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CONSUMERS' PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE SHOPPING AND FOOD SAFETY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which emerged in 2019, is a serious respiratory disease. "Stay at home", "good hygiene" and "social distance" campaigns have been launched to prevent the spread of the virus worldwide. However, these measures were not enough to prevent the devastating effect of the virus, and these new conditions affected the purchasing behavior of consumers. The study, consumers' perspectives on online shopping and food safety during the COVID-19 pandemic were determined. In the study, the sample size was calculated using the proportional sample size formula and was determined as 150. The Covid-19 epidemic has changed the consumption and purchasing attitudes of people in our country as well as in the world. With the change in purchasing behavior, there is an increase in the level of awareness about food safety. According to the results of the research, it has been determined that consumers have a positive attitude towards online shopping and will continue to shop online after the pandemic. In addition, during the pandemic period, consumers should be aware of the expiration date of the food, the hygiene of the place where they buy food, the proper storage of food at home, the reading of the content on the label, gloves, masks, aprons, etc. It has been determined that they pay attention to clothing, brand, additives, food, safety and quality standards, production date, glass packaging. Manufacturers need to pay attention to food safety.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Food Safety, Online Shopping.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, drug-resistant infectious diseases have begun to emerge worldwide. For example, in 2003, outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV) in Guangdong, China, followed by Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS-CoV) outbreaks in Saudi Arabia in 2012 (Peiris et al., 2003; Zaki et al., 2012; Jung et al., 2016). Available coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, first of all is a serious respiratory disease caused by China's Wuhan city declared in the SARS-COV-2. And the virus has been found to be transmitted through direct exposure to respiratory droplets of an infected person or through

direct contact with infected surfaces (Wu et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2021). And before the WHO classified COVID-19 as a pandemic, On March 16, 2020, some policy tools were created by the scientific committee to prevent the spread of the virus. All education and training institutions and public gathering places were closed, the country's borders were controlled, domestic travel was restricted, and curfews were imposed across the country. Citizens to encourage them to help stop the spread of the virus "stay at home", "good hygiene" and "social distance" campaigns were initiated (Copper, 2020; Bostan et al, 2020; Seyahi et al, 2020). However, these measures were not enough to prevent the devastating effect of the virus. These new conditions have affected the purchasing behavior of consumers (Cranfield, 2020; Górnicka et al., 2020; Grashuis et al., 2020; Pulighe and Lupia, 2020; Sheth, 2020; Sidor and Rzymiski, 2020). Examples of changes in consumer behavior include stocking and rushing purchases of essential products during homeownership, postponing purchasing behavior of certain products, and shifting from physical experiences to virtual experiences (Donthu and Gustafsson, 2020; Kirk and Rifkin, 2020; Kohli et al., 2020; Sheth, 2020). Although there is no evidence that the epidemic can be transmitted through food, COVID-19 has an economic impact on the food and agriculture sector. Countries have re-examined their food and agriculture policies to ensure that food supplies remain available to the public and affordable (Ma et al., 2021). The effects of the pandemic on the food supply chain are increasing day by day. According to the United Nations report, food insecurity increased from 23.3% in 2014 to 26.4% in 2018. Before COVID-19 in September 2019, approximately 821 million people, or more than 10% of the world's population, were starving. (FAO; IFAD; UNICEF; WFP; WHO, 2019) It impacted the food supply for an additional 260 million people by the end of 2020 (Anthem, 2020; FAO, 2020). Availability, access, use, and stability need to be addressed in food safety during the pandemic (Zurayk, 2020). During the COVID-19 epidemic, food safety is endangered by the disruptions in the distribution of food products (Galanakis, 2020; Vallianatos et al., 2010). In the study, consumers' perspectives on online shopping and food safety during the COVID-19 epidemic were examined.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The primary data of this research consists of the survey data conducted with individuals who shop online in Konya, Karapınar (Turkey) in 2020. Secondary data were compiled from public institutions, local and foreign scientific studies, journals, and various publications related to the subject. The number of questionnaires used in the study was calculated by using the proportional sample size formula, which is also used in many studies (Çobano lu et al., 2003; Arma an and Akbay, 2007; Büyükbay Oruç et al., 2009) in order to reach the maximum sample size is limited populations (Newbold, 1995). The questionnaires were conducted face-to-face with randomly selected people. The formula for determining the number of surveys is given below. Survey questions consist of

multiple-choice, open-ended, and Likert questions. The survey was conducted taking into account the Covid-19 rules and no problems were encountered.

$$n = \frac{N p (1 - p)}{(N - 1) \sigma^2_{pv} + p(1 - p)}$$

In the formula; n: Sample volume, N: Total number of people in the sampling frame, p: Number of women living in rural and urban areas (based on 50% assumption), σ^2_{pv} : variance of the ratio (with a table value of 1.65 and 5% margin of error at 90% confidence interval to reach the maximum sample volume). Since the characteristics of the consumers constituting the main population were not known at the beginning, p=0.5 was taken to maximize the sample size. The sample volume was taken as p=q=0.5 and calculated as 150 in order to reach the 95% confidence interval, 10% margin of error, and maximum sample volume in the formula. Whether or not the consumers who participated in the survey agreed with some values was measured with a 5-point Likert scale (1: Completely Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Undecided 4: Agree 5: Totally Agree). The Likert scale is one of the attitude measurement methods and is included in the group of graduated scales. The scale value of the person is found with the scores calculated for the degree of participation. With this value obtained, the individual's attitude towards an event or the factors that determine his attitude is rated (Erdo an, 1997).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to examine the consumers' perspectives on online shopping and food safety in the COVID-19 period, it is necessary to examine some demographic characteristics of consumers. When socio-demographic characteristics are examined in the study, 70.6% of consumers are male and 29.4% are female. Considering the ages of the participants, 34.6% are between the ages of 31-40. 28% are between the ages of 21-30. and 19.4% are between the ages of 41-50. The educational status of the individuals participating in the survey is 31.3% at the undergraduate level. 28% at primary education level. 24% at high school level. and 15.3% at associate degree level. Considering the income level of the participants. 35.4% of them are between 2501-3500 TL; 32.6% of it is between 3501-5000 TL; It is seen that 21.4% of it is between 1001-2500 TL. 63.3% of the participants are married and 36.4% are single. Looking at the professions of the participants 24% of them are farmers. The second place is followed by tradesmen with 20% and students with 17%. 4% of the participants are retirees. It was determined that 54.6% of the consumers have a personal computer and 45.4% do not have a personal computer. It was determined that 86% of the individuals who participated in the survey had an internet connection at their place of residence and 14% did not have an internet connection. When looking at the frequency of connecting to the Internet, it was determined that 76% did not connect every day, 11.3% did not connect 2-3 times a week, 4% did not connect several times a month, and 8.7% did not connect regularly.

Table 1. Attitudes towards online shopping

Variables	Mean
Having detailed content about the products increases my shopping desire.	3.94
Being able to get after-sales support increases my desire to shop.	3.57
Having comments on products increases my shopping desire	3.48
The arrival of the product with a secure cargo company increases my shopping desire.	3.34
Referrals (SSL) applications that increase the reliability of the website increase my willingness to shop	3.28
Having special campaigns for members increases my desire to shop.	3.08
Receiving informative e-mails specific to my interests increases my desire to shop.	3.06
The fact that the delivery date of the products I want to buy is certain increases my interest in the product.	3.03
Having different payment options other than credit cards increases my desire to shop.	2.94
Even though I don't need the products to be on the home page of the website, it causes me to be interested in the product.	2.91
Receiving informational e-mails about products with discounts or campaigns increases my desire to shop.	2.91
Having credit card installment opportunities increases my desire to shop.	2.90
Instant or daily discounts on products increase my desire to shop.	2.84
The fact that the sites I shop online are easy to use increases my desire to shop.	2.73

5: Strongly agree 4: Agree 3: Undecided 2: Disagree 1: Strongly Disagree

*Source: Author s' elaboration based on the questionnaire survey results.

According to Table 1, consumers' attitudes towards the factors that are thought to affect their online shopping behavior are given. According to the attitudes of the consumers, it has been determined that the detailed content about the products and the institution that can receive after-sales support increase their shopping desires.

Table 2. Consumers' attitudes towards food safety

Variables	Mean
I pay attention to the expiration date on foods.	4.44
I pay attention to the hygiene of the place where I buy food	4.39
I take care to store food inappropriate conditions at home.	4.26
I read the content section on the label	4.07
The gloves and masks of the employees at the place where I buy food. I make sure that they are wearing aprons etc.	4.01
I pay attention to the brand.	4.00

I'll look into additives.	3.97
I make sure that it has food safety and quality standards.	3.88
I pay attention to the production date of the food.	3.85
I prefer to buy products with glass packaging	3.74
I call the authorities for the problem food product	3.72
On behalf of the manufacturer and packaging company. I pay attention to the address and the place where it was produced.	3.39
I buy open food	1.92

5: I definitely pay attention 4: I pay attention 3: I'm indecisive 2: I don't pay attention 1: I definitely don't pay attention

*Source: Author s' elaboration based on the questionnaire survey results.

The increasing number of conscious consumers in society has increased the importance of the concept of food safety. The dangers arising from food and the change in consumers' perception of quality have led to more emphasis on reliable food production. Along with the COVID 19 pandemic process, consumer behavior has also undergone a rapid and great change (Baltacı and Akaydın, 2020). According to the table 2, during the pandemic period, consumers should be aware of the expiration date of the food, the hygiene of the place where they buy food, the proper storage of food at home, the reading of the content on the label, gloves, masks, aprons, etc. It has been determined that they pay attention to the wearing, brand, additives, food, safety and quality standards, production date, and glass packaging. In some studies, it has been determined that since viruses can be found in environments where we live for a very long time, consumers should also follow general hygiene rules and pay attention to gloves and masks in order to be protected (Akin and Akin, 2020; Aslan, 2020; EUFIC, 2020; FAO and WHO 2020).

CONCLUSION

The study, consumers' perspectives on online shopping and food safety during the COVID-19 pandemic were determined. The Covid-19 epidemic has changed the consumption and purchasing attitudes of people in our country as well as in the world. With the emergence of the pandemic crisis and its increasing impact, the way consumers shop has begun to change. Market in general before the epidemic. purchases made in shopping places such as stores. With the increase of the epidemic, it has started to shift to online shopping more. With the change in purchasing behavior, there is an increase in the level of awareness about food safety. According to the results of the study, during the pandemic period, consumers should be aware of the expiration date of the food, the hygiene of the place where they buy food, the proper storage of food at home, the reading of the content on the label, gloves, masks, aprons, etc. It has been determined that they pay attention to the wearing, brand, additives, food, safety and quality standards,

production date, and glass packaging. Because online shopping is more advantageous than face-to-face shopping, consumers are shifting to online shopping. However, there are some concerns about food safety in online shopping. Manufacturers need to pay attention to food safety.

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