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Introductory Chapter: Consumer Behavior in New Era

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1. Introduction - Consumer Behavior in New Era

No time in the history, consumption is considered to be as important as today's world. It defines who we are, how well/perfect we perform our multiroles within the society (buying the most expensive clothes means being the best mom for instances), what symbolic meanings we attribute to our belongings, and how rich/clever/fashion conscious or innovative we are. Poor is not defined as being jobless anymore, but it is considered to be bad consumers [1]. Additionally, those who have enough money but do not consume trendy and new fashion products are socially disapproved.

Accordingly, consumer and the consumption behavior is today's one of the outstanding issues within the academic literature, and this is not true for just marketing context. The area is quite multidisciplinary, and several academicians in different disciplines study consumption-related subjects. From sociological point of view, a "consumption society" and "consumption culture" view is discussed widely in order to express the present society. In other words, despite the fact that production is the defining concept of the past society, for the present century, it is consumption [2]. Besides, consumption is no longer taken to be a destruction activity at all, but with the personal identity and symbolic meanings formation through consumption, it is considered to be a productive activity. Moreover, the very important economic concept and institution of today's world; shopping malls; and chain stores are considered to be the cathedrals of consumption [3] that make consumption a new age religion. Accordingly, do not surprise while it is argued in USA that Jesus come back as an iPhone form, or while a teenager in China sells one of his kidneys to buy a cellular phone.

Not only sociologists consider consumption centrally to their theorems, but also for anthropologists, it is accepted that consumption and its forms such as exchange and giving presents are valid for all societies including the primitive ones. Besides, consumer behavior is a culturally motivated aspect and may have different meanings and trends for different cultures. Moreover, goods, services, and consumption itself may mean different for different cultures. Different

cultures may have different consumption-related rituals that need to be studied on. As a result, consumption behavior needs to be also held within the anthropological perspective.

According to economists, especially behavioral economists, the rational human/consumer behavior idea is depleted for a long while. Partially, rational consumer behavior is affected from so many factors including the effect of sellers, marketing managers, etc. This is important because they consciously manipulate this behavior to make people buy the product that they want them to buy. Accordingly, since human/consumer is considered to be partially rational or not rational at all, her/his consumption practices are needed to be re-considered.

In the meantime, “consumption” is a curial concept, so as the consumer behavior. Since the “Black Box,” we still do not know enough what is going on within the consumer brain and how this process goes on. Besides, with the improvement of technology and the rise of social media, consumer behavior has definitely changed. First of all, the “conspicuous consumption” of Veblen [4] gains more importance with the social media. Consumers if they do not consume products just to take their photos and share in Instagram, showing-off in the social media is a strong motive. Moreover, the relation between consumption and self is widely accepted. This relation may be extended through the virtual world with avatars that are the symbols of selves in the virtual world. For this purpose, the consumption and the possession practices of avatars also become relevant for consumer behavior literature. From psychological point of view, this may be explained through narcissistic behavior. Besides other consumption-related subjects in psychology, recently, overconsumption is regarded as a psychological disease, and therapy groups are being considered for this issue. Another extensively discussed topic related to consumer behavior within psychology literature is “self.” So many theories are proposed related to this subject, but Belk’s Extended Self Theory is important to mention [5]. Simply, according to this theory, our selves may be “extended” through so many things including possessions. As a result, theory brings light to the relation between self and consumption.

There are many other disciplines that are interested in the consumer behavior literature such as history, architecture, geography, etc., but there is no need to glance over all of them to claim the multidisciplinary character of the subject. Besides, the subject is studied via both qualitative-oriented and quantitative-oriented methods based on different epistemological assumptions (positivist, interpretivist, postmodern, or critical). This multimethod character of the subject paves way to explain and “verstehen” it.

Due to this multidisciplinary and multimethod character of the concept of consumer behavior, it is appropriate to study it accordingly in order to understand the subject with its different aspects and holistically. Especially with the cultural, social, technological, etc., changes within today’s world, this issue becomes prominent. In other words, despite the intensive literature on the subject, there is still a need for such studies. This book is a modest try for that end. Accordingly, in this book also, the concept is tried to be held within different perspectives, frameworks, and methodology. I hope at least some of these studies fit to your taste and draw your attention.

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