

A STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES OF CONSUMER PROTECTION IN TURKEY

TÜRKİYE'DE TÜKETİCİNİN KORUNMASI HAKKINDAKİ GELİŞİMLE İLGİLİ KONULAR ÜZERİNE BİR ÇALIŞMA

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to share the findings of a study concerned with the developmental issues of consumer protection in our country from the perspective of consumers. Views and opinions of consumers with respect to the general subject of consumer protection are believed to reveal future expectations related to the subject and also opportunities and limitations we are likely to be confronted with, as a nation, in reaching a better life.

Keywords: Consumer, consumer protection, consumerist pressures, consumer issues

ÖZET: Bu makalenin amacı, yurdumuzda tüketicinin korunması konusundaki gelişimle ilgili konuları tüketicilerin görüş açılarından ele alarak ortaya koyan bir çalışmanın bulgularını paylaşmaktır. Tüketicilerin genel anlamda tüketicinin korunması konusu hakkındaki görüş ve düşüncelerinin, önümüzdeki yıllarda konu ile ilgili beklentileri ve ulus olarak daha iyi bir yaşama ulaşmada karşılaştığımız olası fırsat ve sorunları göstereceği düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tüketici, tüketicinin korunması, tüketici baskıları, tüketici meseleleri

1. Introduction

Whatever our gender, age, education, occupation, income etc. may be, there is an unavoidable fact we all share: We are all consumers. For this very reason, the subject of consumer protection will always be a vital area of concern which will never lose its value.

Today, it has become more difficult, relative to the past, to be a consumer due to tough market mechanisms and never ending technological advances. There are many product alternatives on the market with varying prices and quality, all appealing to basically the same needs. The consumer has to be more aware of his rights and responsibilities to be able to lead a better life.

Taking into consideration the above factors, this study aims at finding out where Turkey, as a nation, stands with respect to protection of consumers and what future prospects may be expected related to this important topic as well as the kinds of problems and issues we are likely to be confronted with in bringing this subject to the place of importance it deserves.

2. Research Design and Methodology

2.1. Research Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to have an insight into the subject of consumer protection in Turkey, which is likely to gain more and more importance, especially in the 2000's, from the perspective of consumers and also to find out about the expectations, opportunities, and limitations to be confronted with in dealing with consumer protection issues in the years to come.

In achieving this end, it will be aimed at :

1. finding out opinions about ways to improve the prevailing situation of consumers;
2. revealing various constructive programs in responding to consumerist pressures; and
3. getting to know the pace of progress on consumer issues in Turkey on different aspects.

2.2. Research Design

The research is both descriptive and exploratory in nature. Descriptive, as it is a cross-sectional study attempting to describe the prevailing situation with respect to consumer protection and consumerism - related issues in Turkey. Exploratory, as its major emphasis is on gaining ideas and insights into the area of consumer protection.

The research questions for which answers will be sought can be stated as follows:

1. What do consumers think of the possible ways to improve the prevailing situation of consumers?
2. What kinds of constructive programs are offered by consumers against possible consumerist pressures?
3. How do consumers evaluate the pace of progress on various consumer issues?
4. To what extent do demographic variables have an effect on the perceptions, opinions, and expectations of consumers with respect to consumer protection, in general?

2.3. Data Collection Procedure and Instrument

2.3.1. Data Collection Method

Data was collected through a self-administered, structured and undisguised questionnaire distributed among consumers. The questionnaires were highly structured in that the questions to be asked and the responses permitted the subjects were completely predetermined and they were undisguised in that the purpose of the research was made obvious for the respondents by the questions posed. (Churchill, 1991) Questions were developed upon a thorough analysis of relevant literature and they were presented in a very standardized form, with exactly the same wording, and in exactly the same order, to all respondents so as to ensure that all of them were replying to the same questions.

2.3.2. Data Collection Instrument

A pilot study was carried out among 25 consumers with the purpose of getting to know if the questions were readily understood and necessary changes were made in the wording of some questions before distributing the questionnaires for the actual study.

The first part which was taken from the Gaedeke study (1970) was on opinions of respondents about six possible ways to improve the prevailing situation of consumers. Here, respondents were asked to rank order their alternatives from one to six:

- More cooperation among government, business and consumers
- New 'consumer relations' thinking
- More voluntary business efforts
- Additional legislation
- Stricter enforcement of present laws
- Broad consumer education program

In the original study, respondents were asked whether they agreed / were uncertain / disagreed with each of the above listed improvement possibilities.

Opinions about constructive programs in responding to consumerist pressures were asked for in the second part and variables were taken from the Greyser and Diamond (1974) study. Here, the first five programs they considered most constructive were asked of the respondents:

- Upgrading product quality and performance standards
- Establishing industry product standards
- Increasing research commitments to better identify consumer wants and needs
- Modifying products for greater safety, ease of use, and repair
- Making post-sale follow-up calls on consumers
- Supporting industry self-regulation efforts
- Making advertisements more informative
- Developing owners' manuals on product use, care, and safety
- Creating new organizational positions to deal with consumer affairs
- Providing more informative product labelling

In the original study, sixteen such programs were listed and respondents were asked to check the three programs they considered most constructive in responding to consumerist pressures.

The third part was on expectations of respondents about pace of progress on various consumer issues and was selected from the Greyser and Diamond (1974) study. Here, the respondents were asked whether or not they believed:

- the quality of most products,
- the quality of manufacturers' repair and maintenance services,
- truthfulness in advertising,
- manufacturers' sensitivity to consumer complaints, and
- the consumer's lot

- i) were better today than ten years ago,
- ii) would be better ten years from now than today, and/or
- iii) could be better ideally than today.

In the original study, respondents were asked to reveal their expectations about the pace of progress on the above mentioned issues over the years.

The demographic characteristics sought for were: gender, age, socio-economic status, education, marital status, occupation, and district of the city where the respondent lived.

The variables and sources from which the variables were taken are presented below:

Table 1. Variables and the Related Sources Used in the Study

Question No.	Variable	Source
I	Opinions about possible ways to improve the prevailing situation of consumers	Gaedeke (1970)
II	Opinions about constructive programs in responding to consumerist pressures	Greyser & Diamond (1974)
III	Expectations about pace of progress on consumer issues	Greyser & Diamond (1974)
IV	Demographic characteristics	

2.4. The Sampling Design

2.4.1. Definition of the Population

The main element was the society, at large; the unit was the consumer and the extent could be defined as individuals who were not younger than 15 years of age. The questionnaires were distributed to consumers living in the city of Istanbul at the time of administering the questionnaire and being a cross-sectional study, this procedure was completed during the four months of December 1996 - March 1997.

2.4.2. Identification of the Sampling Frame

Various districts in Istanbul were chosen to be included in the study so as to represent high-income, medium-income, and low-income areas with three districts for each income group. These districts, which were chosen randomly, were the following:

- a) High-income areas :
 - Boğaziçi
 - Bağdat Street
 - Yeşilköy / Yeşilyurt
- b) Middle-income areas :
 - Beşiktaş
 - Kadıköy
 - Bakırköy
- c) Low-income areas :
 - Zeytinburnu
 - Cevizli / Kartal
 - Ümraniye and Ünalın Mahallesi

2.4.3. Sampling Procedure

Stratified sampling (probability sample) based on the district of the city the respondents lived in was used in the study. Simple random samples of consumers were then independently drawn from each district.

2.4.4. Determination of the Sample Size and Selection of the Final Sample

Sample size was determined allowing a five per cent error, at 95 per cent level of confidence. Taking the population proportion as 50 per cent, the sample size was calculated to be 384 using the formula $n = \pi (1 - \pi) z^2 / E^2$ where n = sample size; π = estimated population proportion; z = z value associated with the confidence level. Hence, $n = (0.50) (0.50) (1.96)^2 / (0.05)^2$. The questionnaires were distributed in the above mentioned districts of Istanbul to be filled out by the respondents. In case of some of the low-income district inhabitants, assistance was needed in filling out the questionnaires for those who would not be able to read the questions by themselves.

2.5. Analysis of Data

The computer program SPSS-X (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used in conducting the relevant tests to investigate the various relationships and differences sought among the variables included in the study. These tests were the t-test, Oneway analysis of variance, Pearson Correlation, Cross tabulation, Mann-Whitney, and Kruskal-Wallis, with the last two being used in case of the nonnormally distributed variables and nonmetric (ordinal) variables.

3. Findings

3.1. Findings Related to Frequency Distributions

3.1.1. Findings Related to Demographic Characteristics

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Gender	Female	212	55.1
	Male	173	44.9
Age	Less than 20	26	6.8
	20 - 29	104	27.1
	30 - 39	87	22.7
	40 - 49	82	21.4
	50 - 59	42	10.9
	60 and above	43	11.2
	Missing	1	
Income	Very low	9	2.4
	Low	27	7.2
	Medium	248	66.5
	High	84	22.5
	Very high	5	1.3
	Missing	12	

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Education	Primary school	22	5.7
	Secondary school	29	7.6
	Lycee	142	37.0
	University	145	37.8
	Post graduate	46	12.0
	Other	---	
	Missing	1	
Marital Status	Bachelor	134	35.4
	Married	210	55.6
	Widowed	14	3.7
	Divorced	20	5.3
	Missing	7	
Number of years married	1 -5	42	20.6
	6 - 10	25	12.2
	11 - 15	27	13.2
	16 - 20	33	16.2
	21 - 25	25	12.2
	26 - 30	25	12.2
	31 and more	27	13.2
	Missing	13	
Occupation	Self-employed	85	22.5
	Government employee	66	17.5
	Housewife	50	13.2
	Private sector employee	43	11.4
	Student	41	10.8
	Retired	29	7.7
	Manager	26	6.9
	Other	18	4.8
	Worker	11	2.9
	Tradesman	7	1.8
	Merchant	2	0.5
	Missing	7	
	District of the city they live in	Boğaziçi	62
Bağdat Street		33	8.7
Yeşilköy/Yeşilyurt		7	1.8
Beşiktaş		36	9.5
Kadıköy		101	26.7
Bakırköy		29	7.7
Zeytinburnu		40	10.6
Cevizli		46	12.2
Ümraniye/Ünalın Mah.		24	6.3
Missing		7	

3.1.2. Findings Related to Possible Ways to Improve the Prevailing Situation of Consumers

Responses to this question asking for a ranking among six possible ways to improve the prevailing situation of consumers are given in Table 3:

Table 3. Ranking of Possible Ways to Improve the Prevailing Situation of Consumers

	Percentage of Respondents (%)					
	1**	2	3	4	5	6
More cooperation among government, business, and consumers	35.2	11.5	15.1	14.6	12.9	10.7
	Sample mean : 2.91					
New 'consumer relations' thinking	5.8	18.8	14.6	22.1	21.5	17.1
	Sample mean : 3.86					
More voluntary business efforts	9.4	13.1	16.1	24.3	20.2	16.9
	Sample mean : 3.81					
Stricter enforcement of present laws	20.2	22.8	17.9	17.9	15.9	5.3
	Sample mean : 2.99					
Additional legislation	4.7	17.0	16.4	12.3	19.2	30.4
	Sample mean : 4.15					
Broad consumer education program	26.0	18.0	18.3	8.7	11.1	17.8
	Sample mean : 3.18					

*C=Consumers (n=385)

**1 (most relevant possible way).....6 (least relevant possible way)

The above results seem to suggest that 'more cooperation among government, business, and consumers' is the most favored way to be used in improving the prevailing situation of consumers. The second way is chosen to be 'stricter enforcement of present laws'. For the third possible way, 'a broad consumer education program' is chosen by the respondents. The sample considers 'additional legislation' as being the least preferred way to improve the prevailing situation of consumers.

3.1.3. Findings Related to Constructive Programs In Responding to Consumerist Pressures

The first five programs that are considered to be the most constructive in responding to consumerist pressures have been indicated by the respondents as shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Constructive Programs in Responding to Consumerist Pressures

	Percentage of Respondents (%)	
	(1)**	(2)
Upgrading product quality and performance standards	81.5	18.5
Establishing industry product standards	52.0	48.0
Increasing research commitments to better identify consumer wants and needs	58.6	41.4
Modifying products for greater safety, ease of use, and repair	76.3	23.7
Making post-sale follow-up calls on consumers	25.0	75.0
Supporting industry self-regulation efforts	37.6	62.4
Making advertisements more informative	33.1	66.9
Developing owners' manuals on product use, care, and safety	53.1	46.9

	Percentage of Respondents (%)	
	(1)**	(2)
Creating new organizational positions to deal with consumer affairs	40.9	59.1
Providing more informative product labelling	43.0	57.0

*C=Consumers (n=385)

** (1)=Percentage of those respondents that have marked the respective subject.

(2)=Percentage of those respondents that have not marked the respective subject

For the sample, the first five programs are:

1. Upgrading product quality and performance standards
2. Modifying products for greater safety, ease of use and repair
3. Increasing research commitments to better identify consumer wants and needs
4. Developing owners' manuals on product use, care, and safety
5. Establishing industry product standards.

It seems that 'making post-sale follow-up calls on consumers' is the least preferred program.

3.1.4. Findings Related to Pace of Progress on Various Consumer Issues

The last question was on opinions of respondents about the pace of progress on various consumer issues over the years. Table 5 reflects the relevant responses:

Table 5. Pace of Progress on Various Consumer Issues

	X*		Y*		Z*	
	1)	2)	1)	2)	1)	2)
Quality of most products	** 1) 62.4	2) 37.6	1) 51.4	2) 48.6	1) 55.6	2) 44.4
Quality of manufacturers' repair and maintenance services	1) 54.0	2) 46.0	1) 50.9	2) 49.1	1) 49.3	2) 50.7
Truthfulness in advertising	1) 30.0	2) 70.0	1) 37.9	2) 62.1	1) 59.5	2) 40.5
Manufacturers' sensitivity to consumer complaints	1) 47.9	2) 52.1	1) 51.0	2) 49.0	1) 56.3	2) 43.8
Consumer's lot	1) 40.2	2) 59.8	1) 48.6	2) 51.4	1) 59.0	2) 41.0

*X: Better today than ten years ago; Y: Will be better ten years from now than today;

Z: Could be better ideally than today

**1)=Percentage of those respondents that have marked the respective issue

2)=Percentage of those respondents that have not marked the respective issue.

More than half of the respondents think that quality of most products is better today relative to ten years ago and that, will be better ten years from now than today. Coming to quality of manufacturers' repair and maintenance services, again, more than half of the respondents think that it is better today than ten years ago.

In this question, one can see the least optimistic views in case of truthfulness in advertising: A majority of the respondents does not consider this aspect to be better today than ten years ago (only 30% of the sample thinks that it is better) and there is not a very optimistic expectation with regard to the future of this aspect. Only 37.9% of the respondents think that truthfulness in advertising will be better ten years from now. The sample does not seem to think that manufacturers' sensitivity to consumer complaints is better today than ten years ago, either (47.9%). Furthermore, they do not seem to believe that their situation is better today than ten years ago and that it will be better ten years from now than today (only 40.2% and 48.6% acceptance rate, respectively). On the other hand, nearly 60% of these respondents think that they could have been better ideally than today.

3.2. Findings Related to Relationships and Differences Among Variables

(Relevant tables for this section have not been included in this article due to space limitations. The tables consist of the results of those tests which were conducted to investigate the various relationships and differences sought among the variables included in the study. Details of these tests may be found in *A Study on Consumer Movement and Consumer Protection in the Western Countries and Türkiye* (1997), an unpublished doctoral dissertation).

With respect to analyses by demographic characteristics, the questions were analyzed by the demographic characteristics of gender, age, income, education, marital status, occupation, and district of the city the respondent lived in. Only the results of those tests with statistically significant differences are revealed in the following paragraphs:

With respect to opinions on the ways to improve the prevailing situation of consumers, the respondents seemed to share the same ideas independent of their gender, age, income, education, and number of years married. For the rest of the demographics, there were only a few differences: The married group did not seem to give importance to 'a broad consumer education program' to the extent the unmarried group did. Students seemed to rank 'a broad consumer education program' at a higher level compared to other occupation group respondents. Those respondents living in Beşiktaş, Kadıköy, and Bakırköy ranked 'new consumer relations thinking' as a possible way to improve the prevailing situation of consumers to a greater extent than those respondents living in the other districts.

With respect to their opinions on the most constructive programs in responding to consumerist pressures, respondents who were aged between 30 and 49 seemed to think more often than respondents who were either aged below 30 or above 50 that 'modifying products for greater safety, ease of use, and repair' was a constructive program. None of the groups seemed to think that 'supporting industry self-regulation efforts' was a very constructive program; those who were aged between 30 and 49 were more negative in their attitudes toward this program compared to the other two groups. 'Making advertisements more informative' was not considered to be a very constructive program in responding to consumerist pressures by the middle/low and high/very high income groups. The former group was more negative in their attitudes as compared to the latter group in this instance. In case of the education variable, 'making post-sale follow-up calls on consumers', 'making advertisements more informative', and 'providing more informative product labelling' were not considered to be very constructive programs in responding to consumerist pressures. The university/post graduates were more negative toward all of these programs compared to the lycee/secondary school/primary school graduates. Married respondents seemed to think to a greater extent than the unmarried respondents that 'establishing product standards' was a constructive program in responding to consumerist pressures. Overall, 'creating new organizational positions to deal with consumer affairs' was not evaluated by different occupation groups as a constructive way in responding to consumerist pressures. Yet, self-employed respondents seemed to be more negative in their attitude. With respect to opinions of respondents living in different districts of the city, 'making post-sale follow-up calls on consumers' and 'supporting industry self-regulation efforts' were not evaluated as being very constructive. Those respondents living in Beşiktaş, Kadıköy, and Bakırköy seemed to be more negative in their attitudes toward the consideration of these two programs as being constructive.

In the case of pace of progress on various consumer issues, no significant differences of opinions existed among females and males; the different age groups; lycee/secondary school/primary school graduates and university/post graduates; the unmarried and the married respondents; and the different occupation groups. On the other hand, there was general agreement of middle/lower income group as compared to high/very high income group with the idea that 'manufacturers' sensitivity to consumer complaints' could be better ideally than today. However, there was general disagreement with the ideas that 'manufacturers' sensitivity to consumer complaints was better today than ten years ago', that 'consumer's lot was better today than ten years ago' and that 'consumer's lot would be better ten years from now than today', with the middle/lower income group disagreeing to a greater extent than the high/very high income group. One other variable for which there was a difference of opinion in case of the pace of progress on certain consumer issues was 'district'. Those living in Beşiktaş, Kadıköy and Bakırköy seemed to agree with the idea that 'ten years from now, manufacturers' sensitivity to consumer complaints would be better than today', to a greater extent than respondents living in other districts.

4. Conclusions and Implications

As has been mentioned before, finding out about opinions on the possible ways to improve the prevailing situation of consumers was among the aims of this study. The results suggested that 'more cooperation among government, business, and consumers' was the most favored way to be used in improving the prevailing situation of consumers. This was followed by 'stricter enforcement of present laws'. As the third preferred way, 'a broad consumer education program' was chosen by the respondents. On the other hand, the sample considered 'additional legislation' as being the least preferred way to improve the prevailing situation of consumers.

With respect to the constructive programs that may be adopted so as to respond to consumerist pressures, the first five were:

1. Upgrading product quality and performance standards
2. Modifying products for greater safety, ease of use and repair
3. Increasing research commitments to better identify consumer wants and needs
4. Developing owners' manuals on product use, care, and safety
5. Establishing industry product standards

With respect to the last question, more than half of the respondents thought that 'quality of most products' was better today relative to ten years ago and that it would be better ten years from now than today. Again, more than half of the respondents thought that 'quality of manufacturers' repair and maintenance services' was better today than ten years ago. The least optimistic views were obtained in this question in case of 'truthfulness in advertising'. A majority of the respondents did not consider this aspect to be better today than ten years ago and there was not a very optimistic expectation with regard to the future of this aspect. Furthermore, the respondents did not seem to believe that their situation was better today than ten years ago and that it would be better ten years from now than today.

It is interesting to note the relative relation of the three variables (income, education, district) for which high numbers of differences appear to exist with respect to the questions involved. It may be expected that those with higher income levels are educated better and live in the rather high-income districts of the city, sharing the same

ideas with respect to various issues. This expectation was confirmed by the findings: Those with higher income and education levels who lived in Boğaziçi, Bağdat Street, and Yeşilköy gave more importance to protection of consumers' private lives more than any other single group. One other idea shared by 'high income' and 'high education' respondents was that they believed making advertisements more informative was not among the most constructive programs in responding to consumerist pressures. Manufacturers were considered to be more sensitive to consumer complaints now than they were in the past by high and very high income groups with higher education levels.

It should never be forgotten by consumers that rights are not given but are taken and it is the consumer's duty to be conscious enough to ask for his rights. To be a conscious consumer necessitates an awareness on the part of the consumer with respect to his rights as well as his responsibilities. Consumers have to be able to choose wisely, decide carefully before making a purchase, and act in a responsible manner both for themselves and their environment. They should list their needs before shopping, make a budget, buy only those products they have on their list, shop around to find the best buys and hence make quality and price comparisons among products, be aware of misleading tactics, and should read instructions and labelling of products (where possible), care about the production and expiry dates of food products, ask for environmentally friendly packaged goods, look for guarantee certificates and service facilities together with spare part possibilities, and also, report defective goods to manufacturers in the first place and to other institutions if sufficient help cannot be obtained from manufacturers (Başaran, 1996) (Borak, 1992).

As for the business world, "consumerism should be regarded as one of the uncontrollable variables that constitute a firm's environment" (Nicoulaud 1987, p.15) and should be treated with care so as to yield profitable results both for business and the society. Manufacturers may consider upgrading product quality and performance standards, increasing research commitments to better identify consumer wants and needs, developing owners' manuals on product use, care, and safety, modifying products for greater safety, ease of use and repair, establishing industry product standards, providing more informative product labelling, and creating new organizational positions to deal with consumer affairs in contributing to flourishing of consumer protection efforts in our country.

With respect to the State, it will be one of the parties to play a major role in the development of the consumer protection movement in our country. It was revealed in the study that more than anything else, a broad education program is necessary to create the potential for further development of the movements in Turkey. Turkey has an opportunity with regard to this aspect because a large percentage of the population is very young which means higher chances of creating more consciousness on consumer protection issues if necessary actions can be implemented correctly. In improving the prevailing situation of consumers, 'more cooperation among government, business, and consumers' and 'stricter enforcement of present laws' are among the most preferred ways. How this cooperation can be achieved is an important consideration that needs to be taken up by both the State and all parties related with the subject, inclusive of consumers and manufacturers. Besides, 'additional legislation' is the least preferred way implying that the State is expected at this stage to implement the present law, rather than create new legislation.

Media, being one of the related institutions, is an important force and has many responsibilities in the further development of consumer protection in our country. Eventhough some leading newspapers have corners related to the subject of consumer protection, such efforts need to be encouraged more so as to educate people and create more consciousness on the part of consumers and all other related parties (such as manufacturers). The State may be more enthusiastic in the preparation of such programs in case of public TV channels, as well.

Consumer associations try to educate consumers and create conscious individuals; however, with their limited budgets, they are faced with many problems. The State may consider providing financial help to such efforts. However, it is the responsibility of consumer organizations, in the researcher's opinion, to cooperate with each other and not to quarrel over rather unimportant issues because it must not be forgotten that all aim at the same objective. Besides, uncoordinated efforts cannot foster the development of consumer protection; hence, some form of coordination needs to be established. With this purpose, a research and information center may be established providing expert assistance to consumer organizations and promoting consumer protection.

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