

Exploring Buying Behavior Across Several Product Categories from Branding Perspective

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Abstract

Most consumers have different perceptions of global brands about a product in a given category because global brands might have some additional associations related with the brand which local brands do not have. Thus, this has significant contributions to brand image and knowledge, and it enhances brand value which is likely to affect consumers' brand selection and loyalty behavior. In this research, the global brand selection and loyalty within college students are explored. The research investigates global brand loyalty behavior across various product categories, and examines the dimensions that influence consumers' global brand loyalty. Variances were analyzed and exploratory factor analyses were conducted to analyze the data gathered with a survey. The results show that there is a significant difference in the degree of brand loyalty exhibited by college students across a variety of product categories, which also impacts the dimensions of global brand selection.

Key words: Product categories; Global brands; Buying behavior

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INTRODUCTION

Brands are perceived as a vital point of differentiation by consumers and constitute a source of competitive advantage in the market place for firms (Beverland et al., 2007; Low & Blois, 2002) and many brands that are created in the developed markets have been globalized thanks to the developments in communication technology and aligning consumer likes and preferences. That likes and preferences align somehow create "global consumer culture", which increases demand for global brands and provides firms to develop and apply marketing strategies directed to satisfy "global consumer" needs and wants (Lee et al., 2008; Apaydin, 2009). Thus, it can be inferred that globalization creates some opportunities for marketers as well as threats (Chueh & Kao, 2004; Quelch & Knoop, 2006).

Many firms from various countries develop globally integrated marketing strategies and create a brand known all over the world to benefit from advantages of globalization (Baron & Hollingshed, 2004). This of course results in benefiting from scale economies in terms of mass production, identical packaging, and standard marketing communication (Johansson & Ronkainen, 2005). Therefore, for firms and researchers, it is vital to explore and understand the behaviors of consumers towards global brands and their perception of global brands. To be able to create loyal global consumers, gaining an insight of global consumer behavior is necessary. It is believed that this research will contribute to marketers and researchers in this area.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Özsömer & Altaras define "global brands as those that have widespread regional global awareness, availability,

acceptance, and demand and are often found under the same name with consistent positioning, personality, look, and feel in major markets enabled by centrally coordinated marketing strategies and programs.” Many firms are trying to generate global brands in that some consumers have positive attitudes to brands that are perceived as global. One of the reasons why companies are doing so can be explained by consumer preference. “Consumers prefer brands with global image to local images even if there are not cues for superior quality and value of the global brand. Firms are taking advantage of such image-enhancing effect by positioning brands as global in their communications, using message elements such as brand name, logo, ad visuals, and themes” (Steenkamp et al., 2003; Kapferer, 2002; Okazaki et al., 2010).

Okazaki et al. (2010) posit that global brands have “credibility” among the consumers and consumers consider this credibility in their brand preferences in many cultures. This credibility is directly related with the additional associations linked to the global brands and it enhances a brand’s “reputational image”. Therefore, marketers being aware of this develop marketing programs to benefit from it (Johansson & Ronkainen, 2005). “The brand perception is defined as the total impression that consumers have of a brand, based on their exposure to the brand. This consists of both the image that consumers form of the brand and their experience with the brand.” As a result, a brand being global consists of a strong mental image although the consumers might not have experience with it (Gelder, 2004). Thus, this mental image formed of strong additional brand associations is likely to influence consumers’ attitudes and therefore their purchasing behaviors in different product categories.

“Global brands represent stand for a sense of achievement and identification for many people as part of their participation in a global marketplace and can also symbolize the expected value of membership in a global consumer culture” (Özsomer & Altaras, 2008). Baron & Hollingshed (2004) suggest that perceived brand globalness creates additional brand value for three main reasons. Quality, prestige, and psychological associations are the main additional value creating effects which enhances brand equity defined as the marketing and financial value linked with a brand’s strength in a market place (Fan, 2002). As a result, marketers in their promotional activities spend a lot of effort to create quality, prestige, and psychological associations with globally integrated marketing strategy and they use the brand name all around the world (Johansson & Ronkainen, 2005). In the literature, some disadvantages of using the same brand name have been discussed but this is out of the scope of this study. It is obvious that it is not so easy to develop a global brand and developing a global brand requires some abilities and enough resources which many firms lack. Thus, firms that develop a global

brand might be seen as a company which is talented enough to understand the needs of consumers better and have the abilities to respond to these needs. This also have the potential to generate a unique image of a firm among consumers.

An important element of a brand is the name and it has a potential to contribute to the brand equity. In many researches, it is accepted as a vital indicator of quality and it affects consumers’ quality perception. “Brand name is an important cue that provides identification and continuity in the marketplace” (Pecotich & Ward, 2007). Some factors related with global brands escalate the prestige appeal and quality perception and marketers use these in their strategies. They apply high prices to generate high quality perception. Cultures are converging and consumers from different countries share close tastes contributing to the concept of global culture. For some consumers being a member of global culture might create “psychological benefits” and using a global brand may foster the feelings in the consumers belonging to a global culture creating additional value for the consumers. “Consumers may seek to enhance self-esteem and competence by acquiring brands that appear cosmopolitan and modern. However, this phenomenon may depend upon the country, product, and target market” (Lee et al., 2008). Consumers’ approach to various product types may vary because of this reason.

Brands in general possess unique and specific associations which refer to “features, attributes, or benefits that consumers link to a brand and that differentiate it from the competition”. Quality perception is related with the consumers’ subjective evaluation of the product and the credibility of global brands might increase perceived quality. Lee et al., (2008) posit that especially consumers in developing countries generally perceive foreign brands to be of a higher quality than domestic ones due to their high prices and “prestige appeal”. One type of value is called emotional value and defined as “the benefit derived from the feelings or effective states that a product generates and certain products and brands, especially global brands, generate distinct emotional values that are valued by consumers.”

Loyalty is one of the most significant and most researched concepts in marketing because it provides firms some advantages. One of the advantages is it reduces marketing communication costs as it functions as causes positive word of mouth (Rundle-Thiele, 2001). Another one is that the cost of recruiting a new customer is so much when compared to the cost of retaining a current customer (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Loyalty is a strong tool for firms to retain current customers and protect their competitive advantage in the market place. In addition, efficiency is another advantage for firms. It also makes it easy for firms to extend brands and to enter into new markets (Keller and Lehman, 2006). Another

advantage is a person being loyal to a brand might have a positive attitude towards a brand and prefer to purchase a brand (Farquhar, 1989). Loyalty is defined as “the biased behavioral response expressed over time, by some decision making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands which is a function of psychological processes” (Jacoby & Chesnut, 1978). Researchers point out that loyalty consists of attitudinal, behavioral and affective components (McGoldick & Andre, 1997). As a result, exploring global brand loyalty and global brand purchasing behavior in college students of 17-22 of age, who constitutes of a large portion of the population is of great importance. All of these contribute to the competitive advantage of firms.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methods used in this study were taken from Wood (2004). In her study, she explored the brand loyalty dimensions across product categories and loyalty behavior among British college students. The same loyalty dimensions were used in this study testing the Turkish college students’ brand loyalty dimensions in terms of global brands. The convenience sampling was used from students in a higher education in Turkey. A large proportion of the population in this country is young and, therefore exploring their buying behavior may present some new horizons for firms and academicians. This group has so many common characteristics with the young people at this age; however, they may not represent all young people at this age hundred percent as it is a private university where members of families with higher income have education.

182 vocational school students completed the study and SPSS was used to do some statistical analyses. Loyalties for global jeans (clothing), hamburger (food), computer (technology), and deodorant (body care) brands were measured. These four products were chosen from four main consumption product categories to identify differing degrees of global brand attachment.

Adapted version of eleven statements measuring different buying behavior developed by Wood (2004) are used in the questionnaire and variables linked with the product categories are used as Wood did in her research. All the scales in the survey were measured with Likert-like scale at one end ‘very strongly agree (5)’ and on the other end ‘very strongly disagree (1)’.

I like to change global brands for the sake of novelty and variety (novelty).

I have more than one preferred global brand (multi).

I make my purchase according to my favorite global brand, regardless of price (loyalty).

My choice of global brand is largely based on price (price).

I buy the global brands my parents buy (parents).

My choice of global brand says something about me as a person (image).

My choice of global brand is influenced by promotions (price).

I stick with my primary global brand as this saves me time (time).

Quality is my primary concern when buying a global brand (quality).

My choice of global brand is based on what my friends buy (friends).

I choose my global brand because it has a good reputation (reputation).

3. FINDINGS

Brand loyalty was measured with the statement ‘I make my purchase according to my favorite global brand, regardless of price’. To discover whether or not there was any significant statistical difference, analyses of variance were done ($p < 0,05$) between the mean responses across product categories related with loyalty to global brands. Table 1 indicates the results.

Any means above 3 was accepted as agreement and any below as low agreement, and it is obvious that young consumers are sensitive to price and most of them have no global brand loyalty for all products. Some product categories reveal significant difference at the $p < 0,05$ level in the degree of global brand loyalty. Table 1 indicates that there is a significant statistical difference in the degree of global brand loyalty exhibited by young consumers across some product categories (between deodorant and hamburger, between computer and jeans, and deodorant and jeans).

Table 1
Price Insensitive Global Brand Loyalty

Products	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3
1 Hamburger	2,70	1,41			
2 Jeans	2,69	1,29			
3 Computer	2,68	1,26		x	
4 Deodorant	2,65	1,33	x	x	

A cross in a column means there is significant statistical difference between two product categories ($p < 0,05$).

The dimensions of brand purchasing behavior within college students were examined. To discover this, first ANOVA was done and then factor analysis was conducted.

To test if there was any statistically significant difference between the levels of agreement to the statements given previously, ANOVA was carried out. The results revealed significant statistical difference in the responses to the statements. The means of responses were ordered starting from the highest for each product category. Tables 2, 4, 6, and 8 show the order of the dimensions according to agreement level. A across is put into the boxes to show significant differences among between the dimension pairs.

Exploratory factor analyses were carried out to find out the dimensions underlying brand selection behavior about the products by grouping the variables. Only variables having means more than 3 were included in the analysis.

An Verimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization was applied to make explaining factors clearer. The results are shown in Tables 3, 5, 7, and 9 in the following pages. Two dimensions appeared for each product type and the dimensions were named as done by Wood (2004).

Table 2 indicates descriptive statistics and ANOVA results of jeans. It is obvious that there is a significant difference between some dimensions of jeans buying behavior. By looking at the means it can be seen that

respondents most strongly disagreed (lower than 3) with parents and friends being influences on brand purchase. Being reputed (reputation), being loyal to brands, reaching it fast (time), and brand choice being a reflection of self 'image' are other dimensions respondents do not agree. 'Quality' seems to have the highest influence on jeans brand buying behavior and it was significantly different from multi-brand, novelty, promotion, and friends.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA Results of Jeans

JEANS													
Rank	Variables	Means	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Quality	3,45	1,29										
2	Multi-brand	3,39	1,21	x									
3	Novelty	3,35	1,20	x	x								
4	Price	3,26	1,10										
5	Promotion	3,12	1,19	x	x	x	x						
6	Image	2,95	1,28										
7	Time	2,78	1,16										
8	Loyalty	2,69	1,29		x								
9	Reputation	2,50	1,28				x		x				
10	Friends	2,47	1,20	x			x					x	
11	Parents	2,47	1,23					x		x			x

A cross in a column means there is significant statistical difference between two product categories (p<0,05).

Table 3 displays two factors as the dimensions of jeans brand selection, explaining the 58,50 per cent of the total variance. Factor 1 can be named as 'value and variety

seeking' dimension. This factor includes novelty, quality, and multi-brand variables. Factor 2 can be named as 'bargain orientation' explained by price and promotion.

Table 3
Dimensions of Jeans Brand Selection

Variables	Factors	
	1	2
Novelty	0,78	
Quality	0,75	
Multi-brand	0,56	
Price		0,90
Promotion		0,60
% Variance explained	33,93	24,57

In Table 4, it is obvious that respondents most strongly disagreed with parents, friends, loyalty, reputation, and image as a choice for global hamburger brands. Novelty

was agreed highestly as an influence on hamburger brand selection and this was significantly different from quality, multi-brand, promotion, time, and loyalty.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA Results of Hamburger

HAMBURGER													
Rank	Variables	Means	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Novelty	3,51	1,17										
2	Quality	3,46	1,23	x									
3	Multi-brand	3,32	1,20	x	x								
4	Promotion	3,24	1,16	x	x								
5	Time	3,10	1,20										
6	Price	3,03	1,27			x							
7	Image	2,87	1,25										
8	Reputation	2,77	1,18										
9	Friends	2,70	1,18		x	x	x		x	x	x		
10	Loyalty	2,70	1,41	x	x	x				x			
11	Parents	2,66	1,24					x	x		x	x	

A cross in a column means there is significant statistical difference between two product categories ($p < 0,05$).

Table 5 displays two factors as the dimensions of hamburger brand selection, explaining the 49,92% of the total variance. Factor 1 can be named as the ‘value and variety seeking’ dimension. This factor includes

variables multi-brand, quality, novelty, and price. Factor 2, which is explained by time and promotion, is called ‘convenience’ dimension.

Table 5
Dimensions of Hamburger Brand Selection

Variables	Factors	
	1	2
Multi-brand	0,78	
Quality	0,67	
Novelty	0,59	
Price	0,47	
Time		0,83
Promotion		0,65
% Variance explained	29,43	20,49

Table 6 shows that respondents most strongly disagreed with being loyal to brands, parents and friends being influences on brand purchase, brand choice being a reflection of self ‘image’, reaching it fast (time), and being

reputed (reputation). The highest level of agreement with a statement was ‘multi-brand’ as an influence on computer brand selection and this was significantly different from quality, novelty, price, reputation, and parents.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA Results of Computer

COMPUTER													
Rank	Variables	Means	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Multi-brand	3,52	1,15										
2	Quality	3,51	1,25	x									
3	Novelty	3,47	1,22	x	x								
4	Price	3,36	1,20	x	x	x							
5	Promotion	3,29	1,24		x	x	x						
6	Reputation	2,93	1,22	x									
7	Time	2,93	1,26						x				
8	Image	2,92	1,18						x	x			
9	Parents	2,82	1,25	x			x						
10	Friends	2,80	1,20		x				x	x			x
11	Loyal	2,68	1,26										

A cross in a column means there is significant statistical difference between two product categories ($p < 0,05$).

Table 7 depicts two factors as the dimensions of computer brand selection, explaining the 64,49 per cent of the total variance. Factor 1 can be named as the ‘value seeking’ dimension. This factor includes quality, novelty,

promotion, and price variables. Multi-brand is the only variable in Factor 2 and can be named as ‘variety seeking’ dimension.

Table 7
Dimensions of Computer Brand Selection

Variables	Factors	
	1	2
Quality	0,76	
Novelty	0,68	
Promotion	0,80	
Price	0,60	
Multi-brand		0,93
% Variance explained	41,53	22,76

From Table 8, it can be seen that respondents most strongly disagreed with being loyal to brands, parents and friends being influences on brand purchase, and being reputed (reputation). This disagreement indicates that these variables are not effective at global deodorant

brand selection. Respondents agreed with ‘quality’ as an influence on global deodorant brand selection and it was significantly different from multi-brand, novelty, promotion, time, parents, and loyalty.

Table 8
Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA Results of Deodorant

Rank	Variables	Means	Std. Dev.	DEODORANT										
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1	Quality	3,60	1,24											
2	Multi-brand	3,42	1,27	x										
3	Novelty	3,41	1,32	x	x									
4	Promotion	3,27	1,27	x		x								
5	Time	3,24	1,28	x	x	x	x							
6	Image	3,16	1,34		x		x							
7	Price	3,02	1,23		x	x	x							
8	Reputation	2,95	1,22							x	x			
9	Parents	2,68	1,24	x		x	x				x	x		
10	Friends	2,68	1,16								x	x	x	
11	Loyalty	2,65	1,35	x	x	x				x				x

A cross in a column means there is significant statistical difference between two product categories ($p < 0,05$).

Table 9 shows two factors as the dimensions of deodorant brand selection, explaining the 45,81 per cent of the total variance. Factor 1 can be named as the ‘value and variety seeking’ dimension. This factor includes novelty, multi-brand, quality, and image. Factor 2 can be called ‘bargain orientation’ dimension and includes price, promotion, and time.

Table 9
Dimensions of Deodorant Brand Selection

Variables	Factors	
	1	2
Novelty	0,82	
Multi-brand	0,55	
Quality	0,51	
Image	0,62	
Price		0,45
Promotion		0,56
Time		0,84
% Variance explained	25,97	19,84

To test the variances of price, quality, and reputation which are believed to be the main drivers for the consumers to buy global brands, among product categories, paired sample t-tests were conducted. The results are shown in Tables 10 and 11. The preferences of consumers show significant difference between jeans and hamburger, jeans and deodorant, hamburger and computer, and computer and deodorant.

Table 10
Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA Results of Price Attribute of Product Categories

Price/Products	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3
1 Jeans	3.27	1.11			
2 Hamburger	3.04	1.28	x		
3 Computer	3.37	1.21		x	
4 Deodorant	3.03	1.23	x		x

A cross in a column means there is significant statistical difference between two product categories ($p < 0,05$).

No significant difference was found in the responses among the product categories chosen in terms of quality perception. In terms of reputation, jeans have significant difference from other product categories (Table 11).

Table 11
Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA Results of Reputation of Product Categories

Reputation/Products	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3
1 Jeans	2.50	1.29			
2 Hamburger	2.77	1.19	x		
3 Computer	2.93	1.23	x		
4 Deodorant	2.96	1.22	x		

A cross in a column means there is significant statistical difference between two product categories ($p < 0,05$).

4. DISCUSSION

This study provides valuable insights about the consumer behaviors exhibited by young age group. It is observed that there is a significant statistical difference in the degree of global brand loyalty exhibited by 17-22 year-old students across some product categories. This finding implies that when studies investigate global brand loyalty differences, the results are likely to be influenced by the chosen product categories. It seems that consumers are not price sensitive when buying personal care products and expensive products such as computers. Any conclusions made should be constrained to the product studied, and it is difficult to make generalizations for all product categories.

It was also observed that global brand loyalty is far less than expected, which is not in line with the literature. The possible reason might be related with global economic recession, which had a big impact on buying behaviors

of consumers and strategies of companies. The period of the survey coincided with the economic recession which almost all countries have been experiencing for the last two years. As this research was carried out in these years, the results are likely to be affected from it.

The results might show that consumers become more price sensitive during fluctuations in the economic conditions which are significant determinants of environment in the market place and they prefer generic brands. Most companies apply different price tactics during economic crisis, which may as well affect consumers' perceptions about the quality and price. Another reason for observing low loyalty among the consumers might be explained with the features of this age group. At this age group, consumers usually seek for a variety and do not generally stick to certain global brands. It might be beneficial to conduct similar researches for other consumers groups having distinct demographic features as well. As a result, the findings present some opportunities for new entrants to the market.

The dimensions of global brand selection behavior also differ by product type in this age group. Although the differences across some product categories are not big, they are still significant in that they indicate the complexity of buying behavior of young consumers. It is important to note that all products had novelty, quality, multi-brand, price, and promotion within either first or second dimension. Therefore, it can be reasoned that this group looks for variety and value for the product types. Consumers in this group have multi brand preferences due to the price changes in the selected product categories. They also request innovation for these product types as well. The results about dimensions of brand selection are consistent with the findings about loyalty towards this product type.

Jeans brand selection dimensions are value and variety seeking and bargain orientation, which shows consumers' price sensitivity. The variables that explain these factors are novelty, quality, multi-brand, price and promotion. It is interesting to find out that consumers in this group are not affected from their close environment. Parents, friends, image, and reputation didn't explain the dimensions. Hamburger brand selection dimensions are value and variety seeking and convenience, which are explained by multi-brand, quality, novelty, price, time, and promotion. Different from the others, time is an important variable for the selection of this product type, which supports the reason why people prefer fast food. Close environment is not effective for this group in the selection of the global brand. Image, reputation, friends, loyalty, and parents are not so much effective for global brand selection. Computer brand selection dimensions are value seeking and variety seeking, explained by quality, novelty, promotion, price, and multi-brand variables. Reputation, time, image, parents, friends, and loyalty do not affect

consumers' brand selection to a large extent. Value and variety seeking and bargain orientation are the dimensions of deodorant selection, and they are explained by novelty, multi-brand, quality, image, price, promotion, and time variables. Reputation, parents, friends, and loyalty variables do not impact consumers' brand preference so much.

Paired-sample t-tests reveal some important results to be considered by the academicians and marketers. In the analyses, price seems a significant determinant in preferring the product especially in cheap products. When consumers are buying durable goods such as computers and body care products price seems less significant.

Basic limitation of this study is that the sample size is limited. Another limitation could be sample was drawn from one university which might have resulted in some biases. This exploratory research is not enough to explain the reasons of low loyalty behavior among certain product categories, so further researches should aim to the reasons. The effect of the economic recession might be explored if similar researches are done in normal times. Respondents were asked to answer the questions considering the global brands they prefer. In the further surveys, respondents might be requested to answer the same questions considering both global and local brands to see the differences between global and national brand selection behaviors.

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