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Determining the obstacles and attitudes of Generation Z consumers towards organic labeled food

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Abstract

Increasing health concerns and environmental worries on a global scale have rapidly increased consumer interest in organic foods, leading to significant growth in organic food production and retail. The Z generation, in particular, differs from other generations in terms of the values, social norms, and lifestyles that shape their consumption habits. The aim of this study is to reveal Generation Z consumers' attitudes, perceptions, and barriers regarding organic-labeled foods. A qualitative research approach was adopted in the study, and data was collected from 16 participants studying gastronomy using a semi-structured interview technique. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive analysis methods, and seven main themes were identified through a manual coding process: natural environment, healthy and nutritious, limitations, unhealthy and harmful, level of knowledge, taste perception, and desired organic foods. The findings show that Generation Z has positive attitudes towards organic food, but these attitudes are difficult to translate into behavior due to factors such as high prices, limited access, and time constraints. The study interprets the findings within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). According to this theory, positive attitudes and social norms increase young people's intention to consume organic food, but when perceived behavioral control is weak, an intention-behavior gap emerges. The results indicate that the organic food sector needs to strengthen its emphasis on health and naturalness in its marketing strategies targeting young consumers, increase social media and influencer collaborations, and develop solutions to reduce access and pricing barriers. The research contributes to the literature theoretically and provides practical recommendations to practitioners.

Keywords: *Organic Food, Consumer Attitudes, Purchasing Behavior, Generation Z, Organic Farming*

1. Introduction

The industrialization process occurring on a global scale and rapid population growth have led to various problems in individuals' access to food. This problem has been addressed by promoting practices aimed at obtaining more products per unit area as a result of industrialization and, in this regard, increasing the use of synthetic and chemical inputs (Ustaahmetoğlu and Toklu, 2015). Although the use of chemicals has led to a quantitative increase in agricultural production, this development has brought with it significant health problems. These negative consequences have led consumers to diversify their product choices. In this context, consumers have begun to show a tendency to prefer products that do not contain chemicals, are obtained through natural production methods, and do not harm human health or the environment (Avcı & Yıldız, 2021). As a result of this trend, the concept of "organic farming" has come to the fore. Organic farming is defined as an agricultural activity that aims to produce clean products that are certified and guaranteed, which are produced without harming the environment, humans, and other living beings, observing the natural balance, and subject to control at every stage from production to consumption (Gil et al., 2000). Organic products are those that do not contain synthetic and non-natural chemicals such as fertilizers, antibiotics, herbicides, pesticides, and genetically modified organisms (Rana & Paul, 2017).

A review of international literature reveals that there are many different factors influencing consumers' purchasing behavior regarding organic food. Chief among these are health, the local economy, fair trade, and environmental protection (Siderer, Maquet &

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Anklam, 2005). Organic farming activities in Turkey gained significant momentum, particularly between 1990 and 1999. A review of the limited number of sources in the literature (Aslan, 2021; Eti, 2017; Gür & Erdem, 2023; Kvatchadze & Akıncı, 2018; Tirkeş, 2008) indicate that organic product consumers in Turkey are predominantly individuals residing in urban centers, with high income levels, high education levels, and developed health awareness. Factors influencing consumers' attitudes toward organic food include health awareness, environmental awareness, knowledge of organic food, trust, and product quality. The potential barriers to purchasing organic food are listed as: price, accessibility, perceived value, food choice and socio-demographic factors, age-based purchasing motivation, gender, education and income, cross-cultural differences, and the demographic and geographic distribution of consumers (Kvatchadze, 2017).

Although previous studies appear to be sufficient, it has been observed that they have been inadequately addressed in some destinations, particularly in developing regions. Furthermore, it has been determined that consumer perspectives on organic food are limited across generations. These gaps in the field have been considered the starting point for this study. Finally, it was anticipated that the attitude and barriers of Generation Z, one of the important consumer groups, towards organic food have not been sufficiently addressed, and that conducting a study on this consumer group would be beneficial in terms of completing the framework in this field. To fill these gaps in the field, the research aimed to determine Generation Z consumers' attitudes and barriers towards organically labeled foods. A qualitative research approach was used to achieve this goal.

The findings revealed as a result of the research process are expected to provide theoretical benefits to the relevant field and guide service providers operating in this area. On the other hand, it is thought that understanding and revealing consumers' limitations from a theoretical perspective will help determine their attitudes toward and provide a basis for the work of relevant researchers. Furthermore, from a practical perspective, it is expected to guide businesses offering organic food products on issues such as consumers' attitudes and the limitations that prevent them from accessing these products.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis of this study is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Developed by Ajzen (1991), TPB is one of the most widely used psychosocial models explaining individuals' intentions to perform a specific behavior and the conversion of these intentions into behavior. The theory consists of three core components: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The interaction of these components shapes an individual's behavioral intention, and intention directly influences behavior.

Attitude refers to an individual's tendency to evaluate a particular behavior positively or negatively. In the context of organic food, consumers' perception of organic products as healthy, safe, and environmentally friendly leads them to develop a positive attitude (Magnusson et al., 2001; Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008). Our study shows that Generation Z consumers have positive attitudes toward organic food based on health, naturalness, and environmental awareness. This finding is consistent with the results reported in previous studies conducted in different countries (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005; Chen, 2007).

Subjective norms are how individuals perceive the expectations of their social environment and important reference groups (friends, family, social media influencers). Generation Z, in particular, is exposed to powerful social influences through digital platforms and social media. Research shows that young consumers' preferences for organic food are driven by peer groups, influencers, and social trends (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008; Aschemann-Witzel & Niebuhr Aagaard, 2014). In this context, organic food consumption for Generation Z can be seen not only as an individual health choice but also as an indicator of social identity.

Perceived behavioral control relates to the opportunities and perceived difficulties an individual has in performing a specific behavior. The high price perception of organic food, access difficulties, limited product variety, and time constraints negatively affect Generation Z consumers' perceptions of behavioral control. This situation prevents positive intentions towards organic food from always translating into action. In the literature, price and accessibility barriers are the most frequently reported factors hindering organic food consumption (Padel & Foster, 2005; Hughner et al., 2007; Thøgersen, 2010).

According to TPB, behavioral intention is the strongest predictor of an individual's likelihood of performing a specific behavior. However, an intention–behavior gap is frequently observed in organic food consumption. In our study, although Generation Z consumers expressed a strong intention toward organic products, control factors such as price and access limited the translation of this intention into behavior. This finding is consistent with the frequently reported intention–behavior gap in organic food consumption (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Yazdanpanah & Forouzani, 2015).

The attitudes of Generation Z consumers towards organic-labeled foods and the barriers they encounter can be directly explained by the three dimensions of the

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The findings of our study show that each of these dimensions has a strong explanatory power in understanding organic food consumption specifically among Generation Z.

Participants' attitudes toward organic food are largely shaped around themes of health, naturalness, environmental awareness, and nutritional value. Factors such as organic products being "free of chemicals," "produced in natural environments," and "more nutritious" have created positive attitudes among consumers. This is consistent with studies showing that attitude is one of the most important determinants of behavioral intention in the TPB (Ajzen, 1991; Chen, 2007). Furthermore, the literature emphasizes that organic food consumption is closely related to health consciousness and environmental awareness (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008; Magnusson et al., 2001).

Findings support that Generation Z interacts strongly with social media, influencers, and peer groups. Participants indicated that encouragement from their social circles and positive content on social media influenced their preference for organic products. This finding aligns with the subjective norms dimension of the TPB. The literature also shows that young consumers are influenced by social norms shaped by social identity and belonging, leading them to choose organic food (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008). Therefore, for Generation Z, organic food consumption is not only an individual health choice but also a sign of social acceptance and status.

The findings show that despite Generation Z's positive intentions toward organic products, factors such as high prices, access difficulties, and time constraints limit consumption behavior. In this context, low perceived behavioral control leads to a gap between intention and behavior. Similarly, the literature frequently reports that one of the biggest barriers to organic food consumption is the perception of high prices (Padel & Foster, 2005; Hughner et al., 2007; Thøgersen, 2010) and that accessibility directly affects consumption behavior (Dettmann & Dimitri, 2007).

In our study, TPB serves as both a theoretical framework and an analytical lens. The theory comprehensively explains Generation Z's positive intentions (attitudes) toward organic food, social environmental influences (subjective norms), and structural barriers encountered (perceived control). This prevents the research findings from being merely descriptive and allows for comparison with results reported in the national and international literature.

Organic Food And Consumer Attitudes

To meet the food demands of the growing world population, it has been necessary to use agricultural production methods and industrialization together. In order to meet the increasing demand, chemical inputs have been introduced to increase agricultural productivity. Although these chemicals have increased the production of agricultural products, they have also led to serious health problems such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, asthma, and allergies. Furthermore, chemically manipulating the genetics of agricultural products has not only threatened human health but also caused environmental damage (Akoğlu and Demirbilek, 2018; Tirkeş, 2008; Uzundumlu and Sezgin, 2019). As these problems have become increasingly visible, consumers have been prompted to reconsider their product choices. Accordingly, individuals have begun to turn to products that do not contain chemicals, are produced using natural methods, and do not harm either the environment or human health. Alongside the increase in agricultural production, the production of organic products that can offer solutions to these environmental and social problems, protect human health, and do not harm the ecosystem has come to the fore (Avcı and Yıldız, 2021).

Organic farming is an environmentally friendly and health-conscious production method, leading to the emergence of the concept of the organic food market (Uzundumlu & Sezgin, 2019). The organic food market is a rapidly growing sector on a global scale. This growth is based on increasing awareness of the benefits of organic farming for the environment and human health, as well as the establishment of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements). IFOAM has contributed to improving the quality and reliability of organic foods by ensuring that organic farming is carried out according to specific rules (Çağlar Çetinkaya et al., 2021). The basis of consumers' interest in organic products includes factors such as the products being healthy and high-quality, being more nutritious, not using chemicals, having a better taste, not harming the environment, not wanting to use GMO products, people becoming increasingly aware, product diversity, and attractive appearance (Akoğlu & Demirbilek, 2018; Eti, 2017; Turan & Demircan, 2021).

Healthy eating is of great importance to consumers, especially those who are more sensitive to harmful substances. This is even more important for consumers with special needs, such as pregnant women, children, and the elderly. Concerns about food safety have increased significantly, especially following events such as the mad cow disease outbreak, the marketing of meat containing antibiotics, the detection of lead in fish meat, and the proliferation of genetically modified

foods. These concerns have led to organic foods becoming more important and preferred by consumers (Tirkeş, 2008).

The desire to preserve natural resources and pass them on to future generations in a sustainable manner is recognized as an important factor in the purchase of organic food. However, research shows that awareness of the fact that organic foods do not contain chemical pesticides and fertilizers has increased with the spread of organic food production (Canarslan & Uz, 2019). The slogan "You are what you eat" reflects consumers' awareness of the impact of nutrition on health and vitality. This slogan is also an indicator of consumers' growing interest in chemical-free organic foods. Consumers are aware that they are what they eat, so they are turning to healthy and high-quality foods (Çağlar Çetinkaya et al., 2021). In fact, one study revealed that 70% of participants cited avoiding the effects of agricultural chemicals as their reason for choosing organic products (Tirkeş, 2008).

Consumers perceive organic foods as higher quality than industrial foods. This perception stems from factors such as organic foods not containing chemicals, being natural and healthy, and being environmentally friendly. These perceptions cause consumers to develop a positive attitude towards organic foods and prefer to purchase organic products (Gür & Erdem, 2023).

A previous study on organic foods found that although organic foods are perceived by some consumers as more nutritious, there is no scientific basis for this perception. Therefore, it has been suggested that the claim that organic foods are more nutritious may be a misconception stemming from consumer perceptions (Canarslan & Uz, 2019).

It has been observed that consumers prefer organic foods despite their higher cost, citing reasons such as environmental protection, healthy eating, and balanced nutrition (Uzundumlu & Sezgin, 2019). Factors such as age and gender also influence organic food preferences. Older consumers perceive organic foods as healthier and therefore prefer them. Middle-aged consumers, on the other hand, consider organic foods to be environmentally friendly and therefore prefer them. Women have a more positive view of organic foods than men. For this reason, women purchase organic foods more frequently (Kvatchadze & Akıncı, 2018).

Environmental awareness promotes the understanding that organic foods are environmentally friendly. This, in turn, increases consumers' interest in organic foods (Çağlar Çetinkaya et al., 2021). Consumers with high environmental concerns tend to purchase organic foods more because they see them as environmentally friendly products (Gür & Erdem, 2023). The factors influencing interest in organic foods are health and environmental awareness. Health awareness is related to the perception that organic foods are more nutritious and safer. Environmental awareness, on the other hand, is related to the perception that organic foods are environmentally friendly. Consumers' environmental concerns increase their interest in organic foods. Research shows that consumers believe organic foods are environmentally friendly. Therefore, consumers want to contribute to the environment by consuming organic foods and leave a more livable world for future generations (nature, animals, people) (Cengiz, 2017).

Organic Food and Restrictions

Despite the many advantages of organic farming, there are some factors that limit the purchase of organic food (Canarslan & Uz, 2019). In a study conducted by Bulut (2018), the problems encountered with organic food are summarized as follows: The ever-increasing world population causes fluctuations in the supply of agricultural products. The fact that consumption levels increase in direct proportion to population growth prevents organic farming from developing sufficiently. In addition, the fact that the land used for agricultural production is very small or close to each other has a negative impact on organic production. The presence of businesses using chemical inputs around organic farming areas is also one of the factors hindering the development of this type of farming. However, low demand for organic agricultural products causes marketing difficulties, especially in domestic markets. Finally, the lack of effective alternatives to chemical methods for controlling diseases and pests is one of the most significant problems facing organic farming (Bulut, 2018).

Botonaki et al. (2006) found that the main reasons consumers do not purchase organic vegetables and fruits are the inability to find the products in the market, high prices, satisfaction with conventional products, and a lack of trust in the certification process. Tsakiridou et al. (2008) found in their study that Greek consumers perceived price as the main barrier to organic food, followed by quality, access and availability, product appearance, low trust in organic food production, and the quality and presentation of organic food. According to the quantitative research conducted by Brown et al. (2009), which examined the barriers to sustainable food consumption among consumers in France and the UK, specifically in relation to local and organic fruits and vegetables, the most important reason for not consuming organic food among British consumers is the desire to consume certain foods outside of their season. For consumers in France, the most important barrier is the perception of high prices. According to the work conducted by Leila

Hamzaoui Essoussi and Mehdi Zahaf (2009) in Canada, the barriers to organic food consumption were identified as consumers' lack of knowledge and trust in organic food products, high prices reducing the desire to purchase these products, weak distribution systems hindering availability, and organic food reducing product variety. According to the results of Pawel Bryła's (2016) quantitative research on Polish consumers, the barriers to organic food consumption are high prices, insufficient customer awareness, inaccessibility of organic foods, short shelf life, and low visibility of organic foods in stores In this context, the barriers affecting consumers' preference for organic products have been identified as price, accessibility, perceived value, education level, low production, dissatisfaction, and trust issues.

Research shows that 85% of consumers find organic product prices higher than other products (Cananarslan, 2015).According to studies conducted by Padel and Foster (2005) with British consumers, the barriers to purchasing organic food include price effect, price perception, access and availability, product appearance quality and presentation, skepticism about organic food in supermarkets, eating habits, and lack of cooking skills. (Köse & Kırcova, 2020).

The price levels of organic products are determined by various factors such as income and education level, consumption habits, awareness level, and marketing infrastructure, which influence the price premiums consumers are willing to pay. Various studies have shown that the high prices of organic foods are a decisive factor in consumers avoiding purchasing these products. These studies are based on a large amount of empirical data collected by different researchers over different periods. In addition, a finding by Irianto (2015) shows that the price level of organic foods causes consumers to develop a negative perception. While Jones et al. (2001: 365) emphasize that the price of organic foods is an important factor, Shahidul (2013) attributes the high cost of organic foods primarily to high production costs (Kvatchadze, 2017). Accessibility is an important factor that reflects the ease with which consumers can obtain organic foods and is one of the barriers to purchasing organic foods (Kvatchadze, 2017). Detmann and Dimitri (2007) describe accessibility as the most important factor hindering organic food purchases, stating that "consumers can make purchases as long as they can access organic foods; moreover, another dimension of accessibility lies in the availability of product variety. This is because the limited number of organic food varieties available in some grocery stores restricts consumers' choice." Although many large supermarkets have added these products to their shelves with the increasing popularity of organic products, it has been observed that their overall accessibility remains limited. This situation has been supported by various studies conducted by different researchers (Rana & Paul, 2017).

Increased education levels have been reported in various studies to lead to more positive attitudes toward organic foods and a greater tendency to purchase these products (Magnusson et al., 2001; Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002; Lockie et al., 2002; Davies et al., 1995, Kvatchadze, 2017). Furthermore, some studies support the notion that as people's income and education levels increase, they tend to consume healthier products (Cananarslan, 2015). On the other hand, consumers with high levels of education may be inclined to question and doubt whether organic products are produced in accordance with standards; this situation negatively affects purchasing behavior due to a lack of trust in organic products (Karabaş & Gürler, 2012). A large portion of the studies conducted have determined that younger age groups, women with high education and income levels, and those with large families have a higher tendency to purchase organic food products (Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002).

Generation Z and Organic Food

Generation Z is a tech-savvy, ambitious, and materialistic generation. This generation spends a significant amount of time online, is not bound by traditional norms and values, and tends to be introverted. Generation Z consumers show high demand for technology products, prefer fast and practical solutions, shop according to their own tastes and needs, and use social media to make consumption decisions. Generation Z is a generation shaped by globalization and technological developments. This generation is less traditional than previous generations and places greater importance on individuality. Generation Z interacts more with each other through social media and other digital platforms. This generation is more sensitive to environmental and social responsibility issues (Bayrakdaroğlu & Özbek 2018). Generation Z consumers consider price and quality in their purchasing decisions. They actively use social media and take into account comments and recommendations on social media when making purchasing decisions. They also focus on obtaining pleasure and satisfaction through consumption. Therefore, they prefer products that offer fun and enjoyable experiences. Generation Z consumers exhibit more conscious and selective consumption behavior (Beyaz, 2020). Generation Z consumers take these issues into account in their purchasing decisions and prefer products that are sensitive to the environment and society. Gen Z consumers have also been found to have a conscious consumption trend. This trend encompasses factors such as sustainability, product quality, and price. Gen Z consumers consider these factors in their purchasing decisions and prefer high-

quality, reasonably priced products that provide long-term benefits. They are a generation seeking role models. Therefore, they may prefer products and services favored by celebrities and influencers. Generation Z consumers are a generation that researches and compares. Therefore, they conduct research and compare different options before making purchasing decisions. (Altuntuğ, 2012; Akşit Aşık, 2019).

3. Method

This study aims to determine the attitudes and barriers of Generation Z consumers towards organically labeled foods. To achieve this goal, a qualitative research approach has been adopted. The qualitative research approach is a highly useful method for investigating people's thoughts, ideas, feelings, senses, and emotions (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, the identification of under-researched or unexplored topics is important in adopting this approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach is also valuable because it intensively reveals comprehensive information on any given topic (Patton, 2015). Considering all these positive characteristics, it was determined that qualitative research was the most appropriate method for this study.

Sample and Data Collection Process

In line with the purpose of the research, the universe of this study consists of Generation Z individuals working in the gastronomy sector in Turkey. To obtain a sample from this universe, different criteria were determined and a purposive sampling method was used. These criteria include: participants being within the age range that can be classified as Generation Z, being currently employed or previously employed in the gastronomy sector, and being familiar with the definition of organic food. Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixteen participants who are Generation Z and work in the gastronomy sector, taking these criteria into account. The semi-structured interview method is defined as a technique in which the researcher has a general framework of questions but aims to explore various aspects of the topic in depth by asking different questions within this framework, depending on the participant's level of knowledge and interest. If, during the interview, it becomes apparent that certain questions are not appropriate or meaningful for the relevant institution or context, these questions are omitted, and at times, the interview may naturally evolve in different directions (Coşkun, Altunışık & Yıldırım, 2019).

Prior to conducting these interviews, an interview form consisting of five different questions was created using relevant literature. To test the comprehensibility of these questions, they were sent to experts in the field for review and verification. After implementing minor corrections suggested by the experts, pilot interviews were conducted with participants. Following these pilot interviews, no changes were made to the questions, and the main study proceeded.

To conduct the interviews, participants were first invited to take part in the study. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants who accepted the invitation. There is no information regarding the number of participants in the interviews. In qualitative research, the number of participants varies between five and fifty. However, in this study, we adopted a data saturation strategy and will end the research process when no new information emerges. Each interview lasted an average of 15-20 minutes and was recorded. Each interview was listened to, transcribed, and transcribed word for word. The interviews were transferred to Microsoft Word and converted into data analysis.

Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study were analyzed using descriptive analysis methods. Descriptive analysis is one of the basic approaches used in qualitative research to systematically summarize data and interpret it in line with the research questions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). This method allows data obtained from interviews to be classified under themes, supported by direct quotations, and to reflect the participants' perspectives in a holistic manner.

During the coding process, researchers first created open codes by reading the data several times, then converted these codes into categories and themes based on their common characteristics. The researchers compared the resulting themes, discussed different perspectives, and reached consensus to arrive at the final themes. To increase the transparency and validity of the process, the themes were then submitted to external experts for review and finalized based on their feedback.

The data analysis process was conducted manually without the use of qualitative analysis software such as NVivo or MAXQDA. The main reason for this was the limited sample size of the study and the desire for researchers to interact more directly with the data. Manual coding provided researchers with the opportunity to examine the data more closely, notice details, and engage in a higher level of reflexive thinking during the interpretation process. Furthermore, the manual method allowed researchers to develop their own analytical perspectives and establish a deeper connection with the data. This choice was considered valuable in terms of enabling the researcher to stay close to the data and reveal the contextual meaning more strongly, as emphasized by

Creswell (2014) and Patton (2015) in qualitative research.

4. Findings

Natural Environment

When the research data was examined, it was observed that participants emphasized the naturalness of the products and the absence of any additives. In particular, the absence of any external influence was associated with the products being organic. In this context, the analysis of the research data revealed five distinct sub-themes. Accordingly, sub-themes such as "being prepared/grown in more natural environments," "products being fresh," "products being unprocessed," "products being raw," and "products not containing any chemicals" were identified. In this regard, some participants expressed their views on these themes as follows.

K1 (Female, 21 years old): I think organic food is healthy because it contains no chemicals and is also a very nutritious type of food.

K3 (Male, 23 years old): With organic food production, food is presented to us in its raw form, without any tampering with its values, and we consume these food products, which positively affects human health.

The importance of the natural environment is also clearly evident in the effects of organic farming on human health. Organic products prevent chemical residues and synthetic compounds from entering the human body. This reduces health risks for people and promotes a healthy lifestyle. A meta-analysis on this subject has shown that organic farming positively affects children's health by reducing pesticide exposure (Forman et al., 2012). This is important for consumers not only from a health perspective but also from an environmental and ecological perspective. Numerous studies have highlighted the contribution of organic farming to the preservation of the natural environment. For example, a study by Pretty et al. (2006) shows that organic farming increases biodiversity and improves the health of ecosystems. This is a result of organic farming practices that emphasize the importance of the natural environment.

Being Healthy and Nutritious

When the research data was examined, it was observed that participants emphasized the healthiness and nutritional value of the products. In particular, the increased importance of organic foods was attributed to the fact that GMO foods differ from their original content. In this context, the analysis of the research data revealed three distinct sub-themes. Accordingly, sub-themes such as "being healthy and nutritious," "having high nutritional levels," "being important for our health," and "organic foods being more important today because GMO foods now differ from their original content" were identified. In this context, participants expressed their thoughts on these themes as follows.

K5 (Female, 22 years old): Especially nowadays, genetically modified products are widely available on the market in order to feed the growing population, but these practices are not used in organic farming. From this perspective, I find organic food to be very healthy.

K7 (Male, 23 years old): I think organic foods are more important for our health. Because organic foods don't contain additives. You know, they add additives to most foods to extend their expiration dates, and maybe this is harmful to our health, but organic foods don't have that. They have high nutritional levels and are prepared/grown in more natural environments.

Demand for organic foods is on the rise due to increased consumer awareness of healthy eating and environmental sensitivity. Organic farming is structured to produce carefully, knowledgeably, and conscientiously, taking future needs into account.(Bulut,2018) .

Limitations

When the research data was examined, it was observed that participants emphasized limitations regarding organic foods. Within this framework, 19 different sub-themes emerged from the research data. Accordingly, "inability to access heirloom seeds," "focus on trade," "mismatch between supply and demand," "unavailability of organic products due to population growth," "cost and purchasing power," "lack of organic products in stores," "busy daily life," "lack of time to cook," "availability only in elite establishments," "insufficient organic food production," "difficulty of production," "lack of incentives," "low yield," "lack of agricultural land," "inadequate climate," "time-consuming," "difficulty in obtaining certification," "lack of aesthetics," and "existence of concept restaurants." Within this scope, participants expressed their thoughts on these themes as follows.

K2 (Female, 20 years old): Since organic food products do not contain drugs, etc., they do not look uniform, which is why they are not preferred in restaurants. When it comes to home consumption, unfortunately, because they are expensive, we as consumers tend to choose food produced with pesticides. If our economy were in a slightly better state, I would very much like to switch to organic food for the sake of our health. I wish this type of agriculture were more widely known and available at more affordable prices.

K6 (Male, 22 years old): In my opinion, the biggest obstacle to organic food is that supply does not meet demand and there are access issues.People want access to organic food, but there is no agricultural land to provide it, the climate conditions to provide it are not everywhere, seasonal conditions and, as is the case at my workplace, operating costs and planning are obstacles. Looking at the present day, we see that people are starting to migrate from cities to villages for these reasons.

It is evident that limitations play a significant role among the barriers and attitudes toward organic foods. Although consumer demand for organic food is increasing day by day, producers consider this level insufficient. This situation creates an imbalance between supply and demand(Özgen and Yeşiloğlu,2015) . Furthermore, consumers' suspicions about the existence of organic foods, based on the fact that the seeds used in agriculture are modified and unregulated, reinforce these limitations(Akoğlu and Demirbilek,2018) .Furthermore, the fact that a large portion of consumers mention that organic food prices are quite expensive is also significant in terms of limitations.(& Demirbilek,2018; Çağlar Çetinkaya, Durukan,& Karaoğlan,2021; Eti,2017; Köse& Kırcova,2020; Kvatchadze ,2017; Turan& Demircan,2021)

Unhealthy and Harmful

When the research data was examined, it was seen that the participants emphasized that they were "unhealthy and harmful." In this context, the research data identified a sub-theme under this theme. This sub-theme was defined as "not containing preservatives." In this context, the participants expressed their thoughts on these themes as follows.

K4 (Female, 23 years old): When growing inorganic foods, certain chemicals and drugs are used to make them grow quickly. When we consume these foods, we indirectly ingest these components into our bodies, meaning we are consuming harmful substances. However, organic foods do not contain preservatives, etc., and are a more beneficial type of food for our health.

Organic food consumers tend to gravitate toward natural and healthy foods and show a tendency to purchase such products because they are health-conscious individuals. Chen (2009) states that, as a result of his research, health and environmental concerns are important factors in organic food consumption. In addition, he notes that a healthy lifestyle has a mediating effect on the positive relationship between health consciousness, environmental attitudes, and consumer attitudes toward organic food.

Level Of Knowledge

When the research data was examined, it was observed that participants emphasized the theme of knowledge level. Within this framework, four sub-themes were identified. These themes were identified as "people are not aware," "organic food certification provides assurance," "it is trendy," and "it should be used for babies." In this context, participants expressed their thoughts on these themes as follows.

K8 (Female, 21 years old): Moms with babies and high awareness levels are really into organic food. If you look at Generation Z, I don't think we can afford this food because the economic hardships we're facing and the conditions of our student life don't really allow us to buy it.

K11 (Male, 23 years old): Based on what I've seen, heard, and read, I believe that organic farming is not widely practiced either in our country or globally. Currently, it has become somewhat of a trend among current topics. Not much attention is paid to this issue, but people and society need to be made aware of it, producers need to be supported in this regard, and the government needs to get involved. Because this society, that is, human health, is nothing else; I think it would be better if more thought were given to it.

Organic food consumers generally possess a high level of knowledge about such foods. This awareness guides their preferences regarding healthy nutrition and environmentally friendly products, leading them to choose more natural, additive-free foods. They have detailed knowledge about the production processes, benefits, and label information of organic foods, and this information influences their purchasing decisions. As consumers' knowledge about organic food increases, the price they are willing to pay for these products also rises (Díaz, Pleite, Paz, & García, 2012).

Taste Perception

Analysis of the research data revealed that participants emphasized the theme of taste perception. Within this framework, one sub-theme was identified. The identified sub-theme was defined as "the attractiveness of sweeteners used in processed foods." In this context, participants expressed their thoughts on these themes as follows.

K8 (Female, 21 years old): First of all, I am someone who consumes a lot of chicken. I don't eat red meat. I would definitely prefer to consume organic chicken. Other than that, I would like to consume vegetables and fruits such as eggs, tomatoes, and salad organically.

K12 (Male, 21 years old): So, from my perspective, I am someone who consumes a lot of fruit, especially fruit,

Consumers' Barriers and Attitudes Towards Organic Labeled Food
Natural environmen t
Prepared and grown in more natural environments
•Products are fresh
•Products are unprocessed
•Products being raw
Healthy and nutritious
•Being healthy and nutritious
•Having high nutritional levels
•Importance for our health
•Organic foods are now more important because GMO products have changed from their original content
Limitations
•Inability to Access heirloom seeds
•Focus on trade
•Mismatch between supply and demand
•Unavailability of organic products due to population growth
•Cost and purchasing power
•Organic products not being sold in markets
•Busy daily life
•Lack of time to
Unhealthy and harmful
•Not containing preservatives
Level of knowledge
•People's lack of awareness
•Organic food certification provides assurance
•Being trendy
•Should be used for babies
Taste perception
•The attractiveness of sweeteners used in prepared foods
Desired organic foods
•Chicken
•Tomatoes
•Lettuce
•Salad
•Seasonal produce
•Sandwich
•Morel mushroom
•Mint
•Beans
•Eggplant

definitely want the fruit used in food and meals to be organic. I wouldn't want any kind of chemical additives, but I don't know if they're present or not. However, I try to source them myself as much as possible.

Organic food consumers also have a strong belief in the taste perception of organic products. They believe that organic foods, grown without chemical additives and pesticides, have a more natural and intense flavor. Therefore, by experiencing that organic products are fresher, more aromatic, and tastier, they increase their loyalty to such foods. This positive difference in taste perception plays an important role in the preference for organic foods. Taste is a difficult factor for most brands in the food industry to achieve. For this reason, the taste factor has an effect on increasing the ability of food businesses to have a unique taste for their brands and to persuade individuals in marketing (Güzel, 2013: 228).

Desired Organic Foods

When the research data was examined, eleven sub-themes were identified under the theme of desired organic foods. These sub-themes were identified as "chicken," "tomatoes," "lettuce," "salad," "seasonal products," "sandwiches," "chanterelle mushrooms," "sage," "rose hips," "beans," and "eggplant." Within this scope, participants expressed their thoughts on these themes as follows.

K9 (Female, 22 years old): I often get salad with the meals I eat at work, and I would like the salad to be made with organic ingredients. I also eat chicken frequently in my daily life, and I would like it to be organic, raised in its natural environment. At school, we are forced to eat sandwiches frequently, and I would like the ingredients to be organic. Non-organic foods reveal themselves immediately; for example, when you eat a tomato, it tastes like an apple.

K12 (Male, 21 years old): For example, when I wake up in the morning, I want the tomatoes I eat for breakfast to be organic. Or I want the cucumber I use in my yogurt dip, or the beans I cook for dinner, to be organic too. Even when I go on a simple picnic to , I want the eggplant I grill on the barbecue, the chicken I barbecue, or the meat from the animal I buy to be organic. But getting these things doesn't seem very feasible at the moment.

Organic food consumers turn to organic products out of a desire for healthy and natural nutrition. This desire stems from a wish to consume more natural and pure products that do not contain pesticides or chemical additives. These consumers, who are aware of the positive effects of organic foods on their health and the environment, shape their dietary preferences accordingly. "Domestic organic markets have grown significantly over the past 4-5 years in line with the demand of people living in large cities. Organic products are sold in local markets, at "organic greengrocers," or in the special organic products section of supermarkets" (Nardali and Gencler, 2011: 98).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Increasing health concerns worldwide are driving consumers' growing interest in organic foods. As a result, organic food production and retail are experiencing rapid growth on a global scale (Willer & Lernoud, 2017). In this study, the literature on organic food was first reviewed, followed by interviews with 16 participants from Generation Z using qualitative research methods. The interviews revealed seven main themes that shape Generation Z's attitudes toward organic food: natural environment, healthiness and nutritional value, limitations, unhealthiness and harmfulness, level of knowledge, taste perception, and desired organic foods. Participants emphasized that organic products should be preferred because they do not contain chemicals, are produced in fresh and natural environments, have high nutritional value, and are an alternative to genetically modified foods. However, factors such as high costs, limited access, busy lifestyles, low production, and lack of incentives were identified as key elements limiting the consumption of organic products.

Research findings indicate that the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) provides an appropriate theoretical framework for explaining Generation Z consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward organic food. Participants' positive attitudes toward organic food (Magnusson et al., 2001; Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008) indicate a strong tendency at the intention level, while perceived behavioral control was found to be the decisive factor in translating this intention into behavior. The study also highlighted the influence of social environment and digital platforms, particularly social media content and peer group preferences, which reinforced the role of subjective norms in organic food consumption (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008). This finding reveals that organic food is not only a health preference for Generation Z, but also an indicator of social identity and social acceptance.

The most prominent finding in the study is the perceived weakness of behavioral control. Participants reported difficulties in consumption due to the high price of organic products (Padel & Foster, 2005; Hughner et al., 2007), limited availability (Kvatchadze, 2017; Rana & Paul, 2017), and time constraints. This supports the intention–behavior gap frequently

emphasized in the literature (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Yazdanpanah & Forouzani, 2015).

Therefore, in order for Generation Z's positive attitudes to translate into behavior, it is important to make organic products more affordable, diversify distribution channels, and develop practical consumption alternatives that suit young people's lifestyles.

In conclusion, this study explains Generation Z's attitudes toward organic food and the obstacles they face within the TPB framework, thereby contributing to the literature theoretically and developing practical recommendations for industry stakeholders. Businesses adopting communication strategies that emphasize the health and naturalness of organic products, strengthening the social norms of young consumers through social media and influencer collaborations, and developing solutions that reduce pricing and access barriers will contribute to an increase in demand for organic food.

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