

## A study to examine the health interest level of fast food consumers<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of the study is to assess the health interest level of fast food consumers and the effecting factors. To reach this aim, four main hypotheses tested in the study. A questionnaire was formed to collect the data needed to test the hypothesis. The questionnaire was carried out to the 211 fast food consumers at main fast food restaurants in Sakarya/Turkey. Both intentional and convenience sampling methods was used in the study, picking voluntary fast food consumers at the restaurants. The results indicate that, health interest of fast food consumers is at medium-high level (3.36 out of 5). Health interest level of fast food consumers increased in direct proportion to the increase of monthly income level. Also, the more a person visits a fast food restaurant the less her/his health interest level become. It also can be seen from the results that marital and child having situation are both significantly related to the health interest level of fast food consumers. Thus, according to the results, all four hypotheses of the study was supported.*

**Keywords:** Fast Food Consumption, Consumer Health Interest, Marketing strategy

### **1. Introduction**

Obesity is a serious medical disorder that causes various types of diseases which affects the life time and quality in a negative way unless it is prevented. The prevalence of obesity and its influences on health in Turkey is increasing as well as in other countries all around the world on a daily basis (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health, 2015a)..

One of the subtitles of the Consumption Expenses research which is being implemented by Turkish Statistical Institute every year is Food Drink Service Expenses. According to the results of this research, which is the indicator of the out-of-home consumption in Turkey, it is visible that there is more than 4 times between 2004 – 2013 (Table 1). The raise in the population is approximately 15% between the same years.

The share of the out-of-home consumption over the total food expenses have grown up to 50% from 34% between 1974-2004 in the USA (Stewart, et all, 2006: 1). As it is shown in Table 1, even though the raise of the share of out-of-home consumption over total food expenses has decreased in recent years, we can see that there is still a growth of nearly 2 times of the amount in the last decade.

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Yılmaz, A., Arslan, Y. (2016). A study to examine the health interest level of fast food consumers. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education Research*, 2 (1), 110-115.

According to the results of Ipsos' research, restaurants and fast food stores constitute almost the half of the total out-of-home consumption market share (Ipsos Out-of-Home Consumption Research, 2015).

Table 1. Food and beverages service total food expenditures

Year	Food and Beverages Service		Total Food		F&B / Total Food
	Amount (Milion/TL*)	Change % (Base Year 2004)	Amount (Million/TL)	Change % (Base Year 2004)	
'04	640,6	100%	3.781,5	100%	17%
'05	802,2	125%	4.468,4	118%	18%
'06	847,5	132%	5.054,7	134%	17%
'07	1.027,3	160%	5.221,7	138%	20%
'08	1.217,7	190%	6.101,5	161%	20%
'09	1.517,5	237%	6.666,6	176%	23%
'10	1.763,3	275%	7.050,1	186%	25%
'11	2.195,7	343%	7.915,3	209%	28%
'12	2.528,7	395%	8.636,0	228%	29%
'13	2.835,0	443%	9.730,7	257%	29%

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute

\*TL= Turkish Lira

The foods, which can be grouped under fast food category, have various types of options for the customers. Almost none of them are healthy among these types. Fast food is especially not recommended for over middle aged people and people who are suffering from diabetes, due to the reason that these kind of foods contain high level of fat, cholesterol, sodium and salt (Yurtman, 2001: 3). Bowman et al. indicated in their research that fast food is the most important cause of the young generation's increasing obesity problem (2004: 116).

## 2. Fast food consumption and health interest

Fast food is the type of food that being served to the customers as limited menus in a quick, self-service way. This kind of foods are generally prepared before and ready to consume (Lundberg, 1984: 223). Fast food is emphasized in Bender & Bender's Dictionary of Nutrition and Food Technology as the type of foods which are being served in limited menus by using production line techniques. According to this description, fast food is the type of products which offered by the suppliers who tend to specialize in hamburger, pizza, chicken and sandwich (1999: 157). The products that are being mentioned above are examples of western type of fast foods. Döner, Lahmacun, Kebab can be considered as Turkish equivalents (Akbat et al., 2007: 905). Lower prices, speed, social interaction, entertainment, decoration, food quality, accessibility, variety of products etc. can be counted as some of the reasons why people choose to eat at fast food restaurants (Park, 2004: 88; Bayraktar et al., 1995; Binkley, 2006: 372).

Fast food consuming is one of the fundamental reasons for people becoming obese. According to the World Health Organizations' report in 2012, approximately 7% of the children under five years old are obese. This ratio was previously around 5% in 1990s (2014: 41). The necessity of an effective intervention against obesity, which has showed up as a result of unhealthy nourishment, has gained great substantiality. Unless this intervention is performed, it is inevitable for the

youth of modern age to have a less healthy and a shorter life span than their parents (Olshansky et al., 2005: 1143).

There are some activities carried out by the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health to increase awareness such as two public service announcements (psa) “Body Mass Index” and “Harek Et! (Take Action)”. In addition to that “lower your meal portion”, “10.000 steps every day” themed posters and billboards are being used (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health, 2015b).

It is known that fast food is a factor that creates risks for adults to gain weight. Besides that there is a correlation that the incensement on the health awareness causes the frequency of fast food consumption to decrease (Monge et al., 2013: 1011). Since the negative effects of fast food products on human health have been proved with scientific researches, “healthy fast food” products have started to be served by companies. In addition to that, sharing the findings of these researches via media is also a reason why companies have developed these specific strategies.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. The purpose and hypothesis of the study

A lot of people prefer fast food products for many reasons. Mainly because short preparation times and easiness to get. But, can one say those people who eat fast food that they do not care about their health at all? Or is it like smoking, people know its harms and just keep doing it? In this context, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the fast food consumer’s health interest level and the effecting factors. One main research question and three main hypotheses were tested in the study to reach these purposes which are;

*RQ: What is the health interest level of fast-food consumers?*

*H1: There is a significant relationship between fast food consumer’s monthly income and health interest level.*

*H2: There is a significant relationship between fast food consumer’s health interest level and fast food restaurant visiting frequency.*

*H3: Health interest level of fast food consumer differ depending children having situation.*

#### 3.2. The design of the study

In the light of the objectives of the study, the survey population was identified as people lives in Sakarya/ Turkey and aged above 18, who have consumed fast food products from any fast food restaurant during previous month.

Both convenience and judgmental sampling methods was employed for the study. It was thought to be the best way to get chance to reach fast food consumers while eating. The questionnaire was consisting of two fundamental parts. First part consists of eight Likert questions which measures consumers health interest level of fast food consumers. Second part of the questionnaire was consisting of demographic questions.

The data to test the hypotheses were obtained from a consumer survey which conducted at Sakarya shopping malls between April-May 2014 period. Trained students directly applied the surveys to the people who were eating at fast food restaurants of the shopping malls. After the elimination of the surveys which has lack of information, there were 211 surveys convenient for further analysis.

#### 4. Findings

According to the demographic findings of the study, 56% of the population was male while %44 was female. 61% of the population was single. 39% of the population was married and most of them had children (27% of the total population). More than half of the population was graduated from high school and more than 33% was higher educated. %60 of the sample had less than 2000TL monthly income.

Table 2. Demographics

Gender	n	%	Educational Status	n	%
Male	93	44	Primary Ed.	28	13
Female	118	56	High School	113	54
Total	211	100	Undergraduate	63	30
			Graduate	7	3
Marital Status	n	%	Total	211	100
Married	83	39			
Single	128	61	Revenue (TL)	n	%
Total	211	100	1.000 and below	90	43
			1.001 - 2.00	60	28
Children Having	n	%	2.001 - 3.000	40	19
Yes	78	37	3.001 - 4.000	15	7
No	133	63	4001 TL and above	6	3
Total	211	100	Total	211	100

General health interest level of the sample is 3.36. It is between the degrees of 3-4 in the likert scale. It can be said that the population has medium-high level of health interest although they all eat fast food products.

Table 3. Separation of the sample according to health interest levels

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Low</b>	27	12,8
<b>Modarate</b>	94	44,5
<b>High</b>	90	42,7
<b>TOTAL</b>	211	100,0

According to the results of the Chi-square test, monthly income and health interest levels of fast food consumer is significantly related. Thus, H1 Hypotheses is accepted.

Table 4. Monthly income /health interest level crosstab

Groups	Health Interest Level			Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p	
	Low	Moderate	High					
Fast-food Res. Vis-iting Freq.	Below 1000TL*	17	45	28	90	18.006	6	.006
	1001-2000TL	2	22	36	60			
	2001-3000TL	5	15	20	40			
	Above 3000 TL	3	12	6	21			
	Total	27	94	90	211			

1 cells (8,3%) have expected count less than 5.

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According to the results of the Chi-square test, fast food restaurant visiting frequency level and health interest level of fast food consumers are significantly related. Thus, H2 Hypotheses is accepted.

Table 5. Fast food restaurant visiting frequency /health interest level crosstab

Groups		Health Interest Level			Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p
		Low	Moderate	High				
Fastfood Res. Visiting Freq.	Everyday	3	7	6	16	15.995	6	.014
	Several times in a week	18	45	30	93			
	Several times in a month	2	30	31	63			
	More than several times in a month	4	12	23	39			
Total		27	94	90	211			

2 cells (16.7 %) have expected count less than 5.

According to the results of Independent Sample t Test, fast food consumers health interest level is significantly different with regard to marital status ( $t=5,16$ ;  $p<.05$ ). According to results it can be said that married fast food consumer's health interest level is significantly higher than single fast food consumers. Thus, H3 Hypotheses is accepted.

Table 6. Comparison of health interest level with respect to marital status

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	std. error	t-test		
					t	df	p
Married	83	3.69	.66	.073	5.16	201.21	<0.001
Single	128	3.15	.85	.075			

\* $p<0.001$

According to the results of Independent Sample t Test, fast food consumer's health interest level is significantly different regarding children having situation. ( $t=3.98$ ;  $p<.05$ ). According to results, the health interest of fast food consumers having children is significantly higher than those who do not have children. Thus, H4 Hypotheses is accepted.

Table 7. Comparison of health interest levels with respect to children having situation

Children	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	std. error	t-test		
					t	df	p
Yes	78	3.63	.67	.079	3.98	187.48	<0.001
No	133	3.20	.86	.074			

\* $p<0.001$

## 5. Conclusion

According to the results of the study, it can be said that fast food consumers see themselves as health interested people although they eat unhealthy food. We think it is because of the attitudinal

Yılmaz, A., Arslan, Y. (2016). A study to examine the health interest level of fast food consumers. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education Research*, 2 (1), 110-115.

tendency to act in a better way while answering questions about themselves. It should be emphasized that people who have children, see fast food products unhealthy. Although they considering fast food unhealthy for themselves but eat anyway, it would not be the same when it comes to their children. That is why it can strongly be suggested to fast food companies to improve their unhealthy image specifically for their child-related products.

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