



ACADEMIC PAPER

Consumer behaviour and preferences regarding children's clothing in Turkey

Children's clothing in Turkey

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this study is to determine the factors affecting the consumer preferences and behaviour in the children's clothing market in Turkey, a country where the majority of the population is under 18 years old.

Design/methodology/approach – Whilst the study investigated the purchasing preferences and behaviour of parents, such as shopping frequency and period, type of retailer and the effect of reference groups in the children's clothing market, it also explored some children's purchasing characteristics, like shopping decision age.

Findings – This study offers some academic results on consumer behaviour and preferences in the children's clothing market: There is no set shopping period; consumers prefer shopping from independent shops; in the selection of retailers, consumers consider payment conditions, pricing, and range of merchandise; in the family the parents mostly make the buying decisions for their children's clothes; the age of children making their own clothing decisions varies between six and ten; the most important factors affecting consumers' decisions towards shopping for children's clothing are the price, quality, convenience, payment conditions, and size of the clothing.

Research limitations/implications – The study concentrated on consumer behaviour and preferences regarding children's clothing in a limited population – Izmir, a city of three million.

Originality/value – There are few studies related to children in the literature. For the first time, this study has attempted to explore the growing children's clothing market in Turkey.

Keywords Clothing, Children (age group), Consumer behaviour, Turkey

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Turkey is a leading supplier and exporter. It is the world's fourth biggest clothing supplier and tenth textile commodity supplier. In 2003, Turkey realised a total of \$47 billion in exports, \$15 billion of which was from the textile and clothing sector (ITKIB, 2004).

The children's clothing sub-sector in the Turkish textiles sector has recently shown important developments, with improvements in both the materials used and design playing a significant role in the sector's success. When the ratio of children to total population in Turkey is considered, the significance of the children's clothing market clearly appears. According to the 2000 Census, about 29 percent of Turkey's population of 68 million is below the age of 14 (DIE, 2000). This is a major reason why there has



been a recent surge in the number of foreign and Turkish companies entering this market.

Although the children's clothing market is one of the growing market segments, it is interesting that the literature contains no studies investigating it in full. Therefore, our study first aims at building a theoretical framework; second, it investigates the subject by examining some research questions posed to Turkish consumers; this is followed by conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for further research. Thus, the study is endeavoring to make a valuable contribution to the recognition of this knowledge gap, experienced equally by developed and developing countries.

Background

Growth of the children's market

The success of the companies operating in the market depends on their ability to produce and offer products and services in line with the needs and wants of customers in a very competitive market. Therefore, tracing customer expectations closely is absolutely vital if companies are to gain a competitive advantage.

The main consumer in the children's market is the children themselves. The number of children under the age of 15 in the world today is estimated at about 1.5 billion (*Brand Strategy*, 2001). The global market for children's products is being transformed by rapid changes in consumer preferences, the influence of e-commerce and improved marketing techniques. The main targeted product areas in the children's market are food, clothing and shoes, toys and games, confectionery and the other product groups including leisure and entertainment, and cosmetics and toiletries. Clothing and shoes are a fast growing sector compared with the other basic sectors, such as food, due to the massive success of sports brands such as Adidas and Nike and fashion brands like Gap, Ralph Lauren, Benetton and Levis, not to mention the increased fashion-consciousness of children.

Children today become adults earlier, reflect their choices and preferences in the purchasing of products and services and are responsible for making decisions due to having working parents, the increased divorce rate, raised disposable household incomes, along with the other developments in the market. Therefore, they are the target of many manufacturing and retail companies by introducing premium- and value-added products (McNeal 1992a, b). The studies (Frastaci, 1999; McNeal and Yeh, 1990) concluded that the age when children make their own purchasing decisions is regressing and is around five years old now. Children represent a wise and well-informed consumer segment. They not only make their own purchasing decisions, but they also strongly affect family purchasing decisions (Ebenkamp and Miller, 1999; McNeal and Mindy, 1996). McNeal (1992a, b) suggests that the children's market should be viewed as primary, influence and future markets. As a primary market, children are real consumers in the market. They also have great influence on family purchasing decisions. In the future they continue to consume the same products and brands they became familiar with in their childhood. McNeal (1992a, b) also adds that the children's market should be divided into segments according to age, gender, income, geography, lifestyles, product usage and benefits.

Children are affected by their parents during the early years of their childhood. The family has a major influence on the availability of information and subsequent

development of attitudes during the consumer's early years through continued exposure to or use of a product (Feltham, 1998; Blackwell *et al.*, 2001). This process is called the socialisation of the child. The media, especially television and internet advertisements, affect children's purchasing decisions. In developed markets children watch TV, have access to a computer and actively surf the net in order to get information and also make purchases online (Thomson and Laing, 2003; *Brand Strategy*, 2001). Many marketers start to push their products on youngsters to encourage them to build a habit at an early age (Solomon, 2004). Today, even pre-schoolers are a target for American marketers (Wartella, 1995). Apart from family and media, peers can have as great an influence on their purchasing decisions (McNeal and Mindy, 1999).

The influence of parents in the children's clothing market

Although children are an important segment of the consumers to be studied, the second consumer group in the children's market is the parents (and grandparents), especially mothers in the early years of childhood. Companies should offer their products and services by considering parents' needs and wants in order to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Brands such as Gap, Ralph Lauren and Benetton have become market leaders by acting on the fact that parents reflect their brand choices in the children's market. The identification of purchasing frequency, periods, and purchasing points in the children's market significantly affects the marketing policies and strategies of the companies.

The price, quality and payment conditions (i.e. credit card, instalments) have great importance on the consumers' buying behaviour. Darian (1998) suggests that the price of the clothing is more likely to be mentioned by the parent than any other factor. Chen *et al.* (2004) found that among the main attributes of children's clothing, quality and style are more important than price for Chinese parents. In addition to these factors, fashion and advertising generally have a major impact on sales in the textile and clothing industry. Since there is a direct relationship between higher prices and the latest fashion of a product in the textile and clothing industry, the more a product reflects the latest fashion and style, along with the contribution of advertising, the higher its selling price. Branding is also another important attribute affecting children's apparel sales. Although brand recognition is high among children because it is used as a means to satisfy a status or an emotional need and a device to communicate messages to their peer group, Harper *et al.* (2003) reported that 60 percent of parents responded that labels and logos were not of importance to them.

In their study of children's wear in China, Chen *et al.* (2004) found that customers buy from retailers such as department stores, speciality shops, garment markets, wholesale markets, small shops, as well as hawkers. One of the important factors in the selection of the retailer is the assortment of merchandise (Murray, 1994). The other important factor is the provision of physical conditions in the facility such as hygiene, comfort, layout, etc. The consumer's aim in the selection of purchasing points is beyond possessing the product (Thang and Tan, 2003). Consumers choose retailers offering different services to some extent, like toilets, restaurants, cafes, a games/play room for children. Store accessibility, easy parking, and pricing suitable to budget and

payment conditions are other factors attracting the consumer in the selection of purchasing points (*Chain Store Age*, 1996).

Study design

Study purpose

It is interesting that there are few studies related to children, although much research on the purchasing preferences and behaviour of youth has been published in the literature. The current research aims at the following:

- Investigating the purchasing frequency and period for the purchase of children's clothing, type of retailer, and effects of reference groups.
- Exploring the factors affecting the selection of the purchasing points, the purchasing decision maker for children's clothing in the family, and the children's shopping decision age.
- Determining the relationships between the shopping characteristics and the factors that affect the shopping decisions regarding children's clothing and the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Study method

It was thought that focusing on the purchasing preferences and behaviour of the parents in the children's clothing market would be wise since the studies in the literature found that most children rely on their parents to pay for them (Lindstrom, 2003; Prendergast and Wong, 2003). After pre-testing the questionnaire with 20 respondents in January 2004, the data in the study were obtained by the author over a two-month period through face-to-face interviews with the parents who filled in a questionnaire specifically developed for this study.

The first part of this questionnaire included questions relating to demographic information about the respondents participating in the study.

In the second part, respondents were asked to provide information about frequency of shopping, shopping period, type of retailers, and the effects of reference groups. Frequency of shopping was measured on a scale from once a month to irregular. Shopping period was rated on the scale from according to need to only for special days and festivals. Type of retailer covered independent shops, shopping centres, markets, and other retail alternatives. The effects of reference groups were measured on the 3-point Likert scale (from 1: yes, to 3: no).

The third part included the retailer selection factors and asked the respondents to rank the most important factors from 1: most important to 3: least important.

The fourth part investigated questions relating to the decision maker for purchasing the children's clothing, such as own decision, spouse's decision, mutual decision, and the children's purchasing decision age.

In the last part some statements about the factors that affect the purchase of children's clothing were given and respondents were asked to rate their agreement level on the 5-point Likert scale (from 1: completely disagree to 5: completely agree).

Study sample

The study sample comprised 400 respondents living in Izmir, which is the third biggest city in Turkey (almost 3 million). Although the researcher was well aware

of its limitations in representing the population, the judgement sampling method was applied in the selection of the respondents since it was felt that the sample elements selected through judgement could serve the research purpose and represent the population better. It was decided to include parents aged over 20 in the sample. However, a pre-planned effort was made to attain a meaningful distribution of respondent characteristics in the sample in order not to overemphasize certain groups. When the sample distribution was decided upon, proportion of gender and age groups in the total population of Turkey were considered. The distribution of total population according to gender is 51 percent male and 49 percent female. Of the total population, 32 percent are aged 20-29, 24 percent are in the 30-39 age range, and 44 percent are in the 40 and above age. However, because of the subject of interest, the proportion of those in the 40 and above age group in the sample was decreased. The sample is presented in Table I.

Findings

In Table II, the data on the customers' shopping frequency for children's clothes are shown. It is seen that the majority of the respondents buy clothes for their children at least once in any six-month period. When the purchasing periods of the respondents are analysed, it is understood that more than half of the respondents purchased clothes for their children according to need (59.1 percent). The table shows that more than half of the respondents (51 percent) make purchases from independent shops, around one third (29.8 percent) from shopping centres and 16 percent from open markets. However, it indicates that few of the parents buy the clothes from other retailers (supermarkets, street peddlers or through the internet or catalogues). When the respondents were asked if suggestions from people around them affect their decisions regarding the purchasing of clothes for their children, 19 percent of the parents indicated that they are influenced by reference groups.

According to the weighted average scores (Table III), the third factor is the range of clothes they carry in their shops. The second factor is the pricing of clothes in line with consumers' budget. The third factor is more payment options available in the shops.

Table IV shows the shopping decision maker in the family for children's clothing and the age distribution of children making their own shopping decisions. The decision was mostly mutual (40.3 percent) or made by the child itself (27.1 percent). The same table shows that the age of the children making the shopping decision becomes more pronounced between ages 6-10 (26 percent), although there is not much difference between the answers when the age of the children making the shopping decision itself is analysed. A significant part of the parents (36.5 percent) indicated that their children do not make shopping decisions. The reason for this may be that the children are too young for the shopping decision. On the other hand, there may be a simple practical reason such as parents buying clothes when the children aren't there to make the decision, especially when a working parent shops on the way home from work or during a lunch break.

The associations between the respondents' demographic variables and their shopping characteristics, as shown in Table V, were investigated through the chi square statistical technique since the demographic characteristics of the respondents were measured with the categorical scale. It shows that shopping frequency is

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	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	186	46.5
Male	214	53.5
Total	400	100.0
<i>Education</i>		
Primary school	43	10.8
Secondary school	36	9.0
High school	144	36.0
University	177	44.3
Total	400	100.0
<i>Occupation</i>		
Civil servant	100	25.0
Worker	87	21.8
Housewife	73	18.3
Self-employed	42	10.5
Other professions	98	24.5
Total	400	100.0
<i>Age</i>		
21-29	114	28.3
30-39	149	37.3
40 and over	136	34.0
Total	400	100.0
<i>Income</i>		
Under \$300	79	19.8
\$300-\$499	160	40.0
\$500-\$999	123	30.8
\$1000 and over	37	9.4
Total	399	100.0
<i>No. of children</i>		
1	171	42.8
2	182	45.5
3 and more	47	10.5
Total	400	100.0

Table I.
Profile of respondents

correlated with education ($\chi^2 = 68.89, p = 0.000$), occupation ($\chi^2 = 62.97, p = 0.000$), and number of children ($\chi^2 = 48.84, p = 0.000$). The table reveals that shopping period is associated with education ($\chi^2 = 61.58, p = 0.000$), occupation ($\chi^2 = 40.66, p = 0.000$), income level ($\chi^2 = 39.12, p = 0.000$), and number of children ($\chi^2 = 18.09, p = 0.005$). It was found that there are associations between types of retailer and education ($\chi^2 = 39.86, p = 0.000$), occupation ($\chi^2 = 50.24, p = 0.000$), and income level ($\chi^2 = 49.70, p = 0.000$).

The table indicates that there are associations between the shopping decision maker and gender ($\chi^2 = 56.11, p = 0.000$), age ($\chi^2 = 77.40, p = 0.000$), occupation ($\chi^2 = 28.75, p = 0.05$), income level ($\chi^2 = 25.14, p = 0.01$), and number of children

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Table II.

Shopping characteristics

	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Frequency of purchasing clothing</i>		
Once a month	120	30.0
Once in three months	141	35.3
Once in six months	87	21.8
Once a year	17	4.3
Irregular	35	8.8
Total	400	100.0
<i>Effects of reference groups</i>		
Yes	76	19.0
Sometimes	195	48.8
No	129	32.3
Total	400	100.0
<i>Shopping period for clothing</i>		
According to need	237	59.1
During the season	73	18.3
During the sales	62	15.5
Only for special days and festivals	28	7.1
Total	400	100.0
<i>Type of retailer</i>		
Independent shops	205	51.0
Shopping centres	119	29.8
Markets	64	16.0
Other	12	3.0
Total	400	100.0

Table III.

Retailer selection factors

Factors	High preference	Moderate preference	Low preference	Weighted average
Payment options	88	96	47	128
Product prices in line with customer's budget	122	117	47	169
Range of products	151	48	27	171
Proximity to home/ work	9	40	64	33
Parking facilities	20	24	12	30
Physical comfort	5	33	69	28
Professionalism of staff	3	17	106	26
Providing various services	2	24	56	19

($\chi^2 = 32.60, p = 0.000$). No significant correlations were found between the effects of the reference groups and any demographic characteristics of the respondents.

The factors that affect consumers' shopping decisions for children clothing are presented in Table VI. The most important factors in terms of means are clothing size, price, quality, ease of shopping, and payment options. However, fashion, branding, and shopping through catalogues and the internet are not important factors when shopping for children's clothing.

Table IV.
Decision maker and
children's decision age

	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Purchasing decision maker</i>		
Own decision	73	18.3
Spouse's decision	53	13.3
Mutual decision	161	40.3
Older relative's decision	5	1.0
Child's own decision	108	27.1
Total	400	100.0
<i>Decision age</i>		
2-5	95	23.8
6-10	104	26.0
11-15	55	13.8
No decision	146	36.5
Total	400	100.0

The relationships between the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the factors that affect their shopping decisions regarding children's clothing were investigated through employing chi square analysis techniques. The table indicates that price is associated with education ($\chi^2 = 30.28, p = 0.005$), income level ($\chi^2 = 41.45, p = 0.000$), and number of children ($\chi^2 = 30.23, p = 0.000$). There is a correlation between quality of clothing and education ($\chi^2 = 27.91, p = 0.000$), and income level ($\chi^2 = 32.45, p = 0.005$). Clothing advertisements are associated with respondents' occupation ($\chi^2 = 40.03, p = 0.005$). The table shows that payment options correlate with education ($\chi^2 = 19.53, p = 0.000$), occupation ($\chi^2 = 26.37, p = 0.01$), income level ($\chi^2 = 58.39, p = 0.000$), and number of children ($\chi^2 = 15.52, p = 0.01$). Fashion is associated with occupation ($\chi^2 = 21.51, p = 0.01$) and income level ($\chi^2 = 16.23, p = 0.01$). Branding is only correlated with respondents' income level ($\chi^2 = 23.63, p = 0.005$). Shopping for children's clothing through the internet and catalogues is associated with education ($\chi^2 = 16.64, p = 0.01$), occupation ($\chi^2 = 27.38, p = 0.005$), income level ($\chi^2 = 12.92, p = 0.01$), and number of children ($\chi^2 = 20.44, p = 0.000$). It was found that there is no association between size of the clothing and ease of buying in the shops and any demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Conclusion and recommendations

Whilst the study investigated the purchasing behaviour and preferences of parents in the children's clothing market it also explored some children's purchasing characteristics.

Most of the consumers buy clothes for their children at least once in any six-month period. There is no set purchasing period. They generally purchase when the need arises.

Approximately half of the consumers purchase clothes for their children from independent shops, and one in three buys from shopping centres. It shows that consumers prefer shopping from independent shops. Although supermarkets enter in this market and serve the customers' needs successfully and some chain and franchising companies sell their products through catalogues or the internet, it is

Factors	Gender χ^2	df	Age χ^2	df	Education χ^2	df	Occupation χ^2	df	Income χ^2	df	No. of children χ^2	df
Shopping frequency	22.85	4	20.66	8	68.89*	12	62.97*	16	37.44	12	48.84*	8
Shopping period	1.71	3	3.13	6	61.58*	9	40.66*	12	39.12*	15	18.09**	6
Types of retailer	3.16	3	4.43	6	39.86*	9	50.24*	12	49.70*	9	8.18	6
Reference group	1.94	2	5.22	4	7.50	6	5.13	8	5.99	6	5.26	4
Shopping decision maker	58.11*	4	77.40*	8	14.03	12	28.75*****	16	25.14*****	12	32.60*	8

Notes: * $p = 0.000$; ** $p = 0.005$; *** $p = 0.01$; **** $p = 0.05$

Table V.
The associations between
demographic variables
and shopping
characteristics

Table VI.
The associations between demographic variables and the factors that affect consumer decisions on children clothing

Factors	Gender		Age		Education		Occupation		Income		No. of children		Mean	Std dev.
	χ^2	df	χ^2	df	χ^2	df	χ^2	df	χ^2	df	χ^2	df		
Size	2.73	2	7.43	4	5.83	6	8.59	8	7.56	6	5.06	4	3.85	1.26
Price	5.10	4	5.17	8	30.28**	12	30.23	8	41.51*	12	30.23*	8	3.79	1.10
Quality	4.86	4	4.93	8	27.91****	12	20.19	16	32.45**	12	5.85	8	2.70	1.16
Advertisement	3.58	4	6.43	8	11.75****	12	40.03**	16	13.54	12	8.38	8	3.58	1.07
Payment options	3.59	4	3.73	8	19.53****	12	26.37****	16	58.39**	12	15.52****	8	3.43	1.26
Fashion	1.72	2	2.64	4	2.91	6	21.51****	8	16.23****	6	5.58	4	1.97	1.09
Branding	0.49	2	2.50	4	5.25	6	11.79	8	23.63**	6	6.54	4	1.82	1.04
Internet/catalogues	0.75	2	1.07	4	16.64****	6	27.38**	4	12.92****	8	20.44*	4	2.10	1.03
Ease of shopping	2.07	4	5.08	8	7.11	12	14.02	16	17.34	12	5.68	8	4.42	0.78

Notes: * $p = 0.001$; ** $p = 0.005$; *** $p = 0.01$; **** $p = 0.05$

interesting that consumers do not prefer shopping through these retailers in Turkey. Perhaps the reason for this is that there are some easy to access city centre concentrated shopping districts made up of numerous independent shops. In the selection of retailers, consumers consider the range of merchandise, pricing, and payment conditions as the most important factors. This indicates that the retailer should be meticulous about the range of products they carry in their shops, pricing strategies and also payment conditions.

In the family the parents mostly mutually make the buying decisions for their children's clothes. However, the children also make their own decisions. The age of children making their own clothing decisions varies between six and ten. These results show that store managers must take the children into consideration as well as the parents when they make their stock, layout and display decisions.

It was found that there are some important and strong relationships between most of the respondents' shopping behaviour for children's clothing and their demographic characteristics. It was found that shopping frequency is correlated with education, occupation, and number of children. Shopping period is associated with education, occupation, income level, and number of children. The study revealed that there are associations between types of retailer and the education, occupation, and income level of the respondents. The shopping decision maker for children's clothing is associated with the respondents' gender, age, occupation, income level, and number of children. No significant correlations were found between the effects of the reference groups and any demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study.

The most important factors affecting consumers' decisions towards shopping for children's clothing are the size of the clothing, price, quality, ease of shopping, and payment options. However, fashion, branding, and shopping through catalogues and the internet are not seen as important factors for parents shopping for their children's clothing. This finding did not support the findings of Darian (1998), which found that for most parents, price is the most important factor followed by the quality of the garment. Our study also found that branding is not an important attribute for parents, which supports the finding of the study carried out by Harper *et al.* (2003) that 60 percent of parents did not find logos and labels to be important factors in the purchase of children's clothing.

It was found in the study that there are some relationships between the factors that affect respondents' decisions on children clothing. Price is associated with education, income level, and number of children. There is a correlation between quality of clothing and education, and income level. Clothing advertisements are associated with the occupation of the respondents. The study revealed that payment options correlates with education, occupation, income level, and number of children. Fashion is associated with occupation and income level. Branding of the children's clothing is only correlated with the respondents' income level. Shopping for children's clothing through the internet and catalogues is associated with education, occupation, income level, and number of children. It was found in the study that there is no association between size of the clothing and ease of buying in the shops and any demographic characteristics of the respondents.

For the first time, our study has attempted to explore the growing children's market in Turkey although it has sampling limitations. It concentrated on the children's

clothing market in a limited population of four million, Izmir. Further studies should investigate the issue with samples that better represent the population. They should also develop some hypotheses and test them by employing more advanced statistical techniques in order to reach more conclusive results. More research is required to understand a child's shopping behaviour fully, in general, and in different sectors. And, also, some cross-cultural studies could be beneficial to better understand cultural differences and similarities on the subject. These will give more insights to company decision makers to enable them to design better strategies and policies in order to gain competitive advantages in the growing children's product markets.

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