

## **CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: SOCIAL CLASS**

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### **Abstract**

Businesses need to analyze the purchasing behavior of consumers in constantly changing market conditions in order to achieve success in today's world where competition is increasing day by day. The concept of social class, which is one of the cultural factors of societies, plays an important role in shaping the purchasing behavior of consumers. Consumers make choices based on a number of criteria when spending money and these criteria develop in harmony with the consumption patterns of the class in which they belong to. The consumption behavior of the individual sometimes causes him/her to show conspicuous consumption with the desire to protect his/her status by gaining the appreciation of the social class he/she is in, and sometimes to belong to a higher class. In this study, the concept of social class, which affects consumer behavior, is examined by supporting it with an in-depth literature review.

**Key words:** Consumer Behavior, Culture, Social Class

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In order to survive and maintain their competitive advantage, companies need to implement their marketing strategies correctly in today's increasingly competitive environment. Consumers need to analyze their purchasing behavior well and understand the living conditions and purchasing decision processes of the intended population while performing their marketing strategies, (Karaboğa and Çakırkaya, 2020). At this point, it is also necessary to examine the factors that affect the purchasing behavior of the intended population. Culture, an important phenomenon of societies, is one of the most important factors affecting the purchasing behavior of consumers. One of the most important features that distinguishes societies from each other is their culture (Arslan and Mutlu, 2020). Social

classes, which is a lifestyle of the society in the culture, are seen as the most fundamental factor in shaping the purchasing behavior of consumers. The main reason why we examine the concepts of consumption and consumer in a cultural context is that how consumers acquire the goods and services they need varies in different societies and even in different cultural values in the same society. Within this context, social classes in the society affect the needs of consumers, their purchasing behaviors and the way they have goods and services in different ways.

## **2. THE CONCEPT OF CONSUMPTION**

Consumption can be defined as the behavior of meeting the needs of people in its simplest form. (Arslan and Mutlu, 2020). The concept of consumption is a situation that occurs in order to meet individual, social, economic and emotional needs (Payne, 1976; Özsungur, 2017). Today, various external factors such as technological developments, economic and social situation of countries, geography and climate are reflected in the inner world of the society. The purchasing behavior of individuals in society is formed by these internal reflections.

## **3. THE CONCEPT OF CONSUMER**

The consumer can be explained as an individual who makes a purchase in order to meet the needs of himself/herself and his/her family. With a clearer definition, the consumer is defined as individuals and organizations who have a set of needs and have the ability to make a choice according to their taste in order to meet these needs and individuals who have the ability to buy the goods and services offered by the seller, and as a result, feel a sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction about the quality of the goods and services they receive (Tengilimoğlu, 2016; Nazlı, 2019). Consumers must have a satisfying consumption need, have enough money to consume, and be willing to spend for consumption in order for them to be able to consume. According to Walters, “the consumer is the person who buys or has the capacity to buy the goods and services offered for sale by businesses to meet the personal needs or the needs of the people in the household they live in” (Walters, 1974).

### **3.1 The Purchasing Behavior Of The Consumer**

When it comes to mention purchasing behavior, more than one psychological factor comes into play. These are basic or non-basic needs, attitudes and beliefs, motives, perception, learning, and personality (Tengilimoğlu, 2016). Purchasing behavior, which is one

of the components of consumer behavior, is affected by many individual and environmental factors (Durmaz and Taşdemir, 2014). In Payne's work which is "Task Complexity and Conditional Processing in Decision Making", when consumers are faced with too many alternatives, they eliminate until there are few options left for them to choose from the alternatives. Consumers first revealed that they used less cognitive decision making strategies to eliminate the unacceptable alternatives (Payne, 1976; Özsungur, 2017). While performing their purchasing behavior, consumers act in terms of their own cultural and situational characteristics as well as the characteristics of the goods and services offered (Deniz, 2011; Çakır, 2017).

#### **4. CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR**

Consumers are influenced by their family, the society they live in, the culture and subcultures of the society, social class and solidarity groups when they make purchases as Veblen explains in his socio-psychological paradigm (Papatya, 2005). The fact that consumer behavior differs for each individual is an ordinary consequence of personal differences (Sarıtış and Duran, 2017). According to Kotler and Armstrong, factors affecting consumer behaviour can be grouped under four different headings. These are; "Personal Factors", "Social Factors", "Psychological Factors" and "Cultural Factors". The marketing expert needs to understand the role played by the buyer's culture, subculture, and social class. Social Factors: A consumer's purchasing behavior is also influenced by social factors such as the consumer's social roles and status.

##### **4.1 Cultural Factors**

Cultural factors have a wide impact on consumer behavior (Karaboğa ve Çakırkaya, 2020). Culture, subculture, the family and the roles assigned to the individual, and especially social class are considered as cultural factors that shape the purchasing behavior of individuals. Among these factors affecting the purchasing behavior of consumers, the social class factor affects the brand and value of the product that the person wants to buy consciously or unconsciously. Individuals are in tendency to accept social stratification as a fact of life in general (Bereday, 1977: 196; Durmaz and Taşdemir, 2014). Individuals who interact in the same group in society are affected by each other's consumer behaviors (Özsungur, 2017). This influence and state of being affected may occur in the form of acceptance in the society. In this context, members of the same social group in the society are expected to prefer the same clothing style and products of the same brand.

#### 4.1.1 Social Class

Social class and social stratification in societies have been a subject that many social scientists have studied so far. Social classes occur as a result of the classification of individuals with similar characteristics in society according to a set of rules. Social class differences in a society are the main indicator of the high level of inequality in that society. Actually, social class is a correlation of learned habits (Rossiter, 2012: 89; Durmaz and Taşdemir, 2014).

Social class is a set of people who have the same social status and are stratified in society. The characteristics that determine the social class layers in the society can be categorized as equal income, equal living conditions, equal lifestyles. In general, individuals, who belong to the same social class, share common values and form a common way of thinking, common speech and behavior. These characteristics are very effective in shaping the purchasing behavior of consumers.

The social class factor consists of many factors among the cultural factors that shape the purchasing behavior of consumers. The classification of the individuals in the society is the income level, social prestige, occupation, residential area, value of the house owned, institutional membership (Cömert and Durmaz, 2013: 353), the performance of the individual in his/her profession, the interaction of the individual between different groups, the sense of ownership that he/she sees from his environment, the common values of the family or society of which the individual belongs to are the main elements that consist of the social classes (Yıldız and Baş, 2017).

When individuals from different social classes financially are compared, the purchasing behavior of individuals in a social class with higher standards differs from those who have lower standards (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008; Akkaya, 2018).

As it is seen in social psychology research on social classes in societies; while the perception that middle and upper class individuals independently direct their destiny, it has been revealed that the feeling of being dependent on those around them and acting with the idea of a common group is dominant in lower class individuals (Stephens, Markus and Townsend, 2007; Kraus, Piff ve Keltner, 2009; Özsungur, 2017).

Since there are differences in the tastes, behavior patterns and decision-making processes of the social class layers of the individuals, marketing strategies should be developed according to these differences. In other words, marketing and promotional

activities for a brand differ within the scope of the social class that the product affects (Çakır, 2017).

#### **4.1.2 Karl Marx's Theory of Social Class**

According to Marx, social class depends on an economic position and it is a system of exploitation based on the relationship between social classes, the system of production and the possession of the means of production. According to Marx's theory of social class, society is divided into two different social classes. While first class people own the means of production; second-class people are those who make a living by putting forth their labour. As it can be seen, this idea of Marx distinguishes social classes only within the scope of economic inequalities. Today, however, social classes are shaped not only by income level but also by social status. While a primary school teacher earns an average of 5 thousand TL per month, a factory worker can exceed this figure easily with overtime hours. In this case, considering that although the worker earns more, he/she is in a lower social class than the teacher, so it is seen that Marx's social class theory comply with different variables today.

#### **4.1.3 Max Weber's Theory of Social Class**

According to Weber, the social class form, which takes many forms, is gathered around four basic categories. Weber divides these four categories into two distinct classes, primarily those with and without production equipment. The bourgeoisie is the first class holding the largest share of property (Aydın, 2018: 253). The bourgeoisie class consists of those who have a monopoly of using the most expensive consumer goods. A second class holding property rights is the petty bourgeoisie, who owns less property than the first class (Eyce, 1999: 276; Aydın, 2018: 253). Weber also divides non-property owners into two different classes based on their personal skills and education levels. The first working class is the class that puts forth its labour in a qualified and unqualified way. This class earns a living by working to meet their basic needs. The second class are civil servants, technicians and white-collar workers who have been trained and have developed their skills. On the other hand, this class spends in order to exist in society and socialize apart from their basic needs.

#### **4.1.4 The Effect of Social Class on Purchasing Behaviours**

Consumers shape their lives in terms of their level of purchase and at the same time use their freedom to make choices in the markets where they can buy goods and services.

In this way, they are encouraged to make their presence more meaningful (Çınar and Çubukçu, 2009). There is a desire to move to a higher class behind the conspicuous consumption, and this situation gradually decreases from the individuals in the upper class to the individuals in the lower class. This is due to the fact that individuals in the lower class show purchasing behavior with the motive of meeting their needs rather than showing off.

As the studies in the field of marketing indicate, purchasing behavior changes within the scope of the distinctive norms and behaviour patterns of social classes. It has been determined that each social class has its own purchasing behavior and spending patterns (Açıklan and Gül, 2006).

Individuals in the same social class generally have tendency to own houses in settlements with the same characteristics. Clothing styles and brand preferences are the same or close to each other.

While individuals in high social class purchase to have new experiences; individuals to be accepted in the lower class question whether they need a good or service or not.

While the needs of individuals in the lower social class of society consist of basic physical needs (eating, drinking, shelter), purchasing behavior in the middle classes is based on socialization and acceptance by the society. On the other hand, higher social classes tend to be different from the rest of society and shape their tastes according to direction.

The purpose of the individuals who perform their consumption for showing off may be the desire to gain the admiration of the other members of the social class they are a member of, to maintain their status in this class, to rise to the leadership by causing horizontal mobility in the class, or to be accepted to a higher class by causing vertical mobility between classes (Çınar and Çubukçu, 2009).

## 5. CONCLUSION

It is a sociological fact that there are some class differences in all societies from the past to the present day, from the most primitive societies to the most homogeneous human societies (İnce, 2017). Social classes are a cultural concept that is highly effective in people's lives. From the lifestyle of people to their eating and dressing habits, they live their whole lives within the scope of cultural patterns they belong to. The influence of cultural factors on people's purchasing behavior is quite large. The basis of consumption is the fulfillment of human needs and these needs vary from person to person. Consumption is the pattern of behaviour of individuals to meet their physical, emotional and social needs.

Consumers are affected by many factors while displaying purchasing behavior. Social classes have an important place in the purchasing decision process and purchasing behavior of consumers. As long as social classes exist, businesses should diversify their marketing strategies according to these differences.

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