Multi-Channel Information Search:
Consumers' Trust Level and Frequency of Use

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Abstract

Information search is critical step in the purchasing process of consumers, especially in the case of highly involving products and services. This search process may be either internal or external: internal search refers to the consumer's mental reflection on their knowledge and experience of past events, whereas external search refers to the consumer's ability to gather information about the consumer problems from the external environment. Over the years, marketing researchers have devoted considerable efforts to investigate information seeking behavior of consumers. However, there are limited numbers of studies that focus specifically on consumers' frequency of use and trust in multiple channels in searching for and deciding on products. The purpose of this study is to explore which channels consumers select and use in searching for information that influences their purchasing decisions. This study also focuses on explore how often they use these channels and how much they trust in them.

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Keywords: Consumer, Information Search Behavior, Information Channel, Trust Level

Çok Kanallı Bilgi Arama Süreci: Tüketicilerin Bilgi Kanallarına Duydukları Güven Düzeyi ve Kullanım Sıklıkları

Öz

Ürün ve hizmet çeşitliliğinin çok fazla olduğu satın alma davranışların-da, bilgi arama süreci satın alma sürecinin çok önemli bir adımıdır. Bu süreç iç ve dış kaynaklı kanallar ile gerçekleşebilir. İçsel bilgilendirme kanalları tüketicinin geçmiş tecrübelerine ve bilgilerine dayanırken, dış-sal bilgilendirme kanalları tüketicinin problem ile ilgili dış çevresinden bilgi edinmesi anlamına gelmektedir. Yıllar boyunca, pazarlama araş-tırmacıları tüketicinin bilgi arama davranışını inceleyip, araştırmışlar-dır. Ancak tüketicinin ürün seçerken kullandıkları bilgi kanallarına duy-dukları güven düzeyi ve kullanım sıklığına yönelik olarak sınırlı sayıda araştırma bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, tüketicilerin satın alma sürecinde bilgi ararken kullandıkları bilgi kanallarını araştırmaktır. Tü-keticilerin kullandıkları bilgi kaynaklarına duydukları güven ve kullanım sıklıkları da çalışmanın odak noktasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tüketici, Bilgi Arama Davranışı, Bilgi Kanalları, Güven Düzeyi

Introduction

Information search behavior has always been in the spotlight in liter-ature about consumer behaviors because of its importance in the deci-sion-making process. Consumers' information search behavior has been studied for many years in both pre-purchase and ongoing search context, since it helps companies and marketing managers to understand consum-er purchasing behavior, especially consumer choice process (Newman, 1977; Punj and Staelin, 1983; Ratchford, Lee and Talukdar, 2003; Srini-

vasan and Ratchford, 1991; Bruggen vd, 2010; Elliott vd., 2012; Maity, Dass and Malhotra, 2014; Kallweit et. al, 2014; Sousa et al, 2015; Jun and Park, 2016).

Information search is an important stage of the purchase decision process for consumers to determine alternative brands in the market and to choose the best one among the alternatives at hand (Ulubaşoğlu, 2008). Due to this fact, the information search activities of consumers should be explored and understood in detail by the companies to develop effective strategies to influence the search activities of consumers.

Several studies have addressed the extent and duration of consumer information search behavior, how many and which information sources consumers use, and how much time consumers devote to each source when the goal is to purchase a particular product or service (Hauser, Urban and Weinberg, 1993). Although products are used across distinctive categories, most studies have focused on specific durable goods, such as automobiles (e.g., Srinivasan and Ratchford 1991), and electronics.

Given a number of existing research, one might think that the area of information search is well settled. On the contrary, some of the fundamental questions remain unanswered. One of them is consumers' trust level with the information search channel and usage frequency of these channels. The aim of this article is to present a perspective on consumers' trust in information search channels. In particular, the study examines the usage frequency of different channels according to different product categories (durable and non-durable). This study adds to the literature by investigating how much consumers trust certain information channels both internal and external and how often they use these channels. An attempt have been undertaken to analyze which channel or channels as a source of information have been chosen for different product groups. It is common ground that pre-purchase stage of consumer purchase behavior is of vital importance especially in multi-channel sales.

The study is structured as follows, next chapter introduces the conceptual background of the research by briefly explaining information search
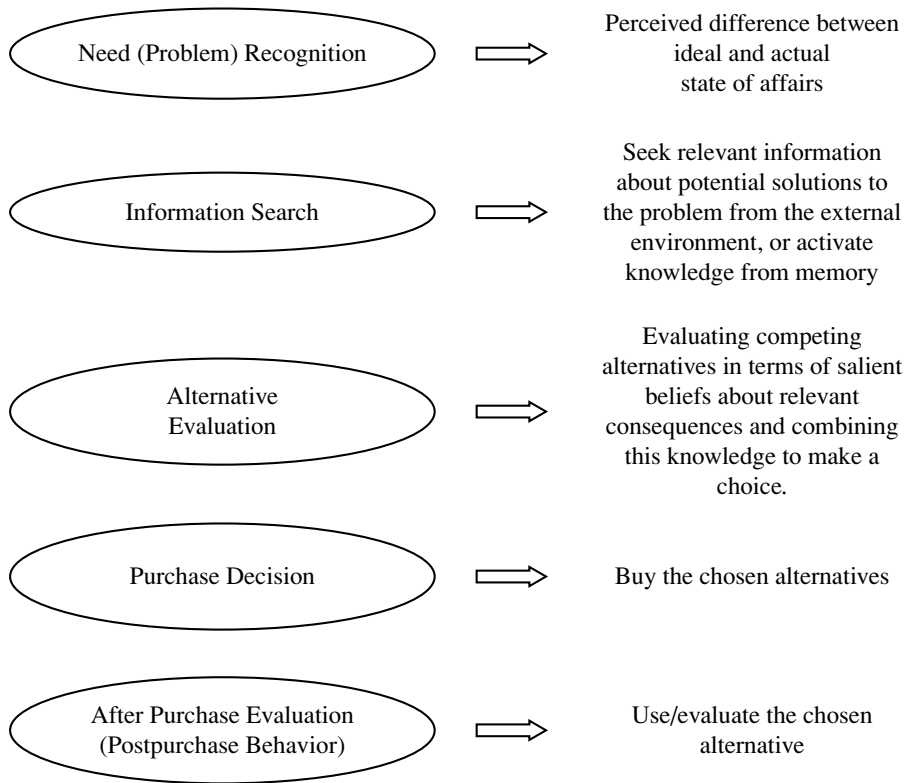
behavior of consumers, product types, and multichannel information search. Third chapter gives data about the methodology of the study. Then, findings of the study are presented. Final section discusses the findings of the study relating them to prior research.

Conceptual Background

Information Search Behavior

Information search is defined as the stage of the decision-making process wherein consumers actively collect and integrate information from numerous sources, both internal and external, before making a choice (Schmidt and Spreng, 1996). As Bagozzi pointed out, "more philosophical, theoretical, and empirical works are needed concerning the concept of choice. The choice is a central phenomenon for study in consumer research" (1992: 358). Information search is essential in making a wise choice.

Marketing scholars have developed a "stages model" of the purchasing decision process. This model implies that consumers pass through five stages in purchasing a product and each stage includes different subsequent decisions. Actually, consumers may not go through all stages; instead, they may skip or reverse some stages of the purchasing decision process. This model is valid in the situation when a consumer faces a highly involving new purchase. (Kotler and Keller, 2006)

Need (Problem) Recognition	⟹	Perceived difference between ideal and actual state of affairs
Information Search	⟹	Seek relevant information about potential solutions to the problem from the external environment, or activate knowledge from memory
Alternative Evaluation	⟹	Evaluating competing alternatives in terms of salient beliefs about relevant consequences and combining this knowledge to make a choice.
Purchase Decision	⟹	Buy the chosen alternatives
After Purchase Evaluation (Postpurchase Behavior)	⟹	Use/evaluate the chosen alternative

Source: Kotler and Keller, 2006, p. 191

Figure 1. A Generic Model of Purchasing Decision Process

It can be summarized from the model that through searching product information, consumers learn about the alternatives, competing brands, and their qualities. Especially during the information search stage which is the focus of this study, consumers develop an awareness set, then consideration set and finally a choice set which includes the most attractive and appropriate brands that can be evaluated to make a final choice. Thereby, it can be said that "information search" stage is the most challenging and the most important stage in the process (Ulubaşoğlu, 2008).

Consumer information search behavior encompasses what is termed internal information search and external information search (e.g., DeSar-

bo and Choi, 1999). By definition, internal information search involves memory and occurs prior to external information search. External information search refers to everything but a memory when searching for information. Although internal and external information search behaviors are conceptually distinct, they are related in that external information search is dependent on memory and the overall information search process is iterative. Unless a consumer is a complete tabula rasa concerning a particular issue or topic, memory must somehow be involved in any information search, and by necessity, must be the starting point for any information search (Bettman, 1979).

External information search can be characterized as consisting of (1) pre-purchase, goal-directed, or problem-solving activities, and (2) continuous, regular, general, or ongoing activities. Most researches on external information search have focused on consumers' conscious efforts to acquire information for specific purchases, with the general purpose of reducing uncertainty and risk. On the other hand, researches focusing on continuous information search have investigated information search as hedonic recreation or entertainment, mavenism and enduring involvement with a product or service (Trampe vd., 2014).

Information search behavior is grounded on economic foundations, in other words, the economics of information theory. According to this theory, consumer information search behavior is guided by a trade-off between the perceived costs of additional search and the expected benefits of that search (Stigler, 1961). In other words, a consumer engages in the active search until the perceived marginal cost of an additional unit of search exceeds the expected marginal benefit. The costs encompass both direct money outlays and indirect costs associated with the time and effort spent searching. The benefits of search include the likelihood of finding a superior alternative to those already considered and the reduction in risk achieved from eliminating inferior, but a priori uncertain, alternatives. Consumers also search for information before purchasing a product or service to reduce the perceived risks associated with the product or service (Rinjsoever, Castaldi and Dijst; 2012).

Product Type

Products are classified by the marketing managers in terms of some criteria such as durability, tangibility and purpose (Jun and Park, 2016). In the broadest sense, they can be classified as consumer goods refers to products purchased and used by consumers for specific purposes and industrial goods named as production or support goods used in the production of final consumer goods. Consumer goods can also be classified as durable goods and nondurable goods. Durable goods have a significant lifespan of five years or more. The consumption of a durable good is spread out over the entire life of the good, it needs maintenance and upkeep. Furniture, refrigerators and cars can be example for durable goods. On the contrary, nondurable goods consumed after short term use. Food, cleaning products and cigarettes are examples of nondurable goods. Even if classified as nondurable goods, clothing and books can be durable goods, if they are used and kept for years by the consumers (Jun and Park, 2016). In another grouping goods can be named as tangible or intangible. Intangible goods are services refers to the act of providing convenience to people as a commodity that are not physical object and only exist in connection to other things. Harker (1995), described services as 'something that you cannot drop on your foot', which vividly illustrates the intangible characteristics of services.

In the information search stage, consumers need more information for durable goods and try to deduce the quality of product from various source of information to reduce the risks. It can be understood that while searching for information about durable goods, consumers will use wider variety of sources compared with the case of nondurable goods. Since it is easy to get information about the quality of nondurable goods (Currim et al., 2015).

Consumer Trust

Trust is conceptualized as buyers' expectations that the retailers will behave ethically, fair, and in a socially appropriate manner and will not take advantage of the situation (Gefen et al., 2003). It is also defined as "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence".

Trust is an important factor determining the final purchasing decision of consumer. It also helps establishing relationship between consumer and retailer. A consumer is willing to remain loyal to a company or brand only if the consumer trusts the company and the risk and uncertainty related to the purchase are minimised (Walczuch and Lundgren, 2004). Trust can trigger increased purchasing to the extent that it reduces the complexity and perceived risks of purchasing. It is even more important in online purchasing since consumers perceive more risks in e-commerce due to theirinability to visit physical store and see the product before purchasing (Hong and Cho, 2011).

The trust level of consumers to the channels giving information about the product also influences purchase intentions. (Zhang et. al, 2014) Only if consumers trust a channel h/she feel free to purchase the product. In brief, trust increases the probability of purchasing. Providing information about most trustworthy channels by consumers, gives a chance to a company to manage all kinds of channels in the most efficient and successful way.

Search for Information in a Multichannel Environment

In a multichannel retailing environment, searching for information is even more of crucial importance. A large number of consumers are using variety of channels interchangeably in one purchasing process. They may use internet (online store) to search for the product or service, but they purchase it from a brick-and-mortar store. This switching behavior affects consumer's loyalty to one channel or store, consumer does not only change the channel, but also the seller (Chiu et al., 2011). Consumers may even refuse to use the useful information channel, because of the compulsion to use it, and they look for an alternative channel. In other words, if they are forced to use firm-preferred channel, they can show reactance against a certain information channel. (Trampe, Konuş and Verhoef, 2014).

Whether it is external or internal, all kinds of information channels have their own characteristics that make themselves more attractive to the con-

sumers. Wilkström (2005) pointed out that in the information search stage, some information can be more accurate or visually stimulating on one channel than it is on the other. It can be understood that the choice of channel is mostly related to the features of product or service. For instance, consumers tend to look for information on complex products online, but chose to purchase them after consulting with sales representative or getting advice from family and friends. It can be concluded that, in terms of multichanneling, there is no one and only information channel, all kinds of channels can be used by the consumers in one purchasing process.

In the pre-purchasing stage, filling the consumer with abundant information may cause confusion. The important thing is giving high relevant information to the consumer. For this reason, filtering the information may increase the trust and usability of the channel. (Kallweit, Spreer and Toporowski, 2014). The quality of the information presented by a channel means the information content of the channel. Therefore, the content should be clear, relevant, easy to understand, latest and complete. (Lee and Chen, 2014). According to Chang, Lee and Lai (2012) the quality of information is among the most important factors determining the quality of channel. Those qualities of information make consumers choose specific information channel and influence consumer commitment and trust. (Kim and Niehm, 2009). This situation can be explained by media richness theory. Media richness is an important channel characteristics and it affects consumer behavior. Media richness refers to channels' capacity to present certain types of information. Language variety, personalization, multiple cues determine the channel's media richness capacity (Maity and Dass, 2014). It is directly related to the trust and usage of information channel. Therefore, there is a need to understand the usage of these channels within the context of multichannel consumer behavior in order to keep up with the pace of channel development.

Aim of the study

As it is stated before, information search behavior has been analyzed based on the different dimensions in the literature. There are limited

number of research that focus specifically on consumers' use of multiple channels in searching for and deciding on products. In an early analysis, Peterson et al. (1997) conceptualized how consumers might navigate a mix of catalog, the internet, and traditional retail channels during various stages of the purchase process, including (a) the preliminary search for information, (b) subsequent search for more detailed information, and finally (c) product purchase. They projected what navigation paths across channels were likely for various product categories. The presence of multiple channels can help consumers efficiently shape their consideration sets early in the search process.

In this study, the trust and usability of the information channel analyzed according to the different product groups. Multichannel information search behavior is tried to be analyzed across different channel use with different product groups. From the past research it is understood that consumer channel usage can be motivated by product category. Six product categories food, cleaning products, clothing, durable consumer goods, and technological devices are the product types chosen for the study. These categories were selected based on their relative differences in purchase complexity, need for information and purchase frequency. While purchasing these products, which information channels are used and how often they are used by the consumers are analyzed. The trust level of the consumers to these information channels is also examined. The information channels given to the consumers within the scope of this study are commercials in televisions and radios, consumer columns in newspapers, advertisements in magazines and newspapers, Family members and friends, labels over the products, sales clerks, consumers' past experiences, consumer unions, brand shops, product catalogs, websites, noticeboards and leaflets, and sales points advertisements. By investigating above mentioned subjects, the relation between search behavior and product type would be also researched.

Methodology

Sample

This research was conducted on five hundred people living in a region connected to Ankara Mother and Child Health and Family Planning Center No.2 which is in Cebeci district. The neighborhoods such as Kurtuluş, Abidinpaşa, Demirlibahçe, İncesu, Topraklık, Sakarya and Gündoğdu were included in the study. These five hundred people living in these neighborhoods were selected out of 31 000 by random sampling. Having received written approval from the institution to which Mother and Child Health and Family Planning Center is attached, the institution's administration was duly informed and face to face interviews was made with the people.

Data Collection Instrument

The research is descriptive in nature. Data were collected via face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire was applied to consumers who were 18 years and older.

Previous studies related to the topic were used to prepare the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises of two sections. The first includes questions on socio-economic and demographic information such as gender, age, educational level, and monthly income, while the second section includes questions on the frequency of using information channels regarding product groups and the level of trust to information channels. Consumers were asked to indicate frequency of use the information channels by choosing "rarely", "sometimes, "frequently" and the trust level as "I rarely trust", "I sometimes trust", "I strongly trust".

Data Analysis

SPSS Win 15 program was used in data analysis. Cross tables related to consumers' information sources for purchasing a product and the frequency of using the sources were formed and chi-square analysis was carried out on the appropriate tables.

Findings

General Information on Consumers

As regards the consumers within the scope of the research, 53,0% are female and 47,0% are male. Those who are in the "18-24" (23,4%) and "25-34" (23,6%) age groups are in the majority with similar rates. Among consumers, 44,0% are graduates of "high school", 41,2% have "university and above" degrees and 46,4% have an income level of "1000 TL and below" (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of Consumers According to Descriptive Variables

Descriptive Variables	Number	%
Gender		
Female	265	53,0
Male	235	47,0
Age		
18–24	117	23,4
25–34	118	23,6
35–44	100	20,0
45–54	90	18,0
55+	75	15,0
Educational level		
Primary School and below	15	3,0
Secondary school	59	11,8
High school	220	44,0
University and above	206	41,2
Monthly income level		
Below 1000 TL	232	46,4
1001–2000	180	36,0
2001–3000	61	12,2
3001+	27	5,4
Total	**500**	**100,0**

Among the consumers included the research, the majority frequently seek information before purchasing food products (35,4%), technological devices (32,4%) and durable consumer goods, while they sometimes seek information before purchasing items of clothing (33,8%) and the frequency of those who state to never seek information before purchasing cleaning products is 29,8% (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of Consumers' Search for Information
Before Purchasing Product Groups

Product Groups	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Frequently		Very frequently		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Food Products	56	11,2	85	17,0	109	21,8	177	35,4	73	14,6	500	100,0
Cleaning Products	149	29,8	83	16,6	120	24,0	111	22,2	37	7,4	500	100,0
Clothing	35	7,0	101	20,2	169	33,8	132	26,4	63	12,6	500	100,0
Durable Consumer Goods	98	19,6	68	13,6	117	23,4	139	27,8	78	15,6	500	100,0
Technological Devices	37	7,4	56	11,2	106	21,2	162	32,4	139	27,8	500	100,0

This section investigates consumers' use of information sources while purchasing food products, cleaning products, items of clothing, durable consumer goods and technological devices, frequency of use and trust levels of these information sources.

Among the information sources used by the consumers while purchasing food items, "the food labels over the product" (45,5%), "television news and commercials" (44,5%), "past experiences" (44,4%), brands/famous shops" (37,2%) took the lead. (p>0,05)

The information sources frequently used by consumers when purchasing food products and the information sources which they trusted were the

same: "past experiences" (I use it frequently: 40,1%, I strongly trust it: 42,3%), information labels on the product (I use it frequently: 37,9%, I strongly trust it: 38,1%), and brands/famous shops (I use it frequently: 27,9%, I strongly trust it: 29,3%), respectively (Table 3).

Consumers mentioned "television news and commercials" as the first information source that they sometimes used (14,9%) and sometimes trusted (22,1%). Forty-five per cent of the consumers used television news and commercials while the rate of those who used them frequently was 24,1%, and the rate of those who said they strongly trusted them was 13,7%. From this regard, one might think that consumers act cautiously when using television news and commercials. As a matter of fact, television news and commercials took the lead among the sources used (5,6%) and trusted (8,8%) rarely.

Table 3. The Frequency of Consumers' Reference to Information Sources Related to Food Products and the Level of Trust to Information Sources

Sources of Information	Food Products													
	Frequency n=444						Level of trust n=444							
	Rarely		Sometimes		Frequently		X^2	I rarely trust		I sometimes trust		I strongly trust		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Television news and commercials	25	5,6	66	14,9	107	24,1	50,9	39	8,8	98	22,1	61	13,7	198	44,5
Consumer columns in newspapers/ magazines	12	2,7	13	2,9	13	2,9	5,16	4	0,9	14	3,2	20	4,5	38	8,6
Advertisements and notices in newspapers/ magazines	8	1,8	27	6,1	36	8,1	17,27	9	2,1	37	8,3	25	5,6	71	16,0
Radio news/ commercials	5	1,1	6	1.4	6	1,4	2,90	2	0,5	10	2,3	5	1,1	17	3,8

Family members who are knowledgeable about the issue	8	1,8	24	5,4	75	16,9	68,65	3	0,7	9	2,1	95	21,4	107	24,1
Friends who are knowledgeable about the issue	10	2,3	40	9,0	83	18,7	60,74	1	0,2	19	4,3	113	25,5	133	30,0
Information labels over the product	9	2,1	25	5,6	168	37,9	227,6	8	1,8	25	5,6	169	38,1	202	45,5
Sales clerks	14	3,2	26	5,8	25	5,6	4,09	8	1,8	26	5,9	31	7,0	65	14,6
Past experiences	2	0,5	17	3,8	178	40,1	289,9	4	0,9	5	1,1	188	42,3	197	44,4
Consumer unions	5	1,1	6	1,4	6	1,4	2,90	3	0,7	7	1,6	7	1,6	17	3,8
Brands/famous (familiar) shops	8	1,8	33	7,4	124	27,9	135,5	4	0,9	31	7,0	130	29,3	165	37,2
Product catalogs	7	1,6	28	6,3	43	9,7	25,15	6	1,4	34	7,6	38	8,6	78	17,6
Internet sites giving information about the product/services	12	2,7	15	3,4	27	6,1	7,00	8	1,8	21	4,7	25	5,6	54	12,2
Noticeboards, Leaflets, Posters, etc.	9	2,1	11	2,5	21	4,7	6,04	5	1,1	18	4,1	18	4,1	41	9,2
Sales points, advertisements and promotion practices	14	3,2	21	4,7	16	3,6	1,52	8	1,8	25	5,6	18	4,1	51	11,5

When purchasing cleaning products, consumers mostly made use of "television news and commercials" (44,7%), "past experiences" (44,49%) and "brands/famous shops" (42,4%) with similar rates (p>0.05).

In terms of frequency and trust, the information sources used frequently and trusted by consumers when purchasing cleaning products were "past experiences" (I frequently use it: 40,2%, I strongly trust it: 42,5%) and "brands/famous shops" (I frequently use it: 31,3%, I strongly trust it: 34,5%).

It could be argued that when purchasing cleaning products, consumers make use of their past experiences and shops/famous brands frequently and trust these sources. Nearly half of the consumers (44,7%) use television news and commercials and the rate of those who state to frequently use and trust it decreases (Table 4).

Table 4. The Frequency of Consumers' Reference to Information Sources Related to Cleaning Products and the Level of Trust to Information Sources

İnformation Sources	Cleaning Products													
	Frequency n=351						Level of Trust n=351							
	Rarely		Sometimes		Frequently		X^2	I rarely trust		I sometimes trust		I strongly trust		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Television news and commercials	12	3,4	51	14,5	94	26,8	64,29	17	4,8	69	19,6	71	20,2	157	44,7
Consumer columns in newspapers/ magazines	10	2,8	9	2,6	3	0,9	3,90	6	1,7	10	2,8	6	1,7	22	6,3
Advertisements and notices in newspapers/ magazines	13	3,7	24	6,8	18	5,1	3,30	5	1,4	29	8,3	21	6,0	55	15,7
Radio news/ commercials	11	3,1	11	3,1	5	1,4	10,70	6	1,7	17	4,8	4	1,1	27	7,7
Family members who are knowledgeable about the issue	6	1,7	21	5,9	85	24,2	94,30	2	0,5	3	0,8	107	30,5	112	31,9
Friends who are knowledgeable about the issue	9	2,6	34	9,7	86	24,5	71,76	2	0,5	11	3,1	116	33,1	129	36,7
Information labels over the product	11	3,1	24	6,8	77	21,9	65,48	4	1,1	24	6,8	84	23,9	112	31,9
Sales clerks	15	4,3	9	2,6	19	5,4	3,53	5	1,4	20	5,7	18	5,1	43	12,3
Past experiences	3	0,9	12	3,4	141	40,2	229,3	1	0,3	6	1,7	149	42,5	156	44,4
Consumer unions	8	2,3	3	0,8	4	1,1	2,80	3	0,8	5	1,4	7	2,0	15	4,3
Brands/famous (familiar) shops	13	3,7	26	7,4	110	31,3	111,6	8	2,3	20	5,7	121	34,5	149	42,4
Product catalogs	6	1,7	22	6,3	31	8,8	16,30	6	1,7	21	5,9	32	9,1	59	16,8
Internet sites giving information about the product/services	9	2,6	9	2,6	19	5,4	0,027	7	2,0	16	4,6	14	4,0	37	10,5
Noticeboards, Leaflets, Posters, etc.	8	2,3	13	3,7	12	3,4	1,27	5	1,4	19	5,4	9	2,6	33	9,4
Sales points, advertisements and promotion practices	11	3,1	17	4,8	8	2,3	3,50	10	2,8	17	4,8	9	2,6	36	10,2

In terms of purchasing clothing items, consumers ranked "brands/famous shops" (44,3%) and past experiences" (42,4%) as the first two information sources they used frequently (p>0,05), while they listed "past experiences" (37,4%) and "friends" (30,1%), respectively, as the ones they strongly trusted. Among the consumers, 57,8% made use of brands/famous shops while purchasing clothes; 44,32% frequently used it; however, 25,2% strongly trusted it and 28,0% sometimes trusted state that they frequently received information from the sales clerks, 12,7% sometimes trusted them and 4,1% rarely trusted them.

Of the information sources used by the consumers when purchasing durable consumer products, brands/shops took the lead with a rate of 57,0%, which is followed by friends who have related knowledge (43,4%), family members who are knowledgeable about the issue (37,1%) and past experiences (36,8%) (p>0,05). In terms of frequency of using information sources and the level of trust, the situation is similar. The ranking varies, but these 4 information sources are among those which are frequently used and strongly trusted. When purchasing durable consumer products, sales clerks are significant sources of information with a rate of 26,6%. However, it is noteworthy that the rate of those frequently using it decreases to 11,0% and the rate of those who stated to strongly trust it decreases to 8,7%.

Both in terms of frequency and trust level, friends (53,1%), brands/famous shops (44,7%), websites giving information about the product (37,7%), and past experiences (31,3%) are information sources used by the consumers when purchasing technological products (p> 0,05).

Discussion and Conclusion

Seeking for information related to consumer behavior is a popular research area in the literature due to its significance in the decision-making process in purchasing. Since the 1950s, many studies have been conducted on information seeking behavior in the areas of consumers, economics, and marketing. This study aimed to identify the information seeking behavior, information sources, and levels of trust to information sources

as well as documented useful information related to consumers, marketers, product and service producers and sellers.

Information seeking behavior can be defined as the consumer's research carried out in order to obtain accurate information from the environment and make appropriate decisions (Solomon et al., 2009). Consumer's information seeking behavior and attitudes is one of the most significant stages in the decision-making process. Consumers try to identify their needs, meet their demands and needs, collect information (internal and external), and evaluate alternatives during and after the stages of purchasing.

The majority of consumers investigates and collects information before purchasing all product groups with varying rates. The rate of those who stated not to seek any information before purchasing is 11,2% for food products, 29,8% for different cleaning products, 7,0% for clothing, 19,6% for durable consumer goods, and 7,4% for technological products. This shows that the majority of the consumers evaluate the information seeking process as a significant stage of purchasing decision making well. Cleaning products are among the products about which consumers do not collect any information; in fact, 30,0% of the consumers do not to seek any information before purchasing cleaning products. This might stem from the fact that consumers perceive the risk related to this purchasing behavior as low since purchasing cleaning products is a routine activity, prices of the products in this group are comparatively low, and these products are frequently used. At this point, research findings are supported by "the economics of information" theory devised by Stigler (1961). According to this theory, if the cost of sources used during information seeking (money, time, and energy) exceeds the benefit they receive, consumers terminate the information seeking process. In other words, consumers seek information more frequently in the case of complex products about which they have less knowledge. In fact, Hugstad and colleagues (1987) reported that as the perceived risk increases, consumers make more use of information sources. Accordingly, in their research, Claxton and colleagues (1974) proposed that product knowledge

would influence the nature of information gathered, the nature of the sources used, and the amount of information obtained. They found that if the consumers are familiar with the product they want to buy, they are less likely to search for information. In another study, Kiel and Layton (1981) supported this result by stating that a positive relationship exists between knowledge and search.

The information sources frequently used by the consumers are past experiences, information labels over the product, brand/famous shops and television news/commercials, respectively. As for the most trusted sources of information when purchasing food products, it was found that the situation is similar. However, these consumers do not trust the television commercials although they use them as information sources. For 24,1% of the consumers stated to use television news and commercials frequently when purchasing food and the rate of those who stated to strongly trust it is 13,7%. It could be interpreted that commercials are used as information sources in purchasing; however, they are not trusted because of the experiences after purchasing.

In terms of clothing, consumers mostly rely on brand/shop name followed by past experiences and friends' opinions as information sources. The rate of those who use information labels over the product is 20,0%, which is significantly high. It can be inferred that brand is a significant factor when purchasing clothing items as expected; nearly half of the consumers buy an item on the basis of brand, but the result is not always satisfying. Therefore, consumer trust cannot be established.

In terms of durable consumer products, the most frequently used and trusted information source of consumers is brand. Relatives and friends' advice is also a significant and trusted information source. In other product groups, purchasing on the basis of past experiences was more frequent, while, in purchasing durable consumer goods, the brand and reference group was more prominent. On the other hand, according to research findings by Newman and Staelin (1972), consumers buy durable consumer goods such as television, refrigerator, and washing machine on the basis of past experiences. When purchasing durable consumer

goods, 22,0% of the consumers stated to use web sites frequently or occasionally as information sources.

When purchasing technological products, friends are the most frequently used and trusted information sources. The internet sites which give information related to brand/famous shops are important sources of information when purchasing technological products. It could be argued that web sites are important sources of information when purchasing technological products and durable consumer goods. Fleishman, Hillard and Harris Interactive (2012), found that 69.0 % of the Internet users give feedbacks on brands, products, and services on websites. Thus, consumers use the Internet to obtain information to improve decision making. According to the findings of a study by Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) in 2015, the rate of internet users in Turkey is 69,5% and 59,4% of them use the internet to obtain information about a product or services. Klein and Ford (2003) stated that online information seeking behavior is replacing traditional information seeking behaviors. However, Bei and colleagues (2004) pointed out that there is a significant relationship between the use of online information sources and traditional information sources. Thus, online information sources are used by the consumers as complementary to traditional information sources to purchasing. (Bodur et al., 2015). In order to report more precise data, future research should investigate the use of internet in information seeking behavior more comprehensively.

Information seeking is one of the methods to decrease risk in the process of purchasing decision processes (Roselius, 1971). In addition, the type of the information sources changes in terms of perceived risk. For example, as the perceived risk increases, the use of personal sources increases, as well. In this regard, the perceived risk related to durable consumer goods and technological products is high, and therefore, the personal information sources (advice from family and friends) were more prominent.

On the whole, it could be argued that consumers' past experiences, relatives and friends as reference groups, brands/famous shops, television news and advertisements are important sources of information when

purchasing products and consumers are cautious about commercials and thus do not trust them. Primary mission of advertisements is to reach prospective consumers and influence their awareness, attitudes and purchasing behavior. They also make consumers aware of the existence of a new product, the advantages of the product, and more. With the rapid development of communication technology, advertisers are quick to devise ways of exploiting the medium for advertising purposes. They move rapidly to exploit the commercial possibilities of radio, television and cable. As a result of these developments, advertising is now less likely to contain meaningful product information, and more likely to be intermingled with other kinds of messages. Consumers, as the targets of these increasingly complex promotional strategies, must become much more aware of the persuasive nature of advertising. The advertisements should not contain misleading and deceptive information. In this regard, governments must keep advertisements under more strict control.

Another important finding is that for some products, the information labels over them (food and clothing), websites (technological products and durable consumer products) and sales clerks (clothing and durable consumer goods) are used as sources of information. Sales clerks are vital to businesses that provide products or services to consumers. These representatives determine the customer's needs and the items that are best suited to fulfill them. Sales clerks make every effort to satisfy the customer within the bounds of company policy. To help the consumers in a proper way, the sales clerks should be well educated about understanding consumers' needs and demands. They are expected to maintain a valid and good record about the products.

Furthermore, it could be pointed out that the consumer columns in newspapers, magazines, radio news and commercials, newspaper advertisements and notices as well as the noticeboard of consumer unions are not preferred, trusted and effective sources. On the contrary, according to the 'Financial Services, Media and Marketing Online Survey' made by the North American Tecnographics in 2013, consumers put high level of trust in consumer product ratings. The consumers also labeled "newspapers"

(46,0%), "magazines" (39,0%), "radio" (39,0%), and "TV" (38,0%) as "trustworthy". "Company blogs" (16,0%) is the most untrustworthy information source for the consumers. The product evaluations objectively made by experts in America may be the reasons underlying differences between results. In brief, for durable goods and items of clothing, sales clerks are frequently used and trusted.

The findings of present study can make retailers understand that consumers may use different channels on different shopping occasions, depending on the features of the product or consumers' needs. It is important for the retailers and marketing managers to place relative importance on all kinds of information channels and develop their multichannel information and retailing channels accordingly.

Previous studies have shown that consumers who have different shopping tendencies resort to different information sources. To exemplify, consumers who are brand oriented prefer commercials as source of information. Consumers are confronted with hundreds of new products each year. They use various amounts and types of information sources to reduce perceived risk, depending on the amount and type of risk. In this study, consumers' information-seeking behavior was investigated according to different product categories. Level of consumer trust in information sources was also analyzed within the scope of the current study.

This study enhances the current body of knowledge on consumer information search behavior, specifically the present understanding of consumer trust in these sources. Due to the purposive and small sample used in the study, the findings of the study are hence not representative. Again, it is hoped that this study will stimulate further scholar discussion about consumer trust in information sources.

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