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## COLOR, FABRIC QUALITY AND BRAND PREFERENCE IN FASHION INDUSTRY: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

*As the population grows and fashion brands expand the requirements, needs of consumers are growing day by day. Fashion retail consumers in Turkey tend to stay up-to-date and they are willing to spend more money on the products of popular brands. In fashion industry, two major variable color and fabric quality affect and facilitate the decision-making process for consumers. Product color and quality plays a significant role in communicating with shoppers and can cause an interest and motivate them toward purchasing.*

*In this study it is investigated the effect of color and fabric quality on consumer brand preference. A qualitative approach has been followed to create hypotheses for future studies.*

**KEYWORDS:**Product Color and Quality, Brand Awareness, Marketing, Consumer Behavior.

## **INTRODUCTION**

As the population grows and fashion brands expand the requirements and needs of consumers are also growing day by day. Turkish consumers tend to follow the fashion; they want to spend more on popular brand products. Potential consumers waste most of their free time surfing the web and for marketers it is the simplest way to reach them through electronic mass media.

Marketers must understand consumer's behavior and what affects their buying decisions. There is a need for thin emotional connection between fashion brand products and customer's purchasing behavior. However, the mission of this research is to investigate the brand knowledge of Turkish customers and how they are affected by color and fabric quality of the products.

Each year, an unlimited number of new products appear on the market, most of which are represented by trademarks, counted in tens or even hundreds. New segments of the market are quickly filled with products that are not sufficiently different in their own essence. The product is placed in a motivated sector. A rapidly growing number of proposals and a slowly increasing demand lead to a fragmentation of the market, concentration of the main advertising efforts in certain areas and segmentation of consumers, the division of products into price categories. This significantly simplifies the process of forming the consumer market, but until it is carried out in one commodity group and in one market, also in one price and consumer sector.

To increase the brand awareness the marketing process should be agitated first of all due to the directly affection of the trades of products and services by the consumer's brand awareness. The rivalness of goods and durable prospects of the brand expansion relate to the popularity of the brand.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Effect of Color in Consumer Decision-Making**

The color of the final product is a part of the target image and communication, and the right choice of color for your product can certainly help create the right image and emotions (Grossman, and Wisenblit 1999; Aslam, 2006). The issue of color selection

would recommend taking the time at the initial stage of developing a new product, service or brand.

Color is important for any product or service: it plays an important role in the design of the products of mass demand (as it can provide a measure of visibility and differentiation on the shelf in a store); and the right choice of color can help companies build trust and right positive attitude in new customers.

There is no ideal or perfect color scheme. As well as no universal color or palette for a specific fashion brand. To support the message of brands there is a meaning of colors (color associations). More information about colors influence the decision-making process with a great effect. (Kaminska, 2014).

In literature many studies cover the issues on the relationship between color and consumer behavior (e.g. Bellizzi & Hite, 1992; Carpenter, Cornforth, & Whittier, 2001; Crowley, 1993; Deng, Hui, & Hutchinson, 2010; Garber, Burke, & Jones, 2000; Labrecque & Milne, 2012). There are also many studies on the effect of colors on buying decision making process (Abdullah, Kalam, & Akterujjaman, 2013; Bunn, 1993; Iyer, 1996; Jeddi, 2013; Moon & Tikoo, 2002; Pelet & Papadopoulou, 2012; Tendai & Crispen, 2009; Wen, 2009; Zekiri & Hasani, 2015)

The color choice in many ways relies on the positioning of the product itself. It is very essential to examine and plainly present the final user. For instance, if we pay attention to expensive watches Rolex advertisement in Forbes magazine, we will notice how they are surrounded on the sides by the green hatch (with a very big size which is more than anything else on the page). Green is symbolized as a character of peace. Possibly the man who got a decision to purchase a Rolex watch should be in a total harmony. It seems he has a huge achievement.

It is possible to clarify the target audience by applying one of the qualitative methods of marketing - a method of color correction. The main point is that we can predict the consumer's reaction to those or other color combinations by using human social parameters. The important thing is that the commercial color correction method does not apply colors only by situational feeling, which relies on the current tasks and target relationship of respondents, but pays attention to age, religious, gender, ethnological and psychological sights of the instinctive and naturalized feeling of colors.

For the situations where company need to urgently draw attention to something new, there is only red. On the waves of the perception, red color is the first, which gets through the lens without any perversion. Red color is not only a symbol of aggression, but a passion as well, activity. It can effectively works like a moment connection, but it is more suitable for short-term activities like “filling” of the products in the brains of consumers.

Rebranding for any company is always a nice chance to correct and change previous flaws. For instance, change or upgrade a poor color scheme. Upgrading corporate colors not only revive the spirit of the brand or a product, but also often change the emotional connection between the company and the consumer.

It is hard to deny that color first assist attracting buyers’ attention. Humans can easily spot colorful products, color inclines to capture the attention better than monochrome. The main reason for this is that human’s brain has a special structure and design to easily reveal color from the external space.

Kotler and Keller (2006) and McWilliam (1999) examined that existing colors are an element of nonoral signs which are one of the important market phenomenon.

It is a fact that colors impact our habits when it comes to purchasing process, but not all of us realize it. That fact can be applied to the both male and female population. It is important not only have a well fitted item but also got it in the colors which attract. Nevertheless, we can often observe that males are less willing to purchase items with an attractive palette of color. At the same time, we must agree that it would be not fair to make quality of the product be sacrificed for receiving an ideal color. To make consumer purchase the product or an item it need to be function and well fitted. Also, it is easy to see that youngsters are more worried about aesthetics of the items and products in comparison to the groups in the middle age. At the same moment groups in the middle age are more interested and worried about the price of the products in comparison to the groups in the older age. Maybe this can be explained that the older generation feel themselves more free to outlay their savings because of most of them are retired and do not have any obligations or small children in comparison to middle aged group. Youngsters are more willing to pay attention to the trends and follow fashion to have the most upgraded items ignoring the cost of these products.

## **Fabric Quality**

The quality of clothing is an important indicator of its "good quality" and competitiveness. It's no secret that most of the quality indicators of garments are laid at the stage of designing clothes. Touching upon the issue of quality, it is first necessary to pay attention to the consumer properties of garments. Undoubtedly, the emphasis on the required quality indicators is made in the case of mass or small-lot production. And at the same time, some of them are also important in the design of single products. All consumer quality indicators are divided into the following main groups:

- Functional,
- Aesthetic,
- Ergonomic,
- Operational.

Functional indices determine the degree of the product's compliance with the main objective functions (clothing designation), clothing compliance with the size and full-age group of consumers, their appearance and psychological characteristics.

Aesthetic indicators characterize the degree of satisfaction of the clothing of basic aesthetic needs - these are the requirements of the aesthetic expediency of the product form and its close connection with the functional purpose of the product, as well as the requirements of artistic expressiveness, harmony, and style unity. Of course, clothing should be designed considering the leading art style of this era and its particular manifestation - fashion. Thus, when designing a new model of a garment, attention should be paid to such important aesthetic indicators as conformity to modern style and fashion, degree of perfection of the composition of the model, marketability of the appearance of the future product.

Ergonomic indicators - characterize the degree of "fitness" of the product to a person. Ergonomics is a science that comprehensively studies a person in specific conditions of his life activity, as well as the laws of interaction between a person, a garment and the environment. The ergonomic indicators of quality include anthropometric conformity, hygienic conformity, psychophysical correspondence.

Anthropometric indicators include static and dynamic matching of clothing to the human body. Static matching involves matching clothing to the shape of the human body, as well as the degree to which the clothing design matches the size of the figure.

Dynamic matching takes into account the fitness of a particular product to perform all types of movements provided for by the operating conditions (no difficulty in lifting and moving hands, freedom of moving the product when lifting hands, when tilting, etc.). When designing clothes of any kind, it is expedient to preliminary analyze the possibility of ensuring, due to the constructive solution of parts, units and the product as a whole, the optimal freedom to perform all necessary movements. It concerns the processes of designing clothes for children, sportswear, and special-purpose clothes.

Hygienic quality indicators characterize the suitability of clothing for sanitary and hygienic standards and recommendations that ensure comfortable conditions for the microclimate of the airfield space (air permeability, hygroscopic, heat-shielding properties of clothing, etc.). In many respects, the hygienic properties of clothing are determined by the properties of the recommended materials. And at the same time, the chosen design of clothing can significantly affect the hygienic performance of clothing.

Psychophysiological indices are indicators of the suitability of clothing for physiological properties and psychological characteristics of a person. These are indicators of ensuring the convenience of putting on and off clothing, ease of use of individual clothing items, etc.

Performance indicators characterize the reliability of clothing in the process of operation, as well as the stability of maintaining the basic quality characteristics during socks. The reliability of the garment determines its reliability, durability and maintainability. Good performance indicators of clothing are determined by the quality and wear resistance of selected materials, the quality of the threaded joints of parts and assemblies, the form-stability of parts and the edges of clothing.

The properties of fabrics are needed not only for the clothing manufacturer, but also for the modern consumer. One of the essential sectors in the economy and exports of Turkey is the production of textiles and clothes. There can be counted almost 35,000 clothes and textile production of Turkish enterprises, where 70 from it were amongst the 500 major Turkish organizations in 2012. The tag "Clothes from Turkey" is known all over the world today.

In addition, more than 30 textile and clothing companies are registered on the Istanbul Stock Exchange. Export of textiles and clothing accounts for about a quarter of the total

exports of all goods and services and continues to confirm that it is the engine of the Turkish economy.

Based on the pace of economic development, the state's approach to the development of the light industry sector, proper business management and staff qualifications, as well as other drivers of growth, we can say the following: the prospects in the sector of production of fabrics and clothing from Turkey are laid out long and long. Currently, the country plans to be not just a major clothing manufacturer in the world. Turkey seeks to become an international fashion center, so that the words "clothes from Turkey" become even more widespread. Josh Sims, editor of *Financial* in the US, writes the following: "In a certain sense, Turkey has been in the last few years, when it comes to the production of fashionable clothes." The clothes made in Turkey "stand on such brands as Hugo Boss, Burberry, Donna Karan and Paul Smith, Next and Marks & Spencer and many, many others".

### **Brand Preference Concept**

Brand preference has a huge area of interest (e.g. Baker, Hutchinson, Moore, & Nedungadi, 1986; Chen & Chang, 2008; Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995; DelVecchio, Henard, & Freling, 2006; Lowrey & Shrum, 2007; Nicholls, Roslow, & Dublisch, 1999; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009) It demonstrates a great passion to utilize a specific company's products or services, even if there are more identically available options at the equal price. In general brand preference can be explained as searching some exclusive product or service even if there is a chance of paying more to get that specific product or service. Brand preference is very important to any organization because it demonstrates how loyal are their customers, achievements of marketing tactics and power of the brands.

Studying the business world, we can understand that the main aims and goals of each business sector is to increase the sales and to strengthen the profits. That is why during the lifetime it is easy to notice how companies and organizations try to stimulate potential clients towards its services and products for purchase. Brand awareness support companies and organizations to inform current and potential clients toward its brand (Gustafson; Chabot, 2007). Gustafson and Chabot (2007) also mentioned that the higher is the level of organization's brand awareness the better is the reputation and acceptableness of its products and service in the market place. The brand knowledge demonstrates an essential role while buying a service or a product also controls deliberate risk assessment of consumers.

Brand knowledge itself is the content of clients to identify or keep in mind a brand. There is a relation between the brand and its product class, and no one mentioned that this relation need to be strong. Brand knowledge is just a process where the brand is enough known to make clients to put it on a higher level and link it “the top of the mind” (Aaker, 1991).

It is very important to make your potential client loyal to the brand by creating exceptional kind of product, make it very easy and comfy in utilization and be sure that consumer has enough knowledge about that brand. Customer must feel himself confident while making a purchase of particular brand. Organizations need to make a rule for themselves to meet requirements of the clients, make them feel satisfied by applying immediate solutions of the problems related to the particular product or service, suggest appropriate price and quality. The loyalty to the brand can be measured by the level of affinity between brand and the customer.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS**

In this study a qualitative approach has been implemented and a focus group study have been conducted. As Rowles & Reinharz (1988) mentioned, qualitative research is suitable and important when it comes to study social experiences, situations which are differential.

The topic of the research is to identify “the effect of product’s color and fabric quality on brand preference: a study in fashion retailers in Turkey”. Due to the open-ended character of focus groups study this method was applied to provide possibilities for discussions and exchanging personal life experiences (Grow & Christopher, 2008).

The process of the focus group methodology consists of 3 important steps, which are preparation, conducting and the analysis. The first step includes preparation, which means that there need to be developed the participant profile, inviting subjects to participate, choosing of the moderator (researcher) and writing the focus group script. The second step includes conducting, which needs the facility preparation, moderation of the proceedings and gathering of the information. The last step includes analysis, which needs the transcribing and coding of the information and writing a report (Kolb, 2008).



After concluding the preparation process, there was conducted one focus group by the researcher. The study parameters were developed and the interview questions between 10-15 were composed.

The universe of this research are females living in Istanbul city. A total of 8 female participants taking part in this focus group study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 35 years old.

Participants were chosen randomly, explained the purpose of the study and informed about anonymity, that any participant is free whether to taking part or withdraw at any moment. Also, researcher informed that no harm will result participating or not participating in this study. After the agreement to taking part in the research, the researcher sent all the needed information regarding the date, time and the location of the group. The focus group was scheduled for two hours, but the real time varied between an hour to an hour and a half according to the discussions.

After the introduction part was completed, the moderator began to ask the interview questions to each participant. Then the discussion started by supporting them to share their opinions. Discussions were permitted to continue until it all had been depleted.

After the focus group study was completed, the audio recording was transcribed by the moderator. All taken notes as well as the nonverbal waves were reviewed. The pseudonyms were determined for anonymity. All the gained information was analyzed by the moderator.

After analyzing all data by grouping participant's comments to each question, moderator received knowledge by applying gathered information to the research objectives.

### Demographic Characteristics of the Responses

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18 and below	1	12.5	12.5	12.5
19-25	3	37.5	37.5	50.0
26-35	4	62.5	62.5	100.0
Total	8	100.0	100.0	
Status	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Married	3	37.5	37.5	37.5
Single	5	62.5	62.5	100.0

Total	8	100.0	100.0	
<b>Educational Degree</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Associate Degree	0	0	0	0
Bachelor	2	25.0	25.0	25.0
Master	4	50.0	50.0	75.0
PhD	2	25.3	25.3	100.0
Total	8	100.0	100.0	

### Responses to the General Questions

<b>Favorite Color</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Red	3	37.5	37.5	37.5
Yellow	0	0	0	37.5
Blue	0	0	0	37.5
Green	2	25.0	25.0	62.5
Orange	0	0	0	62.5
Black	1	12.5	12.5	75.0
Purple	1	12.5	12.5	87.5
White	1	12.5	12.5	100.0
Brown	0	0	0	100.0
Navy Blue	0	0	0	100.0
Other Color	0	0	0	100.0
Total	8	100.0	100.0	
<b>Preferred type of shopping</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Shopping Mall	6	75.0	75.0	75.0
Online Shopping	2	25.0	25.0	100.00
Total	8	100.0	100.0	

## Summary of Sessions

<p>The color of the fashion product affects the customer's brand preference</p>	<p>- Participants mentioned that they are not going to prefer fashion product if they won't like the color of the product. One of the respondents commented that she doesn't like pink color at all, and no matter what kind of the brand is she won't prefer it. The other respondent commented that she prefers doing shopping online because of the lack of time and she trust only her favorite fashion brands and put the color of the fashion brand on the first place while making purchasing choice. There were also comments that color of the fashion products appeals them from the storefront and makes them enter the store itself. Another applicant shared her thoughts that she prefer only specific colors of the fashion products and is not going to change her preferences when it comes to make buying choice. All of the respondents claimed that color plays an important role in their brand preference.</p>
<p>The fabric quality of the fashion product affects the customer's brand preference</p>	<p>- Participants mentioned that an appropriate fabric quality of the fashion product makes them purchase it. One of the respondents commented that she doesn't prefer online shopping at all because in that case it is impossible to touch the fabric quality of the fashion product and decide if the product is well produced and has an appropriate fabric quality. The other participant answered that even if she faced the fashion product which is in one of her favorite color she is going to make purchasing decision based only on the fashion product's fabric quality itself. Another applicant shared her comment that color sometimes can play not so decisive role for her while doing shopping unlike the fashion product's fabric quality. Most of the participants were agree with each other that fashion product need to have a very good fabric quality and make them feel comfortable while putting it one and be pleasant to the touch. These points play an important role to make the fashion product</p>

	<p>be preferred by its potential purchasers and make them loyal to that specific fashion brand.</p>
<p>Fashion product's color choice varies according to the price of the brand</p>	<p>- One of the respondents noted, that she choosed the fashion product which was a little expensive than the other one, but because of it was in her favourite color. Other participant commented that price doesn't play an important role for her unless she find her favorite brand in her favorite color. And the other participant vice versa thinks that the price of the fashion brand need to be in balance with color of the fashion brand. Another applicant claimed that she is not going to purchase a fashion brand product even if it is in her favorite color when it is inadequate expensive. Most of the participants were agree with each other that the price of the fashion product does not play a very important role and has not so huge influence on their brand preference unless they want to purchase a fashion product in their favorite color.</p>
<p>Fashion product's fabric quality choice varies according to the price of the brand</p>	<p>- Most of the respondents commented that they are definitely going to choose a fashion product which has a good fabric quality even if it costs more expensive than the others. One of the participant answered that can sometimes buy a fashion product which has not so perfect quality but has an appropriate price. The other respondent commented that she will better change her mind of making purchase her favorite fashion product if it has inappropriate fabric quality. Mostly participants were agree with each other, that they are not going to change their choices regarding the fashion product's fabric quality</p>

	according to the price of the brand.
The fashion brand never used before influence the customer's brand preference with its color	- Respondents commented, that if they like the color of the fashion brand they have never used before, they will purchase it. One of the respondents noted, that no matter she have never used that specific fashion brand before, if it is in green color she will prefer that product. Another respondent commented that color is the first thing which attracts her even if she is not acquainted with that specific fashion product. And if this fashion brand product is in her favorite color she will think of purchasing that fashion brand. There were also a few loyal respondents which trusts only fashion brands they used before and are already acquainted with. Most of the applicants answered that they are positive to purchase a fashion brand they have never used before because of they liked and find the color of that fashion product suitable or attractive.
The fashion brand never used before influence the customer's brand preference with its fabric quality	- Good fabric quality makes the fashion product which haven't been used before purchase it, after it has an attractive color. Few respondents commented that an appropriate fabric quality of the fashion product can attracts them even if they see that fashion brand for the first time. Most of the participants noted, that even if they faced the specific fashion brand for the first time, color is the first thing which attracts and influence their purchasing decision. Respondents were agree with each other that only appropriate quality of the fashion product is not enough for them to make purchasing decision even if they have never used that specific fashion brand before.

## CONCLUSION

The conducted research is the field study which showed the effectiveness of color and fabric quality influence on the customer's brand preference. The universe of the mentioned study is the females living in Istanbul, Turkey. The research is conducted

between females living in Istanbul by using a focus group study. That group includes eight participants.

To investigate the field study and collect required data there were used lots of books, local and foreign articles, internet resources. After gathering all secondary data there was prepared a list of the questions to be used for a focus group study. The focus group study was held on 18<sup>th</sup> of June, 2017.

Moreover, most of the applicants were 26-35 years old and had at least bachelor degree. Most of the participants selected red as their favorite color. Doing shopping in the shopping malls was the choice of almost all the respondents. They explained it as while doing shopping in the shopping malls you have a chance to touch the fabric quality of the fashion product and look at its color under the different lightning.

Analyzing the data collected from the focus group study it was clear that color and fabric quality of the fashion product influence customer's brand preference almost equally. That it is hard to choose specific fashion brand when it has only a good color and a very poor fabric quality or vice versa. But at the same time, most of the participants concluded that color of the fashion product has a very huge and important influence on customer's brand preference. Color is the first thing which attracts customer's attention.

As the results of the study have been examined, it is seen that the hypotheses listed below can be created for a quantitative research:

H<sub>1</sub>: The color of the fashion product affects the customer's brand preference.

H<sub>2</sub>: The fabric quality of the fashion product affects the customer's brand preference.

H<sub>3</sub>: Fashion product's color choice varies according to the price of the brand.

H<sub>4</sub>: Fashion product's fabric quality choice varies according to the price of the brand.

H<sub>5</sub>: The fashion brand never used before influence the customer's brand preference with its color.

H<sub>6</sub>: The fashion brand never used before influence the customer's brand preference with its fabric quality.

For the future researches hypotheses listed above can be tested by using survey method, and it will be more significant to explore and collect information from the males as well and not only in Istanbul city but the whole Turkey. Conducted research can be applied

to different people with different statuses. Moreover, using the same features like color and fabric quality similar researches could be investigate to study customer's purchasing behavior.

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