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THE BURNED OUT CONSUMER: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND A MODEL PROPOSAL

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Abstract

Consumer culture has become an inseparable feature of contemporary society today. However, unfortunately, while people adopt the consumption culture, they also face the risk of being burned out. It is inevitable that this phenomenon, whose boundaries and scope are not clearly drawn, will negatively affect the individual's well-being. This study aims to reveal the framework, essential components, and possible consequences of the "*Burned out Consumer*" phenomenon. For this purpose, the "*Burnout*" literature has been utilized, and a model proposal has been developed to define the process.

Keywords: Consumed Consumer, Being Consumed while Consuming, Consumer Burnout, Phenomenon, Model

INTRODUCTION

Although there are some studies in the literature about "*Burned out Consumer*", it is noteworthy that a concrete conceptual definition of the subject has yet to be made. There is no clear conceptual definition of the phenomenon, even in most studies with the phrase "*Burned out Consumer*" in the research title. Another surprising thing is that the studies on this subject are mainly shaped around post-modern consumption, advertising, and fashion products. For this reason, it would be appropriate to draw the conceptual boundaries of the subject in a logical framework.

It is possible to come across the concept of "*Burned out Consumer*" with different but similar names in the literature. For example, being consumed while consuming, consumed consumer, consumer burnout, Etc., are used concerning the subject. "*Burned out Consumer*" generally refers to the experience of being wholly absorbed in consumption until the individual feels a loss of control or autonomy over his consumption behavior. This phenomenon is becoming

increasingly common in modern societies where consumption has become integral to daily life. The causes are complex and multifaceted. These reasons can be psychological, sociological, personal, or manipulations arising from the external environment or a combination.

The “*Burned out Consumer*” may be exposed to financial, psychological, and physiological problems due to his consumption actions, and his relations with his social environment may deteriorate. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the “*Burned out Consumer*” phenomenon and deal with its adverse effects to have a more sustainable and satisfying life opportunity for consumers.

This study discusses the “*Burned out Consumer*” within the scope of the “*Burnout*” literature framework. Along with a model proposal that extends from causes to results, some suggestions are also presented for the concept.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand and make sense of the “*Burned out Consumer*,” it would be appropriate first to understand why the consumers are burned out. Although there is no clear and agreed definition of “*Burned out Consumer*” in the literature, it is seen that there are some inferences about the reasons why consumers are burned out. For example, Özel and Mumyaz (2018) argue that virtual needs are masked and presented under real needs and that individuals consume themselves because they compete with greed and a hedonistic perspective to have these offered commodities. On the other hand, Kuzu and Özveren (2011), from a contrary point of view, say that consumers do not consume themselves but that commercial organizations consume consumers by exploiting them to gain more profit. Köse (2011) approaches the issue from a more sociological perspective by expressing that consumers are burned out while consuming due to the consumption society phenomenon. As a result, it can be said that the consumers are burned out due to their preferences, the social structure, and the manipulations of commercial systems.

Undoubtedly, the “*Burned out Consumer*” issue cannot be conceptualized as the exhaustion of the consumer in the literal sense. In that case, it would be appropriate to take the material and moral elements exhausted in the consumer as a basis. At this point, it will be helpful to

proceed through the burnout syndrome phenomenon in the literature in terms of limiting the subject. Burnout syndrome is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by the stress caused by the negative experiences of the individual in the work environment in general (Bezliudnyi et al., 2019). Hypothetically, a similar output may also occur due to the sum of the negative situations or situations arising from the consumption behaviors of the consumer. In addition, it is known that psychologically problematic consumption behaviors such as impulsive buying or compulsive buying consume the individual financially and mentally (Baltacı & Eser, 2022, p. 185).

So, first of all, it would be helpful to address the stress that the consumer may experience. Stress is a physiological and psychological response to an event that challenges a person's coping ability (Durante & Laran, 2016). Whenever an individual is exposed to a source of stress, he creates a reaction against it. The stress experienced by consumers can occur before the purchase (for example, risks or uncertainties about the product), at the time of purchase (for example, the lack of product availability), or after the purchase behavior (for example, the product does not meet expectations). The source of this stress is inconsistencies or uncertainties between desired outcomes or expectations and actual situations (Moschis, 2007). Although reactions to stress generally vary according to the source of stress, demographic and psychological characteristics of the individual, it generally consists of three stages. These are:

1. Alarm: At this stage, the individual decides to fight or avoid.
2. Adaptation: This is the stage when the source of stress is not resolved despite consuming all the resources (hormones, energy, Etc.) in the body. It can have consequences such as fatigue, muscle pain, and sleep problems.
3. Burnout or recovery: If the individual's stress-fighting mechanisms are successful, the individual enters a recovery process. Otherwise, as the process takes longer, the individual can experience depression, hypertension, or coronary disorders (Sharma, 2018).

In this case, the *"Burned out Consumer"* can probably be in the second or third stage. However, it should be noted that the stress experienced by the consumer is not an irreversible process because stress is also a sign that an individual who has been upset due to negative experiences is struggling to re-establish the balance (Pearlin, 1982).

Researchers describe three types of stress in the literature. These are:

1. Acute Stress: If the individual is in a difficult situation, it triggers the escape or struggle response to cope with this situation (Bhide et al., 2016). In other words, short-term, sudden,

and temporary physiological changes occur when an individual perceives danger or threat (Kennedy & Parker, 2019). Acute stress is experienced in minutes or hours (Viswanathan & Dhabhar, 2005).

2. Episodic Stress: It is the state of feeling acute stress very often. People under the influence of this stress may be nervous and angry and adopt an aggressive attitude toward their environment. This situation negatively affects the individual's social relations (Sharma, 2018; Kapcı & Usul, 2020).

3. Chronic Stress: It is an abnormal psychological response to ongoing and unresolved major threats or demands (Roohafza, 2010). According to another definition, it results from an imbalance between the resources an individual has to cope with situational needs (Colombo et al., 2020). It is the cause of emotional exhaustion (Oğuzberk & Aydın, 2008; Omay & Gür Omay, 2022).

As can be understood from the definitions, stress is a process rather than a result. When the resources that an individual can use to cope with stress are inadequate, the impact of the stress increases. The pressure to consume may increase due to the psychological state of the consumer (Baltacı & Eser, 2022), individual consumption preferences (Private and Mumyılmaz, 2018), social environment (Köse, 2011) or the manipulation of commercial organizations (Kuzu & Özveren, 2011). As the pressure to consume increases due to the reasons listed, it can be expected that the individual who cannot cope with it and feels that he has to consume will also be exposed to chronic stress and consume his emotional resources.

In the literature, it is stated that burnout generally consists of four phases. These are:

1. Enthusiasm phase: The individual has unrealistic expectations, high hopes, and high expectations that have emerged in this direction.
2. Stagnation phase: The hopes and expectations of the individual about the situation he is in have started to decrease, and a state of discomfort and questioning of the situation has emerged.
3. Frustration phase: The individual realizes how difficult it is to change his situation.
4. Apathy phase: It is a state of profound hopelessness, lack of pleasure, and unhappiness due to the current situation (Kaçmaz, 2005; Gül et al., 2014).

Suppose it is necessary to rank the stages over the consumption process of the individual. In that case, the first stage can be considered as the pre-purchase, the second stage as the moment or immediately after the purchase, the third stage as the post-purchase evaluation stage, and the fourth stage as the final evaluation of the actual consumption experience.

The burnout state caused by the chronic stress experienced by the consumer regarding the consumption pattern can have many adverse consequences. For example, this situation can damage social relations (Dolgun, 2010), cause substance addiction (Ören & Türkoğlu, 2006), create a feeling of chronic fatigue (Kazu & Yıldırım, 2021), and bring along psychological disorders such as depression (Çalgan et al., 2009), may cause chronic headache and stomach pain (Güven & Sezici, 2016). The burnout consumer may face psychological, physiological, or social problems due to this adverse situation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of the research is to present a conceptual definition of the *"Burned out Consumer"* phenomenon. In this context, the phenomenon of *"Burned out Consumer"* can be conceptually defined as *"the consumer who erodes his emotional resources as a result of his consumption behavior due to the manipulations of commercial organizations in addition to sociological, psychological, and individual reasons, and is exposed to psychological, physiological and social problems as a result of this negative situation."* Again, when evaluated over this definition, *"Burned out Consumer"* can be evaluated as an individual who has lost control over his/her purchasing behavior due to external and internal reasons or has difficulty in struggling with purchasing pressure. It would be appropriate for the consumer, who cannot cope with this situation, to receive support from his social environment or health professionals. Otherwise, in addition to the individual's social life, difficult situations may occur in his financial opportunities.

In light of the information obtained from the literature, a general framework has been drawn regarding the concept of *"Burned out Consumer."* According to the literature, consumers can be burnout due to the stress they experience as a result of their consumption behavior due to the manipulations of commercial organizations in addition to sociological, psychological, and individual reasons. According to this approach, consumption pattern is also a source of stress. Demographic and psychological characteristics moderate consumers' ability to cope with the stress they are exposed to.

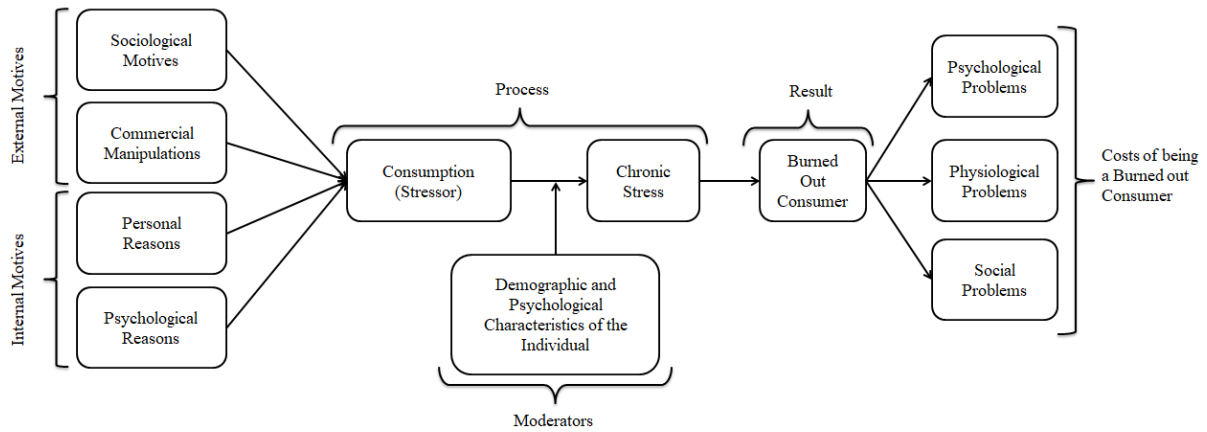


Figure 1 A model proposal for the "Burned out Consumer"

The situation can become chronic when consumers cannot avoid the source of the stress arising from their consumption actions or cope with this stress load. This resulting chronic stress can deplete the consumer's emotional resources. As a result, the *burnout consumer* may encounter psychological and physiological problems due to his unfavorable situation and some problems with his social environment.

It may be beneficial for consumers who cannot avoid the source of the stress arising from consumption or who cannot cope with the stress caused by this stressor to receive support from their social circles or professionals regarding the negative situation they are in. Otherwise, these consumers, who consume their emotional resources, are likely to cause social costs due to their deteriorated social relations and individual costs due to the possibility of losing their health.

The model presented in this study can be used by researchers with both quantitative and qualitative methods as it is or with parameters selected from within limited scopes. In addition, it is thought that Maslach and Jackson's (1981) "*Burnout Inventory*" can be adapted to consumer behavior, and the concept of "*Burned out Consumer*" can be examined in larger samples.

References

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