**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**

**BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY**

# HOW VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES AFFECT CONSUMER DECISION

**Master's Thesis**

**EMRE BAŞTAN**

**ISTANBUL, 2012**

# T.C.

## BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY

## THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
## MARKETING

# HOW VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES AFFECT CONSUMER DECISION

**Master's Thesis**

**EMRE BAŞTAN**

**Thesis Advisory: PROF. SELIME SEZGIN**

**İSTANBUL, 2012**

**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**
**BAHCESEHIR  UNIVERSITY**


**THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**
**MARKETING**

Name of the thesis: How Virtual Communities Affect Consumer Decision
Name/Last Name of the Student: Emre Baştan
Date of the Defense of Thesis: 08.06.2012

The thesis has been approved by the Graduate School of Social Sciences.


Assist. Prof. Burak KÜNTAY
Graduate School Director
Signature



I certify that this thesis meets all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of
Master of Arts.



Dr, Selçuk TUZCUOĞLU
Program Coordinator
Signature



This is to certify that we have read this thesis and we find it fully adequate in
scope, quality and content, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.



Examining Comittee Members                                  Signature____

Thesis Supervisor                                   ----------------------------------
Prof. Selime SEZGİN
Member                                              ----------------------------------
Assist.Prof. Ayşe Banu ELMADAĞ
Member                                              ----------------------------------
Assist.Prof. Gülberk GÜLTEKİN SALMAN

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# ABSTRACT

## HOW VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES AFFECT CONSUMER DECISION

Emre Baştan

Marketing

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Selime SEZGİN

June 2012, 84 pages

The objective of this stduy to understand the virtual community effect on consumer decision process. It investigates how consumers make use of virtual communities as social and information networks, and how this affects their decision-making processes.

Internet has caused an evolution in the world. People have adapted it easily and quickly, it became indispensable part of our life. Increasingly, consumers interact through the Internet to share their knowledge, experiences, and opinions. People can find almost everything on the internet, it is the one of the most important information source for consumers. And with the rise of the Internet, virtual communities have been used by the most of the population and very popular among consumers. People share their knowledge, experiences to each other by uploading text, picture and video within virtual communities.

Consumer decision process has four stages which are need recognition, search for information, pre-purchase evaluation and post-purchase evaluation. In this study, the determinant and effects of virtual community on consumer decision process explained. And also, relationship between four stages of consumer decision process and influencing factors of virtual community effect are evaluated. Besides, Key implications for managers, marketers, and market researchers are discussed.In order to gain data, the survey method has been conducted and survey was spread online.

As a result of the study, main findings are summarized. The most important determinants of community influence on consumer decision process are topical involvement, high or low involvement, knowledge sharing, opinion leader, frequency of visits, membership length. There is a relationship between them and community influence on consumer decision process.

**Keywords:** Virtual Community, Consumer Decision Process, Internet Effect, Social Media, Blogs

# ÖZET

## SANAL AĞLAR TÜKETICI KARARINI NASIL ETKILER

Emre Baştan

Pazarlama

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Selime SEZGİN

Haziran 2012,  84 sayfa

Bu çalışmanın amacı sanal ağların tüketici karar süreci üzerine etkisi incelenmesidir. Tüketicilerin sanal toplulukları bilgi ve sosyal networkler olarak nasıl kullandığı ve bu durumun onların tüketim kararlarını nasıl etkilediği araştırılmıştır.

Internet'in dünya çapında yarattığı değişim tüketici davranışlarını da etkilemiş ve tüketicilerin karar süreçlerinde bazı değişikliklere yol açmış. İnsanlar, internetle beraber değişen dünyaya çok hızlı ve kolay adapte olmuşlar ve hayatlarının merkezine interneti yerleştirerek onu hayatın vazgeçilmez bir parçası haline getirmişlerdir. Her geçen gün artarak, tüketiciler internet sayesinde bilgilerini, fikirlerini ve deneyimlerini birbirleri ile iletişime geçerek paylaşmaktadır. Internet tüketiciler için en önemli bilgi kaynağı haline gelmiştir. Internet'in yükselişiyle beraber ortaya çıkan sanal ağlar insanlar tarafından çok sevildi ve nüfusun büyük bir kesimi tarafından kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. İnsanlar deneyimleriyle ilgili metin, resim veya video formatında istedikleri her şeyi yüklemekte ve sanal ağlardaki arkadaşlarıyla paylaşmaktadır.

Tüketici karar süreci dört aşamadan oluşmaktadır; ihtiyacın fark edilmesi, bilgi arama, satış öncesi değerlendirme ve satış sonrası değerlendirme. Bu çalışmada, sanal ağların tüketici kararı üzerindeki etkisini ölçen değişkenler ve sanal ağların tüketici kararı üzerine etkileri açıklanmıştır. Ayrıca, tüketici karar sürecindeki aşamalar ve sanal ağların tüketici kararı üzerindeki etkisini oluşturan değişkenler arasındaki ilişki incelenmiştir. Buna ek olarak, iş dünyası, pazarlamacılar ve pazarlama konusunda çalışma yapan araştırmacılar için çıkarılabilecek sonuçlar tartışılmıştır. Çalışmada veriler anket yöntemiyle toplanmış olup anket internet aracılığıyla dağıtılmıştır.

Çalışmanın sonucunda elde edilen sonuçlar özetlenmiştir. Çalışma sonucunda varılan sonuç, sanal ağların tüketici kararlarını etkileyen faktörler konuyla ilgilenme, ürün alaka düzeyi, bilgi paylaşımı, kanaat önderliği,  sanal ağları ziyaret sıklığı, sanal ağlara üyelik süresidir. Bu faktörler ve sanal ağların tüketici kararı etkisi üzerinde anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sanal Ağlar, Tüketici Karar Süreci, Internet Etkisi, Sosyal Medya, Bloglar

# CONTENTS

## LIST OF TABLES

# LIST OF FIGURES

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Internet has changed the life of people and it will continue to change. It has been developing rapidly and affecting people's attitudes, behaviors and habits. People are getting used to living with the Internet and it has become the important part of daily life. Most people spend most of their time on Internet. It is almost an indispensable part of our life. People socialize in social networks, search online for gathering information about a subject that they are interested in, watch videos, buy something online both tangible products and services. They live online. Virtual communities are also part of this life. They connect people to each other around a common subject, interest or purpose. People share their knowledge, experience or build relationships with each other. Virtual communities are on of the informal information sources for consumers. Virtual communities have been significantly effective on consumer decisions. Consumer decides what to buy after the research through the internet since credibility of informal sources such as internet, reference groups, friends and family members is higher than commercials, advertisements. Credibility of informal sources is high because consumer perceives that there is no financial gain in these sources. When they perceive it as having no financial gain, trustworthiness of the source gets higher. Virtual communities are like reference groups. People ask other members of virtual communities that they perceive them as expert of the subject, search for other people's own experience, comments about products and after all these they evaluate conditions and alternatives, and finally decide to buy the product or not. When a product is initially introduced to the market people talk to each other on virtual communities such as forums, facebook and so on. They criticize products, share their knowledge that they gain from various sources. Besides, internet provides people to gather information from all virtual communities over the world. This shows the WOM effect of virtual communities.

Virtual communities are also important for marketers and companies. It is a new way to reach the customer, to attract their attention to the company or products. Strategies or ways for communication differ for each virtual community type.

Relevantly, aim of this project is to understand the relationship between virtual communities and consumer decision process. Also, it is explored how virtual comunities affect consumer decision process and which phase of consumer decision is affected more by virtual communities. In addition to that, the determinants of virtual community influence on consumer decision process are investigated. Virtual community is a rising topic on the internet and has many boht direct and indirect effects on consumer decisions. Consumers are influenced by virtual commnities since it has started to be on of the most important information sources for consumers, however, it is not known very well how virtual communities affect consumer decision,in which stage it affects more in Turkey. Thus, it was necessary to conduct a research about virtual community influence on consumer decision process.

Second chapter of this study defines virtual communities and, most commonly used types of virtual communities. This chapter also sheds light on consumer decision process and some concepts such as reference group effect, involvement theory, word of mouth effect, social identity, social self.

In order to gather data from consumers, a survey was designed and snowball sampling method was used to deliver survey. The survey was spread through the internet and social media. Thirds chapter, explains the research method, methodology, research model, concepts in detail.

After data gathered from consumers, results should be analyzed and in the forth chapter analysis method ,which are regression and T test,and results are explained. Regression is used for the scales that are not nominal, T test was used for the nominal variables.
In the last chapter, results of research was discussed and concluded with recommendations for future research, limitations and was ended with managerial implications. The results are aevaluated based on the marketing concepts and some recommendations are made for future researchers, marketing professionals.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW OF VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

The World has changed with the evolution of the Internet. It provides people to get together without boundaries of time and place. In the 1990s, the virtual communities exponentially grew through the rise of the Internet (Flavian & Guinaliu 2006). There are many definitions of virtual community in the literature. It is defined as "a place where a group of people drawn together by an opportunity to share a sense of community with like-minded strangers having common interest, is a large internet-based site offering a range of online services, including access to social environments, community services, municipal information, and e-commerce to its info habitants." (Nichols et al. 2006). It is also defined as a social community which emerged from the Internet when enough people carry on public discussions long enough and with sufficient human feeling to build personal relationships (Kim et al. 2004). It is also asserted that the virtual communities have relationships between people with similar interests and passion in a wide range of subjects. Relationships are formed by people who want to share their own experiences (Kim et al. 2004). An online virtual community can be defined as a new social entity that differs from traditional communities. It removes distances between people who are located in different geographical areas, besides people can share their own interests whenever they want (Flavian & Guinaliu 2006). There is no need to be in the same place and have physical contact. The virtual community should not be understood as merely a place where people communicate, but rather as a virtual place in which to share experiences and knowledge (Flavian & Guinaliu 2006). Virtual Communities enable their users to satisfy some of their needs such as;

**Sharing Resources:** Virtual communities enable people to share information on subjects, experience which they may be interested in. They can find solutions to their problems (Flavian & Guinaliu 2006). Social interaction among users is an important feature of social networks and it considerably influences the extent to which interpersonal knowledge sharing occurs. According to Chiu (2006), users interact with each other with expectation of some future rewards such as approval, status and respect. In addition to that, there are several tangible benefits for users that they could have as a

result of knowledge sharing in virtual communities such as enhancing reputation, achieving a sense of self-worth, enjoyment in helping others (Chiu et al. 2006).

**Establishing Relationships***:* In virtual communities, members can find and meet with people having similar problems and experiences. It allows users to contact other members, maintain those contacts and share online content and media with those contacts. In other words, people are inclined to develop social relationships with other people. They can meet other people (Flavian & Guinaliu 2006).For example, on Facebook people can meet with new people and contact them, they can share whatever they want on their wall. Their contact can see what they write on their wall, what they think about any subject, what they are interested in, what kind of songs they like and so on. Users can establish relationships as in the offline life.

**Living fantasies***:* Virtual communities provide their members to share fantasy experiences as in the case of multiple online games (Flavian & Guinaliu 2006). On most multiple online games, users create a character and play with this character. Generally, it is a character that has supernatural powers and try to complete missions that is given to them to move to upper levels. During the game, people express themselves with these characters and can meet people around the world, they are able to share same objectives in this fantasy world. Members of community are able to actualize their fantasy needs through supernatural world that community creates for its members. World of Warcraft is really a good example of multiple online games that enable their users to interact with each other.

**Trading:** With the increase of e-commerce all over the world, there are some virtual communities that allow users to sell-buy things. It enables their users to have economical transactions as in the case of auction web-sites (Flavian & Guinaliu 2006). For example, e-bay users can sell their used or new products online. Mostly, they upload photos of their products and reply questions of potential buyers. Users rate sellers and write comments about them, comments are very useful for other potential buyers to see whether seller is reliable or not. It is a trust network among users. Members of community can earn money through the community.

## 2.1 TYPES OF VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

Virtual communities include everything from discussion boards to massive multiplayer online role-playing games and virtual realities such as Second Life. There are many types of virtual communities such as;

**Communities of Transaction:** The main function of communities of transaction is to exchange. In the beginning, it was based on information exchange, but now it is based on transaction such as in the case of E-bay. Communities of transaction are different from other virtual communities in making it easier to buy-sell products/services and dissemination of information about products and services (Spaulding 2009). Participants are encouraged to do transaction. Information that is gathered from other community members to do transaction is used as an input (Uzkurt & Özmen 2006). Trust is the main issue in communities of transaction. It can't be exist without trust between members. E-Bay and Craigslist are examples of communities of transaction (Spaulding 2009). Gittigidiyor and Sahibinden are another example of transaction communities in Turkey. On Gittigidiyor or Sahibinden, members can sell their second hand products or new products by uploading photos of products and giving information about the product. Other members of the community can buy products from sellers. After the transaction is finished, buyers make comments about sellers in terms of quality of product and service delivery and rate sellers. These comments and ratings are significant for the buyer since it increases the reliability of seller and sales.

**Communities of Interest:** People have some special interests which they are passionate as an amateur or professional. These can vary from sports to entertainment. So, in communities of interest, members get together for a common theme, purpose or interest (Uzkurt & Özmen 2006). In some cases, people get together for sharing information about products or services. Members who create accounts to get information and never contribute to community may lose their accounts after a while. If a user starts a threaded discussion that is closely related o another discussion they are told to move their discussion to the previous thread. This allows members to answer questions in one place and reduces the complexity to gain the information. (Spaulding 2009). In addition to that, to increase the quality of information in the community, members give rates to

comments and can complain about deceitful information or members who use community for their own purposes. Moral responsibility which creates moral commitment among the community members.is fairly important on virtual communities. It encourages communal behaviors and enables stronger group cohesion. (Flavian & Guinaliu 2006). It also increases the quality and reliability of information disseminated through community members. There are moderators to organize these issues in the community. They reduce the negative contributions in the community. This increases the quality and reliability of community (Spaulding 2009). For example, donanimhaber which is a famous technology forum in Turkey, members share their experiences and knowledge, especially about technological products such as laptops, cameras and so on, and also members can ask questions to other members about products that they want to buy. It is not allowed to make deceitful comments about products in order to promote products. If a user is supposed to be promoting some products in order to convince other members to buy, he is banned from the forum in order to increase the reliability of forum. On Quora, members can ask a question and other members can share their knowledge or experience by answering this question. Members can enhance their knowledge or get some advises for free. On Quora, users are invited by existing users in order to increase the quality of the network.

**Communities of Relationship:** People want to build relationships with others and want to get together with them. This is a way of socializing. It emerges as a result of human nature (Uzkurt & Özmen 2006). Communities of relationship are formed by the objective of connecting people who are in the same situation for social contact and support . Communities of relationship generally focus on real-life relationships such as in the case of LinkedIn.com. However, in the last couple years, with the rise of the MySpace or Facebook, people develop online relationships with other participants who they have never met (Spaulding 2009). Social networks, a type of communities of relations, have been growing rapidly. MySpace was the first social network. The popularity of social networks has increased after Facebook, which was founded in 2004. Furthermore, Twitter, which was launched in 2006, is another type of social network (Silverthorn 2009). In social networks, people can follow their friends' lives, lives of famous people and share many common applications. The biggest discovery in social

networks is ability to load pictures. People can view each other's photo (Silverthorn 2009). Besides people write everything on their profile, make comments about each other. It is a sort of voyeurism. Social networks enable people to pry into other people's lives (Silverthorn 2009). Furthermore, people can build intimate relationships through these social networks. In addition to that, especially in twitter, diffusion of information is very fast. It increases dissemination of information (Silverthorn 2009). For instance, fire of Haydarpasa train station in Istanbul was announced firstly in twitter, people saw pictures of fire firstly in twitter. It was faster than the media.

**Communities of Fantasy:** Communities provide people to get together and discover new entertainment and fantasy worlds. These communities provide their members act as a different personality and having different experiences (Uzkurt & Özmen 2006). Users often omit or falsify personal information. They use different personal identity. Users of fantasy communities expect that they have to find something interesting or entertaining while they are spending their time (Spaulding 2009). For example, on Second Life, users live in a fantasy world by creating their virtual characters. Generally, they act as a different person from their daily life and can meet with other people, talk to them. Another example for community of fantasy is a multiple online game which is Knight Online. On Knight Online, members can create a character that has supernatural powers and fight with other members by creating teams in order to complete some missions and move to an upper level.

## 2.2   SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SELF-IMAGE

Identity is a definition placed on the self. People's sense of identity refers to your knowledge of who you are. Identity is always an answer of "Who are you?". Examples of identity components include being an employee of a certain company, a lawyer, a student, someone's nephew, a member of the swimming team and so on (Baumeister 1999, p. 248).

Identity plays a key role in virtual communities. Identity is also ambiguous in the virtual world. Many of the basic cues about personality and social role that we are accustomed to in the physical world are absent (Donath 1999, p. 30).

7

## 2.2.1 Social Identity

Social identity is defined as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain groups together with some emotional and value significance for him as having the group membership" where a social group is "two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves or which is nearly the same thing, perceive themselves to be members of the same social category." (Abrams & Hogg 1990,, p. 51). Social identity includes how we identify our similarities and differences to other known groups of individuals. Social identity is a continuous interaction between how we identify ourselves and how others identify us. Social identity plays a key role in understanding intergroup relations and relation of an individual to his or her social group.  Individuals have multiple social identities in a variety of social groups. These multiple social identities help an individual to adopt various roles and social contexts (Code & Zaparnyniuk 2009, p. 91). The various social contexts and relationships developed with the development of technology as in the case of virtual communities. Nominal identity is defined as "Who you believe you are" and your virtual identity is the experience of being that person. For example, a person can be a shy person in face-to-face meetings (nominal identity), however, when online he or she can present himself as having outgoing personality (virtual identity). Internet plays a considerable role in social identity formation and it allows individuals to explore their values and beliefs within environments that they perceive as safe. The anonymity of online interactions allow users to create multiple virtual identities (Donath 1999,  p. 37). It is mentioned that "Social and group identities are generally more powerful than individual identities and users in a community are inclined to go along with the group in which they identify. In the development of a social identity, the new group or collective identity tends to depersonalize the individual as being part of the group. Depersonalization make people adapt to group prototypes and behave according to group norms (Code & Zaparnyniuk 2009, p. 95).

The individual observes the situation and acts according to their perceptions; even if their perceptions are inaccurate. In the physical world, the body provides a convenient definition of identity. The virtual world is different. It is composed of information rather

than matter. Information spreads and diffuses among the members of virtual communities (Donath 1999, p. 35).

Reliability of community depends on the quality of information among the community members. You don't know the identity of members but you may know the accuracy and reliability of the member by regarding the information or knowledge he has shared. Trust in the shared motivations and beliefs of the other participants – in other words, their social identity – is essential to the community (Donath 1999, p. 41).

### 2.2.2 Self Image

Consumers have a number of images of themselves. These self-images or perception of self are related to personality which affects the buying behavior of consumers. Individual consumers have been considered to have "a single self" and it is supposed that they are interested in products and services that satisfy their singleself. However, researches indicate that it is more precise to think that consumers have multiple self or selves. It means that consumers are more tend to behave quite differently in different situations. For instance, a person is likely to behave differently at school, at night club, at work, with friends, with parents. They have different social roles (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 136). The self-concept is the individual's beliefs about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is. The self-concept includes many things that might not be part of one's identity. (Baumeister 1999, p. 248).

Consistent with the idea of multiple self-images, each individual has an image of himself or herself as a certain kind of person, with certain traits, habits, possession, relationships and ways of behaving. Individuals develop their self-images through interactions with other people. It inilitially develop with their parents and then other individuals or groups with whom they have relationships over the years. (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 136).

It isgenerally believed that self-images of consumers have an influence on their product selection. Consumers select products in order to preserve or enhance their self-images. They are sensitive that their selection should be congruent with their own self-images and therefore they avoid some products that are not. (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 136).

There are various different self-images that are identified in the consumer behavior literature. One of them defines four specific kinds of self-image. Actual self-image is how consumers in fact see themselves, ideal self-image is to how consumers would like to see themselves, social self-image is how consumers feel others see them, ideal social self-image is how consumers would like others to see them, and expected self-image is how consumers expect to see themselves at some specified future time. The expected self image is like between the actual self image and ideal self image. It is a kind of future oriented combination of "what is" (actual self image) and what consumers would like "to be" (the ideal self image". (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 137).

In different occasions, consumers might select a different self-image to form their attitudes or behavior.For example, with everyday household products, such as detergents, consumers are possibly guided by their actual self images, while for some products that are indicators of social status or socially conspicious products, consumers may be guided by their social-self image. When fantasy products are taken into account, they might be guided by either their ideal self-images or ideal social self-images. (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 137).

Possessions of consumers can be defined as confirmation or extention of their self-images. It is mentioned that possession can extend the self in a number of ways such as; a) actually by allowing the person to do things that otherwise would be very difficult or impossible to accomplish (problem solving using a Computer), b) symbolically, by making the person feel better or bigger (receiving an employee award for excellence), c) by conferring status or rank (status among collectors of rare Works of art because of the ownership of a particular masterpiece, d) by bestowing feelings of immortality, by leaving valued possessions to young family members (this also has the potential of extending the recipients' "selves", e) by endowing with magical powers (a cameo pin

inherited from one's aunt might be perceived as a magic amulet bestowing good luck when it is worn. ) (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 138).

Consumers sometimes wish to change themselves and want to become a different or improved self (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 138).

People create an account on the Internet, in a chat room, in a virtual community, on a free email service etc. In every account they create, they create an additional identity. Such identity is generally is the expression of the self. This identity may point to the real or may be away from the real self. It is mentioned that most people generally are inclined to create an identity that differs from their real identity. De' (2003) mentioned that there are two categories of expression of the self, which are revealing the real and eliding the real, refer to the intention of the creation personas.

**Table 2.1: Categories of instantiations of the self**

| *Revealing Self* | *Eliding Self* |
|---|---|
| Contracted Self | Anonymous Self |
| Mutable Self | Virulent Self |
| Reflexive Self | |

*Source*: De', R., (2003) Social Resistance and the self in Virtual Communities, *Ninth Americas Conference on Information Systems.*

### 2.2.2.1 The contracted self

It is asserted that online self is contracted, or is only a part of the total personality of the real self.
In face-to-face meetings, social information is exchanged which enables trust between people. In online negotiations, the self is guarded and withdrawn (De' 2003).

### 2.2.2.2 The mutable self

The self within the digital environment is mutable.In digital space, people have multiple avatars, multiple email identities, multiple identities in chat rooms. Most people, prefer

to reveal some part of their own personality, somewhat idealized self of themselves. Some users never reveal their real self. They use graphical displays for their self expression (De' 2003**).**

### 2.2.2.3 The reflexive self

The user is conscious of his or her projected image and chooses words and actions that confirm their constructed, reflexive self. This "self-consciousness" shows up in text messages broadcasted to groups, to chat room discussions and to website messages (De' 2003).

### 2.2.2.4 The anonymous self

Use of anonymous identities to protest and challenge authority are common on the internet. Anonymity allows people explore dimensions of their selves that is not possible to happen in real situations. It makes people act how they want. For example, many chat room discussions mainly revolve around sexuality and personal politics that enable participants to fantasize about sexuality and politics. It would not be possible otherwise. (De' 2003).

### 2.2.2.5 The virulent self

People unleash their vicious form of their self on the Internet. Also, people create virulent forms of themselves as avatars or players in multi-user online games. They act cruel in their play and project a devastating form that is totally opposite to their real self. (De' 2003).

### 2.3 VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES AND THE REFERENCE GROUP EFFECT

Generally, people give importance to the opinion of others while making purchase decisions. They talk about their purchase intentions to family members, friends and colleagues and may ask for advice. The prevalent use of spokespeople and service endorsements has an influence on information processing, attitude formation and

purchase behavior of individuals (Rao & Childers 1992). Consumers possibly are influenced while making decision since they interact and communicate with other members whom they believe have more information than them. It is possible that products and brands that individuals select can be influenced by their reference group. This is called as reference group effect. The reference group is defined as "any person or group that serves as a point of comparison (or reference) for an individual in forming either general or specific values, attitudes or behavior." (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 323). Reference group is a person or group of people that has effects on individuals behavior or buying decisions (Etzel & Bearden 1982). Reference groups are groups that give consumers a frame of reference in their purchase or consumption decisions (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 323). Reference groups can be individuals like friends, family members, classmates, local communities, sportsmen, celebrities and so on.

It is mentioned that there are two types of reference groups which are normative referents and comparative referents. Parents, teachers and peers are representative of normative referents who provide the individual with norms, attitudes, and values through direct interaction. Comparative referents, such as sports heroes and entertainment figures, provide standards of achievement to which individuals aspire and therefore, the individual is only able to observe the behavior of the referent and does not directly interact with him or her. The main difference between two types of reference groups is social proximity. Normative referents are socially proximal referents that are in the individual's immediate social network. Comparative referents are socially distant referents that are in the verge of individual's social domain. There is a considerable amount of interaction bevtween socially proximal reference groups, normative referents, and individuals, whereas socially distant referents allow less or no direct interaction (Rao & Childers 1992).

There are two dominant influences of reference groups which are informational and normative. Informational social influence refers to the tendency to accept information from others as evidence about reality. Normative social influence is defined as an influence to conform to the perceived expectations of another person, group, or one's self. The operational mechanism of these two influences differs. Message content,

source credibility, and trustworthiness are the major determinants of informational social influence, while characteristics of the referent, such as appearance and social status, determine the degree of normative social influence. When making purchase decisions, consumers are inclined to seek other people's evaluations of different alternatives or gain information from the brands' reference group members. Referents may provide new information to the solution of a problem or add what the individual already believes. The referent's influence is based on his credibility (Richardson et al. 1999).In general, reference group effect is expected to be higher in some cases such as; a) Relatively high desire for social acceptance; b) Less experience in the situation or with the decision; c) Public conspicuousness of purchase and use; d) Complex products and luxury items (De Valck 2005, p. 38).

Researchers have identified a number of different motives that may emphasize purchase behaviors. There are two kinds of motives which are cognitive versus affective motives. Quality, price, or the functional performance of products are important factors for cognitive motives. Affective motives are related to the need for self expression, social belongingness, or ego gratification. Informational social influence is more dominant than normative social influence in cognitive motivated purchases since there a need to search information related sources to product attributes such as price, quality, and value. Affectively motivated purchases are stimulated by satisfying social belonging, ego gratification, or self expression needs (Richardson et al. 1999).

The main difference between virtual and traditional reference groups is that participating in a virtual community is voluntary and conscious choice; on the other hand membership in traditional, reference groups may be imposed among other things, such as proximity of location. People are free to join the virtual community, it depends on members' choice. This can make virtual communities more influential reference group than traditional communities (De Valck et al. 2009). People participate and share their knowledge in virtual communities because of social reasons such as affective commitment, and group based self-esteem (De Valck et al. 2009).  People have specific reasons to participate within the specific type of virtual communities. So, money is not a reason to participate rather than sharing knowledge and experience in virtual

communities are the main issues. This increases the reliability of information in virtual communities because consumers believe that information in virtual community is not an advertisement or aiming to gain money. In addition to that, virtual communities have low entry and exit barriers (De Valck et al. 2009). If a member does not agree with the group norms, they can easily leave and join another virtual community. This provides people having opportunity to tell what they think, because there is no obligation and exit is very easy. Furthermore, in virtual communities there are some rules to establish and maintain an amiable ambiance in the community (De Valck et al. 2009). Community administrators or managers define these rules and are responsible for carrying out these rules. These rules include some standards regarding behavior, language, content, identity and commercial use and so on. (De Valck et al. 2009). Community members can report behaviors against these rules so that community managers' interference to stress these rules is not necessary. Many virtual community members actively seek information and advice from other members. The most important source characteristic is credibility i.e. the source's expertise and trustworthiness (De Valck et al. 2009). Receivers get advice when they perceive sender to be knowledgeable about a subject and free of personal gain. It is asserted that "online information produced by other consumers is perceived as more credible and relevant, and results in more empathy than marketer-generated information." (De Valck et al. 2009).

Generally, virtual community members don't know each other's offline behavior; they just have information about each other's sharing and knowledge on the community. It is stated that participants who are exposed to online discussions have more product interest than those that are exposed to corporate web pages. (De Valck 2005, p. 40).

## 2.4   VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES AND THE WORD OF MOUTH EFFECT

We need to focus on the way how information flows from one member to another in order to understand the real mechanism of interpersonal effects within the online environment.

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is the concept in marketing that is related to information flows between individuals. WOM is defined as "all informal communications directed at other

consumers about the ownership, usage or characteristics of particular goods or their sales." (Burgee & Steffes 2009). It is also defined as "informal transmission of ideas, comments, opinions and information between two or more individuals, neither one of which is a marketer." (De Valck et al. 2009). Body language, facial expressions, texts, audio-visual or interactive material may be considered as word-of-mouth, it is not only oral expression. It occurs when people talk about product or service characteristics or experiences of people with products or services (De Valck 2005, p. 42). The focus of word of mouth communication is the sharing of information regarding individuals' experiences with various products and services regardless of the form of WOM.

It is claimed that word of mouth has a more significant impact on consumer choice than personal selling, print advertisements and radio (Burgee & Steffes 2009). The sender, as the initiator of the communication can be either formal or an informal source. A formal source generally represents either for profit oriented company or not-for-profit organization, an informal source can be a parent, friend who gives product information or advice, sharing experience. An informal source is often perceived as more reliable since they gain nothing from the receivers' subsequent actions. The receivers have greater confidence in such sources (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 280). WOM is perceived as a relatively credible source of information and is an important source of consumer information. It forms the basis of interpersonal communications and significantly influences product evaluations and purchase decisison (Grewal et al. 2001). It is asserted that "WOM communications often have a strong impact on product judgments because information received in a face-to-face manner is more accessible than infor mation presented in a less vivid manner." (Kim et al. 1991). A personal information source is more persuasive in product evaluations than a nonpersonal source like advertising (Giese et al., 1996). The effect can be positive or negative. The effect of negative recommendation on consumer decision is higher than positive recommendation effect. Word of mouth recommendations can have a more impact on consumer decision process than advertising or other marketer generated sources. This is most probably because of the higher reliability of source, which is considered as not commercially motivated. The influence of word-of-mouth is strongest

with the high risk products, new products and intangible products (De Valck 2005, pp. 42-43).

In word-of-mouth process there is a mutual relationship between receivers and senders. Receivers gain valuable and reliable information about products or services and it helps receivers to make more effective and more efficient buying decisions, so they can decrease the risk of a new buying experience, decreasing cognitive dissonance, which includes doubts after purchase, and increasing the confidence of the product. Senders have some benefits from this relationship such as decreasing cognitive dissonance, increasing confidence in product choice by persuading others to buy it. In addition, advising others may affect feelings of power and prestige, increase their status and cohesion within a group (De Valck 2005, pp. 42-43).

Virtual communities can be considered as word-of-mouth communities. There are several receivers and senders on virtual communities. Individuals share their own experiences or knowledge. The effect of word-of-mouth communication within the virtual communities is related to both the structural and the interactional characteristics of the network. The structural characteristics have factors such as the size of the network, amount of connections between one person and all others, and the number of actual relationships relative to the potential number, whereas the interactional characteristics include tie strength. (De Valck, K., et al., 2009). Virtual communities have large potential; people can have recommendations from other members without any cost. Recommendations can be widespread quickly within and outside the virtual community network. It provides people money and time opportunity. Information about a product or service can be disseminated very quickly within virtual communities. For example, in a mail group when someone tells his/her bad experience, perception and attitude of members toward that product will be affected (Chevallier & Mayzlin 2006). Furthermore, in a forum, which is an example of communities of interest, every member can share their own experience about a product. People read it and decide whether to buy or not to buy this product. There is a famous forum in Turkey, which is www.donanimhaber.com, most people who are interested in technology follow this site to gather information about products they want to buy. Their decision and attitude

toward product or purchase intention is shaped by information shared by other users. It is maintained that there is a correlation between book sales and consumer comments. When positive consumer comments increases, book sales also increases. It is also asserted that online consumer comments are related to number of movie-going audience; even these comments are better forecaster of movie revenues than professional critic comments (Chevallier & Mayzlin 2006). This proves that virtual communities have a function as alternative and influential sources of information.

## 2.5   INVOLVEMENT THEORY

Involvement theory developed from a research called hemispheral lateralization. The basic premise of this theory is that the right and left hemisphere of the brain has specialty in the kinds of information process. The left side of the brain is responsible for cognitive activities such as reading, speaking and attributed information processing. It is mainly concerned with verbal information and cognitively analyzes the information through left brain processing. Unlikely, the right hemisphere is concerned with nonverbal, timeless, pictorial information. The right brain is emotional, metaphoric, impulsive and intuitive; on the other hand, the left brain is rational, active, and realistic (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 215).

There are some purchase situations that there is no need for extensive information processing and evaluation. Such purchases are considered of minimal personal relevance.  Purchases of minimum personal importance are called low involvement purchases, besides complex, search oriented purchases are considered high involvement purchases (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 216).

It is mentioned that passive learning is thought to occur through repeated exposures to a TV commercial, and information is processed on the right side of the brain. It is a simple information processing and is a low involvement information processing. On the other hand, cognitive (verbal) information is processed on the left side of the brain, it is a complex information processing and is depicted as high involvement information processing (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 217).

It is maintained that there are low and high involved consumers, and also there are low and high involvement purchases. This led us to the notion that a consumer's level of involvement depends on the degree of personal relevance that the product holds for the consumer. This means that high involvement purchases are those that are very important to the consumers (in terms of perceived risk) and this stimulates extended information search and problem solving. Buying an automobile is an example of high involvement purchase because of high perceived financial risk. Low involvement purchases are purchases that are not very important to consumers, has little relevance and low perceived risk. Therefore, there is a need to limited information search and processing for low involvement purchases (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, pp. 218-219).

Giese et al. (1996) stated that high involvement consumers strongly hold needs, values and interests, on the contrary, low involvement consumers weakly hold (or nonexistent needs, values and interests. For the low involvement consumers, brands in a product category are perceived as nondifferentiated, there are acceptable substitutes (Giese et al., 1996). As a consequence, involvement plays a significant role in consumer decision process. The need for information search is higher for high involvement consumers, they spend considerable time and effort for buying. For example, there are two consumers. One of them wants to buy a car and other one wants to buy shampoo. A consumer who wants to buy a car searches more on the internet, however, almost nobody searches on the internet but goes to a supermarket, picks a brand which he is familiar with.In general, buying a car is much more difficult and riskier for consumers. Therefore, in order to decrease doubts about the purchase, consumers may ask friends, post a question in a virtual community. As a result of that, the degree of involvement is positively related to the influence of community on consumer decision process.

**Table 2.2: Consumer buying behavior in high and low involvement product**

| Behavior | High involvement | Low involvement |
|---|---|---|
| *Time invested* | Large amount | Small amount |
| *Information search* | Active | Little or none |
| *Response to information* | Critically evaluate | Ignore or accept without evaluation |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Brand evaluation* | Clear and distinct | Vague and general |
| *Likelihood of brandloyalty developing* | Strong | Weak |

Source: http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Journal-International-Business-Economics/243876918.html

## 2.6 CONSUMER DECISION PROCESS

Consumers often face a large number of alternatives, which are constantly changing due to new technologies and competition in the market. There is a great deal of information from various sources and consumers make decisions based on information or prior experiences on their own (Bettman et al. 1991,, p. 53). Consumers follow decision making process in order to choose an alternative that best satisfies their needs considering some constraints such as budget, time and effort. The process is typically composed of five steps including problem recognition (need recognition), information search (prepurchase search), evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-post purchase evaluation (Moon 2004).

When consumers face a problem, they recognize their needs. There are different needs or recognition styles for consumers which are actual state types or desired state types. Actual state types refers to consumers who perceive that they have a problem when performance of the product is low. In contrast, desired state types occur for consumers who want to try something new that triggers the decision process (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 566).

After recognition of the need, information search or prepurchase search begins for the consumers who perceive a need that might be satisfied by the purchase and consumption of a product. Consumers store their experiences in their long term memory and may recall their previous experiences as an information search. Past experiences are such a reference for them. It might provide adequate information. On the other hand, if a consumer hasn't had a prior experience, he may be involved in an extensive search for adequate information. Generally, consumers start to search their memories before seeking external sources of information based on a given consumption need. Consumer

decisions are mainly based on a combination of both sources, internal and external sources. Researches show that there is positive correlation between the external search effort and consumer attitude toward shopping. If the effort increases, attitudes of consumer toward shopping became more positive. People might use personal information sources such as asking friends, co-workers, relatives (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 568). For instance, a consumer may ask a close friend about which attributes are important to consider for a given product but may also gather complementary information from other information sources such as advertising, store visit, and salespeople in order to determine the pertinent product attributes to consider (Nantel et al. 2003) Internet is another source to get information from a variety of sources very quickly and efficiently.

 The Internet provides many opportunities for consumers to access consumption related information more quickly and efficiently. It saves time, effort and monetary cost for information search. Considering the diffusion of information through the internet and members of virtual communities, consumers are overloaded by information (Moon 2004).

After the information search, consumers define their alternatives and evaluate them. While evaluating alternatives, consumers are inclined to use two types of information: a brand list including brands which consumers tend to make their selection (the Evoked Set), the criteria that they are going to use in order to evaluate each brand.

Choosing from a sample of possible brands is one of the human characteristics that enables making decision process simple. Evoked set, within the context of consumer decision, refers to the specific brands a consumer takes into account while making a purchase within a particular product category. Evoked set includes the small number of brands and consumers are familiar with these brands through their experiences and they find them acceptable (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 570-571).

The output of the consumer decision making model consists of two closely related kinds of postdecision activity which are purchase behavior and post purchase evaluation. The

aim of both activities is to increase the customer satisfaction with his purchase (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 581).

Consumers generally make three types of purchases which are trial purchases, repeat purchases and long-term commitment purchases. If the consumers buy something for the first time, they probably buy a smaller quantity than usual in order to try the product. Consumers attempt to evaluate the product that they are not familiar with through direct use. If consumers are satisfied by the trial more than other brands, they tend to repeat the purchase (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 581)

As consumers use a product, they evaluate their performance regarding their expectations. There are three possible outcomes of these evaluations: a) Actual performance meets the expectations, a neutral feeling occurs, b) Performance is more than expectations, causing what is known as positive disconfirmation of expectations (it leads to satisfaction), c) Performance is lower than expectations, causing negative disconfirmation of expectations.

Consumers are inclined to analyze their experience based on their expectations when performing postpurchase evaluation. One of the important components of postpurchase evaluation is the reduction of uncertainty or doubt about their selection. As part of the postpurchase evaluation, consumers try to relieve themselves that their selection is a wise one. They make an effort to reduce postpurchase cognitive dissonance. They follow some strategies to reduce postpurchase cognitive dissonance such as; searching for advertisement that support their choice and avoiding advertisements of competitive brands, trying to persuade friends or neighbors to buy the same brand, finding other owners for reassurance (Schiffman & Kanuk 1997, p. 582).

**Table 2.3: Consumer decision process**

## 2.7   SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Virtual communities are part of our life and used for are used for different purposes. People share their experience, knowledge on virtual communities with other members and use it as information provider. These type of virtual communities are called as communities of interest. Besides, on communities of relationships, people can build social relationships, meet with people having the same interests and similar problems. In addition, people can make their fantasies real on virtual communities, for example on online games they are able to have supernatural powers. These type of communities are called as communities of fantasy. People also can use virtual communities for their commercial purposes. They can sell and buy on aucition websites which is a communities of transaction.

Identity and self-image has an important role in virtual communities. If people are encourage to express their real identity on virtual communities, the reliability of virtual communities possibly increases. In addition, self image on virtual community affects sharing motivation of people. They can try to act as a different person on virtual communities by sharing information with other and try to be considered as a different person who they like to be.

 Virtual communities are a kind of information provider for consumers. It is has a reference group effect on consumer decision process. People make their decisions based

on the information they retrieve from virtual communities. There are some members who are considered as an expert on a specific topic on virtual communities. In order to increase the reliability of virtual communities, they have some rules. Community administrators try to have establish standards of virtual communities. There are some reasons of participation and sharing of people on virtual communities such as affective commitment, and group based self-esteem. There is no financial motivation to participate to virtual communities. As a result of that, the trustworthiness of virtual communities increases.

In addition to reference group effect, virtual communities have word-of-mouth effect on consumption decisions. Friends, relatives and people from consumers' network are considered as more reliable information sources than advertising and other communication tools of companies. Virtual community network is considered as a more reliable information provider than companies, since it is like getting information from your friends and relative. Since, as in the case of your friends, there is no financial gain of people on virtual communities. So, virtual communities are a kind of word-of-mouth communities.

There are some purchases called as high involvement purchases and low involvement purchases. High involvement purchases include more personal relevance than low involvement purchases. Generaally, high involvement purchases are more complex, search oriented purchases and consumers need information more, as a result of that high involvement products trigger consumers to search information about products. Mostly, they are riskier products in terms of perceived risk of consumers. Virtual communities have an important role on consumption of high involvement products, since it provides information to consumers for high involvement products.

Consumer decision process has five stages which are need recognition, search for information, pre-purchase evaluation, purchase and post-purchase evaluation. Consumer decision process starts when consumers recognize their needs, after that they want to find some information about the product. Then, they define their choices and evaluate their options. After the evaluation phase, they decide which product is the best option

for them. They buy the product and evaluate the result of their consumption. This is called as post-purchase evaluation. Satisfaction of their consumption occurs in that phase.

Virtual communities have some effects on the consumer decision process. Consumers use virtual communities in different stages of consumer decision process.

## 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 AIM AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Over the past 20 years, Internet has become a major phenomena and is an important issue for marketers. With the rise of the Internet, virtual communities have emerged and have a considerable effect on marketing. Although, there has been an increasing interest in virtual communities, few studies specifically examined the role of virtual communities.

The aim of this research is to investigate how virtual communities affect consumer decision process. It is explored in what respect existing theories can be extended from traditional context to the computer mediated context of virtual communities. The effect of community influence on the various phases of consumer decision process is explored in this study.

A questionnaire was designed to collect data. Data collection took place on online environment since the objective of the research is to investigate the effects of virtual communities on consumer buying decision process. The survey method was used to obtain data to examine the determinants and effects of community influence on the consumer decision process. The questionnaire was electronically designed by means of standard software that ensured an easy-to-access survey site and an easy-to-navigate survey interface (surveymonkey.com). Respondents could fill out the questionnaire online; their answers were directly saved in a data file. The survey has been online for six weeks from the February to March 2012. Elimination of respondent entries because of missing data was necessary. Since all respondents did not fully completed the survey, even though respondents were prompted by the Web server to complete omitted items.

Snowball sampling method which is applied for rare phenomena, since membership on online communities, although significantly increasing, is not universal in the population and it is easy to contact people within online environment by using snowball sampling method. The URL of survey was delivered randomly through social media and mail groups. The prospective research population is participants in virtual communities in

general in Turkey. Participants are instructed to base their responses on the one virtual community they are most actively involved with.

## 3.2 MODEL AND THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this century, consumers' decision process has changed and it is easy for consumers to find all types of information about products or services on the internet. As a result of that, virtual communities have impact on consumer decisions. Virtual communities have some effects on consumer decision process, which is shown below. Virtual community membership may influence each phase of the consumer decision process. These phases are need recognition, search for information, prepurchase evaluation and post-purchase evaluation. In the context of virtual communities, community members share information and experience about a product or service.

The information or experience about a product or service shared within virtual community members may stimulate members to be involved in consumption activities. Extended knowledge and increased expertise within virtual community encourages consumers to seek more information and enable them to make more informed purchase decisions (De Valck 2005, p. 71). Community members are able to post requests for specific information. They can also participate within discussions about their topic of interest to increase their knowledge, can share knowledge about what they find interesting or useful. Consumers use online communities as a search tool for information.

The next step in the decision process is to make choice among possible alternatives. This is done by evaluation of possible options by regarding expected benefits. Virtual communities enable consumers to narrow their consideration set. Consumers who use the specialized knowledge of other virtual community members are better able to define their expectations of the products or services and evaluate them based on their needs. In the post-purchase evaluation, consumers may feel positively or negatively confirmed or disconfirmed. Companies stimulate people to buy products or services and increase their expectation from it. However, it may decrease satisfaction in the post purchase evaluation because of high expectation that is set by the company. Virtual communities

have a significant role in post purchase evaluation, since consumers have more realistic information through the information that is spread within the community. Community members share their own experience by discussing both advantages and disadvantages. As a result, other members who tend to buy it, have more accurate information and lower their expectation by more realistic information. It may also reduce cognitive dissonance, and doubts after purchase (De Valck 2005, pp. 72-73).

Theoretically, there are a lot of variables that have been identified that may be related to community influence on the consumer decision process. It is asserted that membership characteristics, community interaction characteristics and general consumer characteristics are the variables that are associated with the influence of virtual communities on the consumer decision process (De Valck et al. 2009).

### 3.2.1    Membership Characteristics

Membership characteristic is important for the impact of virtual communities on consumer decision process. The membership characteristics consist of variables that are; topical and social involvement, high and low involvement, and length of membership.

### 3.2.1.1 Topical involvement

It is supposed that virtual community members differ in their involvement in the community's topic of interest and their involvement in the social relationships among the members. Highly involved members have more tendency to be interested in consumption activities that community concentrates on. Supposedly, they have more experiences with these consumption activities and also have more knowledge about products and services. The virtual community includes profound knowledge and experiences for topically involved members who are able to satisfy their demand of information. They have joined the virtual community with the aim of increasing their knowledge, sharing experiences or expressing their interest in the community's topic. Therefore, topical involvement affects the receptiveness to the exchange of information or online communication about the related consumption activities within the

community. It is expected that topically involved members are influenced by the community during their decision making process (Valck, K., 2005, p. 75).

*H1    There is positive relationship between topical involvement and virtual community influence on the consumer decision process.*

### 3.2.1.2 Social involvement

Involvement in the social relations among virtual community members is conceptualized in terms of tie strength. Tie strength is related to the degree of homophily between members, the degree of similarity, familiarity and likeability. Members who think of one another is quite similar become familiar and are inclined to like each other. Thereby, the degree of influence on each other increases (Valck, K., 2005, p. 76).

A person joins a virtual community voluntarily with the aim of sharing interest and knowledge with like-minded people. If a person does not like the environment of virtual community as expected, it is easy to quit and switch to another community. Therefore, members, who are engaged in the social unity of the virtual community, tend to maintain strong, friendly ties with other members. As a result of that, they are affected more and take community information into account when making purchase or consumption decisions (Valck, K., 2005, p. 76).

*H2    There is a relationship between social involvement and virtual community influence on the consumer decision process.*

### 3.2.1.3 High and low involvement

Involvement is a factor that affects receptiveness and information search of consumers. When services or products are highly involved or complex, opinions of other people is more effective on consumer buying decision. If a product or service is highly involved, people need more information from various sources. Consumer's own knowledge and interest in a particular product or service stimulates the need to search for outside

information and input for risky products such as high involvement products or services. (Park et al. 2010). For example, it is stated that a personal computer is a high involvement product and shoe is low involvement product (Saffu & Scott 2009). When you are buying a personal computer, you may need more information than buying shoe. Therefore, it is expected that in high involved products consumers are more affected by virtual communities while making purchase decisions.

*H3     There is a positive relationship between involvement and effect of virtual community influence on consumer decision process.*

### 3.2.1.4 Membership length

When people first enter a virtual community, they don't have enough information about the environment, the other members and the rules of the game. Therefore, in the first stages of membership, members are involved in informational and instrumental activities, whereas, in later stages, they may become more engaged in building intimacy and relational cohesiveness (De Valck et al. 2009). As a result of that, virtual community may be more affective in purchase decision-making process of more experienced members.

As the time goes on and with the expansion of the community, core group who started the community loses interest when too many members join. These pioneers start to leave the community. Their membership was more informational and instrumentally oriented in the beginning. Therefore, it is mentioned that community influence tend to increase at first, however it decreases over time. In addition to that, length of membership influences the needs for information of the member. The more the length of membership is the more knowledged members, since the knowledge of members increase over time in the community through discussions, information or experiences shared by other members.

*H4     There is a relationship between membership length and community influence on the consumer decision process.*

### 3.2.2 Community Interaction Characteristics

In addition to membership characteristics, we also consider how members actually use their membership, community interaction also affects their consumer decision process. Community interaction characteristics include some variables such as frequency of visits, duration of visits, and extents to which members retrieve information and interaction with others.

### 3.2.2.1 Frequency and duration of visits

Frequency and duration of visits have an impact on consumer decision. Regular and extended visits to the virtual community mean a high level of exposure to information and communication within the community. Members who engage in frequent or longer community visits are more inclined to be affected than members who engage in occasional or shorter visits. If consumers are exposed to information regularly and repetitively, even they are not searching for information, it increases the learning and recalling of information (De Valck et al. 2009).

Strong tie sources increases word-of-mouth and reference group effect on consumer decision process. Strong tie depends on the combination of the amount of time, emotional intensity and intimacy. It is asserted that if someone visits the community more and spends more time during each visit, he develops stronger social connections with other members of virtual community. It is expected that frequency and duration of visits are positively related to community influence on the consumer decision process (De Valck et al. 2009).

*H5      Frequency of visits is positively related to community influence on the consumer decision process.*

*H6      Duration of visits is positively related to community influence on the consumer decision process.*

### 3.2.2.2 Retrieve information and interaction with others

It can be distinguished that there are three types of online behavior relevant to virtual community and have impact on the consumer decision process, which are retrieving, interaction with others. (De Valck et al. 2009). Both receivers and senders are in the word-of-mouth process gain information from exchange. Receivers obtain information about behavior and choices of others, and get feedback about their own behavior and choices. It increases the knowledge reservoir of members, it may alter their preferences and it may reduce cognitive dissonance, which can lead to better outcome. As a result, it is expected that a positive relationship between the extension of which members retrieve information from the community and community influence on the consumer decision process (De Valck et al. 2009).

Senders have tendency to share their positive and negative experiences with other people with a motivation to make better decisions, to decrease their doubts about their own behavior, or to experience feelings of prestige and power. Supplying information to others is related to post-purchase evaluation; it may boost satisfaction with the decision outcome and also may relieve negative feeling which leads to reduce dissatisfaction. (De Valck et al. 2009). Discussing information with other members increases participation of the member in the community which leads deeper their experience with and emotional towards the consumption activities of interest. It also may increase the frequency of engaging in these consumption activities, it may optimize members' knowledge reservoir, develop and refine their preferences, and increase confidence in their own behavior. Discussing and supplying information can be combined under one theme which is interaction with others. It is expected the more users interact with others, the more influence of community on consumer decision process occurs.

*H7      Retrieving information from the community is positively related to community influence on the consumer decision process.*

*H8      Interaction with others is positively related to community influence on the post-purchase evaluation phase of the consumer decision process.*

### 3.2.3   General Consumer Characteristics

General consumer characteristic is important in virtual community and have impact on consumer decision process. It includes factors such as orientation toward others, internet proficiency.

### 3.2.3.1 Orientation toward others

#### *3.2.3.1.1   Other directedness*

Consumer traits such as sociability and influence ability are related to someone's orientation toward others. It is asserted that sociable people more tend to participate in word-of-mouth communication than people who are less sociable (De Valck et al. 2009). Social people are outgoing, enjoy spending time with others and have an attitude of participation, therefore they are active in social networks and virtual communities. As a result of that, they are more influenced by virtual communities (De Valck et al. 2009). Sociability affects the formation of online friendship and thus, it is expected that there is a positive relationship between other directedness and consumer decision process (De Valck et al. 2009).

*H9      Other-directedness is positively related to community influence on the consumer decision process.*

#### *3.2.3.1.2   Susceptibility to interpersonal influence*

Someone's base level of influenceability, how receptive one is to opinions and experience of others, is important in the effect of virtual communities on consumer decision process. It affects the degree of reference group effect on members. If members are more receptive to other people's opinions, they are more influenced by other members within the virtual community. As a result, it is claimed that susceptibility to

interpersonal influence is positively related to community influence on the consumer information search phase. (De Valck et al. 2009).

*H10    Susceptibility to informational interpersonal influence is positively related to community influence on the information search phase.*

### 3.2.3.1.3  Opinion Leader

Opinion leaders in a virtual community are people who are supposed to be knowledgeable about the topic they are involved in. They also give information, share experiences and influence other members. The more involved opinion leaders are, they are more eager to talk to others about the topic. Until a certain level, virtual community provides a learning environment to opinion leaders through discussions and sharing of their own. However, after becoming an expert about the topic, the interest and the need for information exchange of opinion leaders eventually decreases. So, the influence of community decreases over time (De Valck et al. 2009).

*H11    There is a relationship between opinion leadership and community influence on the consumer decision process.*

### 3.2.3.1.4  Opinion Seeker

Opinion seekers are people who are influenced by other members. It is supposed that people who think of themselves as opinion seekers are more engaged in exchanging information with other members within a virtual community members. It is expected that opinion seeker behavior is positively related to community influence on the consumer decision process (De Valck et al. 2009).

*H12    Opinion seeking behavior is positively related to community influence on the consumer decision process.*

### 3.2.3.1.5 Knowledge Sharing

The success of a virtual community depends primarily on whether members are willing to continue to stay and use the community, as well as to share and adopt knowledge. If there are a lot of participants who are willing to stay and contribute their knowledge in the virtual community, this will improve the likelihood of connecting to individuals who are able and willing to help. Knowledge sharing is a necessary component of knowledge management. Knowledge sharing refers to the behavior of an individual when he/she distributes acquired knowledge to others within a community (Wu & Sukoco 2009). It is anticipated that the increase in knowledge sharing is positively related to community influence on the consumer decision process.

*H13    There is a positive relationship between knowledge sharing and the community influence on the consumer decision process.*

### 3.2.3.2 Internet Proficiency

Internet proficiency is related to the number of years someone has used the Internet and the number of hours someone spends online. The longer of time spent on the Internet, the Internet users tend to use more the Internet for online buying and information search. It is expected that members who have Internet experience may use the virtual community in the context of purchase and consumption decision making process. It is mentioned that that the number of years someone that has been using the internet and the number of hours someone spends online per week is positively related to influence of virtual community on consumer decision process.

People prefer to use the virtual community as a source of information in different formats. Some people prefer contributing and retrieving factual information through the community's databases, other people like to socialize and exchange information in discussion forums, and some people focus on some activities such as updating and maintaining their member pages (De Valck et al. 2009). Wiki and other community databases, which are rich in information reserving, possibly play a major role in the information search process, on the other hand forums and blogs in which consumer

discusses their experiences are more powerful in forming and changing preferences. Social network sites such as MySpace and Facebook that are primarily used to reanimate and maintain existing social ties, might have a more important impact on need recognition, actual behavior, and post-purchase evaluations because of real life analysis of members' consumption practices (De Valck et al. 2009).

*H14    There is a positive relationship between the number of years that someone has been using the Internet and community influence on the consumer decision process.*

**Table 3.1: Research model**

| MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS | COMMUNITY INFLUENCE ON THE DECISION PROCESS | NEED RECOGNITION |
|---|---|---|
| Topical Involvement (Valck, 2005) | | Perceived influence on the frequency of engaging in the consumption activity |
| Social Involvement (Valck, 2005) | | |
| High or Low Involvement | | |
| Length of membership (Valck, 2005) | | |
| | | **SEARCH FOR INFORMATION** |
| **COMMUNITY INTERACTION CHARACTERISTICS** | | Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity |
| Frequency of Visits (Valck, 2005) | | |
| Duration of Visits (Valck, 2005) | | |
| Retrieve Information (Valck, 2005) | | |
| Interaction with others | | **PRE-PURCHASE EVALUATION** |
| **GENERAL CONSUMER CHARACTERISTICS** | | Perceived influence on choices made out of the alternatives |
| **A- ORIENTATION TOWARD OTHERS** | | |
| Other- Directedness | | |
| Susceptibility to interpersonal influence | | |
| Opinion Leader | | **POST-PURCHASE EVALUATION** |
| Opinion Seeking | | Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome |
| Knowledge Sharing | | |
| **B- INTERNET PROFICIENCY** | | |
| Years Internet Usage | | |

**3.3 RESEARCH METHOD**

**3.3.1 Regression Models**

The dependent variables in our model are the four phases of the consumer decision process, as explicated in the discussion of the research model. Community influence on the consumer decision process is described by each of the four models as a funtion of membership characteristics, community interaction characteristics and general consumer characteristics. Perceived influence on consumption is studied for community influence on the need recognition phase. In this respect, it is asked to the participants whether they buy more often due to their virtual community membership. For community influence on the information search phase, the perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity is studied. In this respect, we ask participants whether their knowledge about products increases due to virtual community membership. For community influence on the pre-purchase evaluation phase, perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives is studied. Participants are asked whether the product range of their purchase decision is extended because of their virtual community membership. Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome is studied for community influence on the post-purchase evaluation phase. Participants are asked whether they are more satisfied with their purchase decisions due to their virtual community membership. In addition to dependent variables, the model contains 16 independent variables.

**3.4 MEASUREMENT AND SCALING**

As mentioned before, data is collected through an online survey and the link of survey is delivered by means of social media, mail groups, virtual communities. Sample consists of 203 respondents. The original survey is reported in Appendix A.

Table 3.2 describes the measurements for membership characteristics. The constructs are length of membership, topical involvement, social involvement, high or low involvement are measured by means of multiple items. Topical involvement scale involvement scale measures member involvement in topics in the virtual community.

The scale related to social involvement measures member involvement in the social relationships among community members. High or low involvement scale measures the involvement of products that people search information for on the virtual communities.

**Table 3.2: Measurements for membership characteristics**

| *Membership Characteristics* | |
| --- | --- |
| **Length of membership** | **How long have you been a registered member of Virtual Communities?** |
| | 0-1 year |
| | 2-3 years |
| | 4-5 years |
| | 6 -7years |
| | **8 -9years** |
| | **10+ years** |
| **Topical Involvement** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements.** |
| | **(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** |
| | I follow virtual communities that are related to my interests. |
| | I have at least one membership to virtual community that has subjects I am knowledgeable about. |
| | I like to enhance my knowledge and make research about the subjects that I am interested in virtual communities. |
| | I follow up magazines, newspapers, books, news about the subjects that I am involved in virtual communities. |
| | I follow up new trends about the topics I am interested in virtual communities. |
| | I like to shop related topics I am interested in virtual communities. |
| **Social Involvement** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements.** |
| | **(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** |
| | I find interaction with other members important in virtual communities. |
| | I spend a lot of time keeping in touch with other members in virtual communities. |
| | I enjoy communicating with other members in virtual communities. |
| | Through virtual communities, I have built meaningful relationships with people I did not know before. |

| High or Low Involvement | Please indicate your opinion about the products you searched for information in virtual communities. |
|---|---|

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unimportant | | | | | | | | Important |
| Boring | | | | | | | | Interesting |
| Means nothing to me | | | | | | | | Means a lot to me |
| Worthless | | | | | | | | Valuable |
| Not beneficial | | | | | | | | Beneficial |
| Irrelevant | | | | | | | | Relevant |
| Unexciting | | | | | | | | Exciting |
| Unwanted | | | | | | | | Wanted |

Table 3.3 describes the measurements for community interaction characertistics. Frequency of visits and duration of visits are measured by means of fixed-response alternatives. The constructs retrieve information, interaction with others are measured by means of likert scale. Retrieve information measures whether people get information from the virtual community. Interaction with others information measures whether respondent shares knowledge, experience or information in virtual communities. And also it measures measures the participation of respondent to discussions, chat sessions.

**Table 3.3: Community interaction characteristics**

| *Community Interaction Characteristics* |
|---|

| Frequency of Visits | How often do you visit virtual communities? |
|---|---|
| | Everyday |
| | 1-2 days in a week |
| | 3-5 days in a week |
| | 1-2 days in a month |
| | 3-5 days in a month |
| Duration of Visits | How much time do you spend in virtual communities each time you visit? |
| | 0-30 minutes |
| | 31-60 minutes |
| | 61-120 minutes |
| | 121-180 minues |
| | 180+ minutes |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Retrieve Information** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements by regarding the virtual community you use much (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** |
| | *When I visit the virtual community;* |
| | Retrieve technical information about the topic I am interested in. |
| | I read articles about the topic I am interested in. |
| | I search for user comments about the topic I am interested in . |
| | I ask for help to other members about the topic I am interested in. |
| **Interaction with others** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements by regarding the virtual community you use much (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** |
| | *When I visit the virtual community;* |
| | I share technical knowledge about the topic I am interested in. |
| | I make comments about the topic I am interested in. |
| | I reply questions requesting advice or knowledge. |
| | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements by regarding the virtual community you use much (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** |
| | *When I visit the virtual community;* |
| | I start a new thread in a forum discussion |
| | I participate in a forum discussion |
| | I participate in a chat session. |

Tables 3.4 contain the measurements for the variables relating to general consumer characteristics. To measure the construct other-directedness, respondents answered on a five-point rating scale (1-5) and it measures how important warm relationships with others are. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale measures how sensitive people are to the effect of other people. Opinion leader and opinion seeker scales measures whether respondents look for opinions or give opinions, advices. Knowledge sharing measures whether respondents share their knowledge and help people finding information about the subject they are knowledgeable about. Years of internet usage and frequency of internet usage is measured by nominal questions.

**Table 3.4: General consumer characteristics**

| | |
|---|---|
| *General Consumer Characteristics* | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Other-Directedness** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements.** **(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** warm relationships with others is important for me. |
| **Susceptibility** **to** **interpersonal influence** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements.** **(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** I don't purchase trendy products until I am sure my friends approve them. I get information from my friends and family before buying a product. It is important to me that others like the products I buy. I'd like to know which products make a good impression on others. If I want to be like someone, I try to buy the same brands that they buy. I ask for advice to my friends, if I don't have enough information about a product. I ask for advice to other people in order to make the best buying decision. |
| **Opinion Leader** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements.** **(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** I am often asked for advice about products and services. My friends come to me more often than I go to them for advice while making purchase decisions. I feel that I am generally regarded as a valuable information source for other people. I generally persuade people to buy products that I like. |
| **Opinion Seeker** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements.** **(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** When I consider buying something, I ask other people for advice. I like to get others' opinions before I buy a product. I often exchange information about products with friends. Other people usually give me good advice about products. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Knowledge Sharing** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements.** |
| | **(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** |
| | When participating in virtual communities, I usually actively share my knowledge with other members. |
| | I usually spend a lot of time to review new products and share my comments about them in virtual communities. |
| | I am always look forward to posting my critics about products or services. |
| | When discussing an issue, I am usually involved in the subsequent interactions with other members. |
| **Years Internet Usage & Frequency** | **How long have you been using the Internet?** |
| | 0-2 years |
| | 3-5 years |
| | 6-10 years |
| | 11-15 years |
| | 15 + years |
| | **How often do you use Internet?** |
| | **Everyday** |
| | 1-2 days in a week |
| | 3-5 days in a week |
| | 1-2 days in a month |
| | 3-5 days in a month |
| **Demographic & Socioeconomic variables** | **Your Education level** |
| | Primary school |
| | Secondary School |
| | High School |
| | College |
| | University |
| | Master + |
| | **Education level of your mother** |
| | Primary school |
| | Secondary School |
| | High School |
| | College |
| | University |
| | Master + |
| | **Education level of your father** |
| | Primary school |

Secondary School

High School

College

University

Master +

**Gender**

M/F

**Age**

<18

18-25

26-30

31-40

40+

 **Your Income**

☐ below 500   ☐ 501-1000   ☐ 1001-2000   ☐ 2001-3000   ☐ 3001-
5000    ☐ 5001 +

Dependent variables are described as perceived influence on consumption, perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity, perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives, perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome. Perceived influence on consumption measures the community influence on the need recognition phase. the effect of virtual community on information search phase is measured by the perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity scale. Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives measures the community influence on the pre-purchase evaluation phase. All these variables construct the community influence on the consumer decision process.

**Table 3.5:Dependent variables**

| Dependent Variables (Community Influence on the Consumer Decision Process) | |
|---|---|
| **Perceived Influence on Consumption** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements. (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** |
| | Because of my virtual community membership, I go shopping more frequently. |
| **Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements. (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** |
| | Because of my virtual community membership, I am more knowledgeable about the products that I want to buy. |
| | Because of my virtual community membership, I learn many things about products without buying them. |
| | Because of my virtual community membership, I gain even technical information about the products. |
| **Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements. (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** |
| | Because of virtual communities, I buy products of different brands. |
| | Because of virtual communities, I try different types of products. |
| | Because of virtual communities, I buy an extended range of products. |
| **Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome** | **Please indicate your opinion about the following statements. (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)** |
| | Because of virtual communities, I am satisfied with my purchase decisions. |

# 4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

## 4.1 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Graphs below contain information about the demographic, socioeconomic profile of the sample of 202 respondents. There are almost equal number of women and men respondents. 96 of respondents are female and 106 of respondents are male. Since the number male and female respondents are almost equal, it can be assumed that differences in online behavior have no effect on the generalizability of this research.

**Figure 4.1: Gender distribution**
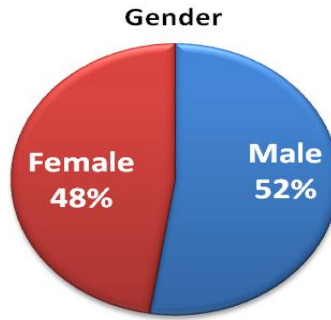


The sample has a normal distribution, the average age of the respondents is 27,5 years. (Median: 27,6 years). Compared with the Turkish Internet population, age distributiton of 18-25 is almost the same as Turkish Internet Population in our sample. However, cohort under 20 years, for example, makes up around 20 percent of the Turkish Internet population[1] whereas this age group is much smaller in the community and the sample average age of both men and women are same which is 27,5. The majority of sample were between 26-30 years old, 60 percent for women and 50 percent for women, 54,5 percent of whole respondents.

---

[1] IAB, 2011. IAB Türkiye internet ölçümleme araştirmasi, http://www.iab-turkiye.org/files/newsletter/IAB%20bulten-Haziran-2011.pdf. [accessed 5 March 2012]. pp. 1-2.

**Figure 4.2: Age distribution based on gender**
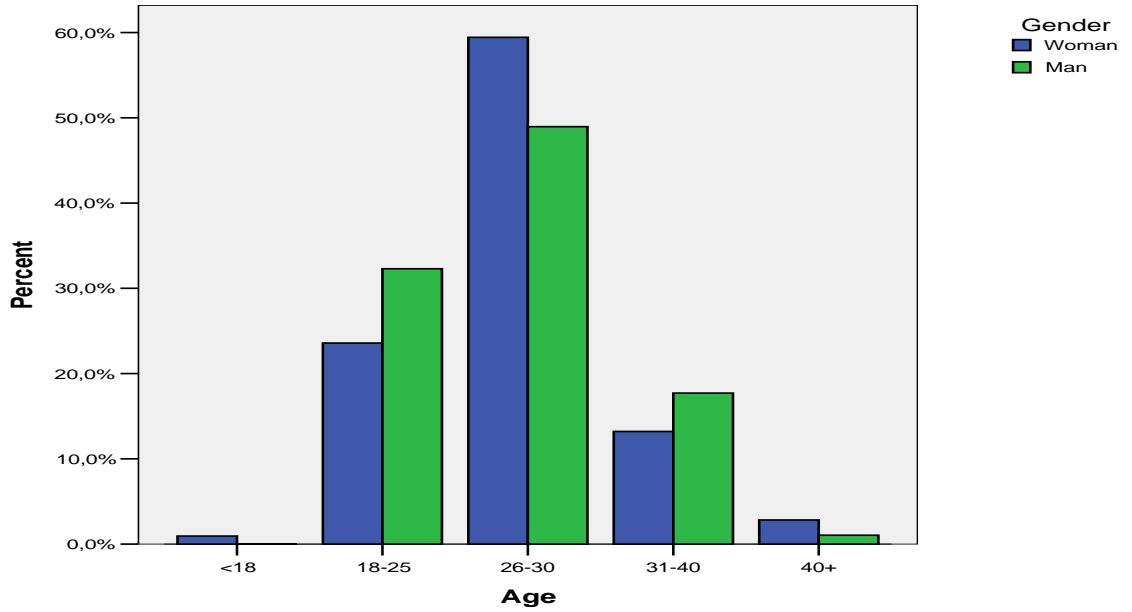


**Figure 4.3: Age distribution of respondents**
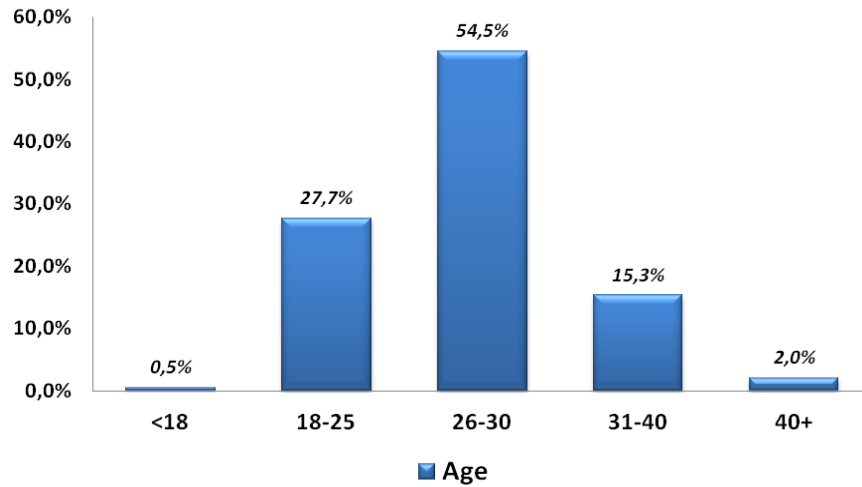


The average monthly income of participant is 2842. According to TUIK, It is relatively higher than GDP per capita which is about 21,293 TL per year in 2011. For our sample, average monthly income of women is higher than the men. Average monthly income of women is 3106 TL and average monthly income of men is 2549 TL.

**Table 4.1: Monthy income distribution of men and women**

| | FREQUENCIES | |
|---|---|---|
| Monthly Income | Woman | Man |
| <500 | 6 | 6 |
| 501-1000 | 3 | 3 |
| 1001-2000 | 17 | 28 |
| 2001-3000 | 27 | 29 |
| 3001-5000 | 34 | 25 |
| 5001+ | 19 | 5 |

The sample's average level of education is high: 66 percent of the respondents have finished university and 27 percent of respondents have finished master or upper. According to TUIK, high percentage of population has graduuated from primary school or below, 44 percent.[2] It is also the same considering the gender of respondents, university or master graduation is higher than others.

**Figure 4.4: Level of education**
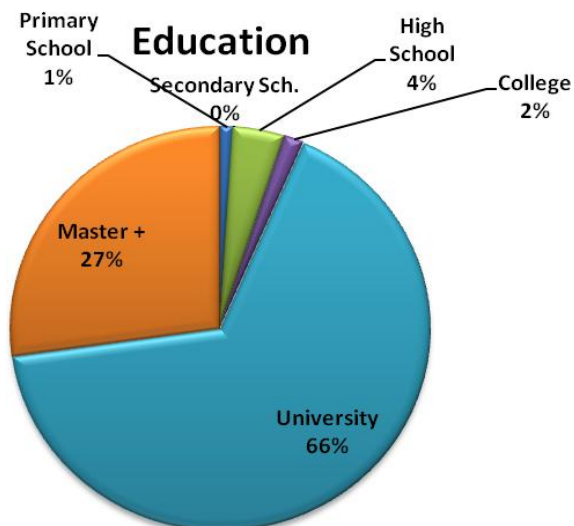


---

[2] TUIK, What figures say?, 2011, www.tuik.gov.tr/IcerikGetir.do?istab_id=4 [accessed 10 March 2012], p. 32.

**Table 4.2: Level of education based on gender**

| | | Gender | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | **Woman** | **Man** | **Total** |
| Education | Primary School | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | Secondary Sch. | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | High School | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| | College | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | University | 78 | 56 | 134 |
| | Master + | 21 | 34 | 55 |
| **Total** | | **106** | **96** | **202** |

The sample's average years of experience in the internet is almost eleven years, which means sample's experience in internet is quite good. In addition, almost all respondents, 198 of 202, use internet everyday

**Figure 4.5: Internet usage of sample**
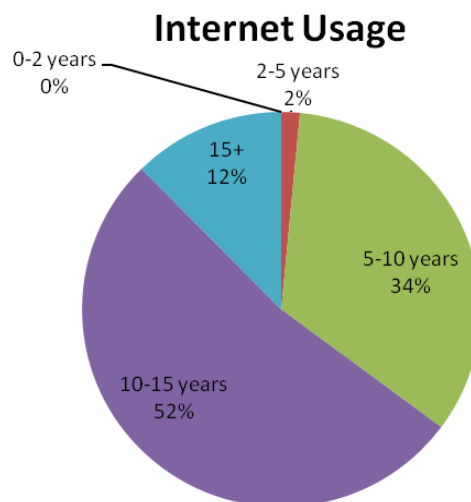


Most respondents have a Facebook membership (89,1 percent), and Twitter is the second one. Besides multiple choices, most respondents indicated that they are also member of linkedin, a social network for business life.

48

**Table 4.3: Virtual community membership distribution**

| Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---|---|---|
| Facebook | 89,1% | 180 |
| Twitter | 60,9% | 123 |
| Google + | 37,6% | 76 |
| Donanımhaber.com | 13,9% | 28 |
| Sikayetvar.com | 16,3% | 33 |
| Forums | 28,2% | 57 |
| Blogs | 21,3% | 43 |
| Other | | 32 |

The average length of virtual community membership of respondent is five years. Most of them are members of a virtual community between 4-6 years. Most probably virtual community membership has started with Facebook for many people in our sample, since it is nearly the same time that Facebook was founded.

**Figure 4.6: Virtual community membership length**
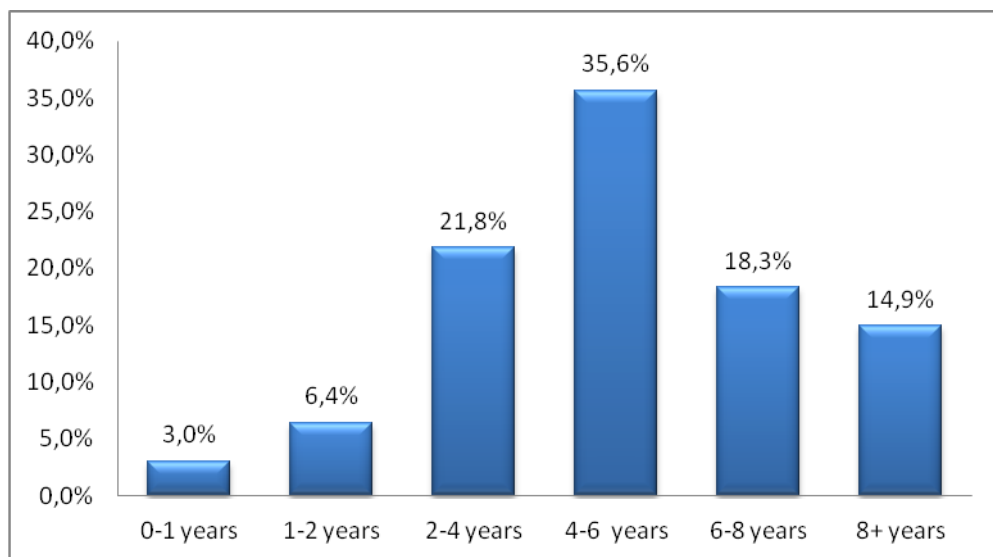
## 4.2   RESULTS

To test scale dimensionality and validation of the four constructs both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis were performed. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy of the factor test was 0,814 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity significance was 0,000 that shows that sample size was satisfactory to perform factor analysis. There were no items with communalities below 0,55.  Then, Rotated Component Matrix has been analysed. One item of the topical involvement scale, two items of the social involvement scale, four items of the retrieve information scale, one item of the interaction with others scale, four items of the susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale, one item of the knowledge sharing scale and one item of opinion leader scale were eliminated during the process of data reduction. This is because these questions did not match with any factor. These questions were listed below.

**Table 4.4: The list of eliminated questions of survey**

---

**Topical Involvement**

I have at least one membership to virtual community that has subjects I am knowledgeable.

**Social Involvement**

I enjoy communicating with other members in virtual communities.

Through virtual communities, I have built meaningful relationships with people I did not know before.

**Retrieve Information**

Retrieve technical information about the topic I am interested in.

I read articles about the topic I am interested in.

I search for user comments about the topic I am interested in .

I ask for help to other members about the topic I am interested in.

*Interaction with others*

I share technical knowledge about the topic I am interested in.

*Susceptibility to interpersonal influence*

I don't purchase trendy products until I am sure my friends approve them.

---

It is important to me that others like the products I buy.

I'd like to know which products make a good impression on others.

If I want to be like someone, I try to buy the same brands that they buy.

***Opinion Leader***

I generally persuade people to buy products that I like

***Knowledge Sharing***

When participating in virtual communities, I usually actively share my knowledge with other members.

The eliminated item from Topical Involvement scale were the question related with the focus on membership and shopping. The reason behind the elimination was that the items had communinalities lower than 0,55. The eliminated items of social involvement were grouped under interaction with others, not under the social involvement. Therefore, they were eliminated from the social involvement scale. The retrieve information scale was entirely excluded because of the fact that questions were grouped under other factors. One item of interaction with others was extracted since it was also under another scale which is retrieve information scale. The eliminated item from susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale was under the 0,55 communality score which is 0,53 and the question related with the focus on the effect of social environment on product choice. The other three items of susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale were extracted because they were combined under another factor. One item of opinion leader was eliminated since it had a communality value lower than 0,55. The item that was eliminated from knowledge sharing was grouped under the interaction with others scale. These items have been removed from the analysis and factor analysis has been revised. After the elimination of those questions, finally eight factors have been grouped for the independent scales. In addition, dependent variables of the model were grouped very well and there is no item eliminated from. There are two factors grouped for the dependent variables of the model, which are perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity, perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives.

The factors that received from the Rotated Component Matrix equally matched with the thesis model except one, which is interaction with others. Each factor has been grouped under the subjects of topical involvement, social involvement, high involvement, interaction with others, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, opinion leader, opinion seeker, knowledge sharing, perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity, perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives.

**Table 4.5: Factor loadings of independent scales**

| MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS | |
|---|---|
| **TOPICAL INVOLVEMENT** | |
| I follow virtual communities that are related to my interests. | 0,725 |
| I like to enhance my knowledge and make research about subject that I am interested in virtual communities. | 0,742 |
| I follow up magazines, newspapers, books, news about the subjects that I am involved in virtual communities. | 0,769 |
| I follow up new trends about the topics I am interested in virtual communities | 0,791 |
| I like to shop related the topics I am interested in virtual communities. | 0,588 |
| **SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT** | |
| I find interaction with other members important in virtual communities. | 0,689 |
| I spend a lot of time keeping in touch with other members in virtual communities. | 0,626 |
| **HIGH OR LOW INVOLVEMENT** | |
| Unimportant/ Important | 0,848 |
| Boring/ Interesting | 0,784 |
| Means nothing to me/ Means a lot to me | 0,844 |
| Not beneficial/ Beneficial | 0,808 |
| Irrelevant/ Relevant | 0,817 |
| Unappealing/ Appealing | 0,792 |
| COMMUNITY INTERACTION CHARACTERISTICS | |
| **INTERACTION WITH OTHERS** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| I make comments about the topic I am interested in. | 0,818 |
| I reply questions requesting advice or knowledge. | 0,642 |
| I start a new thread in a forum discussion | 0,642 |
| I participate in a forum discussion | 0,799 |
| I participate in a chat session. | 0,831 |
| *GENERAL CONSUMER CHARACTERISTICS* | |
| **SUSCEPTIBILITY TO INTERPERSONAL INFORMATION** | |
| I get information from my friends and family before buying a product | 0,734 |
| I ask for advice to my friends, if I don't have enough information about product | 0,807 |
| I ask for advice to other people in order to make the best buying decision | 0,702 |
| **OPINION LEADER** | |
| I am often asked for advice about products and services | 0,810 |
| My friends come to me more often than I go to them for advice while makin purchase decisions | 0,789 |
| I feel that I am generally regarded as valuable information source for othe people | 0,735 |
| **OPINION SEEKER** | |
| When I consider buying something, I ask other people for advice | 0,813 |
| I like to get others' opinions before I buy a product | 0,771 |
| I often exchange information about products with friends | 0,838 |
| Other people usually give me good advice about products | 0,686 |
| **KNOWLEDGE SHARING** | |
| I usually spend a lot of time to review new products and share my commen about them in virtual communities | 0,740 |
| I am always look forward to posting my critics about products or services | 0,787 |
| When discussing an issue, I am usually involved in the subsequent interaction with other members | 0,775 |
| *Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.* | *0,814* |
| *Bartlett's Test of Sphericity* | *0,000* |
| *Average Variance Extracted* | *71,619* |

**Table 4.6: Factor loadings of dependent scales**

| COMMUNITY INFLUENCE ON THE CONSUMER DECISION PROCESS | |
|---|---|
| **PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CONSUMPTION ACTIVITY** | |
| Because of my virtual community membership, I am more knowledgeable about the products that I want to buy | 0,856 |
| Because of my virtual community membership, I learn many things about products without buying them | 0,882 |
| Because of my virtual community membership, I gain even technical information about the products | 0,895 |
| **PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON CHOICES MADE OUT OF ALTERNATIVES** | |
| Because of virtual communities, I buy products of different brands | 0,870 |
| Because of virtual communities, I try different types of products | 0,915 |
| Because of virtual communities, I buy an extended range of products | 0,877 |
| *Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.* | *0,812* |
| *Bartlett's Test of Sphericity* | *0,000* |
| *Average Variance Extracted* | *83,684* |

After finalizing the factor analysis, ten factors were labeled by transforming the factors. Then reliability analysis was assessed by examining the loadings of each indicator. The results of reliability analysis of each factor is shown in Table 4.7. All of the factors' Cronbach's Alpha values were more than 0,7 which shows that all of the factors were reliable.

The minimum correlation was between perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome and high involvement at 0,189 level. The maximum correlation was between knowledge sharing and interaction with others at 0,564 level. There is a strong relationship between knowledge sharing and interaction with others. The perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome and high involvement is

comperatively weaker. All of the factors' reliability results are between 0,765 and 0,916 which shows that the results were very satisfactory (over 0,7).

**Table 4.7: Correlation results**

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Topical involvement** | 0,833 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Social involvement** | ,144(*) | 0,734 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **High or Low involvement** | ,404(**) | ,148(*) | 0,916 | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Interaction with others** | ,280(**) | ,555(**) | 0,067 | 0,869 | | | | | | | | | |
| **Susceptibility to interpersonal informatıon** | ,176(*) | 0,108 | ,246(**) | ,142(*) | 0,786 | | | | | | | | |
| **Opinion seeker** | ,256(**) | 0,117 | ,232(**) | 0,052 | ,516(**) | 0,844 | | | | | | | |
| **Knowledge sharing** | ,223(**) | ,438(**) | 0,102 | ,564(**) | 0,126 | 0,076 | 0,836 | | | | | | |
| **Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity** | ,353(**) | 0,087 | ,396(**) | 0,057 | ,278(**) | ,335(**) | 0,056 | 0,895 | | | | | |
| **Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives** | ,334(**) | ,161(*) | ,328(**) | ,172(*) | ,242(**) | ,309(**) | ,294(**) | ,496(**) | 0,906 | | | | |
| **Opinion leader** | ,345(**) | -0,090 | ,248(**) | 0,036 | ,241(**) | ,286(**) | 0,089 | ,386(**) | ,263(**) | 0,765 | | | |
| **Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome** | ,232(**) | 0,132 | ,189(**) | 0,097 | 0,130 | 0,092 | ,299(**) | ,442(**) | ,544(**) | ,149(*) | | | |
| **Perceived influence on consumption** | ,207(**) | 0,068 | ,153(*) | 0,100 | 0,047 | 0,048 | ,267(**) | ,215(**) | ,465(**) | ,174(*) | ,446(**) | | |
| **Other-directedness** | 0,068 | ,382(**) | ,164(*) | ,243(**) | ,241(**) | ,167(*) | 0,099 | 0,082 | 0,117 | 0,090 | 0,118 | 0,109 | |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: The items at the end of the triangle shows the reliability results.

The total scales of the factors were composed. The correlation analysis was performed by using new constructs after reliability analysis. There were correlations between some factors, as shown n the table below;

**Table 4.8: Correlated factors**

| TOPICAL INVOLVEMENT |
| --- |
| **Correlated with;** |
| High involvement |
| Interaction with others |
| Susceptibility to interpersonal information |
| Opinion seeker |
| Knowledge sharing |
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives |
| Opinion leader |
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome |
| Perceived influence on consumption |
| **SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT** |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Interaction with others |
| Knowledge sharing |
| Other-directedness |
| **HIGH INVOLVEMENT** |
| |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Susceptibility to interpersonal information |
| Opinion seeker |
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives |
| Opinion leader |
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome |
| **INTERACTION WITH OTHERS** |
| |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Knowledge sharing |
| Other-directedness |
| **SUSCEPTIBILITY TO INTERPERSONAL INFORMATION** |
| |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Opinion seeker |
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives |
| Opinion leader |
| Other-directedness |
| **OPINION SEEKER** |
| |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives |

| Opinion leader |
| --- |

<br>

| KNOWLEDGE SHARING |
| --- |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives |
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome |
| Perceived influence on consumption |
| **PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CONSUMPTION ACTIVITY** |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives |
| Opinion leader |
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome |
| Perceived influence on consumption |
| **PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON CHOICES MADE OUT OF ALTERNATIVES** |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Opinion leader |
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome |
| Perceived influence on consumption |
| **PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON SATISFACTION WITH THE DECISION OUTCOME** |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Perceived influence on consumption |
| **OPINION LEADER** |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Topical involvement |
| High involvement |
| Susceptibility to interpersonal information |
| Opinion seeker |
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives |
| **PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON CONSUMPTION** |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Topical involvement |
| Knowledge sharing |
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives |
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome |
| **OTHER-DIRECTEDNESS** |
| **Correlated with;** |
| Social involvement |
| Interaction with others |
| Susceptibility to interpersonal information |

Then, finally regression analysis has been performed. There is a positive relationship between knowledge sharing and perceived influence on the frequency of engaging in the consumption activity. Users who are more sharing their experiences, knowledge and ideas more in virtual communities are more stimulated by virtual communities to buy something. Virtual communities trigger their need recognition. They buy more frequently than other users. It may be because of the fact that they are more exposed to information that are shared within virtual communites, since they follow threads more closely than other users.

**Table 4.9: Regression analysis results of dependent variable: perceived influence on the frequency of engaging in the consumption activity**

Coefficients(a)

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | | Collinearity Statistics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. | B | Std. Error |
| (Constant) | 0,672 | 0,700 | | 0,960 | 0,338 | | |
| Topical Involvement | 0,210 | 0,134 | 0,127 | 1,570 | 0,118 | 0,691 | 1,447 |
| Social Involvement | -0,081 | 0,111 | -0,066 | -0,735 | 0,463 | 0,562 | 1,780 |
| High or Low Involvement | 0,070 | 0,086 | 0,063 | 0,819 | 0,414 | 0,768 | 1,301 |
| Interaction with others | -0,142 | 0,133 | -0,099 | -1,068 | 0,287 | 0,524 | 1,909 |
| Susceptibility to interpersonal influence | -0,063 | 0,125 | -0,041 | -0,506 | 0,614 | 0,680 | 1,471 |
| Opinion Seeker | -0,070 | 0,163 | -0,035 | -0,428 | 0,669 | 0,676 | 1,480 |
| **Knowledge Sharing** | 0,401 | 0,111 | 0,305 | 3,624 | **0,000** | 0,638 | 1,567 |
| Opinion Leader | 0,174 | 0,139 | 0,095 | 1,254 | 0,211 | 0,782 | 1,279 |
| Other_Directedness | 0,131 | 0,085 | 0,116 | 1,536 | 0,126 | 0,786 | 1,272 |

Dependent Variable: Perceived influence on the frequency of engaging in the consumption activity
Values printed in bold are significant (p≤0,05)

There is a positive relationship between opinion leader and perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity. There is connection between opinion leadersship and search for information on virtual communities. Users who are more engaged in virtual communities and are considered as opinion leaders use virtual communities as an information source. They search information on virtual communities and also act as opinion seekers. It is most probably because of that they have to increase their knowledge about products and services to lead the community with their ideas and sharings.

Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between high involvement and perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity. Involvement is a considereable factor that influences the need of information search of consumers. According to results, when products is getting more and more complex, consumers are more likely to search for information on virtual communities. If products or services have high risk and technical issues, are complex to understand, generally consumers' own knowledge is not enough and the need for information search increases. Virtual communities are good sources of information for high involvement products. Therefore, if involvement of product increases, search for information through virtual communities increases.

**Table 4.10: Regression analysis results of dependent variable: perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity**

**Coefficients(a)**

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | | Collinearity Statistics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. | B | Std. Error |
| (Constant) | 0,380 | 0,434 | | 0,876 | 0,382 | | |
| Topical Involvement | 0,159 | 0,083 | 0,139 | 1,915 | 0,057 | 0,691 | 1,447 |
| Social Involvement | 0,078 | 0,069 | 0,091 | 1,135 | 0,258 | 0,562 | 1,780 |
| **High or Low Involvement** | 0,179 | 0,053 | 0,231 | 3,364 | **0,001** | 0,768 | 1,301 |
| Interaction with others | -0,030 | 0,082 | -0,030 | -0,365 | 0,715 | 0,524 | 1,909 |
| Susceptibility to interpersonal influence | 0,087 | 0,078 | 0,081 | 1,115 | 0,266 | 0,680 | 1,471 |
| Opinion Seeker | 0,192 | 0,101 | 0,139 | 1,896 | 0,059 | 0,676 | 1,480 |
| Knowledge Sharing | -0,053 | 0,069 | -0,058 | -0,775 | 0,439 | 0,638 | 1,567 |
| **Opinion Leader** | 0,305 | 0,086 | 0,241 | 3,542 | **0,000** | 0,782 | 1,279 |
| Other_Directedness | -0,040 | 0,053 | -0,051 | -0,754 | 0,452 | 0,786 | 1,272 |

Dependent Variable: Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity.
Values printed in bold are significant (p≤0,05)

There is a positive relationship between high involvement and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives. As in the perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity, when involvement of product increases, the alternative choices for products and services increases during the pre-purchase evaluation phase of consumer decision process. If a product is high involvement product, which has high risk and is complex to understand technical issues, people will use virtual communities as information sources and will learn other alternative products or services that is considered as evoked set.

In addition; there is a positive relationship between knowledge sharing and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives. As in the case of perceived influence on the frequency of engaginging in the consumption activity, users who are sharing knowledge have more product or service alternatives to buy. They have a more extended evoked set than others. People who share their knowledge and experiences via virtual communites, follow topics closely and opinions of other people. As a result, they have great knowledge about products or services and will have more alternatives while buying something. The increase in knowledge sharing within virtual communities is positively related to perceived influence on choices made out of the alternatives in pre-purchase evaluation phase of consumer decision process.

Also, opinion seeking and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives have a positive relationship. Opinion seekers are people who ask opinion of their friends, relatives, opinion leaders, so, they search for information and accumulate great knowledge about products and services. As a result of that, they will have lots of choice alternatives for their consumption activities. Therefore, opinion seeking and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives are positively related.

**Table 4.11: Regression analysis results of dependent variable: perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives**

**Coefficients(a)**

|  | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | | Collinearity Statistics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. | B | Std. Error |
| (Constant) | -0,402 | 0,518 |  | -0,776 | 0,439 |  |  |
| Topical Involvement | 0,180 | 0,099 | 0,136 | 1,821 | 0,070 | 0,691 | 1,447 |
| Social Involvement | 0,013 | 0,082 | 0,013 | 0,159 | 0,874 | 0,562 | 1,780 |
| **High or Low Involvement** | 0,158 | 0,063 | 0,176 | 2,483 | **0,014** | 0,768 | 1,301 |
| Interaction with others | -0,043 | 0,098 | -0,038 | -0,440 | 0,660 | 0,524 | 1,909 |
| Susceptibility to interpersonal influence | 0,044 | 0,093 | 0,036 | 0,474 | 0,636 | 0,680 | 1,471 |
| **Opinion Seeker** | 0,267 | 0,121 | 0,167 | 2,210 | **0,028** | 0,676 | 1,480 |
| **Knowledge Sharing** | 0,247 | 0,082 | 0,235 | 3,017 | **0,003** | 0,638 | 1,567 |
| Opinion Leader | 0,142 | 0,103 | 0,097 | 1,378 | 0,170 | 0,782 | 1,279 |
| Other_Directedness | 0,013 | 0,063 | 0,014 | 0,202 | 0,840 | 0,786 | 1,272 |

Dependent Variable: Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives
Values printed in bold are significant (p≤0,05)

Knowledge sharing positively affects perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome. As mentioned above, people who share their knowledge are tend to increase their knowledge and so they can make better purchase decisions. Also, sharing experiences lead to decrease in cognitive dissonance, make people be confident about their consumption decisions.

**Table 4.12: Regression analysis results of dependent variable: perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome**

**Coefficients(a)**

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | | Collinearity Statistics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. | B | Std. Error |
| (Constant) | 1,012 | 0,572 | | 1,768 | 0,079 | | |
| Topical Involvement | 0,213 | 0,110 | 0,155 | 1,945 | 0,053 | 0,691 | 1,447 |
| Social Involvement | 0,023 | 0,090 | 0,023 | 0,260 | 0,795 | 0,562 | 1,780 |
| High or Low Involvement | 0,066 | 0,070 | 0,071 | 0,936 | 0,350 | 0,768 | 1,301 |
| Interaction with others | -0,213 | 0,108 | -0,180 | -1,963 | 0,050 | 0,524 | 1,909 |
| Susceptibility to interpersonal influence | 0,069 | 0,102 | 0,054 | 0,672 | 0,503 | 0,680 | 1,471 |
| Opinion Seeker | -0,064 | 0,133 | -0,039 | -0,481 | 0,631 | 0,676 | 1,480 |
| **Knowledge Sharing** | 0,362 | 0,090 | 0,332 | 4,005 | **0,000** | 0,638 | 1,567 |
| Opinion Leader | 0,071 | 0,114 | 0,047 | 0,628 | 0,531 | 0,782 | 1,279 |
| Other_Directedness | 0,082 | 0,070 | 0,087 | 1,168 | 0,244 | 0,786 | 1,272 |

Dependent Variable: Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome
Values printed in bold are significant (p≤0,05)

**Table 4.13: Regression results**

| Knowledge sharing | ✓ Perceived influence on the frequency of engaging in the consumption activity <br> ✓ Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives <br> ✓ Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome | **Positive Relationship** |
|---|---|---|
| High or Low Involvement | ✓ Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity <br> Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives | **Positive Relationship** |
| Opinion Leader | ✓ Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity | **Positive Relationship** |
| Opinion Seeker | ✓ Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives | **Positive Relationship** |

Community influence on consumer decision includes four factors that are perceived influence on the frequency of engaging in the consumption activity, perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives, Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity, perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome. Topical involvement is positively related to community effect on consumer decision. When users are more involved with the topic, when they are more interested in the topic, they are more likely to be influenced by the virtual communities while making their purchase decisions. It can be maintained that users who have a high interest in the topic of discussion on virtual communities are more affected by virtual communities on their consumption decisios. Therefore, H1 is supported.

*H1 There is positive relationship between topical involvement and virtual community influence on the consumer decision process.*

There is also positive relationship between high involvement and community effect on consumer decision. When the involvement increases, the influence of community on users' decision is more effective. When the products or services are more complex and risky for consumers, consumers are more involved into products and virtual communities are more influential on purchase decisions under this circumstances. So, H3 is supported.

*H3 There is a relationship between involvement and effect of virtual community influence on consumer decision process.*

Knowledge sharing and opinion leader are positively related to community influence on consumer decision. When knowledge sharing and opinion leadership increase, the influence of community on consumer decision process increases. When people are more tend to give information, share their experiences and are thought as knowledgeable about a subject, they are more inclined to be affected by virtual communitiess on their consumption decisions. Peopl who share knowledge on virtual communiteis should have accurate or precise information in order to increase their reliability about a subject, as a result they have to increase their knowledge and search for information on virtual

communities, they follow topics closeley. So, they are more exposed to information that is shared on virtual communites and virtual communites have impact on their consumption decisions. So, H13 is supported.

*H13 There is a relationship between knowledge sharing and the community influence on the consumer decision process.*

Opinion leadership is like knowledge sharing, it can be maintained that opinion leaders are more tend to search for information in virtual communities in order to increase their online reputation and express their social self in virtual communities.So, they also have to increase their knowledge accumulation to give better advices to other members and be considered as opinion leader by other members of virtual communities. As result of that, they are more involved in the community and they have significant association with the community influence on their purchase decisions. Thus, H11 is supported.

*H11 There is a relationship between opinion leadership and community influence on the consumer decision process.*

**Table 4.14: Regression analysis results of dependent variable: Community effect on consumer decision**

| Coefficients(a) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | | Collinearity Statistics | |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. | B | Std. Error |
| (Constant) | 0,202 | 0,381 | | 0,531 | 0,596 | | |
| Other_Directedness | 0,016 | 0,046 | 0,024 | 0,353 | 0,724 | 0,786 | 1,272 |
| **Topical Involvement** | 0,180 | 0,073 | 0,177 | 2,472 | **0,014** | 0,691 | 1,447 |
| Social Involvement | 0,027 | 0,060 | 0,035 | 0,446 | 0,656 | 0,562 | 1,780 |
| **High or Low Involvement** | 0,143 | 0,047 | 0,208 | 3,066 | **0,002** | 0,768 | 1,301 |
| Interaction with others | -0,072 | 0,072 | -0,082 | -0,995 | 0,321 | 0,524 | 1,909 |
| Susceptibility to interpersonal influence | 0,050 | 0,068 | 0,052 | 0,728 | 0,468 | 0,680 | 1,471 |
| Opinion Seeker | 0,155 | 0,089 | 0,126 | 1,747 | 0,082 | 0,676 | 1,480 |
| **Knowledge Sharing** | 0,168 | 0,060 | 0,208 | 2,791 | **0,006** | 0,638 | 1,567 |
| **Opinion Leader** | 0,198 | 0,076 | 0,176 | 2,622 | **0,009** | 0,782 | 1,279 |

Dependent Variable: Community Influence on Consumer Decision
Values printed in bold are significant (p≤0,05)

Often visitors are significantly more affected by virtual communities in terms of need recognition, since they have higher mean than rare visitors. It means that there is a relationship between frequency of visits and perceived influence on consumption. The more users visit the virtual communities, the more they are tend to recognize their needs.

**Table 4.15: T test results of frequency of visits and perceived influence on consumption**

| | Frequency_Of_Visits | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Influence on Consumption | Often visitors | 149 | 2,9597 | 1,24596 | ,10207 |
| | Rare Visitors | 53 | 2,4717 | 1,17020 | ,16074 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived Influence on Consumption | Equal variances assumed | 2,232 | ,137 | 2,487 | 200 | ,014 | ,48803 | ,19620 | ,10116 | ,87491 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 2,563 | 96,860 | ,012 | ,48803 | ,19041 | ,11011 | ,86595 |

There is no relationship between the frequency of visits and perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity. It means that frequency of visits does not affect search for information of users. Users are not more knowledgeable when they visit virtual communites more frequently.

**Table 4.16: T test results of frequency of visits and perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity**

| | Frequency_Of_Visits | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity | Often visitors | 149 | 3,9083 | ,76999 | ,06308 |
| | Rare Visitors | 53 | 3,6667 | 1,06016 | ,14562 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity | Equal variances assumed | 6,750 | ,010 | 1,767 | 200 | ,079 | ,24161 | ,13674 | -,02802 | ,51124 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1,522 | 72,449 | ,132 | ,24161 | ,15870 | -,07472 | ,55794 |

Often visitors are significantly more affected by virtual communities, in terms of product or service alternatives. When users visit virtual communities more, they find more product or service alternatives. There is a relationship between frequency of visits and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives.

**Table 4.17: T test results of frequency of visits and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives**

| | Frequency_Of_Visits | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives | Often visitors | 149 | 3,4452 | ,96688 | ,07921 |
| | Rare Visitors | 53 | 3,0189 | 1,00939 | ,13865 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives | Equal variances assumed | ,096 | ,757 | 2,725 | 200 | ,007 | ,42632 | ,15643 | ,11785 | ,73479 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 2,670 | 88,182 | ,009 | ,42632 | ,15968 | ,10900 | ,74365 |

There is no relationship between frequency of visits and perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome. It means that more frequency of visits does not result in better decision makings.

**Table 4.18: T test results of frequency of visits and perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome**

| | Frequency_Of_Visits | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome | Often visitors | 149 | 3,1611 | 1,00045 | ,08196 |
| | Rare Visitors | 53 | 2,8679 | 1,09259 | ,15008 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome | Equal variances assumed | 1,369 | ,243 | 1,788 | 200 | ,075 | ,29315 | ,16397 | -,03018 | ,61647 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1,714 | 84,986 | ,090 | ,29315 | ,17100 | -,04685 | ,63315 |

Duration of visits significantly affects perceived influence on consumption. The longer users visit the virtual communities, the more they are affected on their need recognition. It stimulates them to buy something, when they spend more time on virtual communities.

**Table 4.19: T test results of duration of visits and perceived influence on consumption**

| | Duration_of_visits | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Influence on Consumption | Rare Users | 187 | 2,7754 | 1,23255 | ,09013 |
| | Heavy users | 15 | 3,5333 | 1,18723 | ,30654 |

Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived Influence on Consumption | Equal variances assumed | ,212 | ,645 | -2,297 | 200 | ,023 | -,75793 | ,32992 | -1,40851 | -,10736 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -2,372 | 16,516 | ,030 | -,75793 | ,31952 | -1,43357 | -,08230 |

There is no relationship between duration of visits and perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity. The amount of time they spent on virtual communities does not affect their knowledge of consumption.

**Table 4.20: T test results of duration of visits and perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity**

.

| | Duration_of_visits | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity | Rare Users | 187 | 3,8645 | ,85408 | ,06246 |
| | Heavy users | 15 | 3,6000 | ,91894 | ,23727 |

Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity | Equal variances assumed | ,118 | ,732 | 1,148 | 200 | ,252 | ,26453 | ,23046 | -,18991 | ,71897 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1,078 | 16,002 | ,297 | ,26453 | ,24535 | -,25559 | ,78464 |

There is no relationship between duration of visits and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives. It means that the more amount time they have on virtual communities don't affect their product or service alternatives.

**Table 4.21: T test results of duration of visits and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives**

| | Duration_of_visits | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives | Rare Users | 187 | 3,3173 | ,99117 | ,07248 |
| | Heavy users | 15 | 3,5333 | 1,03740 | ,26785 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives | Equal variances assumed | ,087 | ,768 | -,810 | 200 | ,419 | -,21604 | ,26687 | -,74229 | ,31020 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -,779 | 16,119 | ,448 | -,21604 | ,27749 | -,80394 | ,37185 |

There is no relationship between duration of visits and perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome. The amount of time users spend on virtual communities doesn't affect the satisfaction of users.

**Table 4.22: T test results of duration of visits and perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome**

.

| | Duration_of_visits | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome | Rare Users | 187 | 3,0856 | 1,01767 | ,07442 |
| | Heavy users | 15 | 3,0667 | 1,22280 | ,31573 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome | Equal variances assumed | 1,181 | ,279 | ,068 | 200 | ,946 | ,01889 | ,27731 | -,52792 | ,56571 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | ,058 | 15,595 | ,954 | ,01889 | ,32438 | -,67021 | ,70800 |

There is no relationship between years of internet usage and perceived influence on consumption, perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity, perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives and perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome. Internet usage does not affect the community influence on consumer decision process.

**Table 4.23: T test results of years of internet usage and perceived influence on consumption**

| | Years of Internet Usage | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Influence on Consumption | Less Experienced Internet Users | 3 | 2,0000 | 1,00000 | ,57735 |
| | More Experienced Internet Users | 199 | 2,8442 | 1,24351 | ,08815 |

Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived Influence on Consumption | Equal variances assumed | 1,845 | ,176 | -1,169 | 200 | ,244 | -,84422 | ,72205 | -2,26804 | ,57959 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1,445 | 2,094 | ,280 | -,84422 | ,58404 | -3,25175 | 1,56331 |

**Table 4.24: T test results of years of internet usage and perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity**

| | Years of Internet Usage | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity | Less Experienced Internet Users | 3 | 3,8889 | ,19245 | ,11111 |
| | More Experienced Internet Users | 199 | 3,8442 | ,86571 | ,06137 |

Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity | Equal variances assumed | 1,905 | ,169 | ,089 | 200 | ,929 | ,04467 | ,50117 | -,94360 | 1,03293 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | ,352 | 3,403 | ,746 | ,04467 | ,12693 | -,33352 | ,42286 |

69

**Table 4.25: T test results of years of internet usage and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives**

| | Years of Internet Usage | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives | Less Experienced Internet Users | 3 | 2,3333 | 1,52753 | ,88192 |
| | More Experienced Internet Users | 199 | 3,3484 | ,98148 | ,06958 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives | Equal variances assumed | ,864 | ,354 | -1,765 | 200 | ,079 | -1,01508 | ,57496 | -2,14883 | ,11868 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1,147 | 2,025 | ,369 | -1,01508 | ,88466 | -4,77682 | 2,74667 |

**Table 4.26: T test results of years of internet usage and perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome**

| | Years of Internet Usage | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome | Less Experienced Internet Users | 3 | 2,0000 | 1,00000 | ,57735 |
| | More Experienced Internet Users | 199 | 3,1005 | 1,02492 | ,07265 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome | Equal variances assumed | ,364 | ,547 | -1,846 | 200 | ,066 | -1,10050 | ,59604 | -2,27582 | ,07482 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1,891 | 2,064 | ,195 | -1,10050 | ,58190 | -3,53146 | 1,33046 |

There is not a relationship between membership length and perceived influence on consumption. The length of membership does not affect the need recognition of users on virtual communities.

**Table 4.27: T test results of membership length and perceived influence on consumption**

| | Membership Length | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived Influence on Consumption | New Users | 19 | 2,4737 | 1,38918 | ,31870 |
| | Old Users | 153 | 2,8824 | 1,19175 | ,09635 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived Influence on Consumption | Equal variances assumed | ,803 | ,372 | -1,384 | 170 | ,168 | -,40867 | ,29534 | | -,99168 | ,17434 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1,227 | 21,419 | ,233 | -,40867 | ,33295 | | -1,10024 | ,28290 |

There is no influence of membership length on perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity. It does not affect search for information of users.

**Table 4.28: T test results of membership length and perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity**

| | Membership Length | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity | New Users | 19 | 3,5614 | ,94315 | ,21637 |
| | Old Users | 153 | 3,8606 | ,85380 | ,06903 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity | Equal variances assumed | ,200 | ,656 | -1,424 | 170 | ,156 | -,29916 | ,21009 | | -,71388 | ,11556 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1,317 | 21,823 | ,201 | -,29916 | ,22712 | | -,77040 | ,17207 |

There is a relationship between membership length and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives. The longer the users are member of virtual communities, the more alternative they have. It affects variety of their choices.

71

**Table 4.29: T test results of membership length and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives**

| | Membership Length | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives | New Users | 19 | 2,7368 | 1,02788 | ,23581 |
| | Old Users | 153 | 3,3638 | ,96606 | ,07810 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives | Equal variances assumed | ,000 | ,986 | -2,650 | 170 | ,009 | -,62699 | ,23663 | -1,09410 | -,15989 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -2,524 | 22,134 | ,019 | -,62699 | ,24841 | -1,14198 | -,11201 |

There is no relationship between membership length and perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome.

**Table 4.30: T test results of membership length and perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome**

| | Membership Length | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome | New Users | 19 | 2,7895 | ,91766 | ,21053 |
| | Old Users | 153 | 3,1176 | 1,01917 | ,08239 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome | Equal variances assumed | ,444 | ,506 | -1,337 | 170 | ,183 | -,32817 | ,24541 | -,81262 | ,15627 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1,452 | 23,870 | ,160 | -,32817 | ,22608 | -,79490 | ,13856 |

**4.31: Summary of T test results**

| Frequency of visits | ✓ Perceived influence on consumption. |
| | ✓ Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives. |
| Duration of visits | ✓ Perceived influence on consumption. |
| Membership length | ✓ Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives. |

As a result of T test, there is a relationship between frequency of visits and community influence on consumer decision. Community influence is more powerful, when the frequency of virtual community is higher. It means that, the users who visit virtual communities more frequently are more influenced by virtual communities while making their purchase decisions. Higher frequency of visits implies more community influence on consumer decision process. The relationship between frequency of visits aand community influence is especially strong in the phases of need recognition and pre-purchase evaluation. So, H5 is supported.

*H5 Frequency of visits is related to community influence on the consumer decision process.*

**Table 4.32: T test result of frequency of visits and community influence on consumer decision**

| | Frequency_Of_Visits | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VC effect on Consumer Decision | Often visitors | 149 | 3,5227 | ,72772 | ,05962 |
| | Rare Visitors | 53 | 3,1745 | ,81318 | ,11170 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| VC effect on Consumer Decision | Equal variances assumed | ,286 | ,593 | 2,899 | 200 | ,004 | ,34812 | ,12009 | ,11132 | ,58493 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 2,750 | 83,466 | ,007 | ,34812 | ,12661 | ,09632 | ,59993 |

There is no relationship between duration of visits and community influence on consumer decision. Frequency of visits is influential on virtual community effect on

73

consumer decision process. On the contrary, duration of visits is not that influential. Frequency is more important than duration. When users visit the virtual community longer, it is not as effective as when they visit more frequently. So, H6 is rejected.

*H6 Duration of visits is related to community influence on the consumer decision process.*

**Table 4.33: T test result of duration of visits and community influence on consumer decision**

| | Duration_of_visits | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VC effect on Consumer Decision | Rare Users | 187 | 3,4258 | ,76019 | ,05559 |
| | Heavy users | 15 | 3,5000 | ,84251 | ,21753 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| VC effect on Consumer Decision | Equal variances assumed | ,505 | ,478 | -,361 | 200 | ,719 | -,07420 | ,20562 | -,47967 | ,33127 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -,330 | 15,883 | ,745 | -,07420 | ,22453 | -,55046 | ,40206 |

There is no relationship between internet usage and community influence on consumer decision. When people are more experienced in using internet, it is not that influential on virtual community effect on consumer decision process. Contrary to what is expected, there is no relationsphip between variables relating to Internet proficiency and community influence on consumer decision.

**Table 4.34: T test result of years of internet usage and community influence on consumer decision**

| | Years of Internet Usage | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VC effect on Consumer Decision | Less Experienced Internet Users | 3 | 2,8333 | ,87797 | ,50690 |
| | More Experienced Internet Users | 199 | 3,4403 | ,76168 | ,05399 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| VC effect on Consumer Decision | Equal variances assumed | ,003 | ,956 | -1,368 | 200 | ,173 | -,60699 | ,44378 | -1,48209 | ,26810 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1,191 | 2,046 | ,354 | -,60699 | ,50976 | -2,75410 | 1,54011 |

Membership length and community influence on consumer decision are positively related. Old users are more affected by virtual communities on their purchase decisions. They are more likely to get information from virtual communities and use it while making purchase decisions.

**Table 4.35: T test result of membership length and community influence on consumer decision**

| | Membership Length | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VC effect on Consumer Decision | New Users | 19 | 3,0197 | ,82102 | ,18835 |
| | Old Users | 153 | 3,4592 | ,74640 | ,06034 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| VC effect on Consumer Decision | Equal variances assumed | ,636 | ,426 | -2,394 | 170 | ,018 | -,43941 | ,18356 | -,80177 | -,07705 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -2,222 | 21,857 | ,037 | -,43941 | ,19778 | -,84975 | -,02908 |

**Table 4.36: T test summary of community influence on consumer decision**

| Variables | Community Influence on Consumer Decision Process |
|---|---|
| Frequency of visits | Positive relationship |
| Duration of visits | No relationship |
| Years of Internet Usage | No relationship |
| Membership length | Positive relationship |

**Table 4.37: Results of hypothesis**

| NO | HYPOTHESIS | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|
| H1 | There is a relationship between topical involvement and virtual community influence on the consumer decision process. | **Supported** |
| H2 | There is a relationship between social involvement and virtual community influence on the consumer decision process. | Rejected |
| H3 | There is a relationship between involvement and effect of virtual community influence on consumer decision process. | **Supported** |
| H4 | There is a relationship between membership length and community influence on the consumer decision process. | **Supported** |

| H5 | Frequency of visits is related to community influence on the consumer decision process. | **Supported** |
|---|---|---|
| H6 | Duration of visits is related to community influence on the consumer decision process. | Rejected |
| H7 | Retrieving information from the community is related to community influence on the consumer decision process. | **Excluded** |
| H8 | Interaction with others is related to community influence on the post-purchase evaluation phase of the consumer decision process. | Rejected |
| H9 | Other-directedness is related to community influence on the consumer decision process. | Rejected |
| H10 | Susceptibility to informational interpersonal influence is related to community influence on the information search phase. | Rejected |
| H11 | There is a relationship between opinion leadership and community influence on the consumer decision process. | **Supported** |
| H12 | Opinion seeking behavior is related to community influence on the consumer decision process. | Rejected |
| H13 | There is a relationship between knowledge sharing and the community influence on the consumer decision process. | **Supported** |
| H14 | There is a relationship between the number of years that someone has been using the Internet and community influence on the consumer decision process. | Rejected |

**Table 4.38: Community influence on the consumer decision process**

Coefficients

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | B | Std. Error |
| (Constant) | 0,000 | 0,000 | | 0,000 | 1,000 | | |
| **Perceived Influence on Consumption** | 0,125 | 0,000 | 0,203 | 0,9127 | **0,000** | 0,725 | 1,379 |
| **Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity** | 0,375 | 0,000 | 0,422 | 0,1869 | **0,000** | 0,707 | 1,415 |
| **Perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives** | 0,375 | 0,000 | 0,487 | 0,1931 | **0,000** | 0,564 | 1,772 |
| **Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome** | 0,125 | 0,000 | 0,169 | 0,6975 | **0,000** | 0,615 | 1,625 |

Dependent Variable: Community Influence on Consumer Decision
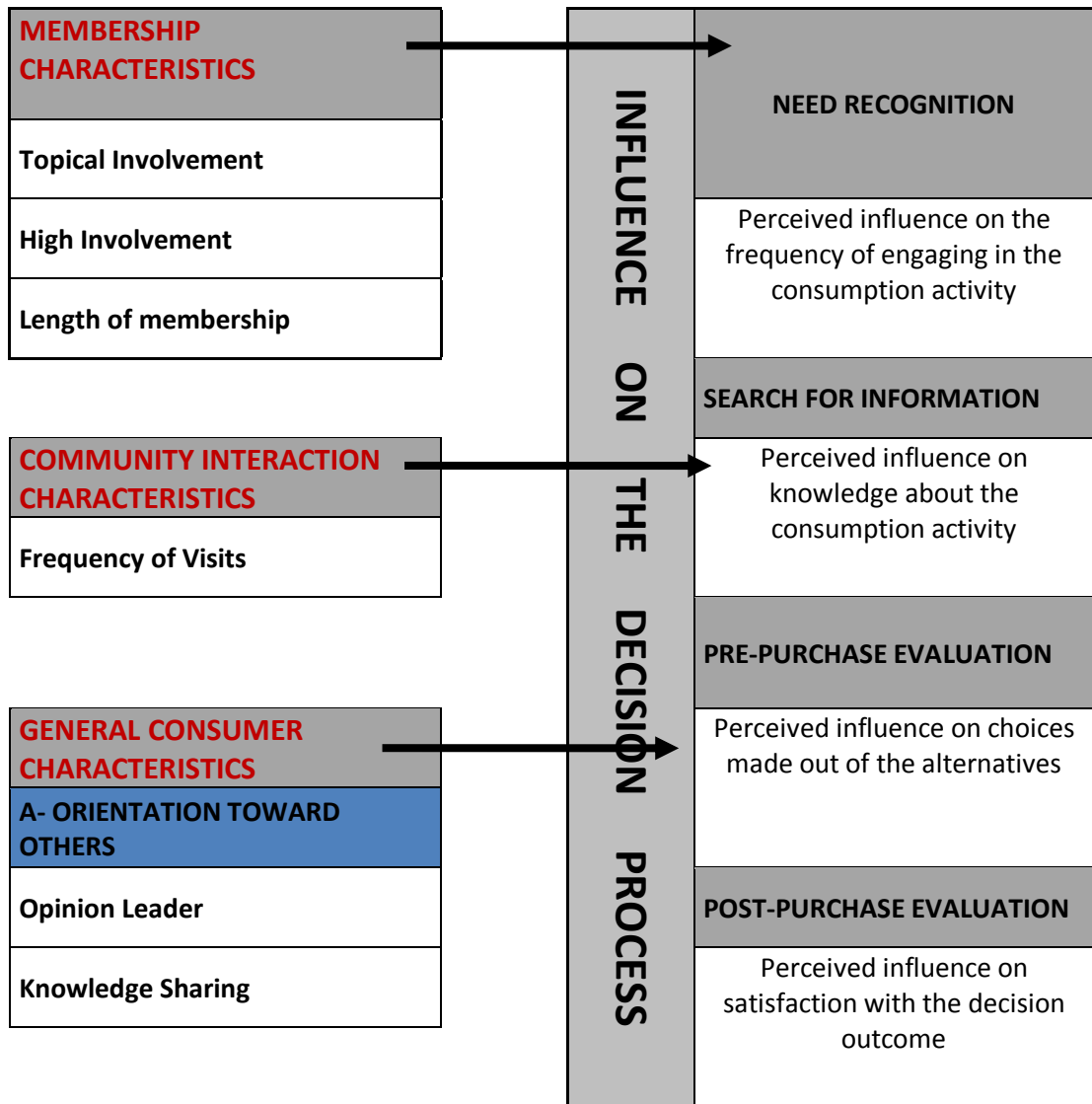Values printed in bold are significant (p≤0,05)

Virtual communities have profound influence on the consumer decision process. Consumer decision process have four phases that are need recognition, search for information, pre-purchase evaluation and post-purchase evaluation. Based on the results, there is relationship between all four phases and community influence on consumer decision process. Percieved influence on knowledge about the consumption

activity and perceived influence on choices made out of alternatives have stronger relationships than perceived influence on consumption and perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome. This means that community influence on the consumer decision process is considerable, especially with regard to the phases of search for information and pre-purchase evaluation. Virtual communities have more impact on search for information and pre-purchase evaluation in the consumer decision process. It means that, after consumers decide to buy something, they use virtul communities as information sources and are able to find different product or service alternatives within virtual communities.

To conclude results, the main findings are summarized. The most important determinants of community influence on consumer decision process are topical involvement, high or low involvement, knowledge sharing, opinion leader, frequency of visits, membership length. There is a relationship between them and community influence on consumer decision process.

**Table 4.39: Revised Model**

| MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS | | INFLUENCE ON THE DECISION PROCESS | NEED RECOGNITION |
|---|---|---|---|
| Topical Involvement | | | Perceived influence on the frequency of engaging in the consumption activity |
| High Involvement | | | |
| Length of membership | | | |
| | | | SEARCH FOR INFORMATION |
| COMMUNITY INTERACTION CHARACTERISTICS | | | Perceived influence on knowledge about the consumption activity |
| Frequency of Visits | | | |
| | | | PRE-PURCHASE EVALUATION |
| GENERAL CONSUMER CHARACTERISTICS | | | Perceived influence on choices made out of the alternatives |
| A- ORIENTATION TOWARD OTHERS | | | |
| Opinion Leader | | | POST-PURCHASE EVALUATION |
| Knowledge Sharing | | | Perceived influence on satisfaction with the decision outcome |

## 5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

Virtual community influence on the consumer decision process as a function of membership characteristics, community interaction characteristics and general consumer characteristics have been analyzed and studied in this study. We have focused on four phases of the consumer decision that are need recognition, searchfor information, pre-purchase evaluation and post-purchase evaluation. The objective of this study was to gain insight in the determinants of virtual community influence and in the differential effects of community influence various stages of the consumer decision process. The factors that are related to community influence on on consumer decision process are topical involvement, high or low involvement, knowledge sharing, opinion leader, frequency of visits, membership length as mentioned in the previous section.

**Table 5.1:Factors affecting virtual community influence on consumer decision process**

| Frequency of visits | **Positive relationship** |
|---|---|
| Membership length | **Positive relationship** |
| Topical Involvement | **Positive relationship** |
| High or Low Involvement | **Positive relationship** |
| Knowledge Sharing | **Positive relationship** |
| Opinion Leader | **Positive relationship** |

## 5.1 CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the study that virtual interpersonal influence does not profoundly differ from interpersonal influence in traditional face to face settings. In both cases, an important determinant of interpersonal influence is the topical involvement. The more someone is topically involved in the virtual community, the more likely it is that community influence on buying decisions occurs. It is also found that the frequency of visits to the community increases the likelihood that virtual community community influence on the purchase decisions. The increase in the regularity of community in a traditional enhances its impact on attitudes, knowledge and

behavior of community, as in the case of virtual community impact on consumer decision process.

There is also strong relationship between length of membership to virtual communities and community influence on consumer decision process. It implicates that old users of virtual communities are more tend to be affected by virtual communities on their buying decisions. Old users may trust and use more virtual communities, they may perceive the information shared within virtual community more reliable and as a result of that, old users are more influenced by virtual communities.

Based on the results of the study, it can be maintained that with the increase of involvement of product, users are more likely to be influenced by virtual communities on their consumption decisions, especially at the search for information and pre-purchase evaluation phases of consumer decision process. If products are high involvement products, it means that they are complex, high risky and hard to understand technical features, so the need of information increases for high involvement products. As a result of that, consumers try to find information about products and they extend their choice of products through the virtual communities. They use virtual communities as information source for their consumption more, if products are not easy to understand and are high involvement products. So, it can be claimed that virtual communities are more effective on consumer decision in high involvement product consumptions.

Although, it is expected that opinion seekers are influenced by virtual communities more than opinion leaders, in our study it is found that opinion leaders are more likely to experience community influence, whereas there is no relationship between opinion seeking and community influence on consumer decision process. It is a surprising finding for us that, opinion leaders are more actively search for information than opinion seekers. It is most probably because of the fact that opinion leaders should have lots of information in order to provide information to others and are considered to be as opinion leaders by other users.

Although there is a strong relationship between opinion seeking and post-purchase evaluation, there is no significant relationship when consumer decision is considered as a whole process. Opinion seekers are more influenced by virtual communites in the post-purchase evaluation phase in the consumer decision process. Through virtual communities, people who are opinion seekers have better product or brand choices. They are more satisfied with their purchases thanks to virtual communities.

Overall, it is found that virtual community influence on the consumer decision process is more in the information search phase, followed by the influence in the pre-purchase evaluation phase. Most users benefit from the extensive knowledge accumulation within the virtual communities to broaden, update and refine their knowledge about a topic, which is affect consumption decisions. To a lesser extent, the community has influence on need recognition and post-purchase evaluation phases. So, virtual communities have less effect on what consumer needs and stimulation of their needs. Also, community's role in reducing cognitive dissonance is limited.

As a result, this study has investigated various factors that could explain the community influence on consumer decision making. The study represents that virtual community is a valuable information source for consumers like family, friends. Interpersonal influence in the traditional context and interpersonal influence in the virtual context have same determinants.

## 5.2 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although our findings provide meaningful implications for marketing managers, companies and virtual communities and the findings are encouraging and useful, the present study has certain limitations. First, whether our findings could be generalized to all types of professional virtual communities is unclear. Further research is necessary to verify the generalizability of our findings. Second, the results may have been impacted by self-selection bias. Our sample comprises only active participants. Individuals who had alreadyceased to participate in virtual communities might have different perceptions about the influence and so could have been differently affected by virtual communities. Third, survey was distributed through friend network and social media, however there

are lots of people outside my network and if it was distributed through a website which has high online traffic, there could be some different results.

Social media is a rising star and became a phenomenon in the world. However, it is not used very well for commerce and transactions even though Facebook is investing to technical infrastructure of it. In the future, with the rise of social media, transactions could occur more on social websites. Then, they will directly affect consumer decision both with the information provided with other users and with the opportunity to buy something on it. As a result of that, social media, which is one kind of virtual community, will have effect on consumer decision in a different way. So, these kind of studies will include both e-commerce part and information provides part while investigating the virtual community effect on consumer decision process.

## 5.3   MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Virtual communities are used for both advertising, building brand loyalty and increasing brand awareness. Different approaches can be implemented for each type of virtual community. Exchange of reliability and objectivity is the most important thing in communities of interest. An advertiser should be careful about that and has to give members that message (Spaulding 2009) If an advertiser tries to manipulate community members that they do not agree with it, members will find the information less reliable and objective. Then sponsor risks dissolving of the community (Spaulding 2009). Besides, in most communities of interest, people write their experiences, products or services of companies. Trust can be broken and reputation of companies can be lost easily. Companies should listen to complaints about their products or service and respond to them (Spaulding 2009). They may hire some employees to monitor and follow these complaints. After that, they can improve their products and can answer these complaints in virtual communities. In Turkey, there is a virtual community which is www.sikayetvar.com. People can write their complaints about products and services. Most companies care about these complaints and they try to solve people's problems. This may increase brand and customer loyalty (Spaulding 2009). Advertising in communities of transaction is a very efficient way for companies. Participants spend money. The most important motivation of participants in communities of transaction is

that they want to find products with lower prices. As a result of that, they don't ignore advertising as in other virtual communities. In other communities, people don't want to see and they do not care advertising. Participants don't mentally or technically block advertisings (Spaulding 2009). In communities of relationship, companies can build relationships by finding key social actors in their brand communities. If a firm can persuade key actors to use or sponsor their product, they may be able to build loyalty to the product (Gupta et al. 2009). In Turkey, Mavi Jeans, a textile firm, does that on Facebook. They persuaded a famous actor and he is the face of the brand. It has Facebook page and sending messages, activities about brand. It organizes some online events on Facebook, competitions, campaigns and so on by using that actor. Besides, companies can build their own fan pages in social networks to build stronger bond with their consumers. Also, companies can use Twitter to reach the masses. They introduce their products in social networks and should give the message to members that "I have designed a product for you." They can make advertisements in social networks. It is maintained that Facebook ads are not clicked very much and they have limited success. Therefore, it is mentioned that companies can generate a viral campaign on Facebook (Gupta et al. 2009). Viral marketing is defined as "any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions." (Cruz & Fill 2008).For example, Sony wants to promote its new digital camera. They can give free cameras to several Facebook members, which is possible to lower costs than advertising. For instance, Honda made a viral campaign on Facebook. They gave Facebook members a heart-shaped virtual gift with Honda logo on Valentine's Day (Gupta et al. 2009). Companies have to find some innovative ways to reach consumers online. They have to find something attractive to affect people.

Companies should define their target customers and try to find the virtual communities they attend. After that, they have to be active in these virtual communities. Especially, recently with the rise of the social networks, companies try to use these social networks to reach customers by using endorser or spokespersons in their online brand community in social networks. They can use these brand communities to interact with their

customers, to announce events, activities of the company. Besides, in online communities, companies can respond to negative comments about their products and can increase the brand and product image. Furthermore, companies can use virtual communities to prepare viral campaigns to reach the customer. All these activities provide companies to increase brand loyalty, brand equity and brand awareness. Virtual communities have a greater impact on consumer decisions and attitudes toward brands or products, in addition to that companies should follow these trends to adopt change of consumer profile, get competitive advantage by reaching consumer in virtual community channel. They have to generate new strategies to be effective on virtual communities.

The generational grouping which was done in the USA includes baby boomers who were born between 1946 and early 1960s. They are also called the post-Second World War generation. Generation X are the ones who were born between 1964 and late 1970s, and generation Y refers to the individuals who were born during 1977-1995 period. Generation Y has also been referred to those born between 1983 and 2001. Generation Y, the largest demographic group in many developed countries, is considered as a highly profitable segment (Azhar & Rahman 2010). It is maintained that Gen Y is exceptionally technologic savvy and they are familiar with the computer (Azhar & Rahman 2010). They have been growing up and most consumers will be Gen Y. As a result of that, it can be claimed that profile of consumers will be similar to Gen Y in the future. They will be more tech oriented and use of Internet and computer will be much higher than today. Therefore, importance of online tools to reach the consumer will be more important than today. Companies may be more obliged to use Internet tools to reach their target consumers. So, virtual communities may also be important for companies and it will be an inevitable tool for them. Perhaps, the importance of virtual communities may be higher than print and visual media.

# REFERENCES

*Books*

Abrams, D., Hogg, M.A., 1990. S*ocial identifications: a social psychology of intergroup relations and group processes.* New York: Routledge.

Baumeister, R., 1999. Self-concept, self-esteem, and identity. *Personality: contemporary theory and research*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, pp. 246-280.

Bettman, J.R., Johnson, E.J., and Payne, J.W., 1991. H*andbook of consumer behavior*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, pp. 50-84.

Code, J., & Zaparyniuk, N., 2009. Social identities, group formation, and the analysis of online communities. *Handbook of research on social software and developing community ontologies*. New York: IGI Publishing, pp. 86-101.

De Valck, K., 2005. V*irtual communities of consumption: networks of consumer knowledge and companionship.* Rotterdam: ERIM.

Donath, J.S., 1999. Identity and deception in the virtual community. C*ommunities in cyberspace.* London :Routledge, 2000, pp. 29-59.

Schiffman, G.L., Kanuk, L.L., 1997. C*onsumer behavior.* Issue No:10. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

*Periodicals*

Azhar, S. & Rahman, **S.,** 2010. Xpressions of generation Y: perceptions of the mobile phone service industry in Pakistan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics.* **23** (1), pp. 1355-5855.

Bagozzi, R.P., Dholakia, U.M., Pearo, L.K., 2004. A social influence model of consumer participation in network- and small-group-based virtual communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing.* **21** (3), pp. 241–263.

Burgee, L.E., Steffes, E.M., 2009. Social ties and online word of mouth. *Internet Research.* **19** (1), pp. 42-59.

Chevallier, J.A., Mayzlin, D., 2006. The effect of word-of-mouth on sales: online book reviews. *Journal of Marketing Research.* **43** (3), pp. 345-354.

Chiu, C.M., Hsu, M.H., Wang, E.T., 2006. Understanding knowledge sharing in virtual communities: An integration of social capital and social cognitive theories. *Decision Support Systems.* **42 (3)**, pp. 1872–1888.

Cruz, D. &Fill, C., 2008. Evaluating viral marketing: isolating the key criteria, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning.* **26** (7), pp. 743-758.

De Valck, K., Bruggen, G., & Wierenga, B., 2009. Virtual communities: a marketing perspective. *Decision Support System.* **47** (3), pp. 185–203.

Etzel, M.J., Bearden, W.O., 1982. Reference group influence on product and brand purchase decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research.* **9** (2), pp. 183-194.

Flavian, C., Guinaliu, M., 2005. The influence of virtual communities on distribution strategies in the internet. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management.* **33** (6), pp. 405-425.

Flynn, L.R., Goldsmith, R.E., and Eastman, J.K., 1996. Opinion leaders and opinion seekers: two new measurement scales. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science.* **24** (2), pp. 137-147.

Grewal, R. Cline, T.W., Davies, A., 2001. Early-entrant advantage, word-of-mouth communication,brand similarity, and the consumer decision-making process. *Journal of Consumer Psychology.* **13** (3), pp. 187-197.

Kim, J., Kardes, F., & Herr, P.M., 1991. Effects of word-of-mouth and product-attribute information on persuasion: an accessibility-diagnosticity perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*. **17** (4), pp. 454-462.

Kim, W.G., Lee, C., & Hiemstra, S.J., 2004. Effects of an online virtual community on customer loyalty and travel product purchases. *Tourism Management*, **25** (3), pp. 343-355.

Kinley, T.R., Josiam, B.M., & Lockett, F., 2010. Involvement and the tourist shopper: using the involvement construct to segment the American tourist shopper at the mall. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. **11** (2), pp. 135-154.

Moon, B.J., 2004. Consumer adoption of the internet as an information search and product purchase channel: some research hypotheses. *International. Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*. **1** (1), pp. 104-118.

Nantel, J., Senecal, S., & Kalczynski, P., 2003. Consumers' decision-making process and their online shopping behavior: a clickstream analysis. *Journal of Business Research*. **58** (11), pp. 1599-1608.

Nichols, M., Maguluru, N., Lea, B.R., & Yu, W.B., 2006. Enhancing business networks using social network based virtual communities. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*. **106** (1), pp. 121-138.

Park, J.K., Feinberg, R., 2010. E-formity: consumer conformity behaviour in virtual communities. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*. **4** (3), pp. 197-213.

Rao, R.A., Childers, T.L., 1992. The Influence of familial and peer-based reference groups on consumer decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research*. **19** (2), pp. 198-211.

Richardson, P.S., Grim, P., & Agrawal, J., 1999. Product conspicuousness and buying motives as determinants of reference group influences. *European Advances in Consumer Research*. **4** , pp. 97-103.

Saffu, K. and Scott, D., 2009. Developing country perceptions of high and low-involvement products manufactured in other countries. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*. **4** (2), pp. 185-199.

Spaulding, T.J., 2009. How can virtual communities create value for business?. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*. **9** (1), pp. 38-49.

Uzkurt, C., Özmen, M., 2006. Pazarlama Yöneticileri Için Yeni Bir Fırsat:Sanal Topluluklar. *Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi İ.İ.B.F. Dergisi*, **8** (1), pp. 23-40

Wu, W-Y., Sukoco, B.M., 2009. Why Should I share? Examining consumers' motives and trust on knowledge sharing. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*. **50** (4), pp. 11-19.

***Other Publications***

De', R., 2003. Social resistance and the self in virtual communities. *Ninth Americas Conference on Information Systems,* 2003 Florida, pp. 373-380.

Gupta, S. et al., 2009, Do friends influence purchases in a social network? [online], Harvard Business School, http://www.hbs.edu/research/pdf/09-123.pdf on 25.12.2011. [accessed 10 February 2012].

IAB, 2011. IAB Türkiye internet ölçümleme araştirmasi, http://www.iab-turkiye.org/files/newsletter/IAB%20bulten-Haziran-2011.pdf. [accessed 5 March 2012]. pp. 1-2.

Silverthorn, S., 2009. Understanding users of social networks [online], Harvard Business School, http://hbswk.hbs.edu/pdf/item/6156.pdf. [accessed 5 March 2012].

TUIK, What figures say?, 2011, www.tuik.gov.tr/IcerikGetir.do?istab_id=4 [accessed 10 March 2012], p. 32.

# APPENDICES

**Appendix 1 Survey**

Marketing Tez- Sanal Ağlar

Anket, internetin hayatımızda daha fazla yer edinmesi ile birlikte ortaya çıkan sanal ağlarla ilgili hazırlanan tez çalışması içindir.

Sanal ağlar twitter, facebook gibi sosyal ağlar olabildiği gibi donanımhaber, şikayetvar, bloglar da olabilmektedir.

Anket 3 SAYFADAN oluşmaktadır. Lütfen 3 sayfayı da doldurunuz.

Vakit ayırıp ankete katıldığınız için teşekkürler...

Hangi sanal ağlara üyesiniz (Birden Fazla İşaretleyebilirsiniz)

☐ Hangi sanal ağlara üyesiniz (Birden Fazla İşaretleyebilirsiniz) Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ Google +

☐ Donanımhaber.com

☐ Sikayetvar.com

☐ Forumlar

☐ Bloglar

Diğer (birden fazla giriş yapabilirsiniz) ⬚

Ne kadar süredir sanal ağlara üyesiniz?

Ne kadar süredir sanal ağlara üyesiniz?

○ 2-3 yıl  ○ 4-5 yıl  ○ 6-7 yıl  ○ 8-9 yıl  ○ 10+ yıl
0-1 yıl

Sanal ağlarda aşağıdaki bilgi kaynaklarını sizin için ifade ettiği güvenirlilik seviyesine göre ölçeklendiriniz

|  | Hiç Güvenilir Değil | Güvenilir Değil | Bir Fikrim Yok | Güvenilir | Çok Güvenilir |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arkadaşlarımın paylaştıkları | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Forumlarda tanımadığım kişiler tarafından paylaşılanlar | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

92

| | Hiç Güvenilir Değil | Güvenilir Değil | Bir Fikrim Yok | Güvenilir | Çok Güvenilir |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kullanıcıların ürünler veya satıcılar ile ilgili yaptıkları yorumlar ve puanlamalar | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Şikayet siteleri | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Konusunda uzman kişilerin paylaştıkları | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıdaki cümleleri, en çok kullandığınız sanal ağı göz önünde bulundurarak değerlendiriniz.

| | Kesinlkle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| İlgilendiğim bir alandaki sanal ağları takip ederim. (Örnek: Araba, yemek, teknoloji,kozmetik vs..) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Bilgi sahibi olduğum bir alanda en az bir sanal ağa üyeliğim vardır. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Üyesi olduğum sanal ağda ilgilendiğim konularda araştırmayı ve bilgi dağarcığımı genişletmeyi severim. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | Kesinlkle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Üyeli olduğum sana ağda yer alan konularla ilgili haberleri, kitapları, dergileri takip ederim. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Üyesi olduğum sanal ağın ilgi alanı olan konu ile ilgili yeni gelişmeleri takip ederim. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Üyesi olduğum sanal ağın ilgi alanı olan konu ile ilgili konularda alışveriş yaparım | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıdaki cümleleri, en çok kullandığınız sanal ağı göz önünde bulundurarak değerlendiriniz.

| | Kesinlkle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Üyesi olduğum sanal ağda diğer üyelerle etkileşimde bulunmak benim için önemlidir. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Üyesi olduğum sanal ağda diğer üyelerle etkileşimde bulunarak çok vakit geçiririm. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Üyesi olduğum sanal ağda diğer üyelerle paylaşımda | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | Kesinlkle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| bulunmak benim için önemlidir. | | | | | |
| Üyesi olduğum sanal ağ sayesinde birçok yeni insanla tanıştım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıda belirtilen soruda, bir sanal ağı bir ürün ile ilgili araştırmak için kullandığınızda o ürünün sizin için ne ifade ettiğini düşünerek cevaplayınız.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| Önemsiz (1) - Önemli (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Sıkıcı (1) - İlginç (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Bir şey ifade etmez (1) - Benim için önemli (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Faydasız (1) - Faydalı (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Alakasız (1) - Alakalı (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| İlgi çekici değil (1) - İlgi Çekici (7) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Kaç kez üyesi olduğunuz sanal ağı ziyaret edersiniz?

○ Kaç kez üyesi olduğunuz sanal ağı ziyaret edersiniz?  Her gün

○ Haftada 1-2 gün

○ Haftada 3-5 gün

○ Ayda 1-2 gün

○ Ayda 3-5 gün

Bir sanal ağı ziyaret ettiğinizde ortalama ne kadar süre geçirirsiniz?

○ Bir sanal ağı ziyaret ettiğinizde ortalama ne kadar süre geçirirsiniz?  0-30 dakika

○ 31-60 dakika

○ 61-120 dakika

○ 121-180 dakika

○ 180 +

En çok kullandığınız sanal ağı göz önünde bulundurarak aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı aşağıdaki ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

Sanal ağı ziyaret ettiğinizde;

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| İlgilendiğim konuda teknik bilgi alırım | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| İlgilendiğim konuyla ilgili makale okurum | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| İlgilendiğim konuyla ilgili kullanıcı yorumlarını araştırırım | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Başkalarından ilgilendiğim konuyla ilgili yardım isterim | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

En çok kullandığınız sanal ağı göz önünde bulundurarak aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı aşağıdaki ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

Sanal ağı ziyaret ettiğinizde;

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| İlgilendiğim konularda teknik bilgi paylaşırım | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| İlgilendiğim konuyla ilgili yorumlar yaparım | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Başkalarının bilgi taleplerine, tavsiye isteklerine cevap veririm | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

En çok kullandığınız sanal ağı göz önünde bulundurarak aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı aşağıdaki ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

Sanal ağı ziyaret ettiğinizde;

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yeni bir tartışma konusu başlatırım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Bir konu hakkındaki bir tartışmaya | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

|  | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| katılırım | | | | | |
| Bir konu hakkındaki bir sohbete katılırım | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıdaki cümleye ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

|  | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| İnsanlarla sıcak ilişkiler kurmak benim için önemlidir. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

|  | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arkadaşlarım onaylayana kadar trend ürünler almam. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bir ürün almadan önce arkadaşlarım ve ailemden bilgi toplarım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Başkalarının satın almak istediğim ürünü beğenmesi benim için önemlidir. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Başkaları üstünde iyi etkiler bırakan ürünleri öğrenmek isterim. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Başkası gibi olmak istiyorsam onun satın aldığı ürünleri almaya çalışırım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Bir ürün hakkında yeterli bilgim yoksa arkadaşlarıma danışırım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Bir ürün seçerken en iyi kararı verebilmek için diğer insanlara danışırım | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bir ürün alırken başkaları benim fikrime danışır. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Arkadaşlarım bir ürün almadan önce genellikle benim fikrime danışır. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Ürün seçimi konusunda insanlar onlara söylediklerimi dikkate alır. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Genelde insanları beğendiğim ürünleri almaları konusunda ikna edebilirim. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bir ürün almam gerektiğinde arkadaşlarımın öneri ve görüşlerini sorarım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

101

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bir ürün almam gerektiğinde diğerlerinin fikirlerini sormak hoşuma gider. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Genellikle arkadaşlarımla bir ürün hakkında bilgi alışverişinde bulunurum. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Arkadaşlarımın bana verdiği bilgiler genellikle işime yarar. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sahip olduğum bilgiyi sanal ağlarda diğer üyelerle paylaşırım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Yeni çıkmış ürünleri incelemek ve bunlarla ilgili bilgilerimi paylaşmak için vakit harcarım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ürünlerle ilgili eleştirilerimi yayınlamak için fırsatları kaçırmam. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Ürünlerle ilgili diğer üyelerin yaptığı yorumlarla ilgili fikirlerimi yayınlarım | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Ne kadar zamandır internet kullanıyorsunuz?

○ 0-2 yıl

○ 3-5 yıl

○ 6-10 yıl

○ 11-15 yıl

○ 15+

İnterneti ne sıklıkta kullanıyorsunuz?

○ İnterneti ne sıklıkta kullanıyorsunuz? Her gün

○ Haftada 1-2 gün

○ Haftada 3-5 gün

○ Ayda 1-2 gün

○ Ayda 3-5 gün

Aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sanal ağlarda üyeliğim nedeniyle, daha sık alışveriş yapmaya başladım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

| | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

|  | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sanal ağlar sayesinde almayı düşündüğüm ürünler hakkında daha fazla bilgi sahibi oluyorum. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Sanal ağlar sayesinde ürün almadan hiç bilmediğim şeyleri öğreniyorum. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Sanal ağlar sayesinde bir ürünün teknik özelliklerine kadar öğreniyorum. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

|  | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sanal ağlar sayesinde değişik markalardan ürünler tercih etmeye başladım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

|  | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sanal ağlar sayesinde yeni ürünler tercih etmeye başladım. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Sanal ağlar sayesinde tercih ettiğim ürünlerin yelpazesi genişledi. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Aşağıdaki cümlelere ne derece katılıp katılmadığınızı ölçekler üzerinde belirtiniz.

|  | Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum | Katılmıyorum | Bir Fikrim Yok | Katılıyorum | Kesinlikle Katılıyorum |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sanal ağlar sayesinde yaptığım alışverişlerden daha çok memnun oluyorum. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

# CURRICULUM VITAE

**Name & Surname**: Emre Baştan

**Permanent Address**: Üsküdar / İstanbul

**Place and Year of Birth**: Bartın, 1984

**Foreign Language**: English

**Primary Education**: Inonu Ilkogretim, 1996

**Secondary Education**: Yıldırım Koleji, 2003

**Undergraguate**: Istanbul Technical University, 2008

**Postgraduate**: Bahcesehir University, 2012

**Name of Institute**: Bahcesehir University

**Name of Master's Program**: Marketing

**Working Life** :

Bahcesehir University Graduate School of Social Sciences, September 2010, -

Kuwait Turk Participation Bank, September 2009 – September 2010