

-RESEARCH PAPER-

EVALUATION OF ORGANIC FOODS' QUALITY IN TURKEY: IMPACT OF GENDER, COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND STORE CATEGORY

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of country of origin (Turkey, Germany, the Netherlands), gender (male, female) and store category (supermarket, discount store, specialty food store) on Turkish consumers' perceived quality of organic cheese products. Data were collected online from 396 participants via unrestricted, self-selected survey. Results revealed significant main effects of COO and store category on the perceived cheese quality. The perceived quality of cheese in specialty stores was the highest, followed by supermarkets. Yet quality perception was not positive in discount stores. Thus, specialty food stores and supermarkets especially appeared to be optimal locations to sell organic foods in Turkey. Perceived quality rating scored the highest for the cheese originating in the Netherlands, followed by German and Turkish cheese. Female consumers showed positive attitudes toward cheese originating from Turkey, whereas male consumers rated the Turkish cheese as the lowest quality cheese across each store category. Based on these findings, the present study offered strategical implications for international and domestic cheese producers as well as retailers operating in Turkey.

Keywords: Country of origin, Organic Food, Store Format, Gender, Perceived Quality, Retailer, Discount Store, Specialty Store.

Jel Codes: M31, M30, Q13.

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ORGANİK GIDALARIN ALGILANAN KALİTESİ: CİNSİYET ÜLKE MENŞEİ VE MAĞAZA TİPİNİN ETKİSİ

Öz

Bu çalışmada, menşei ülke (Türkiye, Almanya, Hollanda), cinsiyet (erkek, kadın) ve mağaza kategorisinin (süpermarket, indirim mağazası, özel gıda mağazası) Türk tüketicilerin organik peynir ürünlerinin algılanan kalitesi üzerindeki etkileri incelenmiştir. Veri 396 katılımcıdan İnternet üzerinden toplanmıştır. Sonuçlar, COO ve mağaza kategorisinin algılanan peynir kalitesi üzerinde anlamlı derecede etkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Özellikle gıda ürünleri mağazasında algılanan peynir kalitesi en fazla olup, ardından süpermarketler gelmektedir. Ancak indirim marketlerinde, kalite algısı negatiftir. Bu nedenle, özellikli gıda mağazaları ve süpermarketler, Türkiye'de

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organik gıda satımı için en uygun yerler olarak tespit edilmiştir. Hollanda menşeli peynir algılanan kalite bakımından ilk sıradayken, arkasından Alman ve Türk menşeli peynirlergelmektedir. Kadın tüketiciler, Türkiye menşeli peynirlere karşı olumlu tutum sergilemekteyken, erkek tüketiciler Türk peynirini her mağaza kategorisinde en düşük kaliteli peynir olarak değerlendirmişlerdir. Bu bulgulara dayanarak, bu çalışma yerli ve yabancı peynir üreticileri ile Türkiye’de faaliyet gösteren perakendeciler için stratejilerönermeye çalışmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ülke Menşei, Organic Gıda, Mağaza Kategorisi, Cinsiyet, Algılanan Kalite, Perakende, İndirimli Mağaza, Özellikli Mağaza.

Jel Kodları: M31, M30, Q13

1. INTRODUCTION

Organic food markets continue to grow remarkably and the industry has expanded worldwide with the increasing concern of consumers opting for healthier natural products. Because organic food sales are increasing particularly in the USA, Canada, and Europe (Denver & Jensen, 2014), most studies on organic foods have been conducted in these countries (Schjoll, 2017), suggesting that there is a need for research conducted in less developed countries. Due to the ever-increasing food demand triggered by a rapidly urbanizing population in developing countries, mass-produced food products have become more widespread, and as a result, consumers in these countries have become more cognizant of health-related hazards in the food products they buy (Jabbar, Baker & Fadiga, 2010). This trend makes the issue of organic food an important and relevant one for emerging economies. As a developing country, Turkey has a population of around 79 million, almost half of which is younger than 30 years old with a high consumption potential. In 2015, the total food retail sector in Turkey reached \$132.5 billion and Turkey is among the top 5 markets in Europe in terms of food expenditure (Atalaysun, 2016).

Mainstream studies argued that COO is an external cue that aids consumers in food product purchasing decisions. But the majority of these studies included only conventional foods and overlooked organic ones (Schjoll, 2017). Organic food marketing studies were mainly conducted in developed parts of the world and most of them confirmed that domestic organic food products were considered superior quality and were preferred over the imported ones (Onozaka & McFaden, 2011; Dransfield et al. 2005; Xie, Gao, Swisher & Zhao, 2016). But studies conducted in less developed countries yielded contradictory results. Due to insufficient food safety regulations, consumers in less developed markets do not tend to trust local manufacturers and display positive attitudes toward imported conventional (Newman, Turri, Howlett & Stokes, 2014) and organic foods (Zheng, Li & Peterson, 2013) and prefer them over domestically produced ones. In addition, the factors that are important for food choice sometimes tend to differ across cultures (Prescott, Young, O’neill, Yau & Stevens, 2002). Therefore, attitudes towards organic food need to be further investigated through additional studies in other less developed countries in order to obtain a broader picture of organic consumption behavior worldwide.

In their intensive literature review, Thogersen, Pedersen, Paternoga, Schwendel, Aschemann-Witzel (2017) commented that there is a limited study examining the interaction between the effects of organic and COO on consumers’ food preferences and

choices, and as a future research agenda, they addressed the issue of whether the impact of COO information on consumer attitudes toward organic products will be diminished or amplified by the presence of other quality cues. In light of this, because consumers have different quality perceptions throughout different stores (Ngobo & Jean, 2012; Black et al., 2014, Uusitalo, 2001), store category was included in this study as an external quality cue affecting consumers expectations from the products within the store. In addition to a store category, gender was also incorporated as it was found to moderate consumers' perceived food quality (de Tavares Canto Guina & de Moura Engracia Giraldo, 2015; Kumpulainen, Vainio, Sandell & Hopia, 2018).

The central purpose of this study is to analyze whether COO (the Netherlands, Turkey, Germany), store type (grocery store, discount store, specialty food store) and gender interact with one another, and then determine consumer's level of perceived quality of organic cheese. In light of the findings, this study suggests marketing strategies for domestic, Dutch and German organic food producers as well as retailers operating in Turkey. New paragraph: use this style when you need to begin a new paragraph.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1 Country of Origin

The global trend of healthy eating along with the reduced structural trade barriers increase the demand for organic foods that are produced abroad, which speeds up organic food import and export (Ciburiene, 2014), and makes COO a relevant attribute for organic food products. COO is an extrinsic quality cue that is not a physical part of the actual product like other extrinsic cues such as packaging, advertising, type of outlet, brand name etc. (Steenkamp, 1989). Studies examining the effects of COO on a consumer's decision making process trace back to the seminal work of Dichter (1962), in which he indicated that COO influences the acceptance and success of products. From that time on, there have been extensive studies on the COO effects on a variety of product categories (Usunier, 2006), providing extensive information on how COO operates. In summary, COO is an important cue for helping consumers to assess the quality of foreign products and brands (Liu, Murphy, Li & Liu, 2006).

Like many other products, when evaluating food products, consumers differentiate between origin countries and possess favorable attitudes towards products originating in some countries rather than in others (Zheng et al., 2013; Chrysoschoydis, Krystallis & Perreas, 2007; Newman et al., 2014; Thogersen, Pedersen & Aschemann-Witzel, 2019; Schjoll, 2017). According to mainstream studies, in developed countries domestically produced organic foods are generally preferred over imported ones. In an experiment conducted in the United States, when US consumers were asked to decide between imported versus organic broccolis they opted for domestic organic broccolis over imported ones (Xie et al., 2016). Similarly, a study on Norwegian consumers revealed that consumers preferred organically produced domestic meat over imported meat and exhibited willingness to pay a higher price for the domestic meat (Schjoll, 2017). Another study investigated to what extent the COO label impacted pork preference, which illustrated that nearly all of those who had a concern for an organic label had a clear preference for pork raised domestically (Dransfield et al., 2005). Onozaka and McFaden (2011) who compared imported apples

and tomatoes with their domestic counterparts in the US, found supporting results showing the superiority of domestic produce. Lim, Hu, Maynard & Goddardet (2013) asked US consumers to pick their most preferred COO for beef, the majority of the respondents rated the domestic beef as safer than imported beef given that of no-opinion option. However, in contrast to developing countries, there are some opposing findings in less developed countries. A study analyzing Chinese consumers' evaluation of beef provided that consumers were willing to pay more for Australian beef than for domestic beef (Ortega, Hong, Wang & Wu, 2016) due to food safety concerns. Another study on Chinese consumers revealed a similar picture. Zheng et al. (2013) who looked at Chinese consumers' preferences for the attributes of organic soybeans, found that Chinese consumers were more inclined to choose soybeans imported from the USA over domestic soybeans. Similarly, Bangladeshi consumers perceived Western food products to be of superior quality over domestic food products (Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu & Hyder, 2000). Most recently, Thøgersen et al. (2019) explained that in China and Thailand, there was a tendency to prefer foods from economically developed countries over those from less developed countries.

These findings highlight that in less developed countries where food safety standards are not fully complied with (Wu et al., 2017) consumers may tend to prefer imported organic foods rather than domestic ones. In light of this, this study concentrates on Turkey, a country with great market potential for international food producers, to further examine to what extent COO (homeland vs. foreign countries) affects the perceived food quality of organic food products.

1.1.2. Store Types

Due to increasing concerns regarding the health aspect of foods, conventional foods containing additives and preservatives have become deemed unhealthy. This trend motivated consumers worldwide to seek organic foods, which gradually shaped the retail market environment. In this respect, retailers spurred growth in the organic products category due to a price premium and a higher margin of organic food items (Dawson, 2013). As a consequence, organic products penetrated into the food market at a higher rate (Hung, Verbeke & Kok, 2016). Once having been found in specialty food stores, organic foods have now become available in nearly all type of retailers (Dimitri, Geoghegan & Rogus, 2017; Hidalgo-Baz, Martos-Partal & Gonzalez Benito, 2017), including discount stores (Gottschalk & Leistner, 2013) and mass-market outlets (Harris & Strom, 2014).

Operating under a traditional supermarket format, stores offering a full line of groceries, meat, and meat-like products with moderate prices are categorized as convenience grocery stores. Specialty food stores offer special types of limited food products (e.g. organic, ethnic and gourmet) usually at higher than regular market prices (Huddleston, Whipple, Nye-Mattick & Jung-Lee, 2009). Discount stores, as relative newcomers in the organic food sector (Gottschalk & Leistner, 2013), sell a variety of products, although not to the extent of convenience grocery stores, with prices usually lower than regular market prices.

One earlier study that examined Finnish consumers' perceptions of retail formats noted that consumers had meaningful differences in their perceptions of various store formats

(Usitalo, 2001). Therefore, the store category determines the performance levels and attributes a store must have within this category. In a US household sample, Huddleston and her colleagues demonstrated that respondents' ratings for product quality differed across conventional and specialty food stores (Huddleston et al., 2009). Respondents considered products sold at food specialty stores as having superior quality compared to the products in convenience grocery stores.

In a more recent study in Hampshire, the United Kingdom, Black et al. (2014) applied a cross-sectional survey of 601 food retailers, including supermarkets, grocery, and convenience stores to assess the healthfulness of food retail stores. The result revealed that large and premium supermarkets offer the most healthful shopping environments, whereas discount stores and small-sized convenience stores exhibited less healthful environments to consumers. Therefore, distinct store types offer diverse attributes, and as a result, consumers do not have the same level of expectations across different stores (Ngobo & Jean, 2012). In fact, decisions about what food to buy and eat for one's family and friends are complex and influenced by many factors (Jaeger, 2006) and thereby perception of a particular store format could influence the evaluation of organic foods. To put it differently, store type can act as an extrinsic quality cue, and thus, "consumers perceived quality of organic foods" may vary depending on different types of food retailers. From this viewpoint, this study aimed to elucidate whether store type is an important factor in influencing consumers' evaluation of organic foods.

1.1.3 Gender

In one of the earlier study, Rappoport, Peters, Downey, McCann & Huff-Corzine (1993) illustrated that males and females rated pleasure and health attributes of several meals in a substantially different way, and accordingly, females considered some dietary foods such as a fruit salad much healthier compared to males. Mainstream studies have revealed that male consumers can be categorized as less oriented towards healthy and organic foods compared to females (Cholette, Ozluk, Ozsen & Ungson, 2013; Davies, Titterington & Cochrane, 1995; Roman, Sanchez-Siles & Siegrist, 2017; Lodorfos & Dennis, 2008). Specifically, females were noted to assign significantly higher importance to some health attributes such as whether the food contains low cholesterol, high vitamin levels, low sugar and low fat (Bellows, Alcaraz & Hallman, 2010), and more inclined to desire healthier menus in fast food restaurants (Lassen et al., 2016). On the contrary, there are also some studies with controversial results. Hansen and his colleagues reported that females were not more knowledgeable on healthy food, nor more inclined to seek product-specific health-related information when compared to males (Hansen, Boye & Uth Thomsen, 2010). In addition, women were found to be less inclined to pay a price premium for organic foods than males, even though they showed a more favorable attitude towards organic food purchase (Ureña, Bernabéu & Olmeda, 2008). Thus, this study is an additional effort to understand the role of gender in behavior regarding the pursuit of healthy food.

2. METHODOLOGY

Factorial design is an experimental plan that incorporates the simultaneous impact of several independent variables on a dependent variable (Neuman, 2013). This study

has a 2 (gender) X 3 (store category) X 3 (COO information) experimental design and investigates the main effects of store category, gender and COO information along with their interaction effects on perceived food quality. Because the effect of familiarity with the product category and ethnocentrism on the food quality perception were intended to be controlled, Factorial Ancova was chosen as the appropriate method in this study. All the analyses were conducted with SPSS 21 software. COO and gender were specified to be between-subjects factors and the store category was specified as a within-subjects factor. Three levels of store category: convenience grocery store, discount store and food specialty store, and three levels of COO: Turkey, The Netherlands and Germany were specified.

A food mainly consumed at breakfast with tomatoes, olives and eggs, in addition to being used in a variety of foods from pastries to salads and served as an appetizer with the traditional Turkish alcoholic drink Rakı, cheese plays a major role in Turkish cuisine (Durlu-Ozkaya & Gun, 2014). Thus, there is a variety of Turkish cheese available in the market representing different tastes of different regions, while at the same time Turkey still imports large amounts of specialty cheese, especially from Germany and the Netherlands (Atalaysun, 2016). In this respect, Turkey is a potential market for organic cheese products, and cheese was chosen as the subject product of this study.

Germany and the Netherlands deemed appropriate to investigate effects of COO due to high familiarity of Turkish citizens with these countries because both countries recruited substantial numbers of so-called 'guest workers' from Turkey starting from the middle of the 1960s and onwards, hence the Turks are one of the major immigrant groups in these countries (Euwals, Dagevos, Gijsberts & Roodenburg, 2007). First and foremost, another reason for including these countries was that in 2016 Germany was the first and the Netherlands was the second-largest food exporter in Europe, together dominating Europe's export of cheese products to third countries (European Commission, 2019; Government of Netherlands, 2017).

2.1 Manipulation Checks

Prior to the main experiment, a manipulation check was conducted to make sure that categorical variables had different scores in the perceived quality ratings. 33 students studying at the graduate and postgraduate programs in the International Trade and Finance department were recruited for the manipulation check. Respondents were asked to evaluate the quality of foods in general made in Turkey, Germany and the Netherlands. They also evaluated the general food quality across discount markets, supermarkets and specialty food stores. To measure quality perceptions, the same statements about food quality were used, but this time they were measured on a five-point scale. Afterward, quality scores were averaged for each country and store category before means were compared. The One-way Anova test revealed that Turkish consumers rated foods produced in the Netherlands to have the highest quality (μ : 3.30), followed by Germany (μ : 2.96) and Turkey (μ : 2.82) in a statistically significant way (F : 3.55; p : 0.033). In addition, food quality perception was rated the highest for specialty food stores (μ : 3.27), followed by supermarkets (μ : 2.77) and discount food stores (μ : 2.27) significantly (F : 28.18; p : 0.000). The manipulation check for gender revealed that Males (μ : 4.66) and females (μ : 4.15) did not differ in quality perception of food products (F : 1.24; p : 0.273). Yet, gender was still retained in the

main experiment since the moderating effect of gender in attitudes toward healthy food has been supported by many previous studies (Lodorfos & Dennis, 2008; Roman et al., 2017; Lassen et al., 2016; Bellows et al., 2010). Furthermore, gender can potentially interact with the store category. Carpenter and Moore (2006) elicited that gender had a significant impact on store patronage behavior, stressing that males and females had different store format choices. In this respect, male and female consumers assigned different levels of significance to certain store characteristics (Mortimer & Clarke, 2011). In addition to a store category, gender can also interact with product origin. Investigating Europeans' attitudes towards Brazilian beef, the study by "de Tavares Canto Guina & de Moura Engracia Giraldi" (2015) reported that a positive country image affected the male respondents' attitude in a more strong way compared to females, indicating a gender-specific difference in attitudes towards the same COO information. This could be due to the general tendency of female consumers to rate domestic products higher than foreign products compared to male consumers (Josiassen, Assaf & Karpen, 2011). Similarly, a recent study elicited that a closer origin of a food product did not necessarily result in a positive response, but gender and product type moderated the consumers' attitudes towards the food product (Kumpulainen et al., 2018). Hence, COO information and gender can be claimed as two related factors that together determine consumers' attitudes towards foreign and domestic products.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected by unrestricted, self-selected online survey and Google docs application was used. The survey link was shared on the social media accounts of a Turkish website that concentrates mostly on higher education. In the survey instrument, a description of three store categories and a cheese picture containing its particular COO information were provided, and respondents were asked to evaluate these visuals for each store format.

Rather than objective indices including nutritional and microbiological etc. characteristics, this study adopted a consumer-based approach to measure food quality, which pertains to the subjective perceptions of potential and existing consumers toward food products (Cardello, 1995). Consumers' subjective evaluation of food quality was measured with a four-item instrument adopted from a previous study (Larceneux, Benoit-Moreau & Renaudin, 2012). Seven-point scales ranging from "fully agree" to "fully disagree" were used. Respondents stated their level of agreement with the following assertions: (Q1: Quality) This cheese product is of high quality, (Q2: Taste) This cheese product seems to taste better than other others, (Q3: Safety) Eating this cheese product do not pose a risk to my health, (Q4: Environmental friendliness) This cheese product seems to have been produced following an environmentally friendly process.

2.3 Control Factors

This study controlled for the impact of ethnocentrism and familiarity levels with cheese on consumers' decision-making. As firstly echoed by Shimp and Sharma (1987), consumer ethnocentrism represents the consumers' beliefs about the social appropriateness of purchasing foreign products. Thus, highly ethnocentric consumers tend to prefer domestic products over imported products (Ahmed et al., 2004; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos,

2004). Ethnocentrism was measured with shortened a five-item version of the original CETSCALE (Josiassen, 2011). The seven-point scale ranged from “fully disagree” to “fully agree”.

Familiarity levels with a particular product influence the consumer decision-making process one way or another. As firstly echoed by Han (1989), when consumers have a high familiarity with the product, the importance of COO on consumer decision making is reduced. In contrast, in the presence of little or no familiarity with the product category, COO information plays a predominant role in the consumer’s decision-making process (Josiassen, Lukas & Whitwell, 2008; Josiassen & Assaf, 2010). This study controlled for familiarity with cheese products and familiarity was measured on one item seven-point scales anchored by 1 (not all familiar) and 7 (highly familiar).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Participants

Due to the fact that online questionnaires have the poorest response rates compared to other data collection methods (Malhotra, 2006), although having reached more than 2000 individuals, the final sample amounted to 396 observations (273 females, 123 males). The mean of participants’ age was 31 with a standard deviation of 6.4, and 276 of them had a graduate degree or were enrolled in a graduate program, followed by 117 bachelor students and 3 middle and high school students. Given that there is a large and persistent association between education and healthy behavior (Cutler & Muney, 2006), the sample deemed adequate at least to shed light on attitudes of potential and existing consumers towards domestically produced and imported organic cheese in Turkey.

3.2 Perceived Quality Ratings

Table 1 shows the two-way Ancova results for the cheese quality dependent variable. The table revealed a significant main effect of COO and store category on the cheese quality dependent variable consistent with research objectives. But gender was noted to have no significant main effect on perceived cheese quality (μ for females: 4.302; μ for males: 4.247). The cheese quality rating score was the highest for the Netherlands (μ : 4.468), followed by Germany (μ : 4.323) and Turkey (μ : 4.034 SE: .111). Yet, the pair-wise comparison revealed that only the mean scores difference between Turkey and the Netherlands was significant at a p.007 level. As expected, the store category was also found to moderate the quality perception of Turkish consumers. In the case where cheese was presented in the specialty food store, quality perception scored 4.852 whereas for supermarkets and discount food stores, quality ratings were respectively at 4.187 and 3.785.

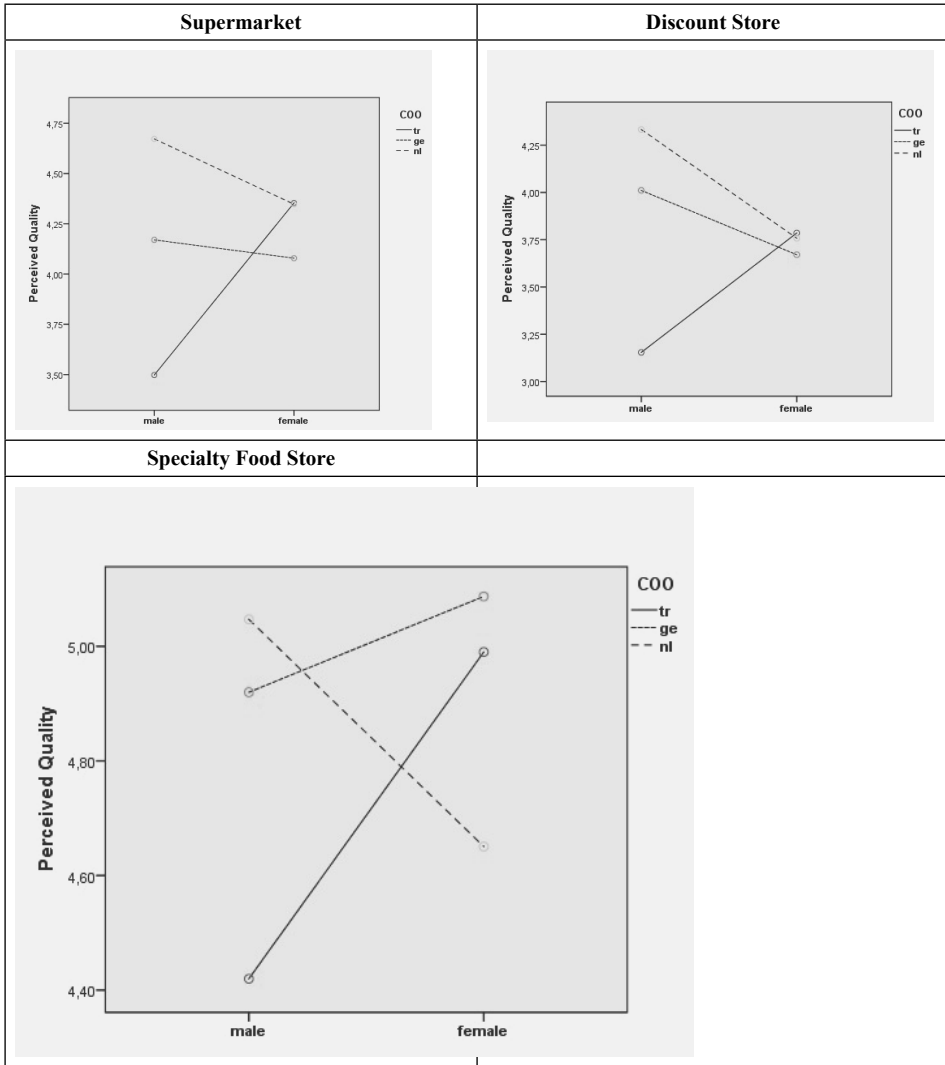
Table 1. ANCOVA for Food Quality Measure

Source	d.f.	SS	F	P
COO	2	11.815	3.783	<u>.024</u>
Store Category (C)	2	64.529	20.659	<u>.000</u>
Gender (G)	1	.244	.157	.693
COO x C	4	3.605	.577	.679
COO x G	2	19.760	6.326	<u>.002</u>
C x G	2	.950	.304	.738
COO x C x G	4	.953	.153	.962
Covariates				
Ethnocentrism	1	7.49	4.80	<u>.029</u>
Familiarity	1	11.265	7.213	<u>.008</u>

One of the most interesting results of this study is that there was a statistically significant interaction only between COO and gender (See Figure 1). Furthermore, whilst the store category did not interact with the rest of the independent factors in a statistically significant way, it still seemed to shape the impact of the interaction between COO and gender on consumers' attitudes towards organic cheese. Female respondents rated the quality of Dutch and Turkish cheese almost equally and higher than the German cheese in discount stores and supermarkets, whereas for the case of specialty food stores, perceived quality of German cheese obtained the highest quality score, followed by Turkish cheese. However, Dutch cheese was rated at the lowest quality in the specialty store format. This indicates that female consumers did not seem to associate Dutch origin with specialty food characteristics in contrast to German cheese which could benefit from COO if presented in the specialty store. Nevertheless, male respondents evaluated Turkish cheese as being of the lowest quality regardless of the store category. In addition, they rated Dutch cheese quality as the highest across each store category, showing that males possessed strongly favorable attitudes towards the Dutch cheese.

These findings elucidate that in addition to the main effect of COO and store category, gender and COO interaction could matter for the evaluation of organic cheese, and, although not statistically significant, store format shapes the strength of this interaction on the perceived food quality. Therefore, retailers, as well as cheese producers, should take these three factors into consideration when they design their marketing strategies.

Figure 1. Perceived Quality of Organic Cheese Across Store Formats.



4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Gender, COO and store category effects

This study attempted to address the question of whether the perceived quality of organic food could be influenced by COO, store category and gender. In other words, the relationship between COO and store category was investigated by taking into consideration the factor of gender. Overall, the results showed that COO had a significant impact on cheese quality perception, and Dutch cheese received the highest mean quality rating, thus having an obvious competitive advantage over the German and the Turkish cheese which was considered the lowest of quality. This result is in line with the previous

literature arguing that consumers in less developed countries have more favorable attitudes towards imported foods than locally produced ones (Ortega et al., 2016; Zheng et al., 2013; Kaynak et al., 2000). Therefore, this result seems to suggest that the Turkish retail market with an annual trade volume of 130 billion USD in 2015 (Atalaysun, 2016), can offer great opportunities for Western cheese producers.

Because distinct store types offer diverse attributes, and consumers hold different levels of expectations for different stores (Ngobo& Jean, 2012), this study also revealed that perceived quality of an organic dairy product was moderated by the store category in which the product was presented. Perceived cheese quality obtained the highest mean score in specialty food stores, followed by supermarket and discount stores because as expected, consumers tend to consider products in food specialty stores of superior quality compared to the products in other types of stores catering to lower market segments (Huddleston et al., 2009). Therefore, store category could play a pivotal role in the evaluation of organic products; and specialty food stores, followed by supermarkets, could be the optimal location to sell distinct organic foods in Turkey. Nevertheless, discount stores did not appear to be a convenient channel to promote organic cheese since quality ratings of cheese were the lowest regardless of COO information and gender. Therefore, one can argue that the Turkish retail market is not yet as developed as the German retail industry, where the image of low-end discount stores does not prevent German consumers from buying organic foods in discount markets (Gottschalk & Leistner, 2013).

It should not be forgotten that, other than solely conforming with consumers' expectations, successful retailers are also a major influence in shaping food choices and preferences (Dawson, 2013). Therefore, if discount stores in Turkey were to decide to sell organic foods at some point in the future, they are advised to implement marketing strategies to improve their store image beforehand. In this way, high-quality perceptions of organic foods will not be impacted by store image.

Gender was found to have no main effect on Turkish consumers' evaluation of cheese quality. However, there was a statistically significant interaction between COO and gender, which together affected perceived cheese quality in a different way for each store format. This result is in line with the previous literature showing that gender could moderate the impact of COO on attitudes towards foreign products (de Tavares Canto Guina& de Moura Engracia Giraldo, 2015). Specifically, as opposed to female consumers who tended to rate Turkish cheese as having the highest quality in supermarkets and discount store formats, males rated Turkish cheese to have the lowest quality compared to German and Dutch cheese within each store category. This result partially supports Josiassen et al. (2011) who reported that female consumers are more ethnocentric than males and rate domestic products higher than foreign products. Therefore, in order for an imported cheese to be successful in Turkey, it may be advantageous to target the male population in the early stages of marketing efforts. Nevertheless, this strategy, not surprisingly, depends on the fact of whether male family members in an average Turkish family frequently, or at least occasionally, do the grocery shopping. Although, males in the present world engage in grocery shopping more frequently and freely (Mortimer & Clarke, 2011), the essence of Turkish male shopping behavior still needs to be examined. Thus, foreign cheese producers will do well by investigating family buying roles in advance to see whether the Turkish market will offer them enough potential.

Although Dutch and German cheese producers are advised to target male consumers in the early stages of their marketing activities, females also should not be neglected because German cheese obtained the highest quality scores among females in specialty food stores, and perceived quality of Dutch and Turkish cheese in supermarkets was rated almost equally among females and males. Based on these findings, if German cheese producers were to thrive in the Turkish market, they could also target females who regularly shop in specialty food stores. Furthermore, Dutch cheese producers could target females who more often shop in supermarkets. Finally, because the Turkish image is considered to be of high quality among females, Turkish well-known dairy brands are recommended to include an organic food category in their product range and to mostly target females. To sum up, although the impact was not statistically significant, findings revealed that store format is an important element in shaping the direction and strength of the interaction between COO and gender on consumers' attitudes towards organic food products.

4.2 Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations associated with this study. Firstly, the data were collected via unrestricted, self-selected online survey from a highly educated sample. Therefore, results can not be generalized to the rest of the country. However, given that there is a large and persistent association between education and healthy behaviour (Cutler & Muney 2006), findings deem capable of representing how a wide spectrum of potential and existing organic food consumers react to organic food within different store settings in Turkey. Secondly, because this study used a hypothetical cheese product with different COO information, in a real store setting the same results may not be replicated. Nevertheless, this study aimed to elicit Turkish consumers' predispositions towards local and imported organic cheese across different retailer formats for the first time, thus shedding light on an issue that is gaining momentum recently also in developing countries.

Organic food consumption behavior is still an under-researched area especially in less developed countries where sufficient regulations on food safety are still somehow lacking (Wu et al., 2017). However, due to the fact that more people in developing countries opt for healthy food with an increasing level of education and income, there is and will be remarkable market potential for international organic food producers in emerging markets (Jabbar et al., 2010). Thus, this study will hopefully trigger additional efforts of international researchers who will concentrate on other emerging markets, in this way, to provide a broader picture of organic food consumption behavior worldwide.

CONCLUSION

The fact that consumers today are more concerned with the health aspects of their food choices, means that the organic food market is growing remarkably. Past research found that consumers use COO as a cue for product quality when they evaluate organic food (Xie et al., 2016; Zheng et al., 2013; Schjoll, 2017). But to the best of the author's knowledge, the significance of distribution channels in the marketing of organic food products was not stressed. In this respect, this study seeks to address the issue of whether the store category influences consumers' evaluation of domestic and imported organic cheese products with a gender-specific approach. In general, the results posit that a careful choice of store category is warranted if one wishes to be successful in the Turkish

retail market, and specialty food stores appeared to be the optimal location to promote European organic cheese. Cheese quality perception was noted to depend on the COO label and its interaction with gender. Hence, in addition to significant main differences in quality perceptions between Germany, the Netherlands, and Turkey, males and females tended to perceive the quality of cheese with a particular origin in a substantially different way.

There are several implications of this study for retailing and food marketing. First, organic food producers will do well by analyzing their COO perceptions in their targeted foreign market with a gender-specific approach. After obtaining sufficient consumer insights, early-stage marketing actions should include concentrating on a particular gender whose predisposition is favorable toward the country's origin. Another strategy available to organic food producers could be to more intensely rely on a particular distribution channel with perceived quality of which appears to intensify the positive perceptions among consumers. However, retailers should not necessarily pursue a wait and see strategy and acknowledge that their store image is not suitable to sell organic foods. In fact, retailers can shape food choices and preferences of consumers using in-store and out-store marketing activities (Dawson, 2013). Thus retailers will do well by reinforcing their store image if they do not want to miss out on opportunities in this continuously growing sector.

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ORGANİK GIDALARIN ALGILANAN KALİTESİ: CİNSİYET ÜLKE MENŞEİ VE MAĞAZA TİPİNİN ETKİSİ

1. GİRİŞ

Tüketicilerin sağlıklı olan ürünlere olan artan taleplerinin bir neticesi olarak organik gıda pazarı dünya genelinde giderek önem kazanmaktadır. Organik gıda satışları özellikle Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Kanada ve Avrupa ülkelerinde artış gösterdiği için alanda yapılan çalışmaların büyük çoğunluğu ise yine bu ülkelerde gerçekleştirilmiştir (Denver & Jensen, 2014, (Schjoll, 2017). Ancak dünya genelinde artan gelir ve refah düşünüldüğünde, organik gıdaya olan tüketici tutumunun gelişmekte olan ülkelerde de incelenmesinin önemli olduğu düşünülmektedir.

Organik gıda alanında yapılan çalışmalar, ülke menşesini tüketicilerin gıda satın alma kararını etkileyen bir faktör olarak göstermiştir. Ancak, bu çalışmaların büyük çoğunluğu kitlesel üretilen ürünleri göz önünde bulundurmuş, organik ürünlerde olan ülke menşesi etkisini incelememiştir (Schjoll, 2017). Organik ürünleri değerlendiren kısıtlı sayıdaki araştırma ise yerel organik ürünlerin ithal edilmiş olan organik ürünlere göre gelişmiş ülkelerde daha kaliteli olarak algılandığını ve tercih edildiğini göstermiştir (Onozaka & McFaden, 2011; Dransfield et al. 2005; Xie, Gao, Swisher & Zhao, 2016). Buna karşın, gelişmekte olan ülkelerde yapılan araştırmalar, tüketicilerin yerel imalatçılara

güvenmediğini ve ithal edilen kitlesel üretilmiş ve organik ürünlere karşı daha pozitif bir tutum sergilediğini göstermiştir (Newman, Turri, Howlett & Stokes, 2014, Zheng, Li & Peterson, 2013). Bu noktadan yola çıkan bu çalışma, gelişmekte olan bir ekonomiye sahip olan Türkiye’de ithal ve yerli organik ürünlerin algılanan kalitesini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Ülke menşesine ek olarak, bu çalışmada mağaza kategorisinin organik ürünlere olan tutum üzerindeki etkisi incelenmiştir. Perakende alanında yapılan çalışmalar tüketicilerin mağaza türleri arasında algıladıkları kalitenin farklılaştığını göstermiştir. (Ngobo & Jean, 2012; Black et al., 2014, Uusitalo, 2001). Bu açıdan, bu araştırma organik gıda ürünlerine olan tutumda mağaza türünün etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Son olarak, çalışmada cinsiyetin kalite algısındaki önemi irdelenmiştir. Gıda pazarlaması alanındaki araştırmalar, tüketicilerin gıda kalitesi algısında cinsiyetin düzenleyici bir değişken olarak etkiye sahip olduğu göstermektedir (de Tavares Canto Guina & de Moura Engracia Giraldi, 2015; Kumpulainen, Vainio, Sandell & Hopia, 2018).

1.1. Literatür Özeti

Ülke menşesi gerçek ürünün bir parçası olmayan; ambalaj, reklam, mağaza türü ve marka gibi ürünlerin sahip olduğu diğer unsurlar gibidışsal bir kalite işareti olarak değerlendirilmektedir (Steenkamp, 1989). Alandaki öncül çalışmalardan birisi olan Dichter’e (1962) göre ülke menşesi ürünlerin kabulünü ve başarısını etkileyen önemli bir faktördür.

Ürünlerin sağlıklı olması durumuna verilen önemin artmasıyla beraber koruyucu ve katkı maddeleri içeren kitlesel üretilmiş gıdalar sağlıksız olarak değerlendirilmeye başlanmıştır. Bu trend, dünya genelinde tüketicilerin organik gıdaya olan taleplerini artırmış ve perakende pazar çevresini şekillendirmiştir. Bu kapsamda, yüksek fiyat imkanları ve kar marjı hedefleyen perakendeciler organik ürünlere daha çok önem vermeye başlamışlardır (Dawson, 2013). Bunun bir sonucu olarak organik ürünler gıda pazarına daha yüksek oranlarda nüfuz etme şansına sahip olmuştur (Hung, Verbeke & Kok, 2016). Daha öncesinde sadece özellikli gıda mağazalarında bulunan organik gıdalar günümüzde indirim mağazaları (Gottschalk & Leistner, 2013) ve supermarketler (Harris & Strom, 2014) olmak üzere neredeyse her mağaza kategorisinde yer almaya başlamıştır (Dimitri, Geoghegan & Rogus, 2017; Hidalgo-Baz, Martos-Partal & Gonzalez Benito, 2017). Son olarak Rappoport, Peters, Downey, McCann & Huff-Corzine (1993) erkekler ve kadınların çoğu gıdayı sağlık ve keyif unsurları bakımından ciddi bir biçimde farklı değerlendirdiğini göstermiştir. Buna göre, kadınlar meyve salatası ve benzeri gibi diyet gıdalarını erkeklere göre daha sağlıklı olarak değerlendirmişlerdir. Bu durum kadınlar ve erkeklerin gıda değerlendirme tarzlarının farklı olabileceğini göstermektedir (de Tavares Canto Guina & de Moura Engracia Giraldi, 2015)

2. YÖNTEM

Bu çalışmada 2 (cinsiyet) X 3 (mağaza kategorisi) X 3 (ülke menşesi) olmak üzere deneysel serim uygulanmıştır. Bu kapsamda, mağaza türünün, cinsiyetin ve ülke menşesinin algılanan gıda kalitesi üzerinde olan etkileri ve değişkenler arası etkileşim araştırılmıştır. Algılanan kalite düzeyi üzerinde etkisi olduğu düşünülen, ürün kategorisine aşına olma

düzeyleri ile etnosentrizmin etkisi kontrol edilmek istenmiştir. Bu kapsamda Faktöriyel Kovaryans analizi yöntemi uygulanmıştır. Araştırma kapsamındaki bütün analizler SPSS 21 yazılımıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ülke menşei ve cinsiyet denekler arası faktörler olarak belirlenmiş olup mağaza kategorisi denekler içi bir değişken olarak tanımlanmıştır. Araştırmada mağaza türü, kolaylık mağazaları, indirim mağazaları ve özellikli gıda mağazaları olmak üzere üç kategori olarak incelenmiştir. Ülke menşei ise Türkiye, Hollanda ve Almanya olmak üzere 3 kategori olarak belirlenmiştir. Araştırmaya konu olan ürün olarak ise Türk mutfağında özel bir öneme sahip olan peynir tercih edilmiştir. Bu kapsamda algılanan organik peynir kalitesi üzerindeki cinsiyetin, mağaza kategorisi ve ülke menşeinin etkisi incelenmiştir.

3. BULGULAR

Araştırma ülke menşeinin ve mağaza kategorisinin, araştırmanın amacına uygun bir şekilde, algılanan organik peynir kalitesi üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisinin olduğunu göstermiştir. Ancak, cinsiyetin algılanan kalite üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisinin olmadığı tespit edilmiştir (µkadımlar: 4.302; µerkekler: 4.247). Algılanan peynir kalite skoru en yüksek Hollanda (µ: 4.468) için olmuştur. Hollandayı sırasıyla Almanya (µ: 4.323) ve Türkiye'nin (µ: 4.034) takip ettiği gözlenmiştir. Ancak çiftler arası karşılaştırmada sadece Türkiye ve Hollanda arasındaki farkın p.007 seviyesinde anlamlı olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca, tahmin edildiği üzere mağaza türünün Türk tüketicilerin kalite algısı üzerinde düzenleyici bir etkiye sahip olduğu gözlenmiştir. Organik peynirin özellikli gıda mağazasında satılması durumunda algılanan kalite skoru 4.85 iken, süpermarketlerde ve indirimli gıda mağazalarında bu değerler sırasıyla 4.18 ve 3.78 olmuştur.

4. TARTIŞMA VE SONUÇ

Bu çalışma, mağaza kategorisi ile yerel veya ithal edilmiş organik peynirin algılanan kalitesini cinsiyet odaklı bir yaklaşımla anlamaya çalışmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları organik ürün pazarlanmasında mağaza kategorisinin Türkiye'de ne kadar önemli olduğunu göstermiştir. Avrupa menşei özellikli ürünlerin teşhir edileceği en uygun dağıtım noktasını özellikli gıda satan mağazalar olduğu ortaya konulmuştur. Ayrıca algılanan peynir kalitesinin ülke menşei etiketi ile cinsiyetle etkileşiminden etkilendiği anlaşılmıştır. Bu kapsamda, algılanan peynir kalitesinde ülke menşeiine göre olan farkların yanı sıra, bu farkların kadınlar ve erkekler arasında da önemli derecede değişiklik gösterdiği anlaşılmıştır. Araştırma bulguları organik gıda üreticileri ile perakendecilerine pazarlama stratejilerinin oluşturulması çerçevesinde bir takım yeni öneriler getirmiştir.