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THE FACTORS AFFECTING CONSUMER DECISIONS IN THE OFFICE FURNITURE SECTOR

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Abstract

Office furniture sector is a sector where design has a profound effect on competition. Product ranges are continuously renewed by companies and presented to consumers through fairs and similar organizations. The success of a product is measured by not only meeting the needs of the user and fulfilling the usage requirements but the commercial success it provides to the company as well. Commercial success is measured by the meeting of the product with its users and the profitability it provides to its company during this meeting. At this point, it becomes important to know who is making the purchase decision about the product. While at home furniture sector it may be the product user who can directly make the purchasing decision, the one who decides to purchase the product and the product user can be quite different when it comes to office furniture. From this point of view, if one put a research on factors affecting the purchasing decisions for home furniture can focus on the user, in a similar study in office furniture, it will be important to determine who made the purchase decisions and establish the study in this focus. With this in mind, in this study, initially the decision-making groups about purchasing were identified. Following this determination, studies were conducted to explore the factors affecting the identified groups' purchasing decisions for the purposes of giving suggestions and providing information to consumers, sellers, manufacturers, designers, and researchers who are actively involved in office furniture.

INTRODUCTION

In the data of 2014, the office furniture made up of metal and wood constitute 10% of whole furniture production. This rate follows right after the proportion of upholstered furniture (10.2%) in furniture manufacturing [1]. Design input in furniture sector is higher than many other sectors and this makes the impact of design in competition maximum [2]. In this condition success of the product becomes a key factor and the success criteria of the products might vary according to whom they are inspected by. While users accept a product that meets their needs as successfully, company managements consider the products that achieved commercial success as successful. This makes designers to find themselves in complicated choices while designing successful products.

In furniture sector all purchasing processes can be carried out by the same person and also there is a possibility where each process can be carried out by different persons. According to Kurtoğlu, Koç and Erdinler, the user/consumer can be defined as 'the individual or group who carries out a certain action', while the furniture can be defined as 'the product used to increase the efficiency in the performance of living, sleeping, eating and similar activities'[3]. As can be seen in these definitions, the relationship between the user/consumer and the furniture is the fulfillment of furniture' main function. When it comes to domestic furniture, households can naturally be expected to play a role in all processes including the usage of it. However, when taking office furniture in to consideration, it can be expected that the processes will be experienced by different people in general by the presence of business divisions in companies.

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In order to figure out the definition of the procurement group for the office furniture sector, it may be important to take a look at the marketing channels and decide on the point of purchase group definition for these channels. For example, groups, that buy products into the office where they work, are located in the procurement status for dealers, and both dealers and related groups can be included in the buyer groups for producers. From this point of view, it may be important to decide at which point the marketing channels should start and determine the purchasing groups in accordance with this decision.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that there are many studies to determine the factors affecting the preferences of the users/consumers in the furniture sector. The success of the products in these studies is based on meeting the expectations of consumers, even if not directly expressed, and studies have been conducted in the form of investigating the relationship between demographic characteristics and preferences of consumers [4,5,6,7,8]. In a study conducted by Erdinler and Koç titled Consumer Preferences and Design Expectations in Furniture in 2015, the preferences of home furniture consumers were investigated but, unlike other studies, this study was carried out as company-oriented on designers working for companies [9].

This study differentiates from other studies so that it determines the purchasing group in the office furniture sector and investigate the preferences of these groups. In the study, it was aimed to evaluate the decision-making processes and factors through the purchasing groups involved in the office furniture sector in particular. As a result, it is aimed to present data and suggestions that can be used by researchers, designers, producers, sellers and consumers who are active in the office furniture sector.

OFFICE FURNITURE

Workshop-style companies were intertwining with buildings and served their surroundings up until the 19th century and branched out with the development in communication thus changed company profiles. The growing companies first turned into multiple-room offices and then into office buildings [10]. The change in technology and business world changed office spaces and this change in office spaces led to the emergence of different office types [11], such that Danielsson and Bodin described nine office types in their study [12]. While changing spaces bring changing office types, changing office types are expected to bring changing office furniture. The sector has grown with these processes, which means the need for office furniture and the need for the change of office furniture. In the business world, the number of white collars has reached or even exceeded the number of blue collar [13] also serves to grow. If we look at the size, in 2014, office furniture sector accounted for 13.76% of the total volume, with a volume of $ 50 billion in interior furniture, which had a total volume of $ 363.3 billion. The world's pioneers in the relevant sector are China and the US in terms of both production and consumption [1]. In the same year, according to CSIL World Office Furniture Sector Report, Turkey was in 11th place with a production volume of $ 823 million, 11th with an export volume of $ 181 million, 12th with a consumption volume of $ 709 million and 31st with an import volume of $ 48 million among 60 countries according to the world office furniture trade report [14].

It is emphasized that in the reports prepared for the sector by the office furniture sector that the development is achieved with design, the continuation of the development will be with design, and the target aimed to be acquired in the international competition can also be reached with design. [15,16,17]. In this sense, this study, which aims to present the data and suggestions that designers who are active in the sector can utilize, gains importance.

Determination of Purchasing Group for Office Furniture

The study focuses on the purchase and design preferences of the relevant groups when questioning the purchase groups' preferences. This is due to the fact that the purchasing preferences are the basic inputs of the designers and the designers are the ones who are expected to be successful in their products. In this context, it can be seen that the identification of the purchasing groups from the producer point of the sales organization may be correct. Beginning from the producer point, final consumers / business or government users, dealers, architects / interior architects / designers, salespersons / marketers, State Supply Office (DMO) are emerging as the stages in the relevant channels immediately after the manufacturer. In the definition of the purchasing group, it is considered that the salesperson/marketer group, who will work in the company of the related groups, that is, who will not be involved in the purchasing activity, may be neglected due to the ability to address the purchasing activity. The following represents the purchasing groups within this definition.

When starting from the producer point, the individuals and groups in the purchasing decision processes are divided into 4 main groups for the purpose of purchasing.

- Buyers to sell,

- Purchasers for use by the customer,

- Purchasers for use in the office where they work,

- Buyers for their own use

In order to make the statements of the groups more comprehensible, it will be possible to identify:

- buyers to sell as wholesalers and retailers,

- purchasers for use by the customer as architects, interior architects, and designers,

- purchasers for use in the office where they work as purchasing specialists and units,

- buyers for their own use as backers and company owners.

2.THEORETICAL METHOD

The aim of the research is to obtain and analyze data on the individuals who are actively involved in the purchasing processes in the sector. For this purpose, face-to-face interviews were conducted with randomly selected 62 participants. The factors affecting the preferences of the purchasing groups and the identification of the effect dimensions were determined before the interview.

2.1. Scope of the Research

The study encompasses the office furniture purchasing groups with different amount of incomes, educational background and reasons for purchase across different regions of Turkey.

2.2. Selection of the Research Area

The study was carried out with buyers who come from different regions of the country and have different demographic characteristics and as of the moment have the purpose of seeing or selecting office furniture. With this in mind, it has been concluded that office furniture exhibition organizations where purchasing-oriented people from different regions of the country can see the products of more than one company the same day where it is possible to create a research area for studies target. Upon examination, it was decided to carry out the research in the process of “İSMOB Furniture Fair” which is an important exhibition in the field of office furniture on the national basis. A survey was carried out in order to reach the purchasing units of government agencies within the research and it was found that many state institutions in Ankara have continued to operate in new buildings in the last 10 years. In order to reach the relevant purchasing units, it was decided to conduct interviews with the purchasing units of state institutions in Ankara.

2.3. Data Analysis

In the study, Microsoft Excel was used for the graphical representations and percentage distribution tables while IBM SPSS Statistics v25 was used for statistical tests.

Since the frequency distributions were below 30 and the analysis was based on the Likert-type questions, non-parametric tests were considered to be appropriate. Kruskal-Wallis tests were applied to the groups with 3 or more analysis bearing in mind the fact that “in a questionnaire formed by independent Likert-type questions, it is necessary to analyze each problem separately and to have non-parametric tests (mode, median, range, Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis etc.) [18]. For the analysis of multiple-choice questions, ‘comparison of column means’ and ‘comparison of column proportions’ tests, which are non-parametric tests that used for questions with multiple choices, were conducted.

3. FINDINGS

In this section, the findings of the study and analysis results are presented in detail.

3.1. Purchasing Group

The information of the individuals in the questionnaire included in the identified purchasing groups is shown in Figure 3.1.

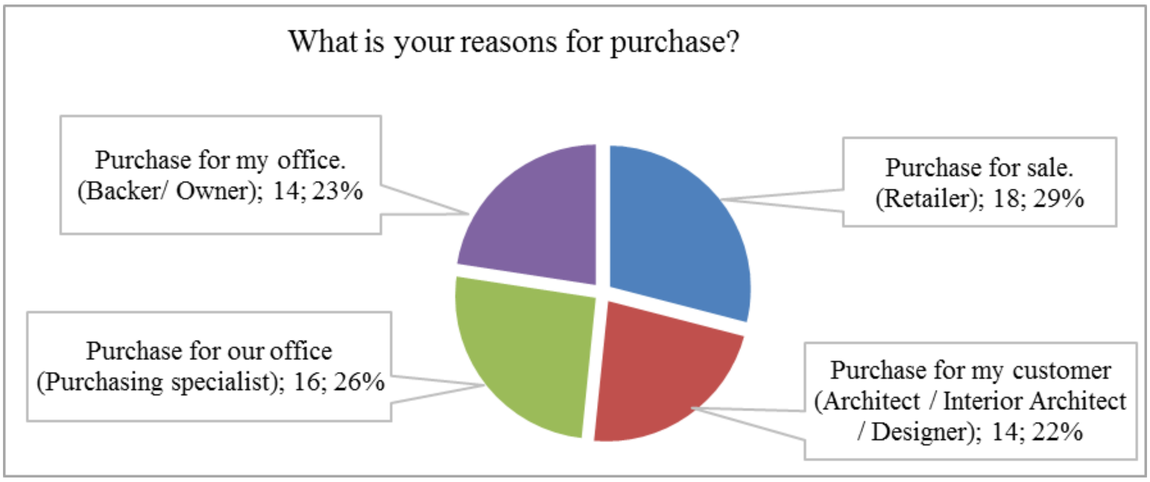

Figure 3.1. Distribution of participants by purchase group associations

As can be seen in the table, 29% of the surveyed individuals purchase furniture for sale (retailer), 22% (architect/interior architect/designer) for their customers, 23% (backer/company owner) for their office and 26% (purchasing specialist) for their office.

3.2. Factor of Aim of Purchasing

The effect of factor, aim of purchasing, evaluated on the office furniture style preferences, executive desk approach, brand preferences, trend tracking, evaluated for executive desks to be showy, to be modest and last whether or not customer sector affects purchasing decisions in the process of purchasing was evaluated.

Table 3.1. Kruskal-Wallis table showing the effect of the participants' reasons for purchase on their attention to brand preferences

Aim of Purchasing	*N*	Mean Rank	X^2	Degree of freedom (df)	*Asym. Sig (P)*
Purchase for selling. (Retailer)	36	65.19	7.588	3	0.055
Purchase for my customer. (Architect/Interior Architect/Designer)	28	68.71			
Purchase for our office. (Purchasing specialist)	32	67.28			
Purchase for my office. (Company Owner / Backer)	28	47.36			
Total	124				

$p > 0.05$

When a comparison made without differentiation between executive furniture and employee furniture, with 62 answers from both types, 124 answers comes in hand in total. Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate opinions about their attention to the brand in office furniture groups and the results are given in the table above. According to the test results, there was no statistically significant difference in the effect of the reason of purchase on their attention to the brand preferences. [X2 value=7.588, p=0.055>0.05].

Table 3.2. Kruskal-Wallis table showing the effect of the participants' reasons for purchase on their attention to the preferences for office furniture groups' being trendy

Aim of Purchasing	*N*	Mean Rank	X^2	Degree of freedom (df)	*Asym. Sig (P)*
Purchase for selling. (Retailer)	36	79.94	14.691	3	0.002
Purchase for my customer. (Architect/Interior Architect/Designer)	28	55.61			
Purchase for our office. (Purchasing specialist)	32	55.66			
Purchase for my office. (Company Owner / Backer)	28	54.79			
Total	124				

$p < 0.05$

When a comparison made without differentiation between executive furniture and employee furniture, with 62 answers from both types, 124 answers comes in hand in total. Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to evaluate the views on office furniture products to be trendy and the results are presented in the table above. According to the results of the test, a statistically significant difference was found in the effect of the reasons for purchase factor on the preference for the office furniture products to be trendy. [X2 value =14.691, p=0.002<0.05]. Data distribution is available in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Distribution table of participants' reasons for purchase on their attention to the preferences for office furniture groups' being trendy

		What is your aim of purchasing?			
		Purchase for selling. (Retailer)	Purchase for my customer. (Architect/Interior Architect/Designer)	Purchase for our office. (Purchasing specialist)	Purchase for my office. (Company Owner / Backer)
Pay attention if office furniture is trendy or not.	Never	0.0%	17.9%	9.4%	14.3%
	Some times	27.8%	42.9%	56.3%	50.0%
	Every time	72.2%	39.3%	34.4%	35.7%

As can be seen in the table, 0% of the dealers participating in the survey never, 27.8% sometimes, and 72.2% always, 17.9% of the architects/interior architects/designers never, 42.9% sometimes, and 39.3% always, 9.4% of the purchasing specialists never, 56.3% sometimes, and 34.4% always, 14.3% of company owners/backers never, 50% sometimes, and 35.7% always pay attention whether their office furniture is trendy or not.

Table 3.4. Kruskal-Wallis table showing the effect of the participants' reasons for purchase on the preferences for office furniture groups' being showy

Aim of Purchasing	*N*	Mean Rank	X^2	Degree of freedom (df)	*Asym. Sig (P)*
Purchase for selling. (Retailer)	18	37.06	5.240	3	0.155
Purchase for my customer. (Architect/Interior Architect/Designer)	14	24.86			
Purchase for our office. (Purchasing specialist)	16	33.94			
Purchase for my office. (Company Owner / Backer)	14	28.21			
Total	62				

$p > 0.05$

Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate the views on executive furniture groups' being showy and the results are presented in the table above. According to the test results, there was no statistically significant difference in the effect of the reasons for purchase factor on the preferences for executive furniture groups to be showy. [X2 value=5.240, p=0.155>0.05].

Tablo 3.5. Kruskal-Wallis table showing the effect of the participants' reasons for purchase on the preferences for office furniture groups' being modest

Aim of Purchasing	*N*	Mean Rank	X^2	Degree of freedom (df)	*Asym. Sig (P)*
Purchase for selling. (Retailer)	18	26.56	2.755	3	0.431
Purchase for my customer. (Architect/Interior Architect/Designer)	14	33.68			
Purchase for our office. (Purchasing specialist)	16	31.56			
Purchase for my office. (Company Owner / Backer)	14	35.61			
Total	62				

$p > 0.05$

Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate the views on executive furniture groups' being modest and the results are presented in the table above. According to the test results, there was no statistically significant difference in the effect of the reasons for purchase factor on the preferences for executive furniture groups' to be modest. [X2 value=2.755, p=0.431>0.05].

Table 3.6. Kruskal-Wallis table showing the effect of the sector the participants belong to or in which they purchase on their purchasing decisions

Aim of Purchasing	*N*	Mean Rank	X^2	Degree of freedom (df)	*Asym. Sig (P)*
Purchase for selling. (Retailer)	18	26.56	12.755	3	0.005
Purchase for my customer. (Architect/Interior Architect/Designer)	14	33.68			
Purchase for our office. (Purchasing specialist)	16	31.56			
Purchase for my office. (Company Owner / Backer)	14	35.61			
Total	62				

$p < 0.05$

Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to evaluate the participants' views on the effect of the participants' sectors or in which they purchase on their purchasing decisions and the results are presented in the table above. According to the test results, there was a statistically significant difference in the effect of the participants' preferences for the sector in which they are or purchase on their purchasing decisions [X2 value=12.755, p=0.005<0.05]. Data distribution is available in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7. Distribution table of the effect of preference for the customers' sector on purchasing decisions

		What is your aim of purchasing?			
		Purchase for selling. (Retailer)	Purchase for my customer. (Architect/Interior Architect/Designer)	Purchase for our office. (Purchasing specialist)	Purchase for my office. (Company Owner / Backer)
Does your/your customers sector affect your purchasing decision?	Yes	88.9%	92.9%	81.3%	42.9%
	No	11.1%	7.1%	18.8%	57.1%

As can be seen in the table, 88.9% of the surveyed retailers, 92.9% of the architects/interior architects/designers, 81.3% of the purchasing specialists, 42.9% of backers/company owners are influenced by the sector they belong to or they purchase in.

Table 3.8. Kruskal-Wallis table showing the effect of the participants' aims of purchasing on their approach to executive deks

Aim of Purchasing	*N*	Mean Rank	X^2	Degree of freedom (df)	*Asym. Sig (P)*
Purchase for selling. (Retailer)	18	29.61	3.997	3	0.262
Purchase for my customer. (Architect/Interior Architect/Designer)	14	36.50			
Purchase for our office. (Purchasing specialist)	16	26.81			
Purchase for my office. (Company Owner / Backer)	14	34.29			
Total	62				

$p > 0.05$

Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to obtain the views of the participants on their approach to executive desks and the results are presented in the table above. According to test results, there was no statistically significant difference in the aims of purchasing factor on the participants' approach to executive desks [X2 value=3.997, p=0.262>0.05].

Table 3.9. Table of comparison of column proportions of the effect of the participants' aims of purchasing on their preferences for office furniture styles

Comparison of Column Proportions		What is your aim of purchasing?			
		Purchase for selling. (Retailer)	Purchase for my customer. (Architect/Interior Architect/Designer)	Purchase for our office. (Purchasing specialist)	Purchase for my office. (Company Owner / Backer)
		(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)
What is your furniture style?	Classical type Furniture	C D			
	Modern type Furniture		.[a]		
	Hi-Tech type furniture				.[a]
	Low-Budget type furniture	D			
	Green type furniture				

Results are based on two-sided tests. For each significant pair, the key of the category with the smaller column proportion appears in the category with the larger column proportion.

Significance level for upper case letters (A, B, C): .05

a. This category is not used in comparisons because its column proportion is equal to zero or one.

When Table 3.9. is examined, it can be observed that the significant difference is between the classical and low-budget furniture types. According to the table, the surveyed retailers, compared to purchasing specialists and backers/company owners, have a high percentage of preference for classical type and again retailers compared to backers/company owners, have a high percentage of preference for low-budget type furniture. Data distribution is available in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10. Distribution table of the effect of office furniture style preferences on the aims of purchasing factor

		What is your aim for purchasing?			
		Purchase for selling. (Retailer)	Purchase for my customer. (Architect/Interior Architect/Designer)	Purchase for our office. (Purchasing specialist)	Purchase for my office. (Company Owner / Backer)
Classical type Furniture	Count	11	4	3	2
	% within purchasing aim	61.1%	28.6%	18.8%	14.3%
Modern type Furniture	Count	15	14	12	10
	% within purchasing aim	83.3%	100.0%	75.0%	71.4%
Hi-Tech type Furniture	Count	5	1	1	0
	% within purchasing aim	27.8%	7.1%	6.3%	0.0%
Low-Budget type Furniture	Count	9	3	5	2
	% within purchasing aim	50.0%	21.4%	31.3%	14.3%
Green type furniture	Count	5	2	1	4
	% within purchasing aim	27.8%	14.3%	6.3%	28.6%
Total	Count	18	14	16	14

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

Because of the multiple answer questions , the sum of columns & rows can be more than %100

Participants advised that they could choose more than one style because the aim is to understand all the styles they prefer. When the data of the surveyed retailers are examined, 61.1% prefer classical type, %83.32 modern type, %27.8 Hi-Tech type , %50 low-budget type, and %27.8 green type furniture; of the architects/interior architects/designers, %28.6 prefer classical type, %100 modern type, %7.1 Hi-Tech type , %21.4 low-budget type, and %14.3 green type furniture; of the purchasing specialists, %18.8 prefer classical type, %75 modern type, %6.3 Hi-Tech type, %31.3 low-budget type, and %6.3 green type furniture; of the backers/company owners, %14.3 prefer classical type, %71.4 modern type, %0 Hi-Tech type, %14.3 low-budget type, and %28.6 green type furniture.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In this study, which aims to investigate the factors affecting consumer decisions in the office furniture sector, data were obtained from the people who had an active role in purchasing processes and analyzed. According to the results of analyses,

- Of the surveyed individuals, it was determined that %29 purchase office furniture for sale (retailer), %22 for customers (architect/interior architect/designer), %23 for their office (backer/company owner), and %26 for their office (purchasing specialist).

- No significant difference was found between the aims of purchasing factor and the preference for paying attention to the brand.

- A statistically significant difference was found between the aims of purchasing factor and the preferences for the office furniture ‘being trendy. When the percentage distribution tables in relation to the obtained difference are examined, it can be seen that retailers have higher percentages than other groups in relation to office furniture’s being trendy. From this perspective, the necessity to follow the trends in the product development processes of a company that aims to sell through retailers arises. It can be seen that the effect of a trend-setting company on retailers can be higher.

- No statistically significant difference was found in the effect of the aims of purchasing factor on the preferences for the executive furniture groups to be showy.

- No statistically significant difference was found in the effect of the aims of purchasing factor on the preferences for the executive furniture groups to be modest.

- A statistically significant difference was found between the aims of purchasing factor and the effect of the sector to which the participants belong to and the one they purchase on their purchasing decisions. When percentage distribution tables are examined, it is observed that backers/company owners sector effects the furniture they choose in a lower rate compared to other purchasing groups.

- There was no statistically significant difference in the effect of the aims of purchasing factor on the general executive desk approach.

- Significant differences were found in the effect of the aims of purchasing factor on office furniture style preferences. When the tables are examined, it can be seen that the surveyed retailers, compared to purchasing specialists and backers/company owners, have a high percentage of preference for classical type and again retailers compared to backers/company owners, have a high percentage of preference for low-budget type furniture. When the percentage distribution tables are examined, the fact that the companies aiming for retailers should have modern, classical, and low budget type products in density order in their product ranges, that the companies aiming the architect /interior designers/designers should have modern type that the companies aiming the purchasing specialists should have modern and low-budget type, and that the companies aiming the backers/company owners should have modern type products will overlap with their target customers.

The user/consumer surveys of the companies operating in the office furniture sector will also help them to achieve their commercial success by adding the targeted purchasing groups. Designing products with a process during which designers work or design for these companies take this approach into consideration will help companies achieving the expected commercial success.

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