him/her, the higher that person's brand sensitivity will be. Consumers who buy brands they believe express their personality best will therefore remain faithful to the brand they feel most comfortable with over the long term.

Because distinctiveness creates a competitive advantage in all markets, marketing managers find it difficult to retain faithful customers because of the diversity of products that promise more value. Brands can be successful in a competitive environment if they take into consideration the style and preferences of their customers and do things never done before. Factors that affect buying behavior, especially among young people, include interest in fashion and the images and symbolism communicated by a brand name. We can conclude that this study will

shed light on future studies and would produce different results if carried out on different age groups and with other variables not included in this study such as lifestyle.

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