

A Study into the Relationships among Consumers' Diet-Focused Behaviors, Organic Nutrition, and Environmentally Conscious Behaviors

Tüketicilerin Diyetle Yatkinlıkları, Organik Beslenme ve Çevreye Duyarlı Davranışları Arasındaki İlişki Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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Abstract

Currently, consumers can be game-changing supporters of a more sustainable world by being healthy and environmentally conscious and opting for food produced in view of social responsibility. It is evident that there are relationships among healthy food, life style, and environmentally conscious consumption and consumers have been becoming more concerned about their own health and environmental issues. The present study conducted to this end revealed relationships among diet-focused behaviors, organic nutrition, and environmentally conscious behaviors. The data was collected with online questionnaires and a statistical software program, was used to conduct the regression analyses, frequency analyses and factor analyses of the data. Results show that there is a significant relationship between consumers' diet-focused behaviors, organic nutrition and environmentally conscious behaviors.

Key Words: Diet-focusedness, organic nutrition, environmental conscious behavior, sustainable consumption

Öz

Günümüzde tüketiciler hem sağlıklı hem de çevreye duyarlı olarak ve sosyal sorumluluk anlayışı ile üretilen besinleri seçerek daha sürdürülebilir dünyanın önemli birer destekçileri olabilmektedirler. Sağlıklı besinler, yaşam stilleri ve çevreye duyarlı tüketim arasında bir ilişkinin bulunduğu görülmektedir ve tüketiciler de günden güne kendi sağlıkları ve çevreyle ilgili konular için daha fazla endişe duymaya başlamışlardır. Bu doğrultuda gerçekleştirilen çalışma ile çevreye duyarlı davranış, sağlık bilincine sahip yaşam tarzı, beslenme ve etik tüketim arasındaki ilişkide algılanan tüketici etkinliğinin düzenleyici rolü araştırılmıştır. Çalışmanın verileri katılımcılardan online anket yoluyla elde edilmiştir ve değişkenler arasındaki ilişkileri ölçmek için sosyal bilimlerde sıklıkla kullanılan bir programda analizleri yapılmıştır. Örneklem veri analizinde regresyon analizi, frekans analizi, faktör analizleri kullanılmıştır. araştırmadan elde edilen bulgulara göre, tüketicilerin diyetle yatkinlıkları, organik beslenme alışkanlıkları ve çevreye duyarlı davranışları arasında anlamlı bir ilişki olduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algılanan tüketici etkinliği, çevreye duyarlı davranış, sürdürülebilir tüketim

Introduction

Currently, an increased number of obesity cases and other health issues have turned into serious global problems (Kleef & Dagevos, 2015, p. 292). One of the reasons is the consumption of such nutrients as sugar, sodium and saturated fat acids more than recommended (Macdiarmid et al., 2012, p. 634). Food systems are considered to be among the factors causing greenhouse gases due to the processes including growing, processing, packaging, distribution, consumption and removal (Macdiarmid et al., 2012, p. 635). Increasing purchasing power in the modern world, competitive market structures and different cultural structures and societies have become more individual-and consumption-focused. Modernization's dominance over the nature and environment has boosted individualistic approaches along with the strengthening consumption culture, which has resulted in underdeveloped environmental consciousness. Therefore, consumers can contribute to the efforts to create a more sustainable world by adopting a sustainable consumption understanding and opting for food which is healthy and produced by observing the ethical standards based on environmental consciousness (Zander & Hamm, 2010, p. 498). The primary concern of the present study conducted to this end is to

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reveal the relationships among diet-focused, organic nutrition, and environmentally conscious behaviors.

In today's world, there is a new consumer profile that is renewed continuously, and improves thyself with healthy living rules. Through smartphones and new phone applications, they provide both a more convenient flow of information and a model for reference groups in their near surroundings. All of this contribute to the environmental consciousness behavior and creates interaction between environmentally conscious consumers.

With the increasing rates of obesity, heart and allergic diseases, awareness about healthy life and sustainable consumption issues are increasing all over the world. Through this study, it is thought to be important in terms of determining the consumer behaviors in the market of organic foods, sports products, healthy life and diet products, which are studied rarely in literature. According to that, the aim of this study is to find out whether there is a relationship between consumers' diet-focused behaviours, organic nutrition and environmentally conscious behaviors.

Material and Method

Environmentally Conscious Behavior

Perceived consumer effectiveness as a decisive factor for individuals to adopt an environmentally conscious behavior can be used to explain such concepts as environmentally conscious behavior and attitudes. The concept is mostly associated with social awareness and environmentally conscious behavior and is referred to as consumers' beliefs that they can contribute to the solution to a social and environmental problem by making a difference (Ellen et al., 1991, p. 105).

Perceived consumer effectiveness as a concept was first discussed by Kinnear, Taylor and Ahmed (1974) to assess individuals' beliefs as to whether they can make a difference with their individual efforts. Accordingly, an individual's intention and behavior are indicative of the belief that the occurrence or discontinuation of a behavior depends on individual's actions (Thompson, 1981, p. 307).

In a study, it is defined as individuals' self-evaluations concerning a certain problem (Berger & Corbin, 1992, p. 80) and differs from attitudes by its ability to evaluate a problem (Tesser & Shaffer, 1990, s.481). Some studies in the related literature report that consumers' attitudes and environmentally conscious reactions potentially make positive differences thanks to the outcomes of this concern (Aaker & Bagozzi, 1982, p. 93; Roberts & Bacon, 1997, p. 230).

If consumers believe that their behaviors will have an effect on outcomes they desire, perceived consumer effectiveness can affect their behaviors. Therefore, a high level of perceived consumer effectiveness is necessary for consumers to translate their positive attitudes into purchasing behaviors (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006, p. 172). As stated in the literature, the fundamental role of perceived consumer effectiveness is to motivate consumers to buy environmentally and socially conscious items called sustainable products (Jacobs et al, 2015, p. 9; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006, p. 172). Thus, with environmental and social sensitivity individuals are evoked to develop consciousness. Businesses should not only produce and sell goods and services but also be able to develop and promote perceived consumer effectiveness.

According to a study, consumers should be convinced to be able to bring about behavioral changes that their behaviors exert decisive effects on such issues as environmental disruption or social inequality (Roberts, 1996, p. 43). This should invoke an understanding of social responsibility in businesses and they should convince their target mass to act accordingly.

If the level of perceived consumer effectiveness is increased, then consumers can be motivated to be more environmentally conscious and to purchase more sustainable products (Gellynck & Verbeke, 2013, p. 14). There are some studies into the effects of perceived consumer effectiveness on the purchase of sustainable products (Jacobs et al, 2015, p. 9; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006, p. 54), but there is a substantial need for research into the choice of sustainable food (Avermaete & Mathijs, 2008, p. 33). According to that this study is intended to satisfy the need to some extent.

Sustainable Consumption

Each modern community creates its own structure characterized by a competitive market, complex cultural structure and consumption-based economy. The communities differ from each other recklessly and fiercely exploit global resources. Modernization's dominance over the nature and environment has boosted individualistic approaches along with the strengthening consumption culture, which has resulted in underdeveloped environmental consciousness.

Broadly speaking, consumption is a dynamic process where social categories, culture and boundaries are incessantly redefined. Merchandises, except for nutrition, drinking, and shelter, are a kind of device of thinking, and also a non-verbal communication form of humans' ability to create (Zorlu, 2006, p. 236). Today, consumption studies have gone beyond psychology- and sociology-based marketing research and come to include environmental consciousness. The main reason for such a paradigmatic shift is the fact that the burden caused by environmental effects associated with consumption (and production as the offering side) on nature has exceeded a certain threshold. In the literature, a greater focus is placed on per-capita consumption in developed countries, how much we have exceeded Earth' bearing capacity and the fact that consumption is not sustainable anymore (Özsoy, 2011, p. 71).

United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) characterizes "Sustainable Consumption" in consideration of quality of life and intergenerational equality. Both concepts focus on not only the process but also goods and services. In other words, a comprehensive emphasis is put on all the processes in a life cycle (UNEP, 2004). Sustainable Consumption is defined in the 2002 report of the OECD as "the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life-cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations". Although this definition can be interpreted in different ways, there is a consensus on the fact that the use of resources by developed countries should be reduced. Meulenberg (2003) refers to sustainable consumption as the social responsibility of consumers and a decision-making process considering individuals' needs and demands.

Marchand, Walker, and DeConinck (2004) describe sustainable consumption with the following terms and statements (Özsoy, 2011, p. 74):

Abstention: Abstaining from consumption or, sometimes, consuming less,

Attitude: Considering consumption of more than needed as a negative act,

Awareness: Choosing products in view of their ecological qualities,

Alternative: Identifying consumption styles alternative to traditional consumption.

In the new world order, which came into being with neo-liberal policies after the World War II, a growing interest in the concept of consumption is observable in both daily life and social sciences. The drive underlying the new world order is "consumption of the produced". At the present time, when individuals' clothing styles and products they consume are regarded

as a communication vehicle and an indicator of social status, the main purpose of consumption is to be revered at higher exchange rates (Doğan et al., 2015, p. 662).

Research

The primary concern of the present study is to reveal whether there are relationships among diet-focused, organic nutrition, and environmentally conscious behaviors. Although there are studies evidencing the relationship between environmentally conscious behaviors and sustainable purchasing behavior (Jacobs et al, 2015; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006, p. 44), no research in the literature was identified to tackle how they affect consumers' behaviors concerning health, nutrition, and ethical consumption. Apart from this exiguousness, practice-oriented studies too are very scanty. Hence, the present research study is anticipated to serve as a vital source of motivation to respond to the need for further research on this issue thanks to its attempt to reveal the relationship between such nutrition preferences as diet-focused and organic nutrition and environmentally conscious behavior.

The sample of the research consists of consumers at the age of 18 and over. A questionnaire was administered as the data collection tool. The questionnaire forms were delivered to the participants via such social media as Facebook and Instagram and e-mails; as a result, 220 questionnaires were returned and analyzed. To produce the questionnaire, the researchers exploited Whitmarsh (2009) to assess environmentally conscious behavior, Gil, Gracia & Sanchez (2000) to assess diet-focused behavior, and Steptoe, Pollard & Wardle (1995) to assess understanding of organic nutrition. 6 demographic questions were included in the questionnaire to collect data on the participants' genders, ages, incomes, marital status, educational background, and professions. The questionnaire contains 4 items to assess environmentally conscious behavior, 3 to assess diet-focused behavior, and 7 to assess organic nutrition behavior. Thus, the questionnaire consists of 20 items. It is a 5-level likert scale. The levels are "1=strongly disagree", "2=disagree", "3=neither agree nor disagree", "4=agree", and "5=strongly agree".

The sample consists of 220 participants due to temporal and cost-related limitations. Future research may focus on a different and larger sample, which is believed to make greater contribution to the literature.

Research Model and Hypotheses

Because the purpose of the present research is to reveal the relationships among diet-focused behaviors, organic nutrition behaviors, and environmentally conscious behaviors, the hypotheses below were constructed in consideration of the available literature: The independent variables of the study are diet-focused behavior and organic nutrition, while environmentally conscious behavior refers to the dependent variable. Accordingly, the model and hypotheses of the research are as follows:

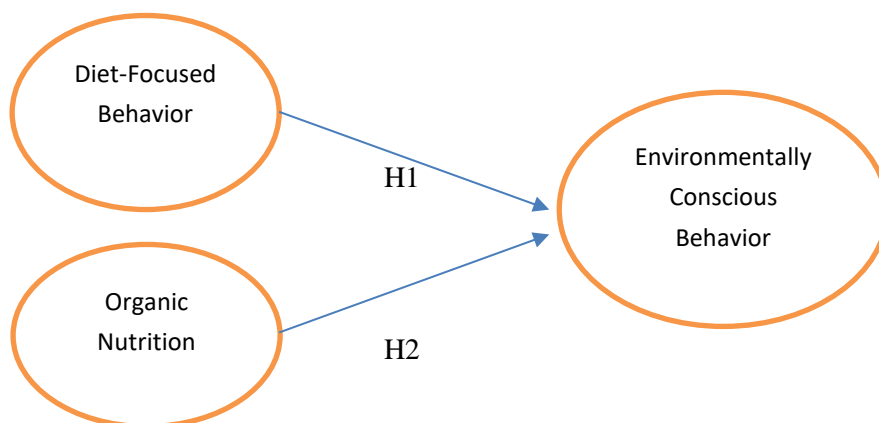


Fig. 1 Research model

H1: There is a positive relationship between diet-focused behavior and environmentally conscious behavior

H2: There is a positive relationship between organic nutrition and environmentally conscious behavior

Findings

Table 1 show that 54.5% and 45.5% of the participants are female and male, respectively. 37.7% are married and 62.3% are single. Moreover, 4% are 18, 46.8% are 18-29, 23.6% are 30-39, 9.5% are 40-49, and 14.0% are 50-59 years old. 1.3%, 27.7%, 9%, 59%, and 2.7% hold elementary and middle school, high school, associate's, bachelor's and postgraduate degrees, respectively. The incomes of the participants amount to 1001-2000 TL for 12.2%, 2001-3000 TL for 13.6%, 3001-4000 TL for 32.2%, 4001-5000 TL for 12.2% and 5000 TL and above for 25.0%.

Analysis

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	120	54.5
	Male	80	45.5
	Total	220	100
Marital Status	Married	83	37.7
	Single	137	62.3
	Total	220	100
Age	Under 18	3	4
	18-29	103	46.8
	30-39	52	23.6
	40-49	21	9.5
	50-59	31	14
	Total	220	100
Educational Background	Elementary and Middle School	3	1.36
	High school	61	27.7
	Vocational School	20	9
	University	130	59
	Postgraduate	6	2.7
	Total	220	100
Income	1001-2000 TL	27	12.2
	2001-3000 TL	30	13.6
	3001-4000 TL	71	32.2

	4001-5000 TL	27	12.2
	5000 and over	55	25
	Total	220	100

Whether the data from the sample were suitable for exploratory factor analysis can be tested with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's Test (Çokluk & Şekercioğlu & Büyüköztürk, 2012, p. 207). The high Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value means that each variable in the scale can be perfectly predicted by the other variables. When values amount to or are close to 0 (zero), no interpretation can be performed based on these values because a scattered pattern occurs in the correlation distribution. In the event that the value is calculated to be under 0.50 with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure, then the analysis cannot be continued with a factor analysis (Çokluk et al., 2012, p. 207).

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's test results

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test for Sampling Adequacy		.879
Bartlett's Test	Chi-Square	1849.117
	Sd	105
	Sig.	.000

The results from the Bartlett's Test and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test are provided in Table 2. As indicated in Table 2, the KMO value is 0.87, which signifies that the sampling size is suitable to conduct a factor analysis (Çokluk et al., 2012: 207). Besides, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity shows that Chi-Square value is significant ($X^2(105) = 1849, 117; p < .01$).

Table 3: The scale's factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha coefficients

Variable	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha
Organic Nutrition	It is important for me that it should not contain additives.	0.736	0.908
	It is important that it should only contain natural nutrients.	0.557	
	It should be vitamin- and mineral-rich.	0.810	
	It is important that it should be nutritious.	0.769	
	It is important that it should be protein-rich.	0.805	
	It is important that it should be good for my health.	0.846	
	Fiber-rich foods	0.652	
Environmentally Conscious Behavior	I may not choose to purchase products with no social responsibility.	0.705	0.787
	I change the products with no social responsibility.	0.715	
	It is important for me to see the information on the tag that the product has been produced with minimal environmental hazard.	0.795	
	It is important for me that the product I purchase has been packaged with minimal environmental hazard.	0.765	
Diet-Focused Behavior	It should be a low-calorie product.	0.846	0.832
	It is important that the product should help me with weight control.	0.740	
	It is important that it should contain a low amount of fat.	0.759	

Regression analyses were conducted to test whether there were significant relationships among diet-focused behavior, organic nutrition, and environmentally conscious behavior. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 4: Regression analysis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.489a	.239	.232	.66921

H1: There is a positive relationship between diet-focused behavior and environmentally conscious behavior.

Ho is rejected because F value (sig.) of correlation coefficient concerning the relationship between the independent variable diet-focused and the dependent variable environmentally conscious behavior is 0.000. Thus, H1 is accepted and there is a positive relationship between diet-focused and environmentally conscious behavior.

H2: There is a positive relationship between organic nutrition and environmentally conscious behavior.

Ho is rejected because F value (sig.) of correlation coefficient concerning the relationship between the independent variable organic nutrition and the dependent variable environmentally conscious behavior is 0.000. Thus, H2 is accepted and there is a positive relationship between organic nutrition and environmentally conscious behavior.

These findings indicate the significance of the research model. An R Square value of .240 refers to the exploratory value of the analysis. Hence, the model has an explanatoriness of 24%.

Conclusion and Suggestions

In the new postmodern marketing world, where globalization has rapidly increased, technology has become highly advanced, and consumption is faster than ever, all the marketing rules have changed fast over the last two years and is likely to change and develop in various ways in five years' time. Coupled with the sophisticated modern life and complex human structure, the rapid change and transformation have led humans to exploit and destroy Earth maliciously.

As stated in the literature, the fundamental role of perceived consumer effectiveness is to motivate consumers to buy environmentally and socially conscious items called sustainable products (Jacobs et al, 2015:9; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006, p. 172). Thusly, with environmental and social consciousness, individuals are evoked to develop consciousness. Businesses should not only produce and sell goods and services but also be able to develop and promote perceived consumer effectiveness.

The primary concern of the present study is to reveal whether there are significant relationships among diet-focused behaviors, organic nutrition habits, and environmentally conscious behaviors. To this end, a questionnaire was administered to consumers at the age of 18 and over. The obtained data were evaluated with frequency analyses, factor analyses, and regression analyses.

The results demonstrate that 54.5% and 45.5% of the participants are female and male, respectively. Married and single participants account for 37.7% and 62.3% of the sample, respectively. Moreover, 4% are under 18, 46.8% are 18-29, 23.6% are 30-39, 9.5% are 40-49, and 14.0% are 50-59 years old. 1.3%, 27.7%, 9%, 59%, and 2.7% hold elementary and middle school, high school, associate's, bachelor's and postgraduate degrees, respectively. The incomes of the participants amount to 1001-2000 TL for 12.2%, 2001-3000 TL for 13.6%, 3001-4000 TL for 32.2%, 4001-5000 TL for 12.2% and 5000 TL and above for 25.0%.

The results of the regression analyses performed to demonstrate whether there were significant relationships among diet-focused behaviors, organic nutrition habits and environmentally conscious behaviors show that there is a significant relationship between diet-focused behavior and environmentally conscious behavior and also between organic nutrition and environmentally conscious behavior. This refers to the significance of the adopted model.

Generally , the obtained results evidence that individuals exhibiting organic nutrition habits and diet-focused behaviors are more conscious of environmental issues. As indicated by these results, individuals more willing to contribute to socially and environmentally a more sustainable world were also found to care about their health, to adopt a lifestyle with a higher level of diet-focused attitude and to eat healthier food. Thus, these results are expected to make notable contributes to marketing practices. The emphasis on the fact that food introduced to markets are more organic and suitable for diet is likely to result in environmentally and socially more conscious purchases, which will in return contribute to the efforts to create a more sustainable world. The results show a number of points of interest for policy-makers and marketing practioners that want to promote healthy food products for a more sustainable World. This research study's original subject, which have not been sufficiently investigated before, and its attempt to develop an original model evidence its originality. However, a larger sampling in future studies is thought to contribute greatly to the related literature and the study can be extended to another countries or regions.

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