

## GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES TOWARD ORGANIC FOOD BEHAVIOR

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to identify factors influencing the purchase intention of generations towards organic products in Bursa, Türkiye. The study was conducted with a quantitative approach with data collection from 395 respondents in Bursa City between November 2021 and February 2022. The results were investigated using descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis, chi-square analysis and regression analysis. It is important to consider generational characteristics in order to achieve realistic results in organic product consumption studies. Thus, marketers will be provided with a different perspective and they will develop more consistent marketing strategies. In this research, it has been determined that the reasons for buying a product differ in the context of generations. According to the results, especially the consumers in the Y Generation are more interested in the concept of organic products. It is seen that social media is the most effective (43%) source of organic product information. According to the results of the factor analysis, the environmental friendliness of organic products and the high nutritional value of organic products are the first preferences of consumers. The least important variable is the reliability of organic products. Within the scope of the research, the organic food product trends of 5 generations were discussed. According to the results obtained, it has been determined that the tendency of the Z Generation towards organic food is lower than that of the X and Y Generations. It can be thought that this situation is due to the fact that they are young and do not have enough economic power yet. It is clearly seen that generational characteristics affect the consumption of organic products. This result will help to identify the problems and opportunities in the organic product market. Raising awareness, informing and directing individuals towards organic products in a way that covers all generations will be an important step in terms of both the country's economy and the healthy functioning of the ecosystem.

**Keywords:** Organic, generations, consumption, organic food, organic farming, Turkey

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### INTRODUCTION

Societies in the world never been static. Social, political and cultural changes are constantly occurring. The source of change may be governments through the laws they put in place or the policies they implement, while it can also be the result of groups organized as social movements, diffusion from one culture to another, or technology (Marshall 1999). In the modern era, social changes are accelerated by processes of technological innovation and more generally by industrial development processes (Giddens 2010). The change may also be caused by the effects of environmental factors such as drought, hunger and changes in economic or political dominance at the international level (Morsümbül 2014).

In recent years, research on generational analyses examining the contributions of age groups to social change has been constantly increasing. The concept of generation was first used by Auguste Comte.

It is a known fact that progress in terms of social life will be possible with the experience and knowledge that one generation will pass on to the next generation. It is stated that the changes of the generations are the forces acting in a certain process (Tuncer 2019). For instance, Karl Mannheim (1952) explained how people of the same generation can look at the world very differently from previous generations. Therefore, experiences unique to each generation enable social change (Marshall 1999).

The concept of generation, which is frequently discussed in many sub-disciplines of social sciences, is generally used to express a group of people who shape their behavioral characteristics and perspectives on life in the time period in which the individuals are born and raised, and who were separated with very clear lines before. The Turkish Language Association defines the concept of generation as a philosophical term as "the community of people who were born in approximately the same years, shared the conditions of the same age,

thus shared similar troubles and destinies, and were responsible for similar duties” (TDK 2022).

Although there are differences of opinion in the literature on the evaluation of generations by researchers in historical periods (Reeves and Oh 2008) generations are named with the following periods by most researchers: (Kavalcı and Ünal 2016; Nagy and Kölesey 2017).

- Silent Generation (War, Traditional, 1900-1945)
- Baby Boom Generation (Baby Boomers, 1946-1964)
- X Generation (Gen X, 1965-1979)
- Y Generation (Gen Y, Millennium, Gen Me, 1980-1999)
- Z Generation (2000-2010)
- Alpha Generation (2011-...)

The features that distinguish the generations from each other were also an issue to which the labor market, producers, educators and decision makers of that period gave importance. The purchasing behaviors of the generations and their preferences for the consumed products are shaped according to the opportunities offered by the period they live in and the value judgments of the society they live in (Dölekoğlu and Çelik 2018). Despite the existence of consumption studies on generations in Turkey, studies on food consumption are relatively few in number.

Teng and Wang (2015) examined the organic food consumption of customers aged between 18 and 70 who shopped at supermarkets and organic food stores in three metropolitan cities in Taiwan, while also investigating differences in age groups.

Akşit Aşık (2019) examined the factors affecting the food consumption choices of consumers in the X and Z Generations. It was found that the preferences of Generation X were more health-oriented, while those of Generation Z were more pleasure-oriented.

In his studies conducted in 2019 and 2020, Gümüş defined the members of Generation Z as people who focus on price and quality, are influenced by social media during the purchasing process, and exhibit hedonic behaviors.

In the research conducted by Vuong and Nguyen in 2018, the factors affecting the purchasing activities of the Y Generation for fashion products in Vietnam were discussed. The research provided important information to fashion industry entrepreneurs trying to enter the Vietnamese market. Again, in the study by Xiao *et al.*, the factors affecting the wine purchasing decisions of the Y Generation in Malaysia in 2022 were examined. Through the research, leaders and managers of local fast food restaurants of Nilai, Malaysia were able to improve the customer experience, solve their problems and ultimately obtain high-quality business by understanding the key factors of consumers’ purchase intentions in the fast food industry. Kanchanapibul *et al.*, on the other hand, examined the green purchasing behavior of the younger

generation in 2014. Structural equation modeling was applied to test the hypotheses in this research, which was conducted by administering a questionnaire to young consumers between the ages of 18-30. The results of the analysis confirmed that ecological impact and knowledge are important in determining green participation and real purchases of young consumers.

Measuring purchasing behavior provides significant benefits for companies in the long term. It is also a critical factor in gaining competitive advantage. In recent years, environmental concern has led to an increase in consumers’ demand for environmentally friendly products. This has created a new environmental ethic that raises the awareness of individuals and significantly changes their consumption behavior (Jang *et al.* 2011). Companies are trying to meet these demands by producing environmentally friendly products with various green initiatives such as organic products and service design, and green supply chain management. They can also develop sustainable marketing strategies targeting consumer groups. For businesses aiming to shape the market, ultimately, the commitment to the green revolution is strengthened by an understanding of consumers’ behavior (Erdal and Turhan 2020).

Communicating with generational consumer groups and meeting their needs is the cutting edge of market positioning this century. Whether or which generations support the consumption of green products, organic products and services has rarely been studied in the literature. Especially in Turkey, research on this subject is quite limited. Therefore, this article attempts to fill the gap in the literature by addressing a few key questions:

What are the important factors affecting the behavior of generations towards organic product purchasing?

How does the basic knowledge level and personal response of generations affect their intention to buy organic products?

It is known that the organic product market is not homogenized and that a marketing strategy suitable for consumer demands is necessary for success in this field (Erdal *et al.* 2020). The aim of this article is to determine intergenerational organic product consumption preferences. Today’s understanding of marketing requires giving importance to consumer preferences. For this reason, intergenerational differences were examined. It is thought that the study will contribute to the development of the market structure of organic products.

For this purpose, the existing literature will be expanded by examining the main factors affecting the organic product purchasing behavior of generations, and the research findings will enable businesses to learn and understand the organic product purchasing behaviors and perceptions of generations. In the material and method section of the research, information is given about

sampling, data collection, questionnaire development and data analysis techniques. In the next section, the results of the analysis are discussed and the results are presented. In the last part, the results are evaluated with comments.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The main material of the research consists of the data obtained as a result of a survey conducted with 395 people to determine the characteristics that affect the organic product consumption of consumers in Bursa.

The snowball sampling method was used. In this method, a reference person is selected regarding the subject of the study. The process is necessarily iterative. The original participants lead the researchers to new respondents and the sample grows. For this reason, it is expressed as the “snowball effect” (Yağar and Dökme 2018).

Some of the survey questions prepared for the research were prepared based on the information obtained after the literature review on the subject (McIver 2004; Crucefix 1998), while some of them were prepared by taking into account the purpose of the research, the content of the subject and the characteristics of the main audience to which the survey would be administered.

In the questionnaire, questions were prepared to reveal the organic product consumption characteristics of consumers in Bursa and how they differed between generations. The main population of the research is the consumers in Bursa. In the research, using the convenience sampling method, the population was studied with a 5% margin of error and the sample volume to represent the main population was determined as 395 consumers (Faul *et al.* 2009). The results were investigated using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality tests, descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

The most commonly used tests to determine the suitability of the data for normal distribution are the Kolmogorov Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests (Dölekoğlu and Çelik 2020). Chi-square analysis was performed with the data obtained by asking questions about organic product consumption and consciousness according to generations (Kızılaslan 2005).

In factor analysis, variables that are related to each other but largely independent of other subsets of the variables are combined into factors. Therefore, many variables can be expressed as fewer variables. Thus, the relationship between the observed variables is defined concisely, or a theory about basic processes can be tested (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). Factor analysis was

conducted to determine the factors affecting the organic product consumption of consumers (Dölekoğlu and Çelik 2018).

National and international research and results on organic product consumption, journals, books, theses, articles published by various universities, and statistical data published by various institutions and organizations were used as secondary data.

**Findings:** The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality tests were applied to the survey data. The results of the normality tests showed that the data did not have a normal distribution. For this reason, non-parametric tests were used in the study (Feirabend *et al.* 1996; Vural 2012) 43.5% of the individuals participating in the survey were women. A large percentage of the individuals (28%) were born between 1980-1999. More than half of the consumers were at least high school graduates. Approximately 50% of the individuals were employees. The income range was concentrated in the range of 3000 TL and below (Table 1).

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Consumers Surveyed**

Gender	Frequency	%
Female	172	43.5
Male	223	56.5
Date of Birth		
1900-1945	31	7.8
1946-1964	84	21.3
1965-1979	109	27.6
1980-1999	112	28.3
2000-2020	59	15
Educational Status		
Primary School	79	20
Secondary School	85	21.5
High School	104	26.3
University	103	26
Postgraduate	24	6.2
Working Status		
Employee	197	49.9
Unemployed	120	30.4
Retired	78	19.7
Monthly Income		
3000 TL and below	196	49.6
3001-5000 TL	127	32.1
5001-10000 TL	58	14.7
10001 TL and above	14	3.6

When Table 2 is examined, 88.6% of consumers stated that they had heard of the concept of organic products. 29.7% of consumers who were familiar with the concept of organic products were in the Y Generation.

**Table 2: Distribution by Generation.**

	Silent Generation	Baby boomers	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z	Chi-square Test
Have you heard of the concept of organic products?						
Yes	23	70	98	104	55	Pearson Chi-Square: 19.022 p: 0.015 Cramer's V: 0.155
No	8	14	11	8	4	
Source of information about organic products						
Family	12	27	44	41	16	Pearson Chi-Square: 38.582 p: 0.000 Cramer's V: 0.313
Friend	4	15	32	29	12	
Social media	6	22	48	51	43	
TV-Radio	10	50	35	27	13	Pearson Chi-Square: 33.064 p: 0.000 Cramer's V: 0.290
Non-governmental organization	3	3	8	14	4	
Are you a member of a non-governmental organization?						
Yes	3	12	20	27	16	
No	0	72	89	85	43	
What do you think are the factors that affect organic product consumption?						
Organic products being natural and healthy	13	69	88	85	47	Pearson Chi-Square: 13.278 p: 0.010 Cramer's V: 0.183
Reliability of organic products	10	49	69	71	41	
High nutritional value of organic products	13	39	62	54	35	Pearson Chi-Square: 16.036 p: 0.003 Cramer's V: 0.201
Price of organic products	8	19	34	30	26	
Environmental friendliness of organic products	6	19	36	33	24	
Protecting animal welfare in the cultivation of organic products	3	9	27	36	15	

When the Pearson chi-Square value (19.022 and  $p < 0.05$ ) and the  $p$  value associated with it in Table 2 are examined, it can be said that there is a statistically significant relationship between birth date and organic product concept awareness. Cramer's V value, which shows the degree of this relationship, is statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level. The degree of relationship between these two variables is approximately 0.15.

As a result of a research conducted by Gürses (2019) on the consumption trends of organic products, when the consumer profile that prefers organic products in Turkey was examined, it was concluded that it generally consists of middle-aged and older consumers with a high education level and income level.

In the same way, when the factor analysis results in the table are examined, there is a 5% significance level statistically between generations regarding the variables of social media, which is one of the organic product information sources, and TV-radio. The reliability factor of organic products is also statistically significant between generations. In addition, giving importance to animal welfare in the cultivation of organic products is statistically significant. As a result of the analysis, it is seen that the Y Generation, which is one of the factors affecting the consumption of organic products, gives more importance to animal welfare than the Z

Generation. In his study on the factors affecting the organic product purchasing behavior of consumers in Turkey, Satan (2019) reached the conclusion that there is a statistically significant difference between the tendency to buy organic products and age. According to this, it was determined as a result of the analysis that the consumers belonging to the 48-57 age group have more sustainable environmental responsibility and give more importance to this than the consumers belonging to the 18-27 age group. In the study, animal welfare is mentioned as a factor that constitutes the sustainable environmental responsibility factor. In addition, another research that reveals the importance of animal welfare in organic product consumption is the study by Özkan and Sağlam (2020) in which they evaluated consumers' perspectives on organic foods. In this study, they investigated whether there is a relationship between the reasons that increase the organic food consumption of people and their educational status, and they concluded that there is a statistically significant difference. Accordingly, with the increase in the education level of the participants, it was seen that the importance of animal welfare was emphasized more among the factors affecting the organic food consumption of individuals.

Factor analysis was conducted to determine the factors affecting the organic product consumption of the consumers participating in the survey (Table 3). KMO

and Bartlett's test statistics were examined. As a result of the test, the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value was found to be 0.602. The fact that the KMO value is close to 1.00 makes the factor analysis excellent; if it is less than 0.50, it is considered as poor (Çokluk *et al.* 2012; Onurlubaş 2018).

Since this value is greater than 0.05, factor analysis is statistically appropriate for the data group. According to the factor analysis, two factors were found to be significant. These two factors explained approximately 48% of the total variance.

**Table 3. Factors affecting organic product consumption.**

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2
Environmental friendliness of organic products	.627	
High nutritional value of organic products	.586	
Protecting animal welfare in the cultivation of organic products	.537	
Reliability of organic products	.524	
Price of organic products		.757
Organic products being natural and healthy		-.539
Total variance (%)	<b>25.515</b>	<b>22.223</b>

In factor analysis, the variables were divided into two main groups. In terms of the variables of the price of organic products and organic products being natural and healthy, the importance given by consumers to the other variables shows statistically great differences. The first factor explains the most important variables of consumers. Accordingly, the fact that organic products are sensitive to the environment and that organic products have a high nutritional value emerge as the first preferences of consumers. The least important variable is the reliability of organic products. The first group factors explain 25.515% of the variance, and these factors are respectively, organic products are sensitive to the environment, the nutritional value of organic products is high, animal welfare is protected in the cultivation of organic products, and organic products are reliable.

**Conclusion:** The consumption factor, which affects the whole life of individuals, shapes human behavior. Individuals with varying purchasing behaviors act depending on the characteristics of the generation they belong to. As long as businesses have knowledge of the characteristics and purchasing behaviors of these generations, they will follow an efficient path to introduce their products and services to the consumer (Aysel 2018). The generation phenomenon is examined in the context of important breaks that coincide with

generational cycles and affect the world, consumption, marketing and the consumer (Altuntuğ 2012).

Revealing these differences will provide us with important clues in terms of both the organic agriculture sector and the marketing of organic products. It will also assist businesses in identifying new market opportunities for existing and new products. It seems possible to determine the consumer profile of the future only by understanding the characteristics of these generations, their way of perceiving life and their ideals. Brands and companies are making an intense effort to determine which marketing strategies will reach the Z Generation, which is thought to have different characteristics from the previous generations, which are expressed as Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y. This is because they have realized that reaching this generation, which does not fit into any mold, will not be as easy as it seems (Silver 2020; Budac 2014). Considering that a significant number of them continue their education life, the most important indicator of this is the fact that a lot of research has been done and is being done, although they have not yet earned their own income. There has been a significant increase in studies conducted in different disciplines by researchers in our country in recent years in order to get to know this generation better.

In this study, an attempt has been made to emphasize the importance of revealing how consumers' attitudes towards organic products and their thoughts about organic products differ between generations. Revealing these differences will provide us with important clues in terms of both the organic agriculture sector and the marketing of organic products. It will also assist businesses in identifying new market opportunities for existing and new products. To determine organic product awareness, consumers were asked whether they had heard of the concept of organic products, and approximately 88.6% of them stated that they had heard of this concept. It has been concluded that especially the consumers in the Y Generation are more familiar with the concept of organic products. While 43% of consumers expressed social media as the source of organic product information, 36% stated it as TV-radio. The result of the chi-square analysis shows that these two sources are significant between generations. It can be said that these two sources are more effective in organic product consumption than other sources.

The most effective factors influencing the consumption of organic products were determined as the reliability of organic products and attention to the protection of animal welfare in the cultivation of organic products. These factors show differences between generations.

As a result of the factor analysis carried out to determine the factors affecting the consumption of organic products, the fact that organic products are sensitive to the environment and that organic products

have a high nutritional value emerge as the first preferences of consumers. The least important variable is the reliability of organic products. The first group factors explain 25.515% of the variance, and these factors are respectively, organic products are sensitive to the environment, the nutritional value of organic products is high, animal welfare is protected in the cultivation of organic products, and organic products are reliable. As can be seen from these analyses, there are intergenerational differences in consumption of organic products and the level of consciousness and factors that affect consumption. Identifying these differences is important for both the organic product producer and the marketing of the products.

There are many studies in the literature about the generational characteristics that cause differences in consumer behavior. For example, Altuntuğ (2012) stated in her study that the future consumer will carry identities that are appropriate for every situation, beyond a standard identity. She stated that the future consumer, who will have various features from each of the BBs, Xs and Ys, will create a puzzle profile in which the characteristics of the Z Generation are more dominant. Adıgüzel *et al.* (2014) found significant differences in the character, working and social lives of different consumer generations. Bilgili (2016) found that there is a significant difference between the decision-making styles of the consumers in the X and Y Generations, as a result of his research with participants from the X and Y Generations. In their research conducted in 2007, Schiffman and Kanuk emphasized that demographic factors affect consumers' organic product consumption.

Within the scope of the research, the organic food product trends of 5 generations were discussed. According to the results obtained, it can be said that the tendency of the Z Generation towards organic food is lower than that of the X and Y Generations. It can be thought that this is due to the fact that they are young and do not have enough economic power yet. However, it is seen in the survey results that the social media usage and awareness rate of the Z Generation is higher than that of the other generations. In this case, it can be suggested that businesses can increase the organic food consumption trend by developing strategies for the generations that use social media platforms intensively. In addition, considering that the young generation will carry the family habits into their lives, it is very clear that the effects of organic product marketing strategies to be made for the Y Generation will also be seen on the Z Generation. Considering that the Y and Z Generations will form the adult market of the future, strategies that will appeal to these generations are of great importance for businesses. The better the businesses know this consumer group, the more suitable products and services they can offer. Raising awareness, informing and directing individuals towards organic products in a way

that covers all generations will be an important step in terms of both the country's economy and the healthy functioning of the ecosystem. This study is very important in terms of providing valuable managerial implications for businesses to design products according to generations, market segmentation and marketing strategy in organic product production and marketing. The research has some limitations. The first limitation is that the research was conducted only in Bursa Province. Choosing the convenience sampling method in the study constitutes the second constraint. In future studies, it is recommended to increase the sample size and carry out studies that will represent all generations in Turkey and take into account different demographic characteristics.

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