



THE IMPACT OF ZERO MOMENT OF TRUTH (ZMOT) ON SMARTPHONE BUYING DECISION

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Abstract:

With the advent of the Internet, consumer buying process has changed dramatically. Consumer's buying habits are influenced by digital medium to a large extent. Online peer reviews, which are also known as Zero Moment of Truth (ZMoT) play a significant role in deciding whether to buy or not buy from a particular brand. This study investigates the consumer buying decision process in smartphone purchase decision. Triggered by stimulus, ZMoT and the subsequent stages are analyzed to find out relative importance of each stage in consumer buying decision in now always-connected digitized world. The survey was conducted against 241 Turkish smartphone owners residing in Istanbul, who have made a purchase in the last six months. An analysis is made to assess the relative importance of each stage in the buying process according to different demographic factors. The results indicate the key role of ZMoT among all stages in consumer buying process. The results also demonstrate ZMoT is more influential in some of the demographic factors.

Keywords:

Consumer Buying Process, Zero Moment of Truth, Stimulus.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century marketing environment, brands try to design their products according to consumer's needs and wishes. Today, brands not only try to convince consumers to buy their products, but also, they try to build their brand equity in customer's mind. In the scope of customer, understanding of consumer buying decision process has great importance. Thanks to the Internet medium and social media revolution, consumers have increased power over the brands. Furthermore, smartphones enable consumers to access Internet everywhere on a 7/24 basis. Smartphones enabled people to fulfill their needs like paying the bill, ordering food or even buying a new smartphone. So, consumer's buying decision process is changed as compared to the conventional means. Consumer buying process typically has five elements, namely; problem recognition, information search, choosing among alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior. It's very important to understand of buying decision process for winning at ZMOT. The research indicated the effect of zero moment of truth (ZMOT) on customer purchase decision and delivers an explanatory research on smartphone in Turkey. According to Google, ZMOT is new added member for three-step process of stimulus, shelf (FMOT) and experience (SMOT) (2011, Google). First Moment of Truth (FMOT) is consumer's decision moment at shelf which brand to purchase and Second Moment of Truth (SMOT) is the consumer faces at home whether products deliver on the brand promise defined by P&G (2006, Annual report). ZMOT is the new and powerful step in these days, because consumers are searching online via smartphone or laptop before the purchase decision. In the next section literature review regarding buying decision process, stimuli and moments of truth are discussed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Buying Decision Process

Marketers studied many years to understand consumer buying process and finally it is a categorized as five steps, namely; diagnosis of the problem, seeking details, choosing among alternatives, buying decision and attitudes after the buying. It's clearly seen that purchase process starts way before actual purchase and has outcomes long afterward (Kotler, 2006). Sometimes it can be skipped some of process, such as maybe consumer is satisfied with one product

and buys it always, so there is no problem recognition or information search but still consumer may write online about the product or tell friends with face to face or via message, that is named word of mouth or/and electronic word of mouth. Since it is possible to search online and after purchase to write a blog about the product, buying decision process should be examined prospect of ZMOT. It can be defined the steps of buying decision process as Figure 1.

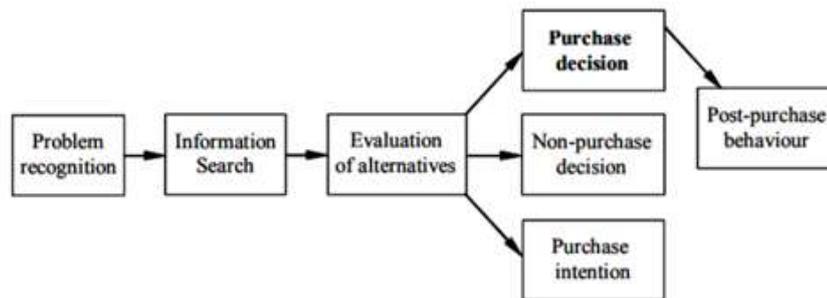


Figure 1. The buying decision process (Maria, 2014).

To achieve playing role at problem recognition phase, demographic factors should be taken into consideration included, age, sex, race, income, race, education status and marital status (Kinnear, 1986). There are two types of demand which are primary and secondary. For primary demand, marketers encourage the customer experience the product or service ignoring of the brand they select such as when they first introduced. Secondary demand is occurred only if primary demand is existing, and marketers try to convince consumer for best solution which is a specific brand's product (Pearson, 2006).

Consumers not always make search rationally, especially consumers who have low income make less external search even they will lose more when they made bad purchase compare to the wealthy ones (Pearson, 2006). Every purchase decision has some risks perceived by customer, in other term, there is a belief that product may has negative consequences. If the product of a brand is unfamiliar to consumer, perceived risk gets higher, so consumers tend to search more in that kind of situation (Alexander, 2004). Moreover, while each group of the search customers more likely to use many sources of information? (Tulin and Erdem, 2004).

The number of brands which exist on consumer's top of minds are varies product to product or for one product it varies country to country. For example, according to research, for autos category, American consumers have eight brands their top of minds to evaluation, and Canadians have only two brands for average however Canadians have seven beer brands in their top of minds while Americans have three (Hauser, 1990). In consumer's top of mind there are many brand names and their qualifications and especially most liked one or most hated one.

To understand the concept of alternatives evaluation, consumer's thinking method which also can be seen on marketplace websites, is categorization should be known. According to Jim Lecinski, a classical ZMOT process would be like this, searching online for more information about the product, checking other consumers who had the product before, comments about the product and checking for coupons, offers, and discounts (Google, 2012).

The consumer has judgments and preferences towards different brands through an attribute evaluation procedure (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden, 1973). Kotler and Keller (2006) expressed that customers assess products and services by incorporating their positive and negative brand beliefs according to significance and the expectancy-value model of attitude formation advances it. According to Taylor, J. (1974) since consequences of a buying decision can be seen in the future, at purchasing moment, consumers are forced to decide in other words take risk, and a consumer's decision to adjust, postpone, or avoid a purchase decision is highly affected by perceived risk. Those risks are defined by Kotler and Keller (2004) as:

1. Functional risk - the product expectation is not satisfied.
2. Physical risk-- the product may harmful to consumer's health.
3. Financial risk-- price of the product is high to its value.

4. Social risk- the product can cause shameful by other people.
5. Psychological risk- the product can be harmful to mental health well-being of the user.
6. Time risk -unsatisfied product can cause an opportunity cost of finding another adequate product.

It's normal to expect that, buyer decision process ends at purchase decision phase. Boulding, et al. (1993), Spreng and Dixon (1992), Zeithaml et al. (1993) mentioned that predictive will be suppositions represent customer's belief about the level of service to occur in consumer's future contact with the brand. Miller (1977) defined the expected standard as normal stems from past incidents with a product from a consumer's perception of standard product quality. The assumed belief is based on averaged performance what the respondent feels performance will be (Miller, 1977, p. 76). Woodruff et al. (1983) mentioned those beliefs based on usual experience since they catch the ideal and realistic aspects of expectations. Santos and Boote (2003) mentioned that as well as attempting to manage pre-purchase expectations, marketers should understand the nature of customer's post-purchase affective states and resultant affective behavior. Four post-purchase affective states have been suggested: delight, satisfaction (positive unimportance), acceptance (negative unimportance) and dissatisfaction.

2.2. Moments of Truth

Moment of Truths are critical moments in which a brand encounter attracts, pleasures or indifferences potential consumers. Procter & Gamble noticed the crucial importance of three to seven seconds after a customer first encounters a store shelf. For this reason, they described this at the shelf decision moment as the First Moment of Truth (FMOT) (Nelson, Ellison, 2005). Löfgren et al. (2008) noted that at the moment of buying, or the FMOT, the aim of the cover is to attract to consumers and works as a silent salesman that assists sell the product. As a marketing term, moment of truth is the incident when customers contact with a service, brand, or product to form an impression about that specific brand, service or product, it's mentioned by Ertemel and Başçı (2015), Ertemel and Köksal (2017) and Ertemel and Peyk (2018). In the second moment of truth, products are used or consumed. According to the Löfgren (2005) the FMOT is a used for defining consumer's decision at moment of buying, however the second moment of truth defines the part of the consumption process that deals with use, handling, and actual consumption after purchase. The third moment of truth is that consumer's feedback or reaction towards a brand, product or service, consumer becomes brand advocate and gives back via word of mouth or social media publishing. The third moment is that powerful point where the product experience stimulates an emotion, curiosity, passion, or even anger to talk about the brand. According to Moran et. al. (2014), by assisting the sharing of favorable consumer experience at Third Moment of Truth, brands can exploit the network effects of social media marketing to build stronger, more sustainable customer-engagement relationships.

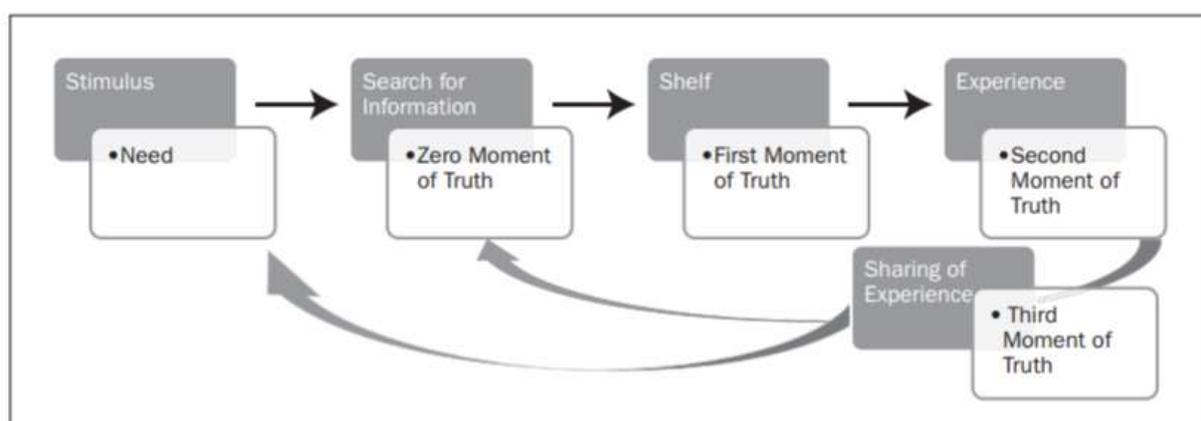


Figure 2. Stimulus and Moments of Truth (Moran et al., 2014).

According to Lecinski (2011), ZMOT is that moment when consumers use their laptop, smart phone or some other devices which can connect to internet and start learning about a product or service they are thinking about trying or

buying. ZMOT is the moment when customer is exposed by stimuli, they immediately start searching for information about product or brand online via Smartphones, tablets and computers. According to Ertemel and Başçı (2015), ZMOT's primary defining features are:

- ZMOT occurs in online habitat, for example search engines.
- It occurs in real time, at any time of day and progressively on the go with smartphones when consumer is exposed by a stimulus.

The conversation is occurring between consumers and experts, friends, strangers, brands and the purpose is getting attention by customer. It can be seen in the figure below that one customer's experiences about product turns out to be another customer's ZMOT.

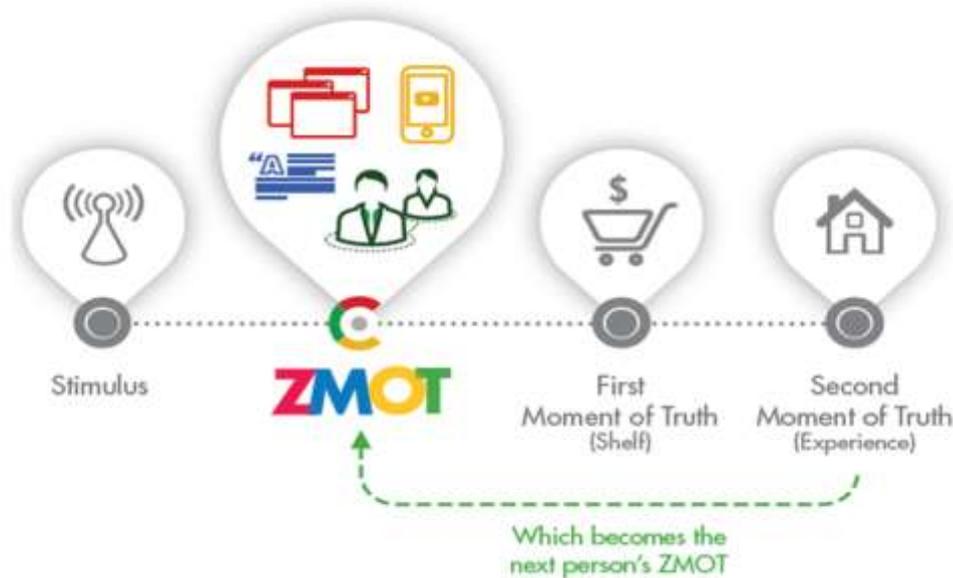


Figure 3. Stimulus, ZMOT, FMOT and SMOT (Lecinski, 2011).

2.3. Word of Mouth

People are exposed massive amount of marketing messages and consumers are exposed these messages via TV channels, radio stations, magazines, newspapers, online advertisements (Cakim, 2010). Word of mouth is passing of information from person to person using oral communication.

There is an argument about word of mouth which is spreading more when customer is dissatisfied or satisfied and Anderson (1998) mentioned that extremely dissatisfied customers engage greater word of mouth than high-satisfied customers. Marketers should be careful about satisfaction level of consumers but they should be more careful about dissatisfaction level of customers.

Thanks to internet and technology, word of mouth still active and powerful at online medium. Gremler et al. (2004) mentioned that, internet makes possible consumers to share their ideas about products, brands and services, through web-based consumer opinion platforms, and this is how electronic word of mouth (eWOM) exist. Since internet has developed, consumers can reach unbiased information about product from other consumers and it also enables to consumers can share their experiences and satisfaction level after purchase, so it can be seen that consumers engage with electronic word of mouth both ways which they exploit from it and contribute to it.

Smartphone Market in Turkey

Turkey's population is 82.44 million people in 2020. According to research which examined by Hootsuite and We are Social (2019), 77% of the adults have a smartphone and 84 of them are using internet daily. It can be seen that, there is a big market in Turkey and it's worth to research.

3. Research Model

Now consumers can reach information about the product, experiences about the product which has been bought and written comment online about it by another customer and that is happening in very short time thanks to smartphones which connect internet any second. Consumers are more active more than ever in buying process.

The research examines the effects of Zero Moment of Truth on consumer buying decision in Turkey on smartphone products in the following aspects:

1. Investigate Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT) based on the different demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, income level, education level etc.
2. Analyze Zero Moment of Truth against Stimulus and First Moment of truth in smartphone sector.

3.1. Research Methods and Limitations

In this research, survey questions which can be found on Appendix-1, and questions are obtained from similar study which has been studied by Google at 2011. In that survey, the first question is asked surveyors whether they bought a new smartphone for last six months or not. If they did not, the survey has ended for them. The survey has delivered online, and 396 surveyors are joined. 155 surveyors said that they did not buy any smartphone in last six months and they did not see other questions so in this research, 241 surveyors completed the whole survey questions and it's analyzed. The questions are translated Turkish before sent to the surveyors from original study which is English.

4. Result

The results show that ZMOT is the most important phase among the surveyors and distributions can be found in Figure below.

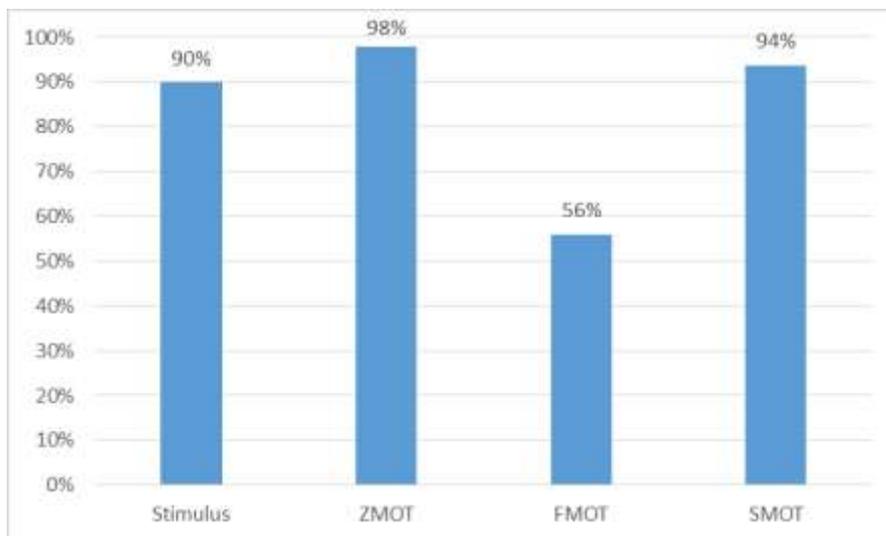


Figure 4. Distribution of Stimulus, ZMOT, FMOT and SMOT According to Survey.

In ZMOT phase, distribution of Source used by surveyors shown in the figure below.

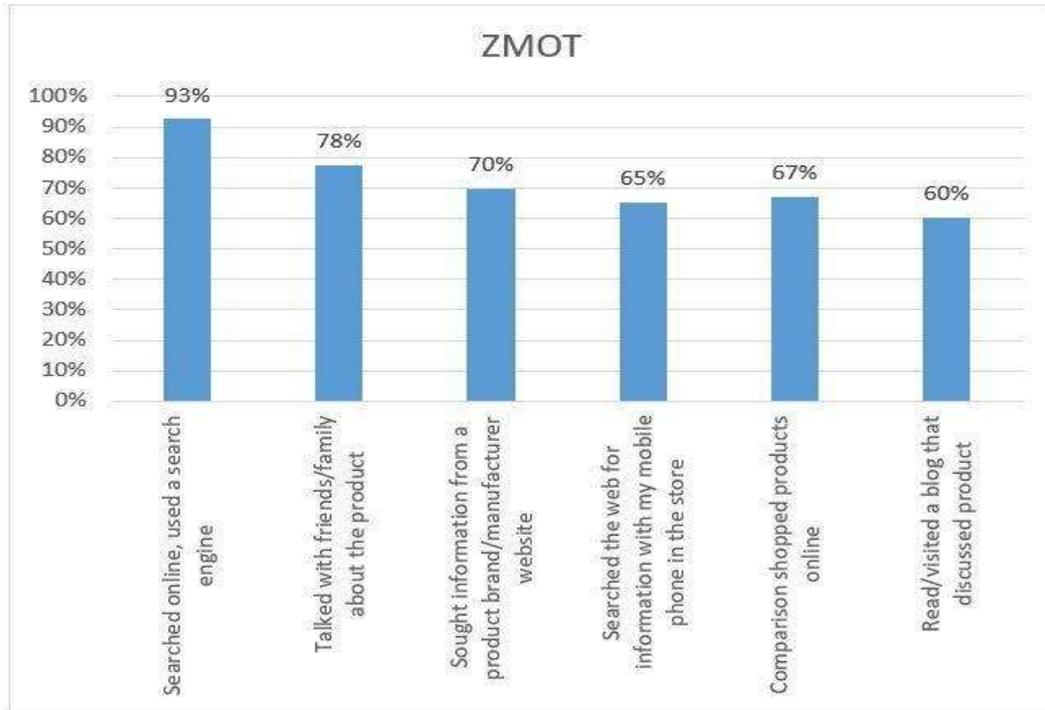


Figure 5. Distribution of Source Used in ZMOT.

As it can be seen on the Figure 5, most of the surveyors searched online and second place is belonging to word of mouth, they talked with their friends and family about the Smartphone while they are in buying decision process.

According to the survey results, gender, age and marital status of the surveyors are not affected on ZMOT process, they have similar attributes, they used sources on ZMOT with similar rates.

The results show that, Educational status of the surveyors were affected, according to ratio of the source used in their ZMOT process. It can be seen on Figure 6.

According to results, ZMOT is shown by 50% of the employee, 45% of the student, 40% of unemployed, 38% of private sector, 36% public sector and less ZMOT percentage belongs to freelance. It can be seen on the Figure 7.

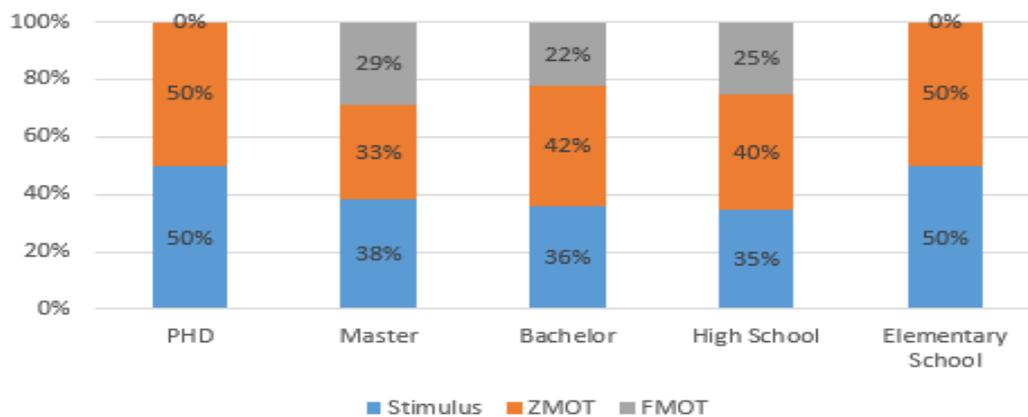


Figure 6. Distribution of Source Used in Stimulus, ZMOT and FMOT According to Education Level.

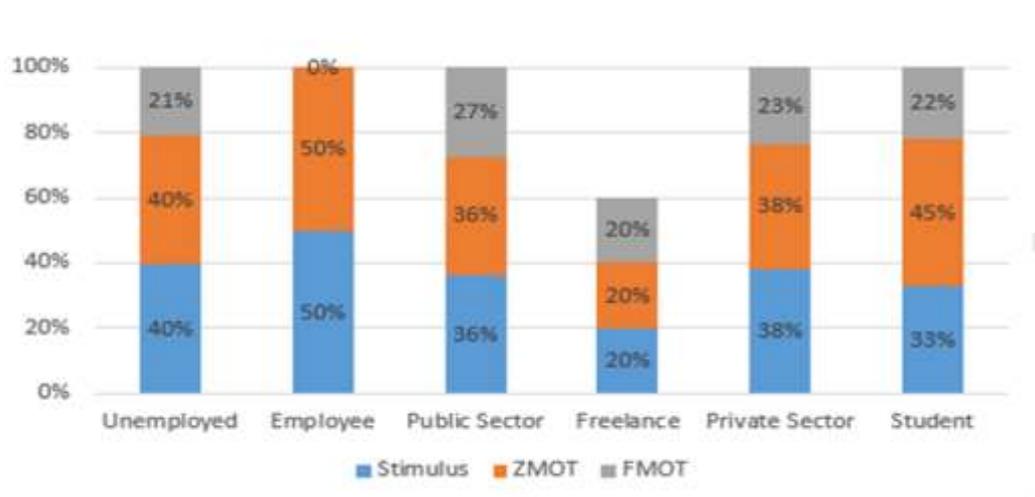


Figure 7. Distribution of Source Used in Stimulus, ZMOT and FMOT According to Occupation.

In order to define, the relationship between participants' time spent on internet daily with FMOT, ZMOT and Stimulus are investigated with using chi-square analysis. The results are shown in the table below. According to this square test, time spent on the internet has relationship with process of buying decision as Stimulus, FMOT and ZMOT.

Table 1. Chi-Square Analysis Results According to Time Spent on Internet at Stimulus, ZMOT and FMOT.

| Time spent on internet | Â | Stimulus | ZMOT | FMOT |
|------------------------|---|----------|----------------|------|
| 0-2 hours | n | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| | % | %33 | %33 | %33 |
| 2-4 hours | n | 56 | 56 | 40 |
| | % | %37 | %37 | %26 |
| 4-6 hours | n | 70 | 71 | 39 |
| | % | %39 | %39 | %22 |
| 6-8 hours | n | 56 | 62 | 27 |
| | % | %39 | %43 | %19 |
| 8+ hours | n | 29 | 40 | 23 |
| | % | %32 | %43 | %25 |
| | | Â | X ² | p |
| | | Â | | |

| | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------|--------|--------|
| | | Stimulus | 20,654 | 0,0001 |
| | | FMOT | 17,6 | 0,004 |
| | | ZMOT | 6,4 | 0,019 |

It can be seen on the graph that the distribution of FMOT, stimulus and ZMOT according to time spent on internet. The graph below shows that, Stimulus and ZMOT are increasing with time spent on internet.

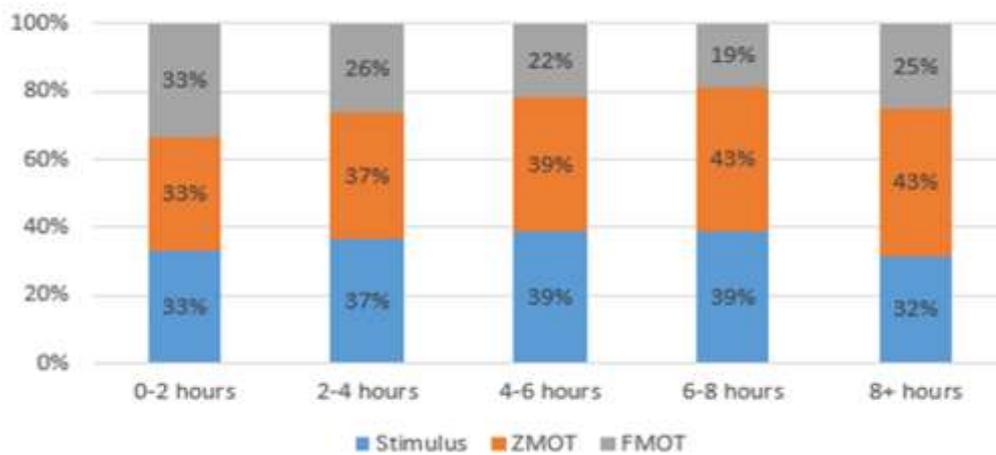


Figure 8. Distribution of Source Used in Stimulus, ZMOT and FMOT According to Time Spent on Internet

5. Discussion

Based on the survey results, zero moment of truth is most important phenomenon and step at buying decision process, on smartphone in Turkey. According to survey, surveyors who all age groups, whether they are single or married, and whether they are female or male, they distributed with similar rates on ZMOT phase. But educational status, occupation and daily time spent on internet were affected on distribution of the surveyors engaged with Zero moment of truth.

6. Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

Technology and smartphones have developed so usage of internet is also increased with these developments. Before, customer's buying decision process is occurred with Stimulus, FMOT and SMOT but there is a new step now which called ZMOT. Now, ZMOT at least as much as important with other steps. Sales are not directly dependent with the performance of sales person and sales are not restricted with time or store, since there is great usage of e-commerce and consumers can reach products, brands whenever they want and stores are open 24 hours in a day. Customers are trying to make more smart choices now, and they are using online sources, e-WOMs more than ever.

Brands need to be more transparent and must be there all the time while consumers at buying decision process. Winning at ZMOT is the new key of success but it cannot be ignored that Stimulus and FMOT are still important. After the purchase, there is a moment called Third Moment of truth, it is defined as customer make comments online or contact with brands directly and it's open to all other customers for reaching information and experiences. Word of mouth was important and it is still important at customers buying decision process but now there is e-WOM and it's more powerful and more reachable more than ever.

In this research, it's been analyzed that, the factors affective on customer's behavior at smartphone buying decision process in Turkey. It's also analyzed that, according to demographic factors, how consumer behavior is affected and which sources are used more in smartphone buying decision process. The research can be developed with running other sectors or other nations, so in that way, it can be comparable with each other, and big picture can be seen more clearly. As a further research idea, how brand loyalty is affected by Stimulus, FMOT and ZMOT according to demographic variables.

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APPENDIX – 1: SURVEY QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH

The following survey is designed to analyze how zero moment of truth effects Turkish consumers' smartphonbuying behavior.

| Q1. What is your gender? | |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Male |
| 2 | Female |
| Q2. What is your Marital Statuses? | |
| 1 | Married |
| 2 | Single |
| Q3. Please specify your age. | |
| 1 | Age $18 \leq 25$ |
| 2 | Age $26 \leq 34$ |
| 3 | Age $> 35 \leq 44$ |
| 4 | Age $> 45 \leq 54$ |
| Q4. What is your educational level? | |
| 1 | Elementary School |
| 2 | High school |
| 3 | University |
| 4 | Master |
| 5 | PhD |
| Q5. What is your income status? | |
| 1 | No income |
| 2 | Less than 2500TL |
| 3 | 2500TL less than 5000TL |
| 4 | 5000TL less than 7500TL |
| 5 | 7500TL less than 10000TL |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| 6 | 10000TL and more |
| Q6. What is your occupation? | |
| 1 | Student |
| 2 | Private sector |
| 3 | Housewife |
| 4 | Employee |
| 5 | Other |
| 6 | Public sector |
| 7 | Retired |
| 8 | Self-employment |
| 9 | Unemployed |

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Q7/A. Time spent planning a product purchase | |
| 1 | 1 year and more |
| 2 | 7 months less than 12 months |
| 3 | 4 months less than 6 months |
| 4 | 2 months less than 3 months |
| 5 | 1 month |
| 6 | 3 weeks |
| 7 | 2 weeks |
| 8 | 1 week |
| 9 | 4 days less than 6 days |
| 10 | 2 days less than 3 days |
| 11 | 1 day |
| 12 | 9 hours less than 12 hours |
| 13 | 4 hours less than 9 hours |
| 14 | 1 hour less than 4 hours |
| 15 | 1 hour |
| 16 | A few seconds |
| Q7/B. Time Spent on Internet Daily | |
| 1 | 0-2 hours |

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2 | 2-4 hours |
| 3 | 4-6 hours |
| 4 | 6-8 hours |
| 5 | 8+ hours |
| Q7/C. When did you buy a product like that? | |
| 1 | Never |
| 2 | 2 years less than 5 years ago |
| 3 | 1 year less than 2 years ago |
| 4 | 1 year ago |
| 5 | 9 months less than 12 months ago |
| 6 | 3 months less than 9 months ago |
| 7 | 1 month less than 3 months ago |
| 8 | 1 month ago |
| 9 | 1 week less than 4 weeks ago |
| 10 | 1 week ago |
| 11 | 4 days less than 7 days ago |
| 12 | 1 day less than 4 days ago |
| 13 | 1 day ago |
| 14 | A few hours ago |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Q7/D. On the last occasion, where did you purchase this product? | |
| 1 | Online |
| 2 | Store |

| Stimulus | | Y | N |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| 1 | Noticed advertising while browsing online | | |
| 2 | Saw/tried product at the house of a friend/family member | | |
| 3 | This is a brand I grew up with | | |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| 4 | Looked at/read magazine advertisements | | |
| 5 | Saw an ad on an outdoor billboard | | |
| 6 | Read magazine articles/reviews/information | | |
| 7 | Saw an ad in a newspaper/newspaper insert | | |
| 8 | Read newspaper articles/reviews/information | | |
| 9 | Looked up brands/retailers in the Yellow Pages | | |
| 10 | Attended a show or event where product were featured | | |
| 11 | Received mail at home from a brand/manufacture (e.g., catalogue, brochure) | | |
| 12 | Received mail at home from a store/retailer (e.g., catalogue, brochure) | | |
| 13 | Read information in an email received from a brand/manufacture | | |
| 14 | Read information in an email received from a retailer/store | | |
| 15 | Tried a sample/experienced the product at a special event | | |
| 16 | Heard it discussed on the radio | | |
| 17 | Saw advertisements on television | | |
| 18 | Watched a TV show that featured the product | | |
| ZMOT – Zero Moment of Truth | | Y | N |
| 1 | Talked with friends/family about the product | | |
| 2 | Searched online, used a search engine | | |
| 3 | Comparison shopped products online | | |

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| 4 | Sought information from a product brand/manufacture website | | |
| 5 | Read product reviews or endorsements online | | |
| 6 | Sought information from a retailer/store website | | |
| 7 | Read comments following an article/opinion piece online | | |
| 8 | Became a friend/follower/"liked" a brand | | |
| 9 | Watched videos about product online | | |

| | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| 10 | Read/visited a blog that discussed product | | |
| 11 | Searched the web for information with my mobile phone before shopping | | |
| 12 | Talked to a customer service representative online | | |
| 13 | Searched the web for information with my mobile phone in the store | | |
| 14 | Saw product mentioned on a social networking website like Facebook | | |
| 15 | Received a referral notice from a friend online | | |
| 16 | Commented on a product mentioned on a social networking website like Facebook | | |
| 17 | Received a coupon or pricing information from someone on a social networking site | | |
| 18 | Commented on a blog that discussed product | | |
| 19 | Searched for a coupon with my mobile phone before shopping | | |
| 20 | Saw an ad/coupon sent to my mobile phone | | |
| 21 | Looked for coupons on a retailer/store website | | |
| 22 | Received a text from a brand/manufacture on my mobile phone | | |
| 23 | Searched for a coupon with my mobile phone in the store | | |
| 24 | Looked for coupons on a product brand/manufacture website | | |
| 25 | Participated in a chat or discussion online about product | | |
| 26 | Used my mobile phone to scan 2D barcode/QR code in the store | | |

The Impact of Zero Moment of Truth (Zmot) on Smartphone Buying Decision

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| 2 7 | Read/visited a forum/message board about product | | |
| 2 8 | Talked to a customer service rep/salesperson via email | | |
| 2 9 | Commented on a forum/message board about product | | |
| FMOT – First Moment of Truth | | Y | N |
| 1 | Tried a sample/experienced the product in a store | | |
| 2 | Talked with a salesperson or associate in the store | | |
| 3 | Talked with a customer service representative on the phone | | |
| 4 | Looked at the product package in the store | | |
| 5 | Read brochure/pamphlet about the product in the store | | |
| 6 | Used product coupon I got at the store | | |
| 7 | Used computer in the store to look up information on product | | |
| 8 | Used a loyalty card/frequent buyer card | | |
| 9 | Redeemed a gift card/rewards card | | |
| SMOT – Second Moment of Truth | | Y | N |
| 1 | Mentioned it to friends/family | | |
| 2 | Mentioned it to a co-worker | | |
| 3 | Took a survey | | |
| 4 | Wrote a customer review on a website | | |
| 5 | Wrote about it on a Facebook page | | |
| 6 | Posted Tweets about it | | |
| 7 | Wrote about it in a blog | | |