OPUS

Journal of Society Research

Volume 21 ● Issue 3 ● May 2024 ● ISSN: 2791-9781 E-ISSN: 2791-9862

Volume: 21
Issue: 3

ADAMOR

OPUS

Volume 21, Issue – 3

Journal of Society Researche
Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi

ISSN: 2791-9781 – E-ISSN:2791-9862

Volume-21 - Issue –3 ● May 2024

Sponsor Organization
ADAMOR Society Research Center

General Director
Abdullah Harun Bozkurt

Editor in Chief
Nevfel BOZ, Social Sciences University of Ankara, Türkiye

Associate Editors*
Bilge Şenyüz, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Türkiye
Emrah Akbaş, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Türkiye
Mehmet Maksut Önal, University of the West of England, UK
Mehmet Ali Akyurt, Istanbul University, Türkiye
Murat Batur, Kastamonu University, Türkiye
Zehra Erşahin, Social Sciences University of Ankara, Turkey

Language Editors
Murat Öztürk, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Turkey

Assistant Editor
Elif Soysal, Institute of Urban Studies, Türkiye

Editorial Board*
Abbas Barzegar, Indiana University, USA
Ahmet Selim Tekelioğlu, George Mason University, USA
Anna Musiała, Adam Mickiewicz University In Poznan, Poland
Carlos Rodrigues, University Of Aveiro, Portugal
Cristina Tonghini, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italy
Dariusz Trzmielak, University Of Lodz, Poland
İsmail Coşkun, Istanbul University, Turkey
Khalid El-Awaisi, Social Sciences University of Ankara, Turkey
Mustafa Akdağ, Yozgat Bozok University, Turkey
Mustafa Çelebi, Erciyes University, Turkey
Sedat Gümüş, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Selahattin Avşaroğlu, Necmettin Erbakan University, Turkey
Shu-Sha Angie Guan, California State University, Northridge, USA
**In alphabetical order*

OPUS

Issue – 3, 2024

Content

Editorial

The OPUS Journal of Society Research (OPUS JSR) brings together a diverse range of theory, practice, and research in the pursuit of understanding human behavior in its social context. The interdisciplinary viewpoint lays the groundwork for presenting and establishing a holistic relationship with other disciplines, concepts, and methods. The OPUS JSR allows researchers to use an interdisciplinary approach to present different interpretations and alternative points of view. The theoretical frameworks that underpin the analyses and interpretations of the subjects under study are as important as the intersection of disciplines. This framing can lead to greater clarity of multiple, even contradictory findings, allowing for a better understanding of social dynamics that would otherwise be invisible if scholars concentrated on a single set of theoretical dynamics.

OPUS JSR reflects more than 10 years of journal sponsorship by ADAMOR Society Research Center and its partner organization, the Institute of Urban Studies. The OPUS Journal of Society Research is the direct successor of two previously published journals: OPUS Turkish Journal of Social Policies and Work Life Studies: OPUS International Journal of Society Research (ISSN 2528-9527 E-ISSN 2528-9535). Since its inception, our journal has steadily increased its issue numbers in the Year - Volume and Issue format. As of 2024, our issue numbers will be limited to 1-6.

OPUS Journal of Society Research (JSR) is abstracted in EBSCO Information Services, ERIHPLUS European Reference Index For The Humanities and Social Sciences, Cite Factor, TEI Index of Turkish Education, ULAKBIM TR Index, SOBIAD Citation Index and ASOS Index.

Received Date: 06 March 2024 I Accepted Date: 22 April 2024

OPUS
Journal of Society Research

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Enchantment of Social Media Influencers: Analysing Consumer Attitudes Through the Lens of the Information Adoption Model

Mehmet Gökerik[1]

[1] Dr., Karabük University,
Faculty of Business
Karabük /Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-0827-5805
E-Mail:
mehmetgokerik@karabuk.edu.tr

Corresponding Author:
Mehmet Gökerik

May 2024
Volume:21
Issue:3
DOI: 10.26466/opusjsr.1454145

Citation:
Gökerik, M. ((2024). The enchantment of social media influencers: Analysing consumer attitudes through the lens of the information adoption model. *OPUS– Journal of Society Research, 21*(3), 125-139.

Abstract

This study meticulously examines the influence of social media influencers on consumer behaviour, adopting the Information Adoption Model (IAM) as its theoretical cornerstone. In the era of Web 2.0, social media has emerged as a vital conduit for user-generated content, profoundly altering the landscapes of communication, public relations, and marketing strategies. The role of social media in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) marketing underscores its potential to craft consumer experiences, thereby augmenting brand equity. Central to this inquiry is the IAM, which elucidates the process through which users assess and adopt information, with the quality, reliability, and perceived utility of information being paramount. This study specifically probes into how the content disseminated by social media influencers impacts consumer purchase intentions. Analyzing data collected from respondents via questionnaires through structural equation modelling, this investigation sheds light on the intricate dynamics of this relationship. The findings underscore the indispensability of influencers' originality, trustworthiness, and emotional resonance in amplifying the perceived value of information, consequently swaying consumer purchase intentions. This scholarly endeavour contributes to the broader academic dialogue on the sway of social media over consumer behaviours. It provides valuable insights for marketers seeking to harness the power of influencer marketing with greater efficacy.

Keywords: *Social media, Information Adoption Model, Influencer Marketing, Purchase Intention*

Öz

Bu çalışma, sosyal medya fenomenlerinin tüketici davranışları üzerindeki etkisini titizlikle incelemekte ve teorik temel olarak Bilgi Benimseme Modeli'ni (IAM) benimsemektedir. Web 2.0 çağında, sosyal medya kullanıcı tarafından üretilen içerik için hayati bir kanal olarak ortaya çıkmış, iletişim, halkla ilişkiler ve pazarlama stratejilerini derinden değiştirmiştir. Elektronik ağızdan ağıza pazarlama (eWOM) konusunda sosyal medyanın rolü, tüketici deneyimleri oluşturma potansiyelini vurgulamakta ve böylece marka değerini artırmaktadır. Bu sorgulamanın merkezinde IAM bulunmakta, kullanıcıların bilgiyi nasıl değerlendirdikleri ve kabul ettikleri süreci açıklamakta, bilginin kalitesi, güvenilirliği ve algılanan faydası ön planda olmaktadır. Bu çalışma, özellikle sosyal medya etkileyicileri tarafından yayılan içeriğin tüketici satın alma niyetleri üzerindeki etkisini detaylı bir şekilde araştırmaktadır. Anket yoluyla toplanan veriler yapısal eşitlik modellemesiyle analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, sosyal medya fenomenlerinin orijinalliğinin, güvenilirliğinin ve duygusal bağlanmanın, bilginin algılanan değerini artırma konusundaki vazgeçilmezliğini ve dolayısıyla tüketici satın alma niyetlerini etkileme kapasitesini vurgulamaktadır. Bu akademik çalışma, sosyal medyanın tüketici davranışları üzerindeki etkisi üzerine literatüre katkıda bulunmakta ve işletmelere sosyal medya pazarlamasını daha etkili bir şekilde kullanma konusunda farkındalıklar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sosyal Medya, Bilgi Benimseme Modeli, Influencer Pazarlama, Satın Alma Niyeti*

Introduction

Social media has emerged as a Web 2.0-based technology and software type that enables creating and sharing user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). On the other hand, social media is described as a communication tool where user-generated content is central, radically transforming the abilities of strategic leaders and individuals to reach, interact with, and communicate with broad audiences (Heavey et al., 2020). These platforms, through the use of hashtags and social network analysis methods, generate data with high research potential to understand users' communication, attitudes, experiences, and behaviours (Pilař et al., 2021). The necessity for developing original theories and concepts underscores social media's role as a significant social innovation in communication, highlighting fundamental changes in public relations, journalism, advertising, marketing, and business practices (Kent & Li, 2020). Additionally, the innovative opportunities presented by social media in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) marketing demonstrate that organizations can create consumer experiences using social media tools, thereby building long-term brand value and product differentiation. Thus, social media is considered a complex and dynamic communication environment enriched with numerous theoretical frameworks and analysis methods, offering a deep understanding of how these platforms transform interactions among individuals, leaders, and organizations (du Plessis, 2010). In this context, the various opportunities and interaction potential offered by social media facilitate a significant transformation in the field of communication, enabling individuals, leaders, and organizations to communicate more effectively through digital platforms and create brand value.

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) provides a theoretical framework for understandding how users evaluate and adopt information presented through content produced on social media platforms (Elwalda et al., 2021). This model examines the impact of various factors, such as the quality, reliability of the information, and the extent to which the user finds the information useful, on the information adoption process (Abbasi et al., 2022). It details how social media users trust and use content generated by other users when making decisions about a tourism destination or service (Haldar, 2022). The Information Adoption Model emphasizes the process of evaluating the quality and reliability of information, as well as how useful the information is to the user, in the information adoption process. Moreover, by expanding with the social support theory, the model establishes that social support is a significant precursor to the quality and reliability of the information, showing how these factors influence information adoption behaviour. This extended application of the Information Adoption Model, such as the adoption of information obtained through mobile messaging applications, proves the model's applicability in new technological contexts (Elwalda et al., 2021). The model assists in understanding the effects of factors like technology, organization, and environment on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises, offering a comprehendsive perspective on information adoption processes related to social media (Qalati et al., 2020). This theoretical framework is critically important for understanding how information is adopted through social media, playing a key role in both academic research and practical applications in understanding user behaviour.

Social media content influences consumers' consumption behaviours and purchasing decisions regarding information, desire, and experience (Bhatli & Mejri, 2015; Ioanas & Stoica, 2014). Social media influencers can affect consumers' purchasing decisions through online marketing and social media, and this influence plays a significant role in the information adoption process (Ioanas & Stoica, 2014; Oumayma, 2019). How consumers evaluate and adopt the information they receive from social media influencers can be analyzed using the variables of the Information Adoption Model. This model examines the effects of factors such as information quality, reliability, emotional attachment, and creativity on the usefulness of the information and, subsequently, on consumer behaviours (Brindha & Parameswaran, 2017). In this context, understandding the influence of social media influencers enables brands and marketers to develop more effective strategies.

Social media influencers are increasingly gaining importance in today's marketing strategies. According to recent statistics, the global influencer marketing market value reached 21.1 billion U.S. dollars in 2023, representing over a threefold increase since 2019. This growth indicates the health of influencer marketing and its growing importance for brands (Statista, 2023). Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers' tendencies to gather information about products and make purchases through social media have increased (Mason et al., 2021). This underscores the importance of the influence of social media influencers on consumer behaviours and the applicability of the Information Adoption Model. Furthermore, it is observed that social media influencers affect the five stages of the consumer decision-making process: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behaviour (Brindha & Parameswaran, 2017).

This research aims to examine the impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviours and how this effect can be understood within the framework of the Information Adoption Model. The research question is as follows: "What is the impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviours and purchasing decisions, and how can the Information Adoption Model explain this effect?" This study aims to contribute significantly to understanding the dynamics of social media that influence consumer behaviours and elucidate these phenomena' role in the information adoption process. Data collected from 492 participants will be analyzed using structural equation modelling. This analysis intends to contribute to businesses and marketers, helping them shape their social media strategies more effectively.

Literature Review

Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers occupy a central position in today's digital marketing strategies, and research into the depth and diversity of their influence unveils this phenomenon's rich facets and complex structure. These individuals are often defined as significant social media presences due to their substantial follower base and their notable influence over these followers (Gökerik, 2024; Harrigan et al., 2021). The impact of influencers on their followers can range from simple product recommendations to the power to shape followers' general consumption habits, social norms, and values. This ensures that the content provided by influencers plays a crucial role in how followers acquire information about brands and products. Moreover, influencer content can increase followers' awareness of brands and influence their purchase intentions (Gökerik et al., 2018; Conti et al., 2022). These dynamics illustrate how social media influencers are positioned as key players in the modern marketing ecosystem and how their strong relationships with followers can potentially be valuable for businesses. In this context, influencer marketing has become a tool that enables businesses to reach their target audiences more personally and effectively (Arora et al., 2019; Dajah, 2020). Thus, influencer marketing has emerged as an essential component of marketing strategies in the digital age, facilitating more personal and effective communication between businesses and their target audiences.

Measuring the impact of social media influencers requires much more than an analysis based solely on numerical data. Factors such as engagement, reach, sentiment, and growth are crucial for understanding influencers' influence on social media platforms. These factors reflect the depth and scope of an influencer's relationship with their followers, showing how widely their messages are disseminated and how much interaction they receive from followers (Albadri, 2023; Borchers, 2019). However, an influencer's real impact is not limited to these numerical values; the authentic connections they establish with their followers and the perception of credibility they create are also of great importance (Yang & Wang, 2023). Followers evaluate the content influencers share through these authentic connections and a sense of credibility. This dynamic is critical in determining how valuable and trustworthy followers find the information an influencer shares, thus shaping their engagement with and loyalty to this content (Ouvrein et al., 2021). Therefore, measuring the impact of influencers requires an in-depth examination of qualitative relationships with followers alongside quantitative data.

Influencer marketing has become a modern marketing strategy for businesses today. This strategy offers a more focused and individualized approach, unlike traditional marketing methods. Influencers are individuals who have specialized in a particular area and have garnered a significant following in that domain. This characteristic provides them with the opportunity to introduce businesses and their products to potential customers directly and effectively (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The trust-based relationships that develop between influencers and their followers can significantly influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Zhang, 2021). This approach, particularly in niche markets, enables businesses to reach their target audiences and establish meaningful connections with them. The success of influencer marketing is based on the natural and genuine relationships between influencers and their followers. These relationships facilitate more effective communication of businesses' messages and make followers more receptive to these messages (Cassia & Magno, 2019), offering a more focused and individualised approach than traditional marketing methods.

The use of social media influencers is shaped by various dynamics, including follower demographics and cultural factors (Kim & Kim, 2021). Influencers addressing a global audience must consider factors such as cultural distance and shared values while interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This interaction can affect how different cultural groups perceive and accept an influencer's messages (Bentley et al., 2021). The effectiveness of influencer marketing depends on the quality of the relationships influencers establish with their followers and how these relationships affect the reception of marketing messages. Therefore, influencers and brands must be sensitive and conscious when engaging in different cultural contexts. This approach can enhance the success of marketing strategies and enable businesses to reach wider and more diverse audiences. It underscores the importance of strategic use of social media influencers' importance in today's digital marketing ecosystems and emphasizes the need for businesses to understand and adapt to these dynamics (Doshi et al., 2022; Oliviera et al., 2020). This situation increases the importance of businesses strategically using social media influencers to manage their digital marketing strategies more effectively and quickly adapt to changing market dynamics.

Information Adoption Model

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) is a framework designed to understand the processes through which users evaluate and adopt information they encounter. The applicability of IAM in social media is particularly crucial for examining how individuals process information from vast and dynamic information pools and the extent to which they accept this information (Virtonia, 2023). Social media platforms provide extensive opportunities for users to exchange information, create content, and disseminate it. In these environments, factors such as the quality, reliability, and usefulness of information play a critical role in the information adoption process of users (Wang & Sun, 2021). The process of information adoption is significantly influenced by the characteristic features of the content presented on social media platforms, largely affecting how users perceive and process this information. Users evaluate the information based on its source, content, and presentation form, which in turn affects the decision-making process regarding the adoption of the information (Qalati et al., 2021). Particularly, the usefulness of information and the trust a user has in the information source are significant factors in the adoption of information in a social media environment. Therefore, the application of IAM in the context of social media helps us understand more deeply how users approach information and process it in a social media environment (Al-Qaysi et al., 2020). In this context, the application of IAM on social media is an important tool in understanding individuals' approaches to information and their information adoption behaviours. Social media provides an environment where information exchange is fast and effective, and IAM offers valuable insights into how users process information in this dynamic environment. Integrating IAM and social media is critically important for understanding how individuals react to information presented on social media and how they adopt it (Sarkar et al., 2019). This is a crucial step in understanding the potential of social media platforms for information sharing and dissemination and maximizing this potential.

Social media platforms' evolution and widespread adoption have profoundly affected how individuals and institutions adopt information. Users access various public services through social media, transforming how citizens interact with the government (Jiang & Zhang, 2023). Additionally, businesses and SMEs adopt social media as a strategic tool to reach their target audiences and enhance their business performance, analyzed in the light of technology acceptance models and other adoption theories (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021). Understanding information adoption processes involves how social media users process and evaluate information, dependent on factors such as the information's quality, reliability, and usefulness. These processes are critical for deeply understanding how information provided through social media is accepted and used by individuals (Abdulaziz Elwalda et al., 2021). In this context, the relationship between social media and the Information Adoption Model (IAM) provides significant insights into how individuals and institutions adopt information presented on social media and use it in their decision-making processes. The role of social media as an effective information-sharing tool necessitates the development of new theoretical models to understand the impact of social media platforms on user behaviours and information adoption processes (Haldar, 2022). These models provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how information spreads in a social media environment, how users respond to this information, and which factors are important in information adoption processes (Sun et al., 2019). These theoretical frameworks lay the groundwork for a deep examination of the effects of social media on how individuals process and adopt information, allowing for a better understanding of the role of social media platforms within the information society.

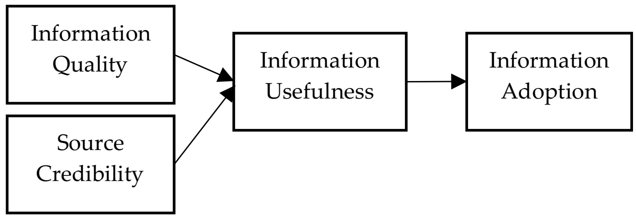


Figure 1: Information Adoption Model (Source: Erkan & Evans, 2016, p.49)

Method

Research Model

This study is a quantitative and descriptive research aiming to determine the effect of social media influencers on consumer behaviours within the framework of the Information Adoption Model. Research data were obtained through a survey application. This study was granted ethical approval by the Karabük University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee on December 29, 2023, with decision number E.303568, permitting the conduct of the research.

In the first section of the questionnaire used in the study, a classification scale was employed to determine the participants' demographic characteristics like age, gender household income, education level, most frequently used social media tool, and daily usage duration). The second section includes interval scale statements on evaluating information quality, creativity, information credibility, emotional attachment, information usefulness, information adoption, and purchase intention variables. These statements are based on the studies of Erkan and Evans (2016), Coyle and Thorson (2001), Barreda et al. (2020), and Dihn and Mai (2005). The survey employed a 5-point Likert scale for its interval scales, which ranged from '1' indicating 'Strongly Disagree' to '5' signifying 'Strongly Agree.' The data for this study were collected from 492 participants through both face-to-face and online surveys, utilizing the convenience sampling method. This data collection occurred over the period from December 2023 to January 2024. Subsequently, the hypotheses formulated for this research were subjected to analysis through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), utilizing the AMOS 20 software for statistical analysis.

Hypotheses Development

The creativity, credibility, information quality, and emotional connections of social media influencers with their followers significantly impact the perceived usefulness of the information they provide. This impact is closely linked to the ability of social media influencers to establish a strong emotional bond with their followers and capture their attention. Emotional attachment increases followers' loyalty to influencers and their trust in their recommendations, which can enhance the usefulness of the presented information (Kim & Kim, 2022; Shoukat et al., 2023). Additionally, the creativity of social media influencers can make their content more attractive and attention-grabbing, thereby increasing followers' interest in this content and, as a result, enhancing the information's usefulness (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). Moreover, the quality and reliability of information play a decisive role in how followers perceive the information presented by social media influencers. Reliable and high-quality information boosts followers' trust in influencers' recommendations, which is a factor that increases the usefulness of information. The credibility and quality of information provided by influencers play a significant role in followers' decision-making processes and can significantly affect the usefulness of information (Ki. et al., 2020; Zhang & Choi, 2022). In this context, a comprehensive examination of the dynamics between social media influencers and their followers provides essential insights into optimizing emotional attachment and information quality, which are critical factors in the information adoption process.

An in-depth examination of the relationships between social media influencers and their followers further emphasizes the importance of emotional attachment and information quality in the information adoption process. The interest, novelty, reliability, and comprehensibility of the content created by influencers can affect users' emotional attachment to influencers and, consequently, the perceived usefulness of the information. This interaction strengthens followers' trust in social media influencers and their recommendations, enhancing the presented information's usefulness (Bhattacharya, 2023; Shah et al., 2023). Additionally, how influencers align their personal brands with their followers plays a significant role in the information adoption process. When influencers' unique personality traits and content creation abilities match the needs and expectations of their followers, this situation can further increase the perceived usefulness of information (Ki. et al., 2020). In this context, the influence of social media influencers is directly related to the strong emotional bonds they establish with their followers and the quality and reliability of the information they provide. These factors determine the extent of influencers' impact on their followers and the overall effectiveness of influencer marketing. These interactions shape the fundamental dynamics of influencer marketing by enhancing the perceived usefulness of information by influencers' followers. In light of this information, the following hypotheses have been formulated.

H1. There is a positive and significant relationship between the creativity of social media influencers and the usefulness of the information they provide.

H2. There is a positive and significant relationship between the reliability of the information provided by social media influencers and the usefulness of this information.

H3. There is a positive and significant relationship between the quality of information provided by social media influencers and the usefulness of this information.

H4. There is a positive and significant relationship between emotional attachment to social media influencers and the usefulness of their information.

Understanding the relationship between the usefulness of information provided by social media influencers and the adoption of this information is critical in today's digital age. Akram and AlBalawi (2016) have indicated that the intention to adopt social media is directly related to factors such as perceived connectedness, entertainment, usefulness, and ease of use, highlighting the mediating role of perceived usefulness in this relationship. Chung, Han, and Koo (2015) have demonstrated that argument quality and source credibility positively affect perceived usefulness in adopting travel information on social media, enhancing information adoption. Erkan and Evans (2016) examined the impact of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) conversations on consumers' purchase intentions, finding that the quality, reliability, and usefulness of information significantly influence this intent through eWOM. Haldar (2022) studied the effect of user-generated content on social media on travel decisions, showing a positive relationship between information quality, reliability, and usefulness on information adoption behaviour. Siamagka et al. (2015) stated that the perceived usefulness of social media adoption by B2B organizations is determined by perceived ease of use and perceived barriers, significantly affecting social media adoption. The evidence compiled from these studies demonstrates that the usability of information provided by social media influencers is a critical factor in individuals' process of adopting this information. Therefore, hypothesis H5 has been formulated, indicating a positive and meaningful relationship between the usability of information provided by social media influencers and the adoption of this information.

H5. There is a positive and significant relationship between the usefulness of the information provided by social media influencers and the adoption of this information.

The adoption of information provided by social media influencers and its impact on consumers' purchase intentions is garnering increasing interest in today's marketing literature. Erkan and Evans (2016) demonstrated that conversations occurring through electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on social media, including factors such as information quality, reliability, usefulness, and adoption, are decisive for consumers' purchase intentions. Tien, Rivas, and Liao (2019) found that adopting eWOM plays a strong mediating role in consumers' purchase intentions, supported by the credibility and usefulness of eWOM. McClure and Seock (2020) revealed that consumers' interaction with a brand's social media pages is significantly affected by brand familiarity and the information quality of social media content, positively contributing to consumers' future purchase intentions. The study by Fu, Lu, Chen, and Farn (2020) showed that social interaction factors significantly influence social media users' intentions for online social shopping. Gunawan and Huarng (2015), while examining the viral effects of social network media platforms on consumers' purchase intentions, noted that source credibility and social influence are critical factors for this intent. Shang, Wu, and Sie (2017) found that brand interaction on social network sites enhances purchase intention through consumer resonance across dimensions of content satisfaction, social-relational satisfaction, and self-expression satisfaction.

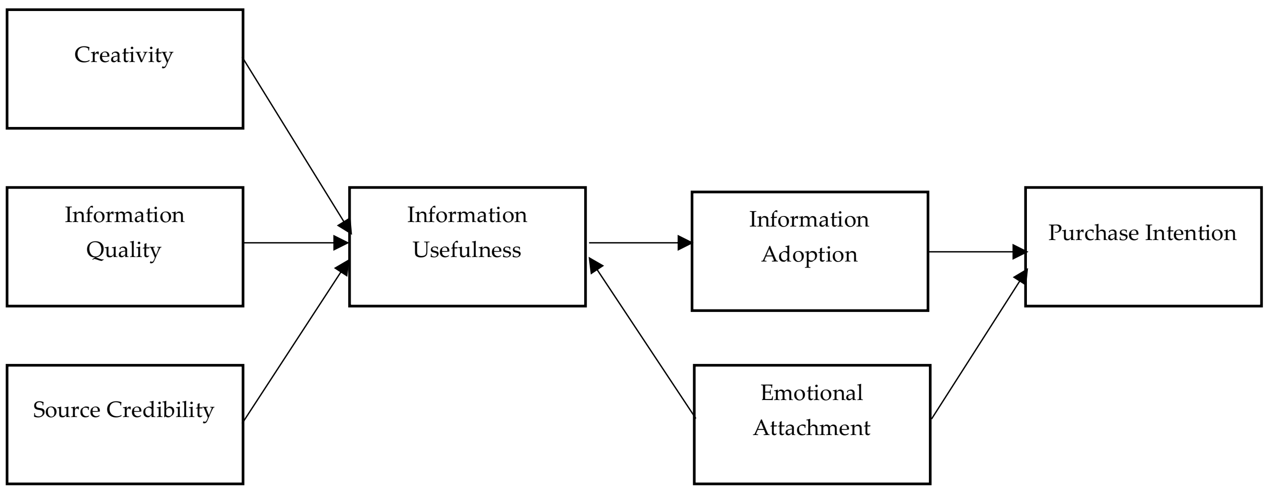


Figure 2. Research Model

In the context of these studies, the positive and meaningful relationships
between the adoption of information provided by social media influencers, consumers' emotional attachment to these influencers, and consumers' purchase intentions have been theoretically supported, leading to the formulation of hypotheses H6 and H7.

H6. There is a positive and significant relationship between the adoption of information provided by social media influencers and consumers' purchase intention.

H7. There is a positive and significant relationship between emotional attachment to social media influencers and consumers' purchase intention.

Findings

In this study, the relationships between the variables in the model were analyzed comprehensively using structural equation modelling. The hypotheses formulated based on the relationships between variables in the model were interpreted considering the test results and the findings obtained. This analysis process represents a comprehensive methodology to understand the accuracy and depth of the model's relationships between the proposed variables. Structural equation modelling was used as an effective tool to comprehend the complex relationships between variables and assess the model's overall fit.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the initial phase of the study, individuals residing in the Karabük region were specifically targeted, and comprehensive demographic information was requested from participants. The requested information encompassed a wide range of demographic characteristics, including gender, age, educational status, household income, the primary social media platform used, and the scope of daily interactions with social media. The distribution of responses from a total of 492 participants is presented in detail in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (n = 492).

Category	Options	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	272	55
	Male	220	45
Age	18-26	198	40
	27-42	163	33
	43-58	93	19
	59 and above	38	8
Education Level	Elementary School	13	3
	Secondary Education	91	18
	Associate Degree	269	54
	Bachelor's Degree	82	17
	Postgraduate	37	8
Household Income (Total)	0- 11402 TL	53	10
	11403- 22804 TL	155	32
	22805- 34206 TL	134	27
	34207- 45608 TL	76	16
	45609 TL – 57010 TL	40	8
	57011 and above	34	7
How often do you use social media each day?	0 – 1 hour	143	29
	1 – 3 hour	189	38
	3 – 5 hour	92	19
	5 hour and above	68	14
What is your favourite social media website?	Instagram	176	36
	Facebook	106	21
	X	73	15
	Youtube	96	19
	Snapchat	32	7
	Other	9	2

The research model was analyzed through structural equation modeling (SEM), which was recognized as an effective method for model estimation (Bentler & Chou, 1987). Before exploring the hypotheses' interrelations, an evaluation of the scale's reliability and validity was conducted. To assess convergent validity, both composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were utilized, determining the inter-item relationships and their alignment within the same measurement construct. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), a minimum threshold of 0.70 for CR and 0.50 for AVE is essential. Hair et al. (2010) suggest that AVE values exceeding 0.4 and CR values above 0.6 are deemed acceptable. As indicated in Table 2 of the study, the CR values for all variables exceed 0.6 (ranging between 0.691 and 0.904), and AVE values surpass 0.4 (varying from 0.451 to 0.652), thereby demonstrating adequate convergent validity. Furthermore, factor loadings for all variables in this research exceed the acceptable benchmark of 0.30 (spanning from 0.51 to 0.85), as per Stevens (2002).

Table 2. Factor Loadings, CR and AVE Values

Variable	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Creativity	C1	0.808	0.854	0.541
	C2	0.810		
	C4	0.668		
	C5	0.713		
	C6	0.655		
Information Crebility	IC1	0.690	0.856	0.599
	IC2	0.764		
	IC3	0.854		
	IC4	0.776		
Information Quality	IQ1	0.780	0.804	0.578
	IQ2	0.758		
	IQ3	0.742		
Emotional Attachment	EA1	0.781	0.763	0.451
	EA2	0.715		
	EA3	0.519		
	EA5	0.640		
Information Usefulness	IU1	0.774	0.702	0.541
	IU2	0.702		
Information Adoption	IA1	0.711	0.691	0.528
	IA2	0.750		
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.808	0.904	0.652
	PI2	0.818		
	PI3	0.785		
	PI4	0.837		
	PI5	0.788		

In the discriminant validity test, the reflection between variables was examined. Each AVE value should be higher than the variable's correlation coefficient in the discriminant validity test. As seen in Table 3, each variable's correlation coefficient is lower than the respective AVE value. This analysis is important to confirm that the variables carry distinct characteristics and do not show excessive overlap with each other. Discriminant validity is a critical measure indicating that the model's variables are independent and distinctive. The results of this test are considered an important indicator of the model's reliability and validity.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of key variables

	IC	C	IA	IU	EA	IQ	PI
IC	0.774						
C	0.618	0.736					
IA	0.724	0.549	0.727				
IU	0.745	0.69	1.061	0.736			
EA	0.074	0.124	0.025	0.068	0.672		
IQ	0.587	0.594	0.833	0.874	0.112	0.761	
PI	0.665	0.851	0.689	0.808	0.131	0.725	0.808

In assessing the model's fit, relying on a single fit index is inadequate. This study considers a range of fit indices, including the chi-square test statistic (X2/Df), the goodness of fit index (GFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the incremental fit index (IFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), the normed fit index (NFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The final results of these fit indices are detailed in Table 4. This comprehensive analysis method evaluates the model's overall fit by examining its alignment with the dataset through various metrics. Each fit index offers insights into different facets of the model, contributing valuable information regarding the study's integrity and reliability. An integrated appraisal of these fit indices is essential to ascertain the model's overall validity and reliability, ensuring a robust and accurate representation of the research findings.

Improvements made in the model resulted in an enhancement in the model fit indices. The chi-square value dropped below 3. RMSEA (0.046), GFI (0.925), AGFI (0.903), IFI (0.961), TLI (0.953), CFI (0.961), and NFI (0.926) criteria were met at an excellent fit level (Hooper et al., 2008). These results indicate an increase in the overall fit and validity of the model. The decrease in the chi-square value signifies that the model has become more compatible with the dataset, while the RMSEA reaching an excellent fit level indicates a reduction in the model's prediction errors

Table 4. Final Model Fit Index Results

Model fit index	Suggested Criteria	Acceptable Criteria	Results
X^2/Df	1-3	3-5	2.021
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.90 ≥ 0.80	0.925
AGFI	≥ 0.90	0.90 ≥ 0.80	0.903
IFI	≥ 0.90	-	0.961
TLI	≥ 0.90	-	0.953
CFI	≥ 0.95	0.95 ≥ 0.90	0.961
NFI	≥ 0.90	-	0.926
RMSEA	< 0.05	0.10 ≥ 0.05	0.046

Structural Model Hypothesis Verification Results

After confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), path analysis was conducted. As seen in the analysis results, the model fit index shows good compatibility with the chi-square test statistic being below 3. The CFI index is considered a good fit between 0.90 and 0.95 and an excellent fit above 0.95. GFI and AGFI values are acceptable, though not at a good fit level (Doll et al., 1994). The RMSEA value is considered a good fit (between 0.05 and 0.10), though not at an excellent level (Doll et al., 1994). Other indices meet the recommended criteria. Table 5 reports the relevant values. These results indicate that the model generally has a good fit with the dataset and is structured to support the research hypotheses. The majority of the model fit indices meeting the recommended criteria is an important indicator that enhances the reliability and scientific nature of the model.

Table 5. Model Fit Index Results

Model Fit Index	Suggested Criteria	Acceptable Criteria	Results
X²/Df	1-3	3-5	2.559
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.90 ≥ 0.80	0.899
AGFI	≥ 0.90	0.90 ≥ 0.80	0.873
IFI	≥ 0.90	-	0.939
TLI	≥ 0.90	-	0.929
CFI	≥ 0.95	0.95 ≥ 0.90	0.938
NFI	≥ 0.90	-	0.903
RMSEA	< 0.05	0.10 ≥ 0.05	0.056

Hypotheses were analyzed based on path analysis, critical ratios, and p-value. Table 6 presents the results of seven hypotheses and their respective path analysis variables. For statistical significance, the p-value of the hypotheses must be below 0.05, which is the case for all hypotheses.

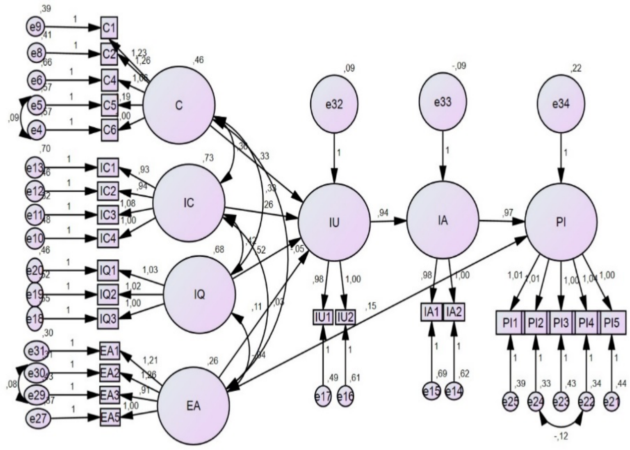


Figure 3. Path Analyses

The variables creativity (β = 0.333, t-value = 5.987, p <0.05), information credibility (β = 0.261, t-value = 6.163, p <0.05), information quality (β = 0.521, t-value = 9.827, p < 0.05), and emotional attachment (β = 0.112, t-value = 2.036, p < 0.05) all have positive and significant effects on information usefulness. Information Quality had the most impact on information usefulness, while emotional attachment had the least impact. Information adoption relationships with information usefulness were found to be significant. The correlations between information usefulness and information adoption were found to be positive and significant (β = 0.938, t-value = 15.153).

Table 6. Maximum Likelihood Estimates: Regression Weights

Hypothesis and Relationships	Estimate	S.E.	P-value	Hypothesis Verification
H1: Creativity (C) → Information Usefulness (IU)	0.333	0.056	***	Supported
H2: Information Credibility → Information Usefulness (IU)	0.261	0.042	***	Supported
H3: Information Quality → Information Usefulness (IU)	0.521	0.053	***	Supported
H4: Emotional Attachment → Information Usefulness (IU)	0.112	0.055	0.042	Supported
H5: Information Usefulness (IU) → Information Adoption (IA)	0.938	0.062	***	Supported
H6: Information Adoption (IA) → Purchase Intention (PI)	0.972	0.069	***	Supported
H7: Emotional Attachment (EA) → Purchase Intention (PI)	0.151	0.063	0.016	Supported

This indicates that the hypotheses are significant and accepted. These results show that the research hypotheses are compatible with the dataset and that the fundamental assumptions of the research are valid. The p-value of all hypotheses being below 0.05 is an important indicator that these hypotheses are statistically significant and support the accuracy of the research model. These findings provide strong evidence for the overall validity of the model and the research.

Finally, it is observed that both information Adoption (β = 0.972, t-value = 14.152, p <0.05) and emotional Attachment (β = 0.151, t-value = 2.399, p <0.05) have a significant impact on Purchase Intention.

Discussion

This study examined the impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviours and how this effect can be understood within the framework of the Information Adoption Model (IAM). The research extends IAM by incorporating new variables such as emotional attachment and creativity and evaluating their effects on information usefulness and purchase intention, thus making a significant contribution to the literature.

The findings of the research support all the hypotheses. These findings reveal that the creativity (H1), information credibility (H2), and quality (H3) of social media influencers positively influence consumers' perception of information usefulness. Additionally, emotional attachment (H4 and H7) has a significant effect on both information usefulness and purchase intention. It was observed that information usefulness (H5) positively influences information adoption, and information adoption (H6) positively affects purchase intention.

The theoretical and practical contributions of this study are highlighted by its in-depth examination of the impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviours and how this impact can be understood within the framework of the Information Adoption Model (IAM). Theoretically, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of the information adoption process by expanding IAM, particularly with the addition of new variables such as emotional attachment and creativity. This expansion allows for a more in-depth examination of the information adoption process.

Practically, the findings guide marketers and brands on which factors to focus on when collaborating with social media influencers to influence consumer behaviours. The creativity and credibility of social media influencers can affect consumers' perception of information usefulness and, consequently, their purchase intentions. This indicates that brands need to consider influencers' creativity and credibility attributes when shaping their social media strategies. Additionally, this study demonstrates that the impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviours is not limited to quantitative data. Factors such as emotional attachment and creativity provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of influencers' impact. This requires marketers and brands to consider these psychological factors when collaborating with social media influencers.

Existing literature shows that the impact of social media influencers on consumer behaviours is often assessed through follower counts, engagement rates, and content quality (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2021). These studies emphasize that influencers' impact is generally based on quantitative data. However, this approach may overlook the deeper and psychological aspects of influencers' impact. The Information Adoption Model (IAM) is used to understand information processing and adoption processes, especially in online contexts. This model explains the information adoption process by considering factors such as information quality and source credibility (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). However, the expansion of this model in the context of social media influencers, especially with the addition of new variables like emotional attachment and creativity, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the information adoption process. Emotional attachment and creativity offer new dimensions in understanding the impact of social media influencers. Emotional attachment refers to consumers' emotional closeness to brands or influencers, while creativity highlights the innovative and appealing approaches of influencers in content production (Khamis et al., 2017). These variables play a significant role in influencing consumer behaviours.

Cultural factors play an important role in understanding the impact of social media influencers. In different cultural contexts, the influence of influencers and consumers' information adoption processes may vary (Chu & Kim, 2011). Therefore, examining the impact of social media influencers in terms of cultural diversity can broaden the scope of research in this area. Social media has created a significant change in how consumer behaviours are influenced. Consumers gather information about brands through social media and use this information in their purchasing decisions (Erkan & Evans, 2016). This process plays a critical role in understanding the impact of social media influencers.

The theoretical framework of this research constitutes an important step in understanding the impact of social media influencers, yet it is open to some criticisms. Particularly, the measurement of emotional attachment and creativity can be subjective and may vary in different cultural contexts. However, the addition of these variables opens new dimensions in understanding consumer behaviours.

A limitation of this study is the use of convenience sampling, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies can overcome this limitation by conducting similar research in different geographic and cultural contexts. Additionally, the long-term impacts of social media influencers and their effects across different social media platforms can be explored.

References

Akram, M. S., & Albalawi, W. (2016). Youths' social media adoption: theoretical model and empirical evidence. *International Journal of Business and Management, 11*(2), 22.

Albadri, H. A. (2023). The Role and Impact of Social Media Influencers. *Information Sciences Letters, 12*(8), 2685-2696

Ali Abbasi, G., Abdul Rahim, N. F., Wu, H., Iranmanesh, M., & Keong, B. N. C. (2022). Determinants of SME's social media marketing adoption: competitive industry as a moderator. Sage Open, 12(1), 21582440211067220.

Ali Qalati, S., Li, W., Ahmed, N., Ali Mirani, M., & Khan, A. (2020). Examining the factors affecting SME performance: the mediating role of social media adoption. *Sustainability, 13*(1), 75.

Al-Qaysi, N., Mohamad-Nordin, N., & Al-Emran, M. (2020). A systematic review of social media acceptance from the perspective of educational and information systems theories and models. *Journal of Educational Computing Research, 57*(8), 2085-2109.

Arora, A., Bansal, S., Kandpal, C., Aswani, R., & Dwivedi, Y. (2019). Measuring social media influencer index-insights from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. *Journal of retailing and consumer services,* 49, 86-101.

Audrezet, A., De Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J. G. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of business research*, 117, 557-569.

Barreda, A. A., Nusair, K., Wang, Y., Okumus, F., & Bilgihan, A. (2020). The impact of social media activities on brand image and emotional attachment: A case in the travel context. *Journal of hospitality and tourism technology, 11*(1), 109-135.

Bentler, P. M., & Chou, C. P. (1987). Practical issues in structural modeling. *Sociological methods & research, 16*(1), 78-117.

Bentley, K., Chu, C., Nistor, C., Pehlivan, E., & Yalcin, T. (2021). Social media engagement for global influencers. *Journal of Global Marketing, 34*(3), 205-219.

Bhatli, D., & Mejri, C. A. (2015). The influence of social media on consumption practices. In Ideas in Marketing: Finding the New and Polishing the Old: Proceedings of the 2013 Academy of Marketing Science (AMS) Annual Conference (pp. 802-802). Springer International Publishing.

Bhattacharya, A. (2023). Parasocial interaction in social media influencer-based marketing: An SEM approach. *Journal of Internet Commerce, 22*(2), 272-292.

Borchers, N. S. (2019). Social media influencers in strategic communication. International *Journal of Strategic Communication, 13*(4), 255-260.

Brindha, N., & Parameswaran, R. (2017). Consumer Decision-Making Process in Social Media Platform. *Global journal for research analysis., 5*(12).

Cassia, F., & Magno, F. (2019). *Assessing the power of social media influencers: a comparison between tourism and cultural bloggers. In Predicting Trends and Building Strategies for Consumer Engagement in Retail Environments* (pp. 169-186). IGI Global.

Chung, N., Han, H., & Koo, C. (2015). Adoption of travel information in user-generated content on social media: the moderating effect of social presence. *Behaviour & information technology, 34*(9), 902-919.

Conti, M., Gathani, J., & Tricomi, P. P. (2022). Virtual influencers in online social media. *IEEE Communications Magazine, 60*(8), 86-91.

Coyle, J. R., & Thorson, E. (2001). The effects of progressive levels of interactivity and vividness in web marketing sites. *Journal of advertising*, 65-77.

Dajah, D. S. (2020). Marketing through social media influencers. *International Journal of Business and Social Science, 11*(9), 10-12.

Dinh, T. D., & Mai, K. N. (2015). Guerrilla marketing's effects on Gen Y's word-of-mouth intention–a mediation of credibility. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics, 28*(1), 4-22.

Doshi, R., Ramesh, A., & Rao, S. (2022). Modeling influencer marketing campaigns in social networks. *IEEE Transactions on Computational Social Systems, 10*(1), 322-334.

Du Plessis, T. C. (2010). Theoretical guidelines for social media marketing communication. Communicare. *Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa, 29*(1), 1-20.

Elwalda, A., Erkan, I., Rahman, M., & Zeren, D. (2021). Understanding mobile users' information adoption behaviour: an extension of the information adoption model. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management, 35*(6), 1789-1811.

Erkan, I., & Evans, C. (2016). The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions: An extended approach to information adoption. *Computers in Human Behavior,* 61, 47-55.

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating Structural Equation Models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research, 18*(1), 39–50.

Fu, J. R., Lu, I. W., Chen, J. H., & Farn, C. K. (2020). Investigating consumers' online social shopping intention: An information processing perspective. *International Journal of Information Management,* 54, 102189.

Gökerik, M., Gürbüz, A., Erkan, I., Mogaji, E., & Sap, S. (2018). Surprise me with your ads! The impacts of guerrilla marketing in social media on brand image. *Asia Pacific journal of marketing and logistics, 30*(5), 1222-1238.

Gökerik, M. (2024). Consumer Cynicism in Influencer Marketing: An Impact Analysis on Purchase Intention and Brand Loyalty. *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi, 13*(1), 404-421.

Gunawan, D. D., & Huarng, K. H. (2015). Viral effects of social network and media on consumers' purchase intention. *Journal of business research, 68*(11), 2237-2241.

Hair Jr., J.F., Black, W.C., Babin, B.J. and Anderson, R.E. (2010) *Multivariate Data Analysis: A Global Perspective*. 7th Edition, Pearson Education, Upper Saddle River.

Haldar, P. (2022). The influence of social media on users' travel decision using information adoption model. *Community & Communication Amity School of Communication,* 15, 2456-9011.

Harrigan, P., Daly, T. M., Coussement, K., Lee, J. A., Soutar, G. N., & Evers, U. (2021). Identifying influencers on social media. *International Journal of Information Management*, 56, 102246.

Heavey, C., Simsek, Z., Kyprianou, C., & Risius, M. (2020). How do strategic leaders engage with social media? A theoretical framework for research and practice. *Strategic Management Journal, 41*(8), 1490-1527.

Ioanăs, E., & Stoica, I. (2014). Social media and its impact on consumers behavior. International *Journal of Economic Practices and Theories, 4*(2), 295-303.

Jiang, X., & Zhang, S. (2023, April). Using Social Media for E-government Services: A Service-level Perspective of Citizen Adoption. In *Proceedings of the 2023 8th International Conference on Information and Education Innovations* (pp. 193-198).

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons, 53*(1), 59-68.

Kent, M. L., & Li, C. (2020). Toward a normative social media theory for public relations. *Public Relations Review, 46*(1), 101857.

Ki, C. W. C., Cuevas, L. M., Chong, S. M., & Lim, H. (2020). Influencer marketing: Social media influencers as human brands attaching to followers and yielding positive marketing results by fulfilling needs. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services,* 55, 102133.

Kim, D. Y., & Kim, H. Y. (2021). Trust me, trust me not: A nuanced view of influencer marketing on social media. *Journal of Business Research,* 134, 223-232.

Kim, D. Y., & Kim, H. Y. (2022). Social media influencers as human brands: an interactive marketing perspective. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 17*(1), 94-109.

Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. *Journal of interactive advertising, 19*(1), 58-73.

Mason, A. N., Narcum, J., & Mason, K. (2021). Social media marketing gains importance after Covid-19. *Cogent Business & Management, 8*(1), 1870797.

McClure, C., & Seock, Y. K. (2020). The role of involvement: Investigating the effect of brand's social media pages on consumer purchase intention. *Journal of retailing and consumer services,* 53, 101975.

Oliveira, M., Barbosa, R., & Sousa, A. (2020). The use of influencers in social media marketing. In *Marketing and Smart Technologies: Proceedings of ICMarkTech 2019* (pp. 112-124). Springer Singapore.

Oumayma, B. (2019, October). Social media made me buy it: the impact of social media on consumer purchase behavior. In *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Smart City Applications* (pp. 1-7).

Ouvrein, G., Pabian, S., Giles, D., Hudders, L., & De Backer, C. (2021). The web of influencers. A marketing-audience classification of (potential) social media influencers. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *37*(13-14), 1313-1342.

Pilař, L., Kvasničková Stanislavská, L., Kvasnička, R., Bouda, P., & Pitrová, J. (2021). Framework for social media analysis based on hashtag research. *Applied Sciences, 11*(8), 3697.

Puriwat, W., & Tripopsakul, S. (2021). Explaining social media adoption for a business purpose: an application of the UTAUT model. *Sustainability*, *13*(4), 2082.

Qalati, S. A., Yuan, L. W., Khan, M. A. S., & Anwar, F. (2021). A mediated model on the adoption of social media and SMEs' performance in developing countries. *Technology in Society,* 64, 101513.

Sánchez-Fernández, R., & Jiménez-Castillo, D. (2021). How social media influencers affect behavioural intentions towards recommended brands: the role of emotional attachment and information value. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *37*(11-12), 1123-1147.

Sarkar, D., Roy, S., Giri, C., & Kole, D. K. (2019). A statistical model to determine the behavior adoption in different timestamps on online social network. *International Journal of Knowledge and Systems Science (IJKSS), 10*(4), 1-17.

Shah, S. A., Shoukat, M. H., Jamal, W., & Shakil Ahmad, M. (2023). What drives followers-influencer intention in influencer marketing? The perspectives of emotional attachment and quality of information. *SAGE Open, 13*(2), 21582440231179712.

Shang, S. S., Wu, Y. L., & Sie, Y. J. (2017). Generating consumer resonance for purchase intention on social network sites. *Computers in Human Behavior,* 69, 18-28.

Shoukat, M. H., Selem, K. M., & Asim Shah, S. (2023). How does social media influencer credibility blow the promotional horn? A dual mediation model. *Journal of Relationship Marketing, 22*(3), 172-201.

Siamagka, N. T., Christodoulides, G., Michaelidou, N., & Valvi, A. (2015). Determinants of social media adoption by B2B organizations. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 51, 89-99.

Statista. (2023). *Influencer marketing worldwide - statistics & facts.* Erişim tarihi: 21.12.2023 https://www.statista.com/topics/2496/influence-marketing

Stevens, J. P. (2002). *Applied multivariate statistics for the social sciences* (Fourth Edition). New Jersey: Lawrance Erlbaum Association.

Sun, Y., Wang, N., Shen, X. L., & Zhang, X. (2019). Bias effects, synergistic effects, and information contingency effects: Developing and testing an extended information adoption model in social Q&A. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, *70*(12), 1368-1382.

Tien, D. H., Rivas, A. A. A., & Liao, Y. K. (2019). Examining the influence of customer-to-customer electronic word-of-mouth on purchase intention in social networking sites. *Asia Pacific Management Review, 24*(3), 238-249.

Virtonia, I. (2023). The Adoption of Information Thread at Social Media during Covid using Modified Information Adoption Model. In *2023 International Conference on Computer, Control, Informatics and its Applications (IC3INA)* (pp. 347-352). IEEE.

Wang, Z., & Sun, Z. (2021). Can the adoption of health information on social media be predicted by information characteristics?. *Aslib Journal of Information Management, 73*(1), 80-100.

Yang, Y. J., & Wang, C. C. (2023, January). Recently Research on Social Media Influencers. In *2023 International Conference On Cyber Management And Engineering (CyMaEn)* (pp. 444-448). IEEE.

Zhang, E. (2021). *Social media influencers. In The SAGE Encyclopedia of Trans Studies* (Vol. 2, pp. 790-790). SAGE Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.4135/9781544393858

Zhang, X., & Choi, J. (2022). The importance of social influencer-generated contents for user cognition and emotional attachment: An information relevance perspective. *Sustainability, 14*(11), 6676.

Received Date: 09 March 2024 I Accepted Date: 21 May 2024

OPUS Journal of Society Research

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Syrian Migrants' Experiences of "Irregular" Migration to Austria Interlaced by Virtual Networks: A Qualitative Study[1]

Nadide Schwarzenberger[1] I Yelda Özen[2]

[1] Linz, Austria
ORCID: 0009-0000-6385-0342
E-Mail: nadidegndz@gmail.com

[2] Asst. Prof. Dr., Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Department of Sociology, Ankara / Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0003-0382-5094
E-Mail: yelda.ozen@aybu.edu.tr

Corresponding Author: Yelda Özen

May 2024
Volume:21
Issue:3
DOI: 10.26466/opusjsr.1449441

Citation:
Schwarzenberger, N. & Özen, Y. (2024). Syrian migrants' experiences of "irregular" migration to Austria interlaced by virtual networks: A qualitative study *OPUS– Journal of Society Research, 21*(3), 140-158.

Abstract

The beginning of the war in Syria in 2011 led to a massive migration wave from Syria to Europe; however, this move made European migration policies more rigid in securing borders. The growing crisis has compelled Syrians to explore various ways to move. On September 14–15, 2015, thousands of people organized through Facebook gathered in Edirne and demanded to be allowed to enter Europe by crossing the Balkans on foot. This incident underlined the significant impact of social media on the process of irregular migration. This study aims to understand the role of virtual networks in the migration experiences of Syrians during multi-stage migration process, covering pre-migration, the journey itself, and the post-migration period. In this context, face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted with 26 Syrian migrants[2] who arrived at or were captured in and currently reside in Linz, Austria. Syrian migrants meticulously planned nearly every step through virtual networks and smartphone tools, creating a holographic impression in their minds before embarking. These networks significantly enhanced the familiarity and safety of the irregular migration route and allowed them to proceed with "the migration network ladders" one by one. The Syrian migration experience highlights the pivotal role of virtual networks in motivating, guiding, and connecting individuals throughout the process.

Keywords: *Syrian Migrants, Irregular Migration Route, Austria, Social Media, Virtual Networks*

Öz

Suriye'de 2011 yılında savaşın başlaması, Suriye'den Avrupa'ya büyük bir göç dalgası oluşturdu, ancak bu hareketlilik, Avrupa'nın, sınırlarını korumak adına göç politikalarını daha katı hale getirmesine neden oldu. Büyüyen krizle birlikte, Suriyeliler göç etmeleri için çok çeşitli yollar aradılar. 14-15 Eylül 2015 tarihlerinde Facebook üzerinden örgütlenen binlerce kişi Edirne'de toplanmış ve Balkanları yürüyerek geçip, Avrupa'ya girmelerine izin verilmesini talep etmişlerdir. Bu olay, sosyal medyanın düzensiz göç süreci üzerindeki önemli etkisini göstermiştir. Bu çalışma, Suriyelilerin göç öncesi, göç esnasında ve göç sonrasındaki göç deneyimlerinde sanal ağların rolünü anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Avusturya'nın Linz kentine gelen veya burada yakalanan ve hali hazırda bu kentte ikamet eden 26 Suriyeli göçmenle yüz yüze derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Suriyeli göçmenler, yola çıkmadan önce zihinlerinde holografik bir izlenim yaratarak sanal ağlar ve akıllı telefonların sunduğu araçlarla neredeyse her adımı titizlikle planlamışlardır. Bu ağlar, göçmenlerin düzensiz göç rotasına aşina olmalarını sağlamış, rotanın güvenliğini önemli ölçüde artırmış ve "göç ağı merdivenlerini" birer birer geçmelerini sağlamıştır. Suriye göç deneyimi, sanal ağların göç süreci boyunca bireyleri motive etme, yönlendirme ve göç eyleminde bulunan bireyleri birbirine bağlamadaki önemli rolünü vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Suriyeli Göçmenler, Düzensiz Göç Rotası, Avusturya, Sosyal Media, Sanal Ağlar*

[1] *The data used in this article were retrieved from the first author's master's thesis (thesis number: 514529), completed under the supervision of Yelda Özen at the Sociology Department of Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University in 2018 (available at https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/).*

[2] *Instead of the use of "refugee" or "asylum seeker", we prefer to use the term "migrant" in a broad sense for referring to people who leave their homes and migrate to another place either for fleeing from conflict or war, displacement, or reaching better life conditions etc.*

Introduction

> *"We don't want food, we don't want water, we don't want humanitarian help, we want to cross the border by land. We will cross or die here". For 5 days in Edirne, Turkey, around three thousand migrants (mostly Syrians but also Afghanis, Iraqis, and others) gathered, following a call started on a Facebook page ('Crossing no more'), to ask for the Turkish-Greek border to be opened for them. They refuse to risk their lives in the Aegean Sea anymore to reach a European country where they'll finally be safe, get basic human rights and have a chance to make a life for themselves (Kasparek, 2015).*

The phrase "We will cross or die here" encapsulates the Syrian migration "crisis" from 2011 onward. On September 15th, 2015, thousands, primarily of Syrian origin, gathered in Edirne, Türkiye, aiming to cross into Europe. Organized through Facebook, this collective action underscored the profound impact of social media on initiating large-scale movements. More precisely, the rapid flow of information exchange and the organization of virtual networks appear to bring about a significant shift in the nature of migration, unlike the historical organization of community networks for migration because today's technology allows a migrant to know that "it is possible to find a store where they can get a telephone line across the X city they have never visited and the Y mosque they have not yet passed or which migrant smuggler is more reliable in Greece without ever visiting Greece" as a participant (Maher, 29 M) notes.

The Syrian conflict began in 2011, but the aspects, effects, and consequences of migration, as well as the attitudes of the various parties to irregular migration, have been consistently consulted and have continued to remain on the global agenda due to the continuation of internal disorder and human mobility, and the impacts of this process on societies. Dozens of topics, such as the economic aspect of the crisis, integration policies, political attitudes where borders are built by fences, the industrialized/commercialized face of migrant smuggling, and temporary solutions, can be listed as issues discussed. Still, one should not be overlooked: the struggle for the survival of millions of people.

This study aims to understand how Syrian migrants experienced the migration process by weaving the migration routes using virtual/mobile instruments such as sharing networks, social media, and tools. It is based on the question of the role of virtual networks in the process that thousands of Syrians experienced when moving to Europe, specifically to Austria, due to the humanitarian crisis of the Syrian War. Considering the notion that virtual networks, through digital communication, transform the migrant experience apart from the community network and create available migration routes to Europe, the study focuses on how these networks shape the migration of Syrian people. Adopting a qualitative approach to comprehend participants' experiences and the overall process, the study conducted face-to-face, in-depth interviews with 26 Syrian migrants residing in and around Linz, Austria. Participants migrated to Austria across the Mediterranean Sea, either from Türkiye or one of the nearby Middle Eastern countries. How and under what conditions the Syrian participants decided to migrate, and how they used social media with its networks, messaging apps, and tools during the migration decision, on the route, and after migration to Austria were explored in the study by applying the semi-structured interview form to capture the diverse narratives and perspectives of the participants.

Background and the Literature

The "Arab Spring", originating in Tunisia in 2010, had widespread repercussions in the MENA region, igniting a crisis in Syria in 2011 (Castles et al., 2014, pp.14-15). This aligns with predictions that political or ethnic conflicts could trigger large-scale refugee movements (Castles et al., 2014, p.7). "The Syrian refugee drama" has roots beyond the 2010s-2020s, encompassing regional factors that produced the regional instability that set Syrian mass migration such as the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq in 2003, the collapse of Libya in 2011, and the Yemeni civil war starting in 2014 (Mandic, 2023). Because of "heavy repression from the Bashar al-Assad's regime", the region's persistent economic instability/crises, denial of human rights, sectarianism, and ethnic marginalization, the process appears to have devolved into a catastrophe (Berzins, 2013; Akhtar & Nagen, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of social cohesion in Syria made it susceptible to foreign interventions. The crisis has resulted in mass migration, not accidentally (Mandic, 2023), making it a global issue, as UNHCR High Commissioner Grandi deems "the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time and a continuing cause for suffering" (UNHCR, 2023a). For Syrians, the crisis is framed not merely as a political conflict but as a dire choice between leaving or facing death. Many sought asylums in neighboring countries under temporary protection policies (UNHCR, 2016). Fleeing became "the most daunting humanitarian crisis in our time" (Ferris & Kirişçi, 2016, p. 1), particularly evident in the tragic events of the summer of 2015 when the death toll on Turkish and Greek shores reached alarming levels (Yazgan et al., 2015, p. 182). The Mediterranean Sea witnessed a staggering number of deaths: 3771 in 2015, 5096 in 2016, 3139 in 2017, and 2,275 in 2018. Notably, 2018 figures reveal that every 51 arrivals to Europe corresponded to one death at sea (UNHCR, 2018, pp. 6, 13).

Since 2011, millions of Syrians have been compelled to leave their homeland, seeking security by land and/or sea. Pre-pandemic official data reveals 5,642,322 Syrian migrants residing in various countries: 3,666,059 in Türkiye, 924,161 in Lebanon, 657,945 in Jordan, 228,573 in Iraq, 130,371 in Egypt, and 35,713 in North Africa (UNHCR, 2019). Presently, most Syrian migrants still reside in Türkiye, with fewer in neighboring countries and very few in European nations (UNHCR, 2023b). Considering the Austrian case, the period between 2014 and 2016 witnessed a significant refugee influx, marking one of Austria's largest since 1945 (Baumgartner et al., 2021). Migration numbers rose steadily, starting with approximately 5,000 Syrian-born residents in early 2014, escalating to 12,332 by year-end 2014, reaching 33,569 in 2016, and peaking at 46,963 in 2018 (Buber-Ennser et al., 2020, p. 140). By 2022, the Syrian population in Austria surged to 73,923 (Statista, 2023).

UNHCR spokesman Adrian Edwards outlined seven principal factors driving the movement of Syrian refugees to Europe: loss of hope, high living costs and deepening poverty, limited livelihood opportunities, aid shortfalls, obstacles to renewing legal residency, scarce education opportunities, and feeling unsafe in Iraq (UNHCR, 2015a). The decline in hope for a resolution to the Syrian crisis, apprehensions about an uncertain future, challenging economic conditions, the struggle to meet basic needs, the compulsion to work in illegal and precarious conditions, concerns about a lost generation due to restricted and irregular education, feelings of insecurity, and the inadequacy of state policies and aid all play crucial roles in motivating Syrians to migrate to Europe. Additionally, the temporary status of Syrians in neighboring countries has spurred them to explore any available means to move to Europe.

The European Union's failure to reach a consensus on migration has driven Syrians to intensively utilize irregular migration routes. Despite facing unwelcoming responses from destination countries, Syrians persistently navigate these challenging routes. Irregular migration has evolved into a systematically functioning industry involving legal and illegal actors. It encompasses travel agents, labor recruiters, brokers, interpreters, lawyers, housing agents, smugglers, traffickers, and other illegal operators (Castles, 2003, p. 15; Castles et al., 2014, p. 235) facilitating border crossing, securing employment, and housing, and engaging in activities such as smuggling and falsifying documents in clandestine migration (Düvell, 2008, p. 486). The primary migration routes for potential migrants, traffickers, and smugglers from Syria to Europe typically involve first reaching Türkiye and then proceeding to the Greek islands from the Aegean coasts by sea, or reaching Bulgaria, then Serbia (Mandic, 2017), or reaching Greece from the northwest of Türkiye by road. Another route involves reaching Italy from a Middle Eastern country with a coast on the Mediterranean (UNHCR, 2015b), as participants also indicated. The complexity of these routes highlighted the challenges Syrians face in seeking refuge in Europe and the intricate networks involved in facilitating their journey.

Comparing migration influenced by migrant community networks, which involve "sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, non-migrants and former migrants in webs of kinship, friendship and shared origin" facilitating movement as stated in migration network theory (King, 2012, p. 21; Massey et al. 1998), the distinctive feature in Syrian migration is the pivotal role of new communication technology. As Bauman (1998, pp. 12-19) states, the emergence of digital advancements and communication makes geographical distances insignificant, enables the spread of information much faster than the movement of its bodily carriers, and makes information instantly available worldwide. As a result, these developments enable individuals to move with greater awareness to a place they have not been physically present before. By allowing people to see better living conditions, the internet fosters people's motivation to migrate to the "European dream". Social media serves as a technological compass, enabling people to navigate and choose viable routes they have researched. Thousands of Syrians have moved "without drowning in the waters of the Mediterranean" or "without suffocating in a pickup truck" as participants expressed. This journey is not only physical but a "digital passage to Europe" facilitated by smartphone infrastructure and affordance, as noted by Gillespie et al. (2018).

Social media networks have provided access to a wide range of information about the Syrian War, the migration wave to Europe, the integration of migrants, and recommendations for newcomers. These networks, which form the "network society" defined by Castells (2004, p. 3) as "a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies", eliminate the importance of distance. It enables people to connect more closely, experience the immediacy of the moment, and perceive the vastness of space. Platforms like Facebook, frequently used by participants, offer unprecedented content and cultural diversity, transcending physical borders and reshaping perceptions of space. Sharing enables communicating ideas to become crucial, especially for networking, solidarity, and movement as in the case of the Syrian War and migration. Social media and messaging applications, notably Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube, where people help each other, make solidarity, and constitute networks, have a very significant influence on the movements. By openly asserting its significance in these movements, social media exerts a transformative influence which is evident in the spread of the "Arab Spring" to the streets of Syria, the seeking asylum of millions of Syrian people, fleeing conflicts that turned into a war, in neighboring countries, seeking ways to adapt and integrate with the country, and attempting to reach European countries from Syria's neighboring nations. Social media acts as a medium connecting the ends of networks, providing alternative means for people to share information, coordinate movements, and make impactful decisions.

In the emerging literature on irregular migration's relationship with social media and digital tools, a notable study by Dekker and Engbersen (2014) emphasized social media's impact on communication, migration network formation, and the enhancement of ties among migrants. The study reveals that social media contributes to maintaining strong connections with family and friends, addresses weak organizational relations during migration, establishes new implicit relationships, and serves as a valuable source of informal migration information. Hacsek and Visnansky's research (2017) focuses on migrant smugglers' use of social media and smartphones, emphasizing the role of these technologies in enhancing migrants' safety. Another study by Gillespie et al. (2018) highlights the dialectical tension between the risks and benefits of smartphone use during migration for Syrian and Iraqi refugees. The study by Dekker et al. (2018), involving 54 Syrian participants in the Netherlands, indicates widespread social media and smartphone use before and during migration. The study emphasizes that limited access to technology and fear of government surveillance restrict refugees' smartphone use but they develop strategies to maintain access to social media, avoid government surveillance, and validate information. Another study by Gough and Gough (2019), based on in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees in Denmark, underlines the vital role of smartphones in their journey. The study also highlights the role smartphones play as part of migration infrastructure, both in facilitating access to the migration industry and shaping migrants' journeys.

Study Methods

The study aims to explore the impact of new information technologies including virtual networks, messaging services, and other smartphone tools on the migration process (including pre-migration, during migration, and after arrival), and the formation of migration routes from Syria to Austria from migrants' perspective. It employs the qualitative method, focusing on capturing participants' perspectives to understand the social processes and contexts surrounding them (Neuman, 2014, p. 17). This approach is assumed appropriate for investigating the influence of social media on migration drawing insights from the experiences of Syrian migrants who completed this route despite significant challenges.

The fieldwork was conducted in Linz, Austria with Syrian interviewees. During the preliminary observations in the search for the sample, it was understood that Syrian migrants formed a mobile group due to ongoing migration. This mobility made reaching the sampling frame with official figures challenging, so participants were reached through snowball sampling. The researcher joined the Syrian group, conducted interviews, and made observations. In the sample, it should be mentioned that many Syrian participants say that they are still people with trauma. It is ethically important, and particular attention was paid during the fieldwork to ensure that the research carried out did not increase or stimulate their trauma. When the participant was observed to be anxious during the interview, the interview was interrupted, and the subject was changed and chatted. When the continuity of the negative situation was observed, the interview was finalized. The researcher was aware that the sample profile consisted of a group that had gone through a difficult process, and maintained her sensitivity on this issue throughout the study. During the interviews, the researcher not only observed participants and their social environment but also acted with the awareness that the participants observed the researcher and formed a circle of trust based on cultural commonalities. The trust circle between the researcher and the participants did not occur immediately. The field researcher was initially mistaken for a police officer or another public official by interviewees, so the researcher could enter and gain access to the field through the references of 'gatekeepers', as Neuman (2014) puts it.

Between April 26 and August 25, 2017, twenty-six Syrian migrants (20 men, and 6 women) were interviewed in Linz and nearby towns. Twenty entered Austria by passing through irregular migration routes, while six, including one male, four female spouses, and one daughter, arrived after obtaining visas due to their relative status. Twenty-three participants reached Austria between 2014 and 2015, and three arrived between 2016 and 2017. Participants initiated their migration routes alone, with friends or family, often joining crowded migration groups during the journey. While boats and walking were common transportation means, buses, trains, cars, trucks, lorries, vans, and occasionally airplanes were also utilized. The average age of participants is thirty-three, with concentrations in their twenties and thirties. Twenty acquired professional expertise in Syria, four left university due to war, one female participant left high school, and one housewife female is a high school graduate. The majority held white-collar jobs while in Syria. The detailed profile of the participants is shown in Table 1.

In the research, face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview forms. The questionnaire, available in three languages (German, English, and Turkish), accommodated participants' preferences in language choice.

Table 1. Detailed information about participants

Name	Sex	Age	Educational Status	Occupation (In Syria)	Employment Status in Austria	Marital Status, Number of Children	Hometown	Year of Arrival in Austria	Duration of Stay in Türkiye	Journey Duration	Modes of Transport	Group Size During Journey (including oneself)	Interview Location, Date, and Duration
Ammar	M	31	University graduate	Teacher	Employed	Married, two children	Damascus	2014	Nine months	Three months	By boat, on foot, by car	Two people (with his friend)	Linz, April 26, 2017, 1 h. 25 min.
Khalil	M	29	University graduate	Architecture	Employed	Single	Damascus	2014	Eight months	Three months	By boat, on foot, by car	Two people (with his friend)	Linz, May 6, 2017, 2 hours
Abdulla	M	28	University graduate	Architecture	Unemployed	Single	Aleppo	2015	Two years and four months	19 days	By boat, on foot, by car, by bus	13 people (with friends' group)	Linz, May 12, 2017, 1 hour
Ruba	F	60	University graduate	Retired	Retired	Married, three children	Damascus	2015	One month	Six days	By truck	Five people (with another family)	Linz, May 12, 2017, 50 min.
Taha	M	29	University graduate	Teacher	Employed	Married, two children	Damascus	2015	One month	Two months 20 days	By boat, on foot, by taxi, by bus	Five people (with another family)	Gallneukirchen, May 16, 2017, 1 h. 15 min.
Jalal	M	28	University graduate	Accountant	Employed	Single	Damascus	2014	One year and six months	Two months	By boat, by plane	Alone	Gallneukirchen, May 29, 2017, 1 h. 20 min.
Nour	M	40	High school graduate	Photographer	Unemployed	Married, three children	Damascus	2015	Two months	Two months 15 days	By boat, on foot, by car	Alone	Linz, June 7, 2017, 1 hour
Loay	M	42	High school graduate	Cook	Employed	Married, seven children	Damascus	2015	Two months	Three months 10 days	By plane, by boat, on foot, by car	Alone	Linz, June7, 2017, 1 h. 5 min.
Omar	M	28	University dropout	University student	Unemployed	Single	Qamishli	2015	Eight months	20 days	By boat, on foot, by truck	Four people (with his sister and his two nephews)	Gallneukirchen, June 8, 2017, 1 h. 10 min.
Adnan	M	25	University graduate	Economist	Unemployed	Single	Damascus	2015	One day	10 days	By plane, by boat, on foot, by taxi, by bus	With a group of friends	Linz, June 13, 2017, 45 min.
Mustafa	M	22	University dropout	University student	Employed	Single	Damascus	2014	Two days	Two months 15 days	By boat, by car, by taxi, by bus, on foot	Alone (but later he joined a group on the route)	Gallneukirchen, July 7, 2017 and 2 h. 15 min.
Ghith	M	26	University graduate	Lawyer	Employed	Single	Damascus	2015	Six months	One month	By boat, by taxi, by bus, on foot	Two people (with his friend)	Linz, July 17, 2017, 1 h. 40 min.
Ramy	M	33	High school graduate	Merchant	Unemployed	Married, four children	Damascus	2015	Two years and six months	One week	By boat, on foot, by car	Alone (but later he joined a group on the route)	Gallneukirchen, July 19, 2017, 55 min.
Doha	F	29	University graduate	Teacher	Unemployed	Married, four children	Damascus	2017	Four years and six months	One day	By plane	Five people (with her children)	Gallneukirchen, July 19, 2017, 45 min.
Maher	M	28	University dropout	University student	Employed	Single, no child	Damascus	2015	Four days	14 days	By plane, by boat, on foot, by taxi, by car	Two people (with his friend)	Gallneukirchen, August 5, 2017, 2 h. 40 min.
Ali	M	51	University graduate	Manager	Employed	Single, five children	Homs	2014	None	One day	By plane	Six people (with his children)	Linz, August 5, 2017 and 1 h 10 min
Rawan	F	19	Student in High School	Student	Unemployed	Single, no child	Homs	2014	None	One day	By plane	Six people (with her father and siblings)	Linz, August 5, 2017, 1 hour

Morad	M	49	University graduate	Lawyer	Unemployed	Married, three children	Damascus	2015	Three years	10 days	By boat, by bus, on foot, by car	With a group of friends	Mittertreffling, August 7, 2017, 1 h. 40 min.
Hadi	M	28	Vocational high school graduate	IT Technician	Employed	Married, two children	Homs	2014	None	One week	By ship	14 people (with his wife and relatives)	Freistadt, August 9, 2017, 1 h.. 30 min.
Firas	M	44	High school graduate	Shoemaker	Unemployed	Married, three children	Damascus	2015	Seven months	Two months	By boat, by taxi, on foot	Two people (with his friend)	Linz, August 17, 2017, 50 min.
Yasmeen	F	34	University graduate	Teacher	Unemployed	Married, three children	Damascus	2017	Two years and four months	One day	By plane	Four people (with her children)	Linz, August 17, 2017, 50 min.
Ahamd	M	31	Vocational high school graduate	Machine Technician	Unemployed	Single	Damascus	2015	One week	One month	By boat, by car, on foot, by bus	10 people (with a group of friends)	Mittertreffling, August 21, 2017, 1 h. 15 min.
Yassin	M	23	University dropout	University student	Unemployed	Single	Aleppo	2015	One month	Two weeks	By boat, on foot, by car, by bus	Three people (with a sibling and cousin)	Freistadt, August 22, 2017, 1 hour
Afra	F	23	High school graduate	Housewife	Unemployed	Married, two children	Damascus	2016	Eleven months	One day	By plane	Three people (with her children)	Linz, August 23, 2017 and 30 min.
Eslem	F	34	University graduate	Teacher	Unemployed	Married, two children	Latakia	2017	Four years	One day	By plane	Three people (with her children)	Freistadt, August 25, 2017, 1 hour
Yossef	M	46	High school graduate	Manager	Unemployed	Married, three children	Latakia	2014	One year	Two months	By boat, by taxi, on foot, by bus	Three people (three friends later joined with a group of 15 people on the route)	Freistadt, August 25, 2017, 1 h. 15 min.

Notes: F: female. M: male.

An Arabic translator was initially engaged, but concerns arose due to the translator's subjective comments and participant discomfort. Consequently, a translator was discontinued, and interviews proceeded in languages preferred by participants.

The study adhered to the ethical procedures necessary for conducting social research, such as obtaining informed consent and providing information about the purpose and methods of the study, anticipated length of the interview, right of withdrawal, anonymity, and confidentiality. It was established that there was no damaging material in the interview questions. The field interviews were conducted in an informal setting. The researcher emphasized that the research was conducted for scientific purposes and provided sincere and honest answers to all questions during the interviews. Interviews were recorded with the consent of participants and simultaneously noted.

However, after the first few interviews, making notes created unease among participants, leading to interviews continuing only with a recording device. Details that could expose participants' identities were omitted, and names were changed for anonymity.

Thematic analysis, widely used for qualitative data, was applied to interview transcripts obtained from face-to-face interviews with Syrian participants. The analysis was done manually by reading numerous times to become familiar with the data, gain a deep understanding, and identify patterns. The data analysis commenced, transferring raw data to Word, and categorizing through open coding. Axial coding was applied by making connections, followed by selective coding determining data to support core concepts, refined with analytical reminder notes.

The study tries to reveal multifaceted stories and experiences of migration in the process; however, understanding Syrian women's migration experience is not at the desired level for various reasons. The most important limitation of the study was not being able to reach enough female participants, and it has not yielded significant findings about women's experiences because the act of migration seems to be male-dominated. Based on the findings and observations, the migration route is considered more dangerous for women; women are expected to be passive in the entire migration process; and women are supposed to stay with the children in families. Even though the gatekeeper was the intermediary, being able to meet and reach women depended on the permission of the men, sometimes their father, sometimes their husband or brother. In addition to access problems, interviewing women in a qualified, independent manner was not done at the intended level. The women arrived later than their family members in the role of husband or father, and their integration was seen as quite limited. During the interview, they were not alone; their husbands or fathers were with them, and they were observed to be much more anxious, timid, and emotional. Therefore, women's experience in the migration process is not sufficiently explored within the scope of this study.

Findings

The Syrian civil war, which erupted in 2011, escalated into a crisis that profoundly affected millions of lives, both Syrian and non-Syrian. The initial movement seeking asylum in neighboring countries evolved into a broader impact as individuals sought ways to reach European countries through various routes. The legal process struggled to keep pace with the intensity of the war and migration crisis, pushing people towards "illegal" migration routes.

While irregular migration through these routes is not a new phenomenon (Sardelić, 2017), the sudden surge in the number of individuals attempting to cross into Europe and the associated accidents brought global attention to the issue. What sets this apart is the role of social media in shaping migration routes, alongside traditional migrant community networks and the guidelines of migrant smugglers.

This study explores the extensive and multi-stage migration process, covering pre-migration, the journey itself, and the post-migration period, with a specific focus on the influence of virtual networks on migration routes. The findings shed light on the motivations for migration, the experiences of migrants during the journey, and the sense of being migrants upon arrival in Austria. In the findings section, the migration process is conceptualized as “migration network ladders”. The first step involves seeking asylum in neighboring countries, starting from the decision. The subsequent step is to migrate from the asylum country to a European country.

Reasons for migration: “I was not part of this war.”

In the Syrian civil war, the main reason for leaving the country is expressed as the right to life. Ammar (31, M), a participant with two primary school-aged daughters, explained his concern as follows: “If I had stayed in Syria, I would have been killed. I didn’t want to die because I have a family, two daughters”. At the crossroads between leaving and staying, the expressions of participants were similar, as Yassin (23, M) stated, “In the war, it was equally dangerous to stay there or to try this path. I attempted”. The other participant, Taha (29, M), who first came to Türkiye as a transit country and then to Austria, reported that his wife and two young sons also arrived in Austria a year later. He expressed the feeling that risk could be taken with his words: “In case of war, they would die anyway, so they tried. We had no choice!”. Married participants often mention leaving for the survival of their children and families, while single participants express a desire to avoid involvement in the war. Jalal (28, M) clarifies this sentiment:

> *In Syria, I was forced to join the military. It only means that in a war, you will either kill or be killed! You don’t have the right to choose. I was young. My financial situation was good. I owned my home and car. I was going to university while working at a bank. Then the war began. I was not a part of the war! One night while I was sleeping, they attacked me, and I was shot in the leg. What could I do? I had no choice! It doesn’t matter which side you support. They just think they have the right to kill people. Both sides were killing civilians. We had a good life there. Everything is ruined right now. It hurts me.*

In addition to indefinite conscription, the fear of sudden disappearance and detention for posting on social media platforms or for other reasons was also reported as a cause for fleeing the country. Among participants, Maher (28, M) expresses this rationale in detail, with emphasis on the prison:

> *My friend was imprisoned in Damascus for 2.5 months. They made a village-sized prison on the 15th floor underground. He recounts that they kept 400 half-naked men standing close to each other in a tiny room…. Each person receives one olive, a slice of bread, and water daily. They could drink water as much as they wanted, but they could only use the toilet twice a day, in the morning and evening. Bathing was not allowed. It was a big problem if they were caught bathing. That’s precisely why I fled Syria. My friends stated they were begging to die under these conditions. Only God knows when the one who goes in will come out!... There is no record, no name. Who remains and who leaves is determined by money and relationships. There is no food coming in too! Even if the man survives, he is no longer the same… They do not prefer to kill directly but rather consume them slowly and enjoy it. Therefore, instead of starving to death, individuals prefer to die in this way. I cannot judge them. My friend living in Innsbruck lost his eye with this choice … People would rather die in the sea than be tortured. We wanted to save our family and myself.*

Maher’s uneasy attitude and sadness were observed while describing this situation. Based on Maher’s and other interviews, it can be concluded that spreading discourse about the conditions of detention serves to preserve and reproduce the power of existing authority.

Another reason for migration is that Palestinian-originated Syrian participants believe that there is no difference between staying in Syria and leaving because Syrian policies do not let them take citizenship. Mustafa (22, M), for example, stated that despite being born in Syria, he and his father were unable to get citizenship since his grandparents were Palestinian migrants.

Some participants also stated that because some of their family members perished or relocated to other countries, there was no reason to retain them in Syria. Many participants stated that most older parents and married sisters were left behind in

Syria. Married sisters stayed since their spouses did not allow them due to the patriarchal culture. This reason seemed normal and sufficient for the participants.

Revealing the factors that drive people to move is crucial for understanding how the migration process starts and continues. Findings show that the loss of social trust due to war, the lack of human value under war conditions, and the pressures exposed caused Syrians to flee their country with cultural trauma. Furthermore, it was seen that male participants decided to migrate, and the rest of the family members obeyed. It was found that married participants decided to migrate for their children, and singles migrated to avoid joining the army. Although the migration motives were expressed in different words, they shared a similar expression. Syrian migrants, based on the war losses in their families, wanted to migrate to maintain their right to life in general.

From Neighbors to Europe: "European Dream" discourse

Almost all the participants migrated to Europe through neighboring countries like Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan, residing there for varying durations. Their decisions on which neighboring country to go to were influenced by the possibility of staying in the transit country if migrating to Europe proved challenging. While factors like the political and cultural atmosphere, attitudes towards migrants, working conditions, and low wages played a role, the primary motivation was the "European dream" discourse created by migrants living in Europe through online channels.

The first reason expressed by many participants was the belief that the living conditions in the neighboring countries were poor and the opportunities were inadequate, therefore, their quality of life would improve if they could reach Europe. For instance, Ammar (31, M), who spent 9 months in Türkiye, justified his decision with this perspective:

> *I love Türkiye very much, and I admire Istanbul. My wife, two daughters, and I attempted to live there. I worked 14-15 hours daily. Despite being in the same house, I couldn't see them. We lived in a flat on the 3rd underground floor that never got sunlight, and my children and wife became ill due to dampness. I was working hard but earning less. I couldn't afford it. Finally, I decided that we couldn't live in these conditions. Although I hadn't considered going to Europe previously, we felt we had no choice.*

Due to harsh living and working conditions with meager wages, participants aspired to enhance their quality of life upon reaching Europe. The pervasive influence of the "European dream" discourse, widely disseminated and promoted through social media, played a crucial role in shaping this belief and expectation. Maher (28, M), who first went to Lebanon and lived for 2.5 years there and passed to Europe through Türkiye, expresses the significance of social media as follows:

> *A man in Germany posted on Facebook and shared videos on YouTube about how beautiful life was there. Another person shared, "They gave me a house, they paid 1000 Euros monthly, I don't need to work". He added that next month they can give him a car, so he doesn`t have to walk. The uneducated person, who has never owned a phone, and started using Facebook soon after acquiring it, has no idea what social media is, naturally believes these posts. That's exactly the problem! Not only Syrians, but also Afghans and Somalis see these posts, believe them, and begin looking for ways to go to Europe.*

The other reason is the inconsistent policies and negative attitudes towards Syrian migrants in neighboring countries. It has caused many Syrians, such as Hadi (28, M), to see migration to Europe as a unique solution. After living in Libya, he reached Italy by ship and, subsequently, Austria. Hadi's words can help us understand the situation:

> *We had a good life in Syria before the war. I first heard the word "migrant" in Libya. The problems occurred after the first year. The government started to request visas, but nobody knew where we could get them. Security problems on the street began to increase seriously too. We could not go out, and we were unable to work. After being robbed in the street with a knife threat, I decided to go.*

In the interviews with female participants, it is understood that they didn't participate in the migration decision but acted in line with the decisions of their husbands/fathers for family reunification. However, some of the participants stated that thanks to internet tools such as social media, maps, messaging applications, etc., they were able to conduct pre-migration research, so they were less worried when their husbands set out illegally. Men migrated first, followed by women and children. In this process, most of the female participants stayed in Türkiye. In Türkiye, they both experienced financial difficulties and were sometimes victimized by anti-migrant sentiments. Eslem (34, F) describes her experiences as follows:

> *We lived alone in Kayseri and Istanbul for 4 years with our children. My husband came before us. When he first said he was going on this journey, I was very worried, the road was very dangerous. I was not very willing to go because of the bad news. If there was no social media, I wouldn't have let my husband go. When we were in Türkiye, we researched Austria. I worked as a teacher for very intensive long hours, more than 12 hours, and it was very difficult for me. I left the children alone at home, I was very worried. Other children threw stones at one of my children.*

While she was about to describe the bullying against her child in detail, her spouse intervened by saying "But there are also very good people who helped us a lot". In general, women followed the person in the role of husband or father during the migration process and determined their own steps in line with the steps that person would take in this process. In this research, which is conceptualized as the migration network ladder, it is understood that women are not the first to take a step but follow the steps of the man. The difficulties they experienced in the neighboring country are also noteworthy in terms of the experience of being left behind.

Primarily, the pursuit of improved living conditions appears to be the main driving factor. A minority mentioned aspirations for higher education in Europe as a motivation for migration. Participants highlighted that choosing Türkiye as the initial destination was influenced by its comparatively better conditions among Middle Eastern countries and its strategic role as a transit point to Europe. Social media plays a significant role in transforming neighboring countries into transit spaces. Initially, migration occurred as forced asylum in neighboring countries due to the war. In the subsequent stage, challenging living conditions and the portrayal of European life on social media prompted Syrians to explore irregular migration routes. Whether participants truly believe in this portrayal is a subject of debate. Some acknowledged a distinction between fiction and reality. For instance, Morad (49, M), expressed disappointment upon realizing that the European life portrayed on Facebook and YouTube did not match reality. Smartphone-accessible content on social media platforms plays a stimulating role in influencing migration to Europe.

Social media use on the way

Participants in the study undertook diverse and perilous migration routes to reach Austria, with journeys ranging from a six-day pickup truck ride without stops to flying from Greece to Prague with forged passports. Some engaged in a hazardous cruise from Libya to Italy in a week, while others walked for 3 months and 10 days, utilizing nearly all means of transportation. Only three participants had Austria as their predetermined destination; the rest aimed to reach Europe for a fresh start. Notably, the majority who reached Austria illegally traversed from Türkiye to Greece primarily by inflatable boat. Participants emphasized the crucial role of social media, sharing networks, and various applications, including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Google Maps, in facilitating and supporting their challenging journeys. One participant highlighted the courage needed for the road, while another emphasized the immediacy of information on platforms like Facebook, underlining the indispensable role of social media in enabling such dangerous migrations.

The use of Internet technologies not only facilitated migration to Europe but also enhanced safety and familiarity for migrants. Before moving, they extensively researched road conditions and European countries, often reaching out to acquaintances through social media for information. Many spent time in effective preliminary preparation, utilizing their mother tongue, Arabic. Yassin (23, M) mentioned obtaining crucial information through WhatsApp, Facebook, and Google Maps, including details on crossing from Türkiye to Greece, safe hotels, potential risks, recommended migrant smugglers, and reliable means of transportation. The other participant, Nour (40, M), lacking acquaintances in Austria, relied on Facebook pages/groups to gather information on obtaining a residence permit, rights, and necessary actions upon reaching the destination country. According to participants, preliminary preparation encompasses migration bureaucracy, safe migration routes, key contacts, and living conditions in the chosen European country. Omar, (28, M), highlighted the importance of this process in navigating the complexities before setting off:

> *I did not know anyone in Austria. Before I left, I did some research on Facebook: what should I do on the road, how much to pay the mafia, how to behave when I meet the police, which direction is better for me… A famous Italian woman, Noval, is on Facebook and helps people on the road. Whenever a Syrian arrived in any European country and decided to stay there but somehow couldn't reach the police, Noval would help, contact the police, and tell them to pick them up from where they stayed.*

In addition to preliminary preparation, a solidarity network was formed among migrants, fostering a continuous flow of updated information along the process. As Omar mentioned sometimes European local helpers like Noval were involved in enhancing the migrant experience. Utilizing tools like maps, texting, and video sharing, Syrian migrants actively guided each other through the complex migration route, sharing insights on encountered problems and potential solutions.

Most participants followed the Greece-Macedonia-Serbia-Hungary-Austria route through Türkiye and the Aegean Sea, predominantly traversing on foot, starting with boats, occasionally by rail, and rarely by taxi. Khalil (29, M), who embarked on the journey with friends, described the experience as follows:

> *On the way, we used both offline and online maps. We looked for free Wi-Fi at train stations. Facebook shares always helped us. For example, we needed a cheap rail ticket during the Christmas season in Hungary. We found a Facebook group looking for train tickets on the same route as us. We agreed because the rail ticket was cheaper for group purchases. All this happened in an hour in a foreign city. Social media made it possible.*

In addition to networked solidarity through the virtual world for making the route secure and available, findings point to the existence of a networked migratory economy on the road as well. Participants, forming a solidarity network despite being strangers, employ strategies to mitigate challenges and reduce costs, such as acquiring affordable transportation, accommodations, negotiating for forged passports, or giving money to migrant smugglers. Notably, individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to remain in countries of refuge or Syria, while middle-class and upper-income groups can reach Europe. All participants belong to the middle-income occupational group and initiated the journey with a predetermined budget.

Like many participants, Ahamd (31, M), emphasized the pivotal role of WhatsApp, online/offline maps, Google, Facebook, and various apps in migration routes and collective action development. He shared how he and his friends utilized social media networks to plan and execute the migration process because he hadn't found a job in Jordon:

> *First, I got information from my friend in Germany via Messenger. Then, together with a friend from Jordan, three from Syria, and five in Istanbul, we planned the route via Messenger. We also formed a WhatsApp group. We met in Istanbul and went to Greece via İzmir. I could find Wi-Fi in a hotel while in Greece, so I called my family on WhatsApp. My friends were using Google Maps on their phones, and we had an extra battery. We encountered Syrians, Afghans, Iranians, and Iraqis on the route and exchanged*

information. Crowding on the migration route also protected us from dangers such as the mafia.

Participants consistently highlighted the significant role of social media networks in the migration process making the way navigable and providing crucial support. Many emphasized that sharing on social networks and utilizing internet tools encouraged the decision and made migration possible. Adnan (25, M, economist) stated that these networks not only encouraged migration but also alleviated fears by making the unknown aspects of the process known through social media. Excerpts from participants suggest that new communication technologies play a dual role, both triggering and encouraging migration initiation and facilitating the journey itself. Maher (29, M) further illustrates the impact of virtual networks on the irregular migration route:

Without social media, reaching Europe would have taken much longer and been difficult… Without it, I would go to Türkiye, and look for a migrant smuggler, but I wouldn't know where I was, where I should go, where I was going, or where the police station was… Facebook is a basic communication tool with pages, maps, and locations. Without them, many more people would die on the way… Friends on Facebook wrote, "My brother is over there, his location is this and he couldn't reach the police, please help!" and others saw the post and helped… These networks, of course, might sometimes be alarming. Anyone can catch you where you are. This possibility and negative comments on Facebook did not reduce my motivation but rather strengthened me. Before I left, I read stories and experiences on Facebook, so I set out with a lot of information. For example, there is a station in Hungary where you can drink water, everyone needs water, so they know it before they set off. That's what social media does! … For instance, the absence of a treaty prevented Egyptians from coming here, but they heard that Germany welcomes everyone, so they attempted to go there… I could come via social media, especially Facebook. I didn't need to download things to my phone or ask my friends. I just needed to open Facebook and take screenshots of the information and coordinates…I also knew alternative ways. Many people had already traveled the same road. I didn't wait for someone to kill us.

Participants concurred that new communication technologies shape the migration route. In the Syrian case, migration evolves from community networks rooted in face-to-face relations to virtual communities and social media networks. Initially, participants connect through social media with friends or relatives in European countries, seeking information about living standards and practical migration experiences rather than expecting immediate support upon arrival. Unlike labor or chain migration, where community networks are influential, Syrian migration hinges on the reasons, type, means, and legal situation, often leading migrants to end up where they are apprehended rather than their intended destination. The process reveals that individuals, despite being strangers, collaborate with a common goal, planning and completing migration with solidarity. Those risking migration might also embrace a life separate from their ethnic community post-migration, maintaining connections via social networks. Community formation during the process occurs through social media networks, irrespective of social identities or kinship ties. Interestingly, the formed community during migration doesn't seem to be an essential need in real life post-migration. Additionally, post-migration attitudes are influenced by integration policies in the destination country.

Reaching Austria

While Austria was the target country for a few participants, for others, it became the country where they were caught and subsequently lived. The term "Europe" was commonly used in interviews rather than specifying a particular country. While some secured residence permits and others awaited application results, family members were scattered across Syria, asylum countries like Türkiye, and various European nations. Upon reaching Austria, they attempted to complete formalities and continued using virtual networks for diverse purposes.

It is understood that participants faced numerous challenges and official procedures upon arrival. Participants noted that they were caught by the security forces in Austria and had to stay by providing fingerprints. Similar incidents occurred in countries along the route, such as Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary. Participants, reluctant to give fingerprints, were sometimes granted permits and instructed to leave the country after a specific period, indicating the reluctance of these nations to host migrants. In Austria, the post-arrival process involved entering the country through official channels, waiting in detention rooms, and residing in refugee camps until the acquisition of a residence permit. In this process, financial support for health services, German courses, and vocational training was provided, either before or after obtaining the residence permit. While they seem to be passive/docile migrants subjected to biopolitical regulations such as fingerprints and mandatory detention upon arrival, they gradually became more active in organizing their lives through social networks.

Syrian migrants residing in Linz continue to effectively utilize virtual networks, employing them in three main ways post-migration. Firstly, they establish connections with those remaining in Syria and friends and family across different countries. Secondly, they utilize virtual networks to adapt to their new life in Linz, fostering solidarity with newcomers by sharing information on daily life and official matters. Lastly, they facilitate the migration route by exchanging insights with those intending to migrate, those who have already begun, and those on the route.

While social media is often used by migrants in Austria for integration purposes, it remains a crucial tool for staying connected with family in Syria, the country of asylum, and friends dispersed across European nations. Various virtual platforms such as Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, Imo, and Viber are actively employed. Participants engage in these networks to stay informed about Syria, maintain bonds with those left behind, exchange information, and alleviate the sense of isolation in their new life in Linz. Khalil (29, M) illustrates his communication with family in Syria:

When there is electricity, I usually call my mom on WhatsApp every three days. We also chat with my sisters and friends on Facebook. When bomb news comes from Syria, I immediately call my friends via Messenger or WhatsApp because phone calls are quite expensive. I also use Imo for video calls.

Similarly, Morad (49, M) maintains daily contact with his wife and children in Canada, from which he had to be separated for bureaucratic reasons, through WhatsApp, Messenger, or Imo, and his parents and siblings in Syria weekly due to electricity shortage. Ahamd (31, M) frequently engages in group video calls with family and friends in Damascus and Jordan, relying on Messenger and WhatsApp.

Despite spatial separation due to migration, virtual networks help unite individuals from the same Syrian community. While they endeavor to maintain their own culture, habits, and relationships, they are aware that they need to adapt to their new life. Their social networks converge in the virtual world, but with the social adaptation to the new country, they can begin to separate from their network over time. Spatial distances converge with new communication technologies, but they express occasionally their need to avoid the war chaos to adapt to their new lives and get rid of trauma. While some participants who see social media networks as useful ways to follow agendas, and news in Syria, expressed that new communication technologies relieved their concerns to some extent, other participants stated that their psychological state was not available to follow the news.

The interviews reveal that social media networks significantly assist migrants in socio-cultural adaptation to Austrian society after their arrival. Their information-seeking for integration covers a broad spectrum, including basic needs, official procedures, residence permits, rental houses, job and education opportunities, driver's license requirements, migration rights, and aspects of Austrian culture such as history, lifestyle, and language learning. The availability of much of this information in Arabic on virtual platforms is a crucial facilitator for adaptation. Platforms like YouTube and Facebook, particularly valuable for learning German, are actively utilized, with participants also downloading mobile apps for language acquisition. Ghith (26, M) expresses his viewpoint:

> *I've used Facebook daily for communication and entertainment since arriving here. I follow the Facebook profile of a man who wishes to bring his family from Syria here. People share what they have learned. I also watch YouTube to learn about Austrian history, rights, and the language. I removed the groups on the migration route. I am still in contact with my friends in other countries.*

Ghith quit the groups, both because he didn't want to remember the negativities they experienced during the journey and because of an incident he experienced before migration regarding the use of social media. He was imprisoned for 2 months and his father for 3 months in Syria because of Facebook posts. They paid $4,000 in bail. At the time of the interview, her brother was also in prison, but they did not know where he was, and Ghith was worried because he could not get any information. It was observed that he was cautious about social media and used it more functionally, as this experience increased her concern that her relatives in Syria might be harmed.

Facilitating the migration process, participants share experiences and support each other, turning the unknown route into a known and safer path by reducing dangers and risks. Their roles evolve from receiving support to helping, making migration an ongoing process facilitated by internet tools rather than a completed journey. The participants' engagement with migrants on the route varies. Some actively share knowledge and experiences, while others passively observe. Some, like Ghith, opt to disconnect from groups to move past the challenging process.

A female participant, Ruba (60, F), a retired woman, first stayed in Mersin and then illegally traveled to Austria by truck for 6 days. On the one hand, she stated that she used Facebook, Imo, and WhatsApp to get news from her relatives; on the other hand, she expressed that she did not want to follow the news in Syria in general, by saying "I don't want to hear anything, Damascus was so beautiful, now horrible, they destroyed it and ruined it". She also stated that she maintained her relations with a person who helped her in Mersin before migration and that they established a mother-son relationship after arrival. Although relationships may seem temporary during the migration process, sometimes, as in Ruba's case, they can continue.

Participants who want to communicate with those who want to migrate and share their experiences through virtual networks noted that they warn about the reliability and changeability of information. Taha (29, M) explains this situation as follows:

> *Many people asked how I arrived here through the internet. I assisted my cousin, but I emphasized, "Don't completely trust the information I give you, research it". Because the borders are very long, everyone's method and experiences are different when crossing. Money has a major role. I gave tips on hazardous spots.*

Participants indicated that new dangers and risks may emerge on the migration route. The information about the migration route is dynamic, and the sharing of migrant experiences may occasionally lose significance and become functional.

Conclusion

During the "Arab Spring", when the protests turned into a civil war in Syria, social media began to be influential in shaping the social movement and human mobility. Virtual networks emerged as powerful tools for organizing solidarity, guiding individuals through migration routes, and facilitating post-migration integration. These networks served as the eyes and ears of people as a compass for them when they had to flee their country and were on the way to Austria. As Gough and Gough study (2019) indicates, social media serves as a facilitator of migration. This technology, which connects people, has established a migration route that may appear "illegal" from the outside but is considered "safe" for them.

In the context of Syrian migrants, social media posts encourage individuals who want to migrate, enabling them to visualize a bird's-eye view of the migration route with every step. Based on the findings, it can be said that most of these posts in this process constitute and reproduce a "European dream discourse". The shares containing videos, photos, and messages about the European destination trigger migration, and other mobile tools with the shares make the migration route safer while passing through European countries. Afterward, they use them for official procedures in the country where they were captured, to adapt to their new life, and to communicate with those left behind, while guiding new migrants in the formation of the migration route.

Based on the findings, Syrian migration differs from many mass migrations in history in terms of the role of virtual networks in creating the routes and the rate it has reached. The Syrian migration could be inferred to include the "migration network ladder" with a navigation system. To progress on this ladder, the individual must be motivated, because when taking a step, an individual only takes the stairs if there is a better option in front of her/ him. Rather than the dominant role of traditional community-based networks, where blood ties, ethnic ties, or friendships are influential in the process, virtual networks, driven by social media, played a comprehensive role in the entire migration process, influencing individuals from the decision to migrate. In the Syrian case, social media minimized the perceived distance, making potential migrants aware of obstacles, risks, and costs involved in the migration route. As communication technologies have advanced, migration strategies and methods have evolved. Rather than being mutually exclusive, virtual and community networks have become more integrated because virtual networks have made the process in the physical world more predictable, safer, and manageable.

Before departure, migrants extensively researched Europe and the migration route through social media. Post-arrival, they shared their experiences online, contributing to the formation of a "hologram of the migration route" in the minds of those planning to migrate. Virtual searches covered diverse aspects, from the dangers posed by the mafia to the locations of police stations, emphasizing the importance of maps and SIM cards. Participants stressed that these tools were essential for learning about risks and alternative routes before and during the journey.

Online migration, facilitated by social media, eliminated the dependence of strong ties to community networks in the destination country. Trust spaces were predominantly created among individuals with similar experiences in the virtual world, rather than relying on governments or formal community networks. Certainly, community networks are still influential in the process. Some participants stated that they contacted their relatives who migrated to European countries to get information about life conditions in Europe. However, the aim is not to demand that basic living conditions be prepared for them before arriving but to get an idea about the country's conditions and make preliminary preparations for the migration route. Migrants act in solidarity by joining a group and forming communities along the route; however, it is understood that they are not planned but emerge depending on the road conditions, therefore the communities along the migration route are mostly temporary and interest-based, eventually disbanding.

The main motive for this migration was the chaotic situation in Syria. However, not everyone desiring to migrate to Europe could realize this goal; advantages such as economic and cultural capital, education, being in the middle or upper class, being white-collar, knowing at least one European language, and being male were crucial. The study revealed a predominantly middle-class narrative, with participants possessing education, technological literacy, and a budget for migration expenses. According to our findings, except for a small number of male participants who migrated with their families or relatives, most of them came to Austria either alone or with groups of friends or by joining different groups along the way, leaving their close family members either in Syria or mostly in neighboring countries such as Türkiye, as statistics supports (Buber-Ennser et. al., 2020). Part of their spouses and/or children were able to come later; however, older relatives such as parents, female relatives such as single sisters, and/or those who could not afford the migration budget were left behind, as many participants stated. Women and children, older people, socio-economically disadvantaged and unable to afford migration expenses, and uneducated individuals either stayed in Syria or established their lives in the countries they sought refuge in, such as Türkiye. More precisely, they could not take the next step on the migration network ladder.

Although the migrants focused on establishing their own life after reaching their European destination in Austria, it is understood that most participants could not completely break away from both the migration route and Syria. It would not be correct to say that family ties disappear with the completion of migration, that is, with spatial separation. Dekker and Engbersen's study (2014), while discussing the impact of social media on the migration process, also states that it strengthens family ties. Similarly, in our research, we found that although the participants were spatially dispersed with close family members or relatives (*e.g*. some in Syria, some in neighboring countries, and some in other countries around the world), internet tools, whether voice or video calls or social media, preserved these relationships in a sense. On the one hand, it is seen that they encourage them by making plans for those staying in Syria, and on the other hand, they stay in contact with those on the migration route and are in solidarity. Just as the participants were on their way to migration, they received help from people they did not know. There is a situation in which the roles change and the person who reaches the target transfers his/her role to the new one. The migrant, who actively uses virtual networks on the migration route to achieve migration, transfers this migrant role to the newcomer after reaching the target, and this time he/she helps those on the way. The fact that those who have completed the migration help and support the newcomers indicates that they are not completely detached from this process. Social media as Dekker and Engbersen (2014) state, serves as a valuable source of informal migration information.

Gillespie et al. (2018) highlight both the risks and benefits of smartphone use during migration for Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Similarly, in our study, although sharing on the road with smartphone tools facilitates migration, as many participants stated, it also causes people to become targets or mislead people with inconsistent information. As Castles et. al (2014) and Mandic (2017) point out, it is important to remember that there are not only migrants on the migration route and within the migration industry but also many legal and illegal actors such as traffickers, smugglers, etc. Because of too much information and, the variability and inconsistency of the migration route information, as noted by the participants, the migrant needs to decide on the information that is up-to-date and reliable in order not to be in a difficult situation.

Based on the findings of this research, new studies can be proposed to emphasize certain issues. For example, a separate study of women's experience in the migration process will be able to show us how gender differentiates the migration experience. In addition, the criminal elements experienced on the road during the migration process should be studied in terms of criminology. Later, this research can continue to better understand the process by focusing on how Syrian migrants can integrate into the Austrian society during the post-migration process, how family-relative relations change, and whether there is spatial segregation or clustering over time.

In conclusion, the Syrian migration narrative, shaped by social media, highlights the pivotal role of virtual networks in motivating, guiding, and connecting individuals throughout the migration process. These networks have reshaped traditional migration dynamics, providing a unique perspective on the impact of technology on human movement.

Disclosure statement: The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

References

Akhtar, N & Nageen, H. (2019). The Syrian conflict: An inside-out and outside-in approach. *International Journal on World Peace, 36*(3), 7-34.

Bauman, Z. (1998). *Globalization: The human consequences*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Baumgartner, T., Bilger, V., Landesmann, M., Leitner, S. M. & Palinkas, M. (2021). Evidence from Austria: A setback for the labor market integration of refugees? *International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Expert Voice.* https://www.icmpd.org/news-/evidence-from-austria-a-setback-for-the-labour-market-integration-of-refugees. Accessed 20 Oct 2023.

Bērziņš, J. (2013). *Civil war in Syria: Origins, dynamics, and possible solutions*. National Defence Academy of Latvia Center for Security and Strategic Research. https://www.naa.mil.lv/-sites/naa/files/document/7_SA-07p_0.pdf. Accessed 16 Oct 2023.

Buber-Ennser, I., Rengs, B., Kohlenberger, J., & Zeman, K. (2020). Demographic profile of Syrians in Austria. In E. Carlson & N. E. Williams (Eds.), *Comparative demography of the Syrian diaspora: European and Middle Eastern destinations* (pp. 139-163). Cham: Springer.

Castells, M. (2004). Informationalism, networks, and the network society: A theoretical blueprint. In M. Castells (Ed.), *The network society: A cross-cultural perspective* (pp. 3-45). Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Castles, S. (2003). Towards a sociology of forced migration and social transformation. *Sociology*, *37*(1), 13–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038503037001

Castles, S., de Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2014). *The age of migration: The population movements in the modern world*. London: Palgrave, Macmillan.

Dekker, R. & Engbersen, G. (2014). How social media transform migrant networks and facilitate migration. *Global Networks, 14*(4), 401-418. https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12040

Dekker, R., Engbersen, G., Klaver, J. & Vonk, H. (2018). Smart refugees: How Syrian asylum migrants use social media information in migration decision-making. *Social Media+Society*, *4*(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1177/205630511876

Düvell, F. (2008). Clandestine migration in Europe. *Social Science Information*, *47*(4), 479-497. https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018408096

Ferris, E. & Kirişçi, K. (2016). *The consequences of chaos: Syria's humanitarian crisis and the failure to protect.* Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Gillespie, M., Osserian, S. & Cheesman, M. (2018). Syrian refugees and the digital passage to Europe: Smartphone infrastructures and affordances. *Social Media+Society*, *4*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118764

Gough, H.A. & Gough, K. V. (2019). Disrupted becomings: The role of smartphones in Syrian refugees' physical and existential journeys. *Geoforum*, *105*, 89-98. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.05.012

Hacsek, Z. & Visnansky, B. (2017). *The impact of social media on the smuggling of migrants.* Regional Academy of the United Nations. http://www.ra-un.org/uploads/4/7/5/4/47544571/2_unodc_2_final_paper.pdf. Accessed 10 May 2018.

Kasparek, B. (2015, September, 20). Edirne: Refugees demand safe passage to Greece. *Bordermonitoring*. https://bordermonitoring.eu/tuerkei/2015/09/edirne-refugees-demand-safe-passage-to-greece/. Accessed 22 Feb 2019.

King, R. (2012). *Theories and typologies of migration: An overview and a primer* (Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers in International Migration and Ethnic Relations 3/12). Malmö: Malmö University.

Mandic, D. (2017). Trafficking and Syrian refugee smuggling: Evidence from the Balkan route. *Social Inclusion*, *5*(2), 28-38. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v5i2.917

Mandic, D. (2023). *The Syrian refugee crisis: How democracies and autocracies perpetrated mass displacement*. New York: Routledge.

Massey, D. S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor, J. E. (1998). *Worlds in motion. Understanding international migration at the end of the millennium*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Neuman W. L. (2014). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Essex: Pearson.

Sardelić, J. (2017). From temporary protection to transit migration: Responses to refugee crises along the Western Balkan route. *Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Research Paper (35).* https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3023937/1/Julija%20Sardelic%20RSCAS_2017_35.pdf. Accessed 11 Aug 2023.

Statista (2023). *Ranking of the largest Syrian refugee-hosting countries in 2022.* Retrieved November 14, 2023, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/740233/major-syrian-refugee-hosting-countries-worldwide/. Accessed 14 Nov 2023.

UNHCR (2023a). *Syria refugee crisis.* https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/. Accessed 16 Oct 2023.

UNHCR (2023b, October 30). *Syria regional refugee response.* Retrieved November 14, 2023, from https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria. Accessed 14 Nov 2023.

UNHCR (2019, September 20). *Syria regional refugee response.* Retrieved September 27, 2019, from https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria. Accessed 27 Sep 2019.

UNHCR (2018). *Desperate journeys: Refugees and migrants arriving in Europe and at Europe's borders.* https://www.unhcr.org/desperatejourneys/. Accessed 29 Jun 2023.

UNHCR (2016). *Global appeal 2016-2017, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional summary.* https://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-global-appeal-2016-2017-middle-east-and-north-africa-mena-regional-summary. Accessed 16 Oct 2023.

UNHCR (2015a, September 25). *Seven factors behind movement of Syrian refugees to Europe.* Retrieved August 30, 2022, from https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2015/9/560523f26/seven-factors-behind-movement-syrian-refugees-europe.html. Accessed 30 Aug 2022.

UNHCR (2015b). *The sea route to Europe: The Mediterranean passage in the age of refugees.* https://www.unhcr.org/media/sea-route-europe-mediterranean-passage-age-refugees. Accessed 30 Jun 2023.

Yazgan, P., Eroğlu-Utku, D. & Sirkeci, İ. (2015). Editorial: Syrian crisis and migration. *Migration Letters, 12(*3), 181-182. https://doi.org/10.33182/ml.v12i3.273

Received Date: 19 February 2024 I Accepted Date: 16 May 2024

OPUS Journal of Society Research

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigation on the Effect of Conspicuous Consumption and Brand Equity on the Purchasing Intention of Premium Branded Products

Duygu Baysal Kurt[1] I Adnan Kara[2]

[1] Assist. Prof. Dr., Bayburt University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Bayburt/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0001-8364-0705
E-Mail: duygukurt@bayburt.edu.tr

[2] Assoc. Prof. Dr., Bayburt University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Bayburt/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-9045-0392
E-Mail: adnankara@bayburt.edu.tr

Corresponding Author: Duygu Baysal Kurt

May 2024
Volume:21
Issue:3
DOI: 10.26466/opusjsr.1439999

Citation:
Baysal Kurt, D. & Kara, A. (2024). Investigation on the effect of conspicuous consumption and brand equity on the purchasing intention of premium branded products. *OPUS– Journal of Society Research*, *21*(3), 159-174.

Abstract

Economic stability have a significant impact on consumer behavior. There are many studies in the literature showing that consumer behavior changes during economic instability. In addition, studies on the change in behavior towards premium branded products during these periods reveal that consumers' demand for such products shifts to other products of the same brand. The study aims to examine the effect of perceived design value on brand value, brand prestige on conspicuous consumption, and conspicuous consumption and brand value on purchasing intention of premium branded products. In other words, Within the framework of consumer behavior towards premium branded products, this study examines the purchase intention of premium branded products during economic crises and also investigates the effect of conspicuous consumption and brand equity on this purchase intention. This study examines the purchase intention of premium branded products during economic crises and also investigates the effect of conspicuous consumption and brand equity on this purchase intention. Snowball sampling is used in sample selection, and data is collected using the survey method from 426 people. The results of the analysis show that there is a strong relationship between conspicuous consumption and the intention to pay high prices for premium branded products. A significant and positive direct relationship was found between brand equity and the intention to pay high pricess for premium branded products. In addition, a significant and positive relationship was found between brand prestige and conspicuous consumption. Finally, a significant and positive relationship was found between perceived design value and brand equity.

Keywords: *Economic crises, Premium branded products, Conspicuous consumption, Brand equity, Purchasing intention*

Öz

Ekonomik istikrarın tüketici davranışları üzerinde önemli bir etkisi vardır. Literatürde ekonomik istikrarsızlık dönemlerinde tüketici davranışlarının değiştiğini gösteren pek çok çalışma bulunmaktadır. Ayrıca bu dönemlerde premium markalı ürünlere yönelik davranış değişikliğine ilişkin çalışmalar, tüketicilerin bu tür ürünlere olan talebinin aynı markanın diğer ürünlerine kaydığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, algılanan tasarım değerinin marka değeri üzerindeki, marka prestijinin gösterişçi tüketim üzerindeki, gösterişçi tüketim ve marka değerinin premium markalı ürünlerin satın alma niyeti üzerindeki etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Başka bir ifadeyle, tüketicinin premium markalı ürünlere yönelik davranışları çerçevesinde, bu çalışma ekonomik krizler sırasında premium markalı ürünlerin satın alma niyetini incelemekte ve ayrıca gösterişçi tüketimin ve marka değerinin bu satın alma niyeti üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktadır. Örneklem seçiminde kartopu örneklemesi kullanılmış olup, 426 kişiden anket yöntemiyle veri toplanmıştır. Analiz sonuçları gösterişçi tüketim ile premium markalı ürünlere yüksek fiyat ödeme niyeti arasında güçlü bir ilişki olduğunu göstermektedir. Marka değeri ile premium markalı ürünlere yüksek fiyat ödeme niyeti arasında anlamlı ve pozitif bir doğrudan ilişki bulunmuştur. Buna ek olarak marka prestiji ile gösterişçi tüketim arasında anlamlı ve pozitif bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Son olarak algılanan tasarım değeri ile marka değeri arasında anlamlı ve pozitif bir ilişki bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Ekonomik krizler, Premium markalı ürünler, Gösterişçi tüketim, Marka değeri, Satın alma niyeti*

Introduction

Although the world is facing the danger of economic recession, the demand for expensive brand products is increasing (The Economist, 2023). The concepts of premium product, prestige brand or massprestige are used to describe brands that cost consumers more than their counterparts. This category can include some luxury products, but can also include high-priced, high-quality, well-designed and even sustainable products with good-performance and global brand perception (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999; Dall'lmo Riley et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2023). In the study conducted by Nielsen in 2016 on the features of premium products, older consumers described these features as high quality-material and content, while younger ones described them as design and superior customer service (NIQ, 2016). Consumers' spending on fast-moving consumer goods is increasing due to factors affecting the economy such as financial crises and epidemics around the world. However, interestingly, the markets of premium branded products are also growing along with fast-moving consumer goods. For example, in 2022, the size of the prestigious perfume and cosmetic product market in the world was 12 billion dollars in the USA with the largest market share, while it was 224 million dollars in Türkiye, which ranked 29th on the list (Statista Research Developmet, 2023). Despite a decline during the Covid-19 period, market growth continues to rise.

When a company, product or service perceived as status, quality or exceptional value by costumers, it labeled as premium brand (Yu et al. 2022). As the number of premium brands increases, consumer interest in premium branded products is increasing. Premium brand generally refers to high-priced-quality products. Prestigious product brands are more common in product categories such as mobile phones, clothing, automobiles, cosmetics and household appliances. These products are often confused with luxury products. Premium products are more availeble than luxury. However, consumers' purchasing motivations can be explained in similar terms (Leibenstein, 1950; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). These terms are Bandwagon, Snob and Veblen effect. The Bandwagon effect (also called the herd effect) occurs when consumer demand increases while other people purchase the same type of goods/services. The Snob effect is the reduced desire to purchase goods that are desired by the majority of society. This means that consumers who see themselves as unique and different tend to purchase goods that are considered undesirable (or unaffordable) by the masses (Stępień, 2018). In relation to the Veblen effect, which refers to status-oriented spending, the Bandwagon effect and Snob effect are driven by symbolic and high-status motives in the expensive product category, while the Snob effect is based on individuality, uniqueness and exclusivity (Tsai et al., 2013).

In the literature, it is mentioned that consumer behavior generally changes during economic crises. Marangoz & Uluyol (2010), Urbonavicius & Pikturniene (2010), Voinea & Filip (2011), Jasiulewicz (2012) and Kosicka-Gębska & Gębski (2013) discussed consumer behavior during economic crises. These studies generally reveal that consumers plan to cut back on spending and overcome the uncertainty of the crisis by saving. In other words, consumers turn to a simpler demand structure during economic crisis. However, there are also studies in the literature indicating that consumers behave differently in premium branded products. Mark et al. (2016) and Ho & Murphy (2020) pointed out that the demand for premium brands increases during economic recession because consumers cannot give up hedonic consumption and they turn to other products with more affordable prices in premium brands.

The research aim is to domanstrate the effect of conspicuous consumption and brand equity on the purchasing intention of premium branded products. In scope of this aim, a empirical research was designed. Research scales adapted from literature. Data are collected by online questionnaire.

This study extend knowledge about premium branding. It is contributed to the literature by addressing brand equity and conspicuous consumption together. The following section provides theoretical concepts for measures.

Subsequently, the empirical results of the research, its comparison with the literature, the limitations of the research and suggestions for future studies are presented.

Literature

Consumer Behavior During Economic Instability

The concept of consumer has gained importance with the modern marketing approach and has gradually increased its importance during the transition to the postmodern marketing approach. When evaluated in this context, it is possible to say that the consumer has become the focal point of businesses in terms of marketing activities (Yürük, 2010).

Economic crises cause many changes in consumer behavior. Most consumers behave differently during economic crises. These behaviors can be defined as more economical and more responsible (Voinea & Filip, 2011). Consumer personality traits such as risk aversion, value consciousness and materialism are significantly affected during the economic crisis (Ang, 2001; Urbonavicius & Pikturniene, 2010). Thrift, defined as a unidimensional consumer lifestyle trait characterized by the extent to which consumers are constrained in acquiring affordable goods and services and using these goods and services prudently to achieve long-term goals, is a trait common to a relatively small number of consumers during periods of economic prosperity. However, when this feature is evaluated during economic crises, it is seen that it becomes a common purchasing premise (Lastovicka et al., 1999; Urbonavicius & Pikturniene, 2010; Suárez et al., 2020). There are various reasons for thrift during the economic crisis. These reasons can be listed as budget constraints, feeling of guilt about luxury spending during the economic crisis, difficulties in loan repayments, increased bargaining power of consumers and pent-up demand (Urbonavicius & Pikturniene, 2010). Individuals' spending and saving tendencies change during periods of economic crisis. Moreover, it is seen that these behaviors are interrelated. Individuals' perception of uncertainty increases during periods of economic crisis. Therefore, individuals tend to save by reducing their consumption (Marangoz & Uluyol, 2010). The possible effects of the economic crisis presented through the media have an important role in changing individuals' consumption behavior. In this context, consumers reflect the real decrease in their income due to the economic crisis to their consumption expenditures, including food (Kosicka-Gębska & Gębski, 2013). During periods of economic crisis, consumers change their purchasing patterns and reduce their demands to a simple level. In other words, they turn to more ordinary products or prefer replica products instead of designer products. They even reduce their purchases of organic food products as they are expensive. In times of economic crisis, individuals change their consumer behavior and prioritize recycling and second-hand purchasing (Jasiulewicz, 2012).

In addition to the negative social and psychological effects of the Covid 19 process on individuals (Saladino et al., 2020), it has also had negative effects on the global economy. It was known by everyone that consumption should be effectively encouraged in order to eliminate these negative economic effects. (Zhang et al., 2023). It is possible to say that during the Covid 19 period, many people in the world engaged in panic buying behavior because they felt vulnerable to the disease, and in this context, the anxiety caused by the disease caused this behavior (Omar et al., 2021). In their study, Koç & Armut (2022) examined the change in consumer behavior by considering the Covid 19 epidemic process from an economic perspective. In this study, consumers generally turn to online shopping and their baskets of goods and services change in online shopping.

During economic recessions, individuals do not want to give up the premium brands they use. In this case, consumers prefer to switch to another product category of these brands that may be more affordable. In other words, these preferences of consumers cause premium brand products to be preferred more during economic crises. Here, hedonic consumption motives of individuals come to the fore (Mark et al., 2016; Ho & Murphy, 2020).

Premium Brand Perception

The satisfaction or exciting effect of the product has a lot to do with what it means to the consumer. Product symbolism is the emotions and meanings experienced by consumers regarding purchasing and using a product (O'Cass & Frost, 2002). Brand associations that consumers acquire through their experiences add symbolic value to the product. Products with symbolic value gain market position as status brands. Status brands have a well-defined target customer profile. However, if the brand is distinctively unique and its focus is on a specific market segment, it is compatible with fewer consumer profiles (Wolter et al., 2016). Premium brands provide similar experiences to status brands. Premium brands are more prestigious, upper class or luxurious than ordinary brands in a certain category. They can also appeal to a wider range of consumers. A premium brand is a ''new luxury'' brand with a social image that appeals to middle segment consumers who are willing to pay reasonably higher prices (Yu et al., 2022).

Positive opinions of the consumers are important for improving their relationship with the brand because no matter how prestigious, luxurious, perfectionist or innovative the brand is, if it does not create admiration in consumers, their interest decreases (Kim et al., 2021). Factors affecting premium brand perception can be listed as product design, product category, price and perceived quality. Product design is one of the factors that are effective in creating a strong brand image by the consumer. When consumers encounter an unfamiliar brand, they evaluate the brand image with visual clues. For example, when a brand uses dark colors and straight-vertical lines on its labels, it is perceived as more luxurious (Yu et al., 2022). Product design, which includes functionality, symbolism and aesthetic elements in a compact way, positively affects the attitude towards the brand (Homburg et al., 2015). In premium brand perception, the product category differs in terms of showing off to reference groups (Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 2015). Whether the brand is luxurious, cheap or premium becomes important depending on the product categories. For example, while being luxury or cheap is a striking factor among automobile brands, it does not make much difference whether it is premium or luxurious in clothing brands (Dall'Olmo Riley et al., 2015). This is because the automobile is more visible and a status symbol.

Conspicuous Consumption

Conspicuous consumption is generally defined as purchases made by consumers to emphasize wealth, social cohesion and individuality. It is often the acquisition of status as an indicator of social class. A consumer cannot achieve status with a showy, extraordinary purchase. However, after the consumer has the qualifications to obtain any status (education, being selected, being appointed, inheritance), he/she can obtain the status through conspicuous consumption (Hamilton & Tilman, 1983). Conspicuous consumption was first defined by Veblen (1899), Keasbey (1903) and Rae (1905) (Uzgoren & Guney, 2012). Veblen (1899) stated that conspicuous consumption includes high-priced status products and is used to show the difference between social classes.

There are theories in the literature that offer different perspectives to understand conspicuous consumption. Bindra et al. (2022) listed the main theories regarding conspicuous consumption in their literature review. According to the authors, these are optimal distinctiveness theory, attribution theory, signaling theory, psychological response theory (PRT) and leisure class theory. Optimal distinctiveness theory states that each individual seeks a fit between his/her uniqueness and social class (Brewer, 2003). Attribution theory explains people's behavioral patterns based on cause and effect relationships (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Signaling theory explains how individuals gather information and use cues to obtain benefits (Bindra et al., 2022). Psychological response theory explains that individuals make decisions based on free will and when this situation is removed, they are motivated to regain their free will (Torrance, 1968). Leisure theory explains that individuals acquire assets as a sign of social class and that the unproductive leisure time they spend with these assets is an upper-class action (Veblen, 1899). On the other hand, terms such as prestige brands

(Vigneron & Johnson, 1999), status brands (O'Cass & Frost, 2002), luxury brands (Tsai et al., 2013) are used for conspicuous consumption in the literature. Leibenstein (1950) stated that this consumption, which he categorized as non-functional products, was caused by three different effects, Veblen effect, Snob effect, Bandwagon effect. The Snob effect is the decrease in demand for a consumer good due to the consumption of the same good by others. The Veblen effect is when the demand for a consumer good increase because that good has a higher price rather than a lower price. The Bandwagon effect is the increase in demand for a good because others consume the same good (Leibenstein, 1950).

The first term used by Leibenstein (1950) to explain conspicuous consumption is the Veblen effect. In the Veblen effect, the price and demand of the product move in the same direction (Chenavaz & Eynan, 2021). It is a form of conspicuous consumption when consumers purchase goods that are functionally similar to each other but for which they are willing to pay a higher price. Veblen stated that conspicuous consumption has a psychological origin and it is a connection between the status system and culture (Dolfsma, 2000). In the modern consumer society, this connection is explained by the connection between popular brand preference and culture. High-priced branded products that appeal to a small number of customers represent conspicuous consumption. Popular brands create a Veblen effect in the reference groups of target consumers through advertising, enabling the brand name to get ahead of its competitors (Pepall & Reiff, 2016). Brands with the Veblen effect is so popular that their prices are determined by consumers. In other words, the prices of these products are demand-based rather than supply-based (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996). On the other hand, there are also negative benefits that the consumers have to endure in conspicuous consumption. The consumer is also exposed to non-financial expenses, such as purchasing a new coat before the old one wears out, spending not only money but also effort to throw a party, and incurring the cost of searching for the product to purchase a quality product. Spending on such negative benefits is no different from wasting money (Malakhov, 2012).

The Snob effect, like the Veblen effect, is a term related to luxury consumption. What distinguishes the Snob from the Veblen effect is that consumers want to feel different from others by owning a product (Leibenstein, 1950). As in Veblen consumption, the Snob consumer may also want to own high-priced products. However, if the mass demand for a product is high despite the high price, the desire of Snob consumers to purchase will decrease (Uzgoren & Guney, 2012). In other words, the rarity of the product is important for Snob consumers. Therefore, unlike normal consumers, Snob consumers are more selective. Consumers can use the Snob effect to organize their relationships with close friends. Conspicuous consumption products that are not suitable for daily use, such as an expensive bag, can create both Snob effect and Bandwagon effect (Kuwashima, 2016). The same product can be purchased for two different purposes, such as showing close friends that they have a product that they do not have and using what wealthy people use.

The Bandwagon effect is associated with the terms uniqueness, need for learning, materialism, self-concept and consumer sensitivity to normative influence (Bindra et al., 2022). It is also known as the majority effect (Henshel & Johnston, 1987). It refers to the tendency of individuals to prefer what the majority chooses. For example, while a fashionable garment is preferred by the majority for a certain period of time, it becomes unwearable after a while because it is considered out of fashion. However, the Bandwagon effect should be evaluated according to the circumstances of each purchase or choice. Because, there is a lot of factors affecting individuals' purchase. Some of the factors that affect the Bandwagon effect are heuristics, groupthink, desire to be right, a need to be included (Cherry, 2023). Heuristics means solving problems on one's own by learning from past experiences (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). The Bandwagon effect occurs when individuals do same thing what he/she sees from everyone to make their choices easier (Cherry, 2023). Groupthink is the pressure to continue doing what everyone does, in order to stay their comfort zone

(Levitan & Verhulst, 2016). Another factor is individuals' desire to be on the winning side and be acceptable by the social group (Mallinson & Hatemi, 2018). Finally, consumers may adopt the decision of the majority due to fear of social isolation (Schmitt-Beck, 2015). These factors may speed up or slow down the individual's decision-making, depending on the opinion of the majority.

When consumers cannot make a decision about a product, they may trust that what the majority purchases is the right one. For example, a product sold in a developed country can gain more customers and gain prestige as its sales increase (Stępień, 2018). However, a product that may be considered prestigious for consumers in developed countries may be perceived as luxury for consumers in a developing country (Stępień, 2018). For a developing country, lower sales volumes may bring more profitable Snob customers to the product because while Snob consumers prefer rare and high-priced luxury products, Bandwagon consumers purchase mass prestigious products with accessible prices (Stępień, 2018). In addition, middle-income consumers feel the Bandwagon effect more because owning a luxury product that will enable them to move to a higher class and be accepted by the majority seems attractive to middle-income consumers (Saruchera & Mthombeni, 2023).

Brand Equity

Methods that use subjective evaluations such as brand image, memorability, loyalty, perceived quality are called consumer-based brand equity or brand equity (Christodoulides & Chernatony, 2009). Measuring brand equity is more difficult than financial-based brand equity because it is subjective and it cannot be determined exactly which elements are effective. In the literature, brand equity dimensions are explained with sub-dimensions such as positive brand image, quality, awareness, reputation, brand assets and differentiation (Farquhar, 1989; Doyle, 1990; Aaker, 1991; Kapferer, 1994). Keller (1993) defined brand equity as consumers' understanding of the brand and distinguishing it from others as a result of marketing activities. Keller argued that brand equity has two general components, brand image and brand awareness. Brand image is the perception of brand associations in the consumer's mind. Brand awareness is related to an easy and memorable brand name. Godey et al. (2016) practically demonstrated that brand image and brand awareness, which are sub-dimensions of brand equity, are effective in creating strong brand equity. In addition, Godey et al. (2016) found that brand equity has positive effects on brand preference, intention to pay premium price and loyalty. In addition, the authors found positive effects of brand equity on brand preference, intention to pay premium price and loyalty. Furthermore, Yoo et al. (2000) found that brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand awareness were positively and significantly related to the level of brand equity. Similarly, Jara & Cliquet (2012) reported with their research findings that two main components, retail brand awareness and perceived quality, explain consumer-based brand equity in retailers. As a result, while the antecedents of brand equity are dimensions such as quality, awareness and image, its successors are the intention to pay premium prices and preferability.

Perceived value is the consumers' assessment about utility of the product versus cost of it (Zeithaml, 1988). Alongside, product design consists of style, function, ergonomics and the perception created by all of these together (Noble & Kumar, 2008). Design value offers both emotional and functional design benefits to consumers (Noble & Kumar, 2008; Kotler, 2012). According to a survey, consumers are willing to pay an extra $204 for a laptop just because of a better design (Kotler & Keller 2012). There are many studies that support this view and show the relationship between brand equity and perceived design value (Keller, 1993; Mishra, 2016; Meng & Bari, 2019). For these reasons, the following hypothesis was developed.

H1: Perceived design value positively affect brand equity.

Brand Prestige

Brand preference can be seen as a reflection of consumer personality. Consumers see brands as a way to improve themselves. Prestige is the motivation for self-improvement for consumers (Wolter et al., 2016). Brand prestige is valued by consumers to show others that they are self-actualized individuals. While a prestigious brand makes the consumer shine brighter, like a spotlight, a disreputable brand without prestige causes the consumer to be exposed to a situation such as being disgraced (Wolter et al., 2016). Prestige is also a means of communicating the consumer's well-being to others. Brand prestige is effective in creating perceptions such as stimulating, great, majestic, aesthetic and magnificent, which give people strong emotions (Kim et al., 2021). Therefore, brands that are prestigious enough to be used in public spaces in daily life are more remarkable because designs that are eye-catching but cannot be used in public spaces will lose their meaning (Yu et al., 2022).

The conspicuously consume is seen to be determined by consumers' subjective benefits. Perception of prestige can be considered as one of the subjective benefits. If a prestigious brand satisfies subjective benefits such as aesthetic, it determines brand selection (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). In addition, consumers perceive key brand associations such as positive relationships, brand image, self-image brand image congruency, and brand feelings in the process of status and conspicuous consumption (O'cass & Frost, 2002). Even if the symbolic value of the brand is seen by consumers, if other subjective desires (brand feelings, e.g.) are missing, conspicuous consumption will not be positively affected (O'cass & Frost, 2002). In the literature, there are various studies showing the relationship between prestige and conspicuous consumption (Acikalin et al, 2009; Kim & Jang, 2014; Tor Kadıoğlu & Yağcı, 2021; Lai et al. 2022). Therefore, this hypothesis was developed.

H2: Brand prestige positively affect conspicuous consumption.

Intention to Pay Premium Price

Premium price is defined as the relatively higher price of a product or brand compared to other products in the same category. Premium price may be due to the content of the product (such as quality, customer service) or the symbolic value of the brand. The perception of a prestigious brand makes consumers happy, which leads them to make financial sacrifices (Mansoor & Paul, 2022). In other words, when consumers value the brand highly, they reflect this financially.

H3: Conspicuous consumption positively affect intention to pay high prices for premium brand.

Brand equity positively affects the intention to pay premium prices (Arvidsson, 2006; Bougenvile & Ruswanti, 2017). High brand equity is a symbol of trust in the brand (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Spry et al. 2011). Consumers give high value to brands for products that they are sure that they will not experience situations such as low perceived quality, incompatible image, or financial risk after purchasing them. Trust in the brand creates price elasticity in consumers (Erdem et al., 2002). Consumers' low price elasticity indicates that they may have the intention to pay premium prices.

H4: Brand equity positively affect intention to pay high prices for premium brand.

Method

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of brand equity and conspicuous consumption on the intention to pay high pricess for premium branded products. In addition, the study investigated the effect of perceived design on brand equity and the effect of brand prestige on conspicuous consumption. The scales used in the study were obtained from various sources in the literature. The scales were taken from the original source, translated from English to Turkish. Perceived design value (Aesthetic, Functional, Symbolic: 8 items) was taken from the scale developed by Homburg et al. (2015). Brand Prestige (3 items) was taken from the scale used by Ahearne et al. (2005). Brand Equity (4 items) was taken from the scale used by Yoo et al. (2000). Premium price (4 items) was taken from the scale used by Netemeyer et al. (2004). The Snob (3 items) and the Bandwagon Effect (3 items) was taken from the scale developed by Kastanakis (2010). A seven-point Likert type scale was used. In the study, data were collected by the researchers themselves using an online survey. The main population of the research is those over the age of 18 in Turkiye. Snowball sampling method was used to select the sample. Snowball sampling was preferred to ensure participants from all professional groups. At first, a survey form was sent to participants from different professional groups. Participants were then asked to provide references for their colleagues to participate in the study. In this way, the process continued until a sufficient number of participants from each sector was reached in the research. The research conducted within the scope of this study was examined by the Bayburt University Ethics Committee and it was decided that there was no ethical objection, number 271, on 20.09.2023.

Research Model

The research model is shown below.

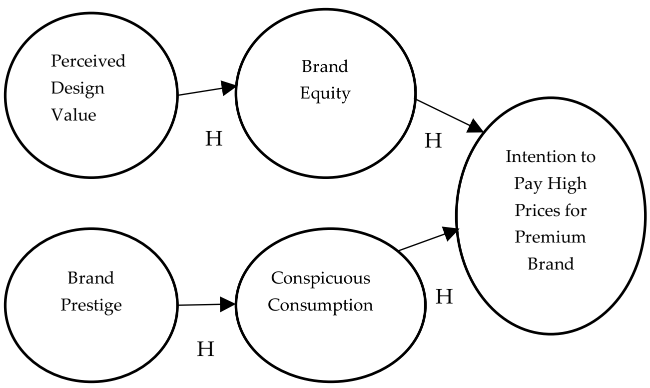


Figure 1. Research Model

Research Findings

Descriptive Statistics

Data were collected from 426 participants in the study. It was aimed to reach the general population with participants with an average age of 35 and from various education levels and professional groups. The question about age was asked open-ended and then categorized. The table below shows demographic data of the participants.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants at Baseline

Baseline characteristic	n	%	Baseline characteristic	n	%
Marital Status			**Gender**		
Single	284	66,7	Female	270	63.4
Married	142	33.3	Male	156	36.6
Highest Education Level			**Age**		
Primary School	5	1.2	17-25	37	8.7
High School	29	6.8	26-34	176	41.3
University	243	57	35-38	104	24.4
Master	81	19	39-68	109	25.6
Doctorate	68	16	**Employement**		
Income (TL)			Not employment	33	7.74
0-9999	22	5.1	Academic	90	21.1
10000-15000	53	12.4	Student	23	5.39
15001-25000	90	21.1	Teacher	49	11.5
25001-35000	137	32.2	Public Sector	28	6.57
35001-50000	110	25.8	Business Owner	16	3.75
50001-100000	11	2.6	Private Sector	182	42.7
100000>	1	0.2	Retired	5	1.17

Note: N = 426. Participants were on average 35.1 years old (SD = 8.2).

As seen in the table above, 66% of the participants are single and 57% are university graduates. More than half of the participants (57%) earn between 25000 and 50000 TL, which can be defined as middle income in Türkiye. 65% of the participants are young people between the ages of 26-38, and 42% work in the private sector.

Table 2 shows premium brands and product categories. Participants were asked about their most preferred premium brand products with an open-ended question. The obtained answers were categorized.

Table 2. Most Expressed Premium Brands and Product Categories By Participants

Brand name	n	Category	n
Apple	110	Smart Phone	119
Volvo	8	Clothing	118
Zara	7	Organic Health Products	73
Mercedes	6	Automobile	61
Samsung	26	Vacation-travel	30
Nike	7		
Mavi	8		
Audi	8		
Adidas	8		

As seen in the table above, the most preferred premium brand by the participants is Apple. The premium product category most preferred by the participants is smartphones.

Discriminant Validity

Correlation, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE) and square root of AVE were calculated to test the structural validity of the model. The table below shows the findings of the structural validity analysis.

CR values of the structural model are above the recommended value of 0.70 (Hair & Alamer, 2022; Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and AVE values are above the recommended value of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Premium Brands

Variable	CR	AVE	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Perceived Design Value	0.886	0.612	5.2312	1.24630	**0.782**				
2 Premium Price	0.918	0.788	3.8443	1.85851	0.385**	**0.887**			
3 Brand Equity	0.896	0.684	4.6312	1.78536	0.418**	0.584**	**0.827**		
4 Brand Prestige	0.903	0.757	5.3521	1.44282	0.488**	0.426**	0.483**	**0.870**	
5 Conspicuous Consumption	0.904	0.614	3.0227	1.63704	0.287**	0.532**	0.408**	0.345**	**0.783**

*Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.*

As a result of the analyzes carried out to test the structural validity of the research model, it is seen that validity is achieved.

In addition, the correlation values are significantly correlated among all dimensions and the square roots of AVE are higher than the correlation values.

Table 4. Results From a Factor Analysis of Premium Brands Questionnaire

Item	EFA					CFA	
	1	2	3	4	5	Std. β	t-val.
Factor 1: Conspicuous Consumption (α= 0.901)	*Total Variance Explained: 37.471*						
Snob2: I prefer to purchase premium products with such limited production that their users are truly exclusive and unique.	**0.859**	0.244	0.371	0.280	0.442	0.907	28.971
Snob1: I prefer to purchase premium products that are hard to find and that only a few people can afford.	**0.856**	0.222	0.387	0.298	0.486	0.913	
Snob3: I prefer to purchase premium products that have just been launched and are currently only known and valued by a small circle of people.	**0.838**	0.225	0.373	0.337	0.427	0.863	26.061
Bandwagon1: I prefer to purchase premium products that people I admire and value are already using.	**0.754**	0.138	0.328	0.274	0.368	0.670	16.477
Bandwagon2: I like to have the same things that famous people have.	**0.733**	0.120	0.285	0.247	0.420	0.623	14.801
Bandwagon3: I intend to purchase a premium product that everyone will approve of, which is very popular and very trendy at the moment.	**0.636**	0.225	0.303	0.305	0.445	0.537	12.133
Factor 2: Perceived Design Value (α= 0.877)	*Total Variance Explained: 12.720*						
Aesthetics2: Premium Product has good appearance.	0.170	**0.905**	0.235	0.366	0.276	0.911	23.536
Aesthetics3: Premium Product looks attractive.	0.211	**0.845**	0.245	0.432	0.272	0.883	22.554
Aesthetics1: Premium Product is visually appealing.	0.189	**0.804**	0.260	0.388	0.261	0.833	
Function1: Premium Product is likely to perform well/capable of doing its job.	0.125	**0.710**	0.400	0.384	0.284	0.645	14.471
Function2: Premium Product is functional.	0.193	**0.612**	0.440	0.350	0.310	0.537	11.543
Symbolic1: Premium Product will help me create a distinctive image.	0.450	**0.581**	0.436	0.446	0.391	0.571	12.423
Factor 3: Brand Equity (α= 0.898)	*Total Variance Explained: 7.714*						
Equity2: I prefer to purchase brand A even if there is another brand with the same features as brand A.	0.380	0.317	**0.909**	0.430	0.527	0.905	18.555
Equity1: It makes sense to purchase brand A instead of another brand even if it is the same.	0.380	0.308	**0.833**	0.475	0.499	0.846	17.398
Equity3: I would prefer to purchase brand A even if there is another brand that is as good as brand A.	0.430	0.288	**0.827**	0.350	0.522	0.837	17.200
Equity4: If another brand is not different from brand A in any way, it seems smarter to purchase brand A.	0.268	0.386	**0.730**	0.451	0.456	0.735	
Factor 4: Premium Price (α=.915)	*Total Variance Explained: 5.433*						
Price3: I am willing to pay much more for brand A than I pay for other brands.	0.334	0.421	0.480	**0.900**	0.371	0.934	29.628
Price2: I am willing to pay a higher price for brand A than for other brands.	0.335	0.466	0.413	**0.894**	0.353	0.907	
Price4: I am willing to pay 50% more for brand A than others	0.306	0.426	0.447	**0.814**	0.425	0.815	22.913
Factor 5: Brand Prestige (α=.901)	*Total Variance Explained: 4.048*						
Prestige2: People I care about have VERY positive opinions about brand A.	0.506	0.345	0.568	0.422	**0.949**	0.908	21.977
Prestige3: People I care about believe that brand A has a GOOD reputation.	0.467	0.372	0.617	0.413	**0.890**	0.895	21.682
Prestige1: People I care about believe that brand A is a reputable brand.	0.539	0.271	0.463	0.342	**0.820**	0.813	

Note: N = 426. EFA: The extraction method was principal axis factoring with an oblique (Promax with Kaiser Normalization) rotation. KMO: 0.896, Barletts Test of Sphericity: Chi-Square: 6801.84, df: 231, sig: 0.000. CFA: $\chi 2$: 526.3, df: 196, p: 0.000, $\chi 2$/df: 2.685, GFI: 0.900, CFI: 0.952, RMSEA: 0.063, RMR: 0.281, NFI: 0.926, IFI: 0.953.

Factor Analysis

Explanatory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to test the factor validity of the research model. Since the factors discussed were brought together for the first time and adapted from English to Turkish, explanatory factor analysis was applied. Then, confirmatory factor analysis was applied to test the validity of the factors. Finally, reliability was analyzed with the Cronbach Alpha test. The Table 4 shows the findings of factor and reliability analyses.

As a result of the exploratory factor analysis, a five-factor structure emerged as initially designed. One variable each from the dimensions of intention to pay high prices for the premium product and perceived design value was excluded from the analysis as their factor loadings were below 0.50. In confirmatory factor analysis, the standardized regression weights of all factors were above 0.50. The compatibility values of the confirmatory factor analysis were close to or above the recommended values.

Hypothesis Testing with Structural Equation Modeling

Structural equation modeling was applied using the AMOS program to test the research model. Structural equation modeling fit values are close to the recommended values.

Perceived design value has a significant positive effect on brand equity (ß = 0.350***, t = 7.367). Brand equity has a significant positive effect on the intention to pay high prices for premium brands. Brand prestige has a significant positive effect on conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption has a significant positive effect on the intention to pay high prices for premium brand.

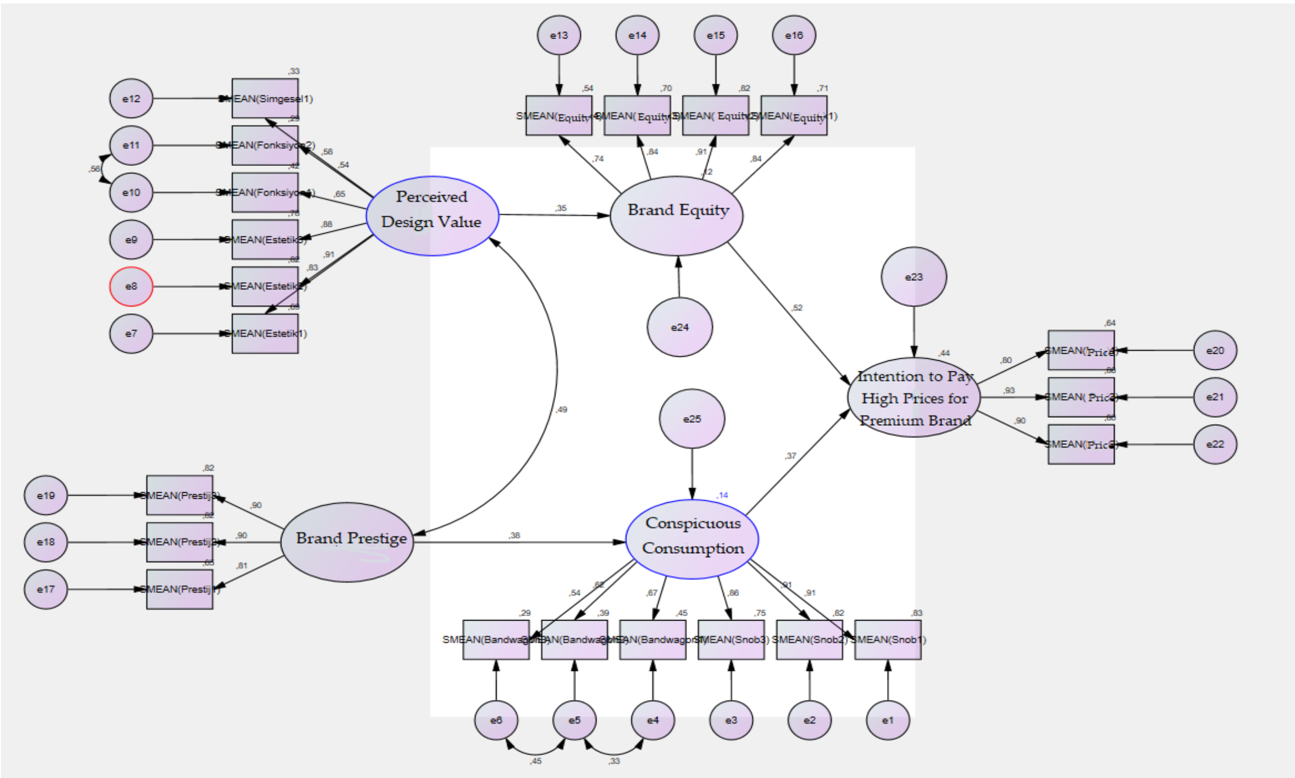


Figure 2. The structural equation model

According to the analysis findings, all hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4) were accepted. In addition, VIF and tolerance values were checked to check whether there was a multicollinearity problem. VIF and tolerance values were found to be within the recommended values.

Table 5. Structural Equation Model Coefficients and Hypothesis Acceptance/Rejection Statuses

Hypotesis	Path Coefficients β	ϱ-Value	Hypotesis Confirmed
H1: Perceived design value positively affects brand equity.	0.114	0.000	YES
H2: Brand Prestige positively affects conspicuous consumption.	0.379	0.000	YES
H3: Conspicuous consumption positively affects the intention to pay high prices for premium brands.	0.369	0.000	YES
H4: Brand equity positively affects the intention to pay a high price for a premium brand.	0.523	0.000	YES

*Note: **:p< 0.000, Cmin/df: 3.211, p: 0.000 RMR: 0.527, GFI: 0.877, CFI: 0.936*

ANOVA Analysis

One-way ANOVA analysis was used to test whether the variables used in the study varied between groups. With ANOVA analysis, it was examined whether all dependent and independent variables differed according to education and income. Since there were no distinguishing differences in other demographic variables, analyzes were not included. In the analyes, no difference was found according to the income of the participants. There was a difference in the participants' intention to pay premium price according to their education level. The table below shows the results of the ANOVA analysis.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study shows the effect of brand equity and conspicuous consumption on the intention to pay high prices for premium branded products. Premium brands create brand knowledge, likability, love, and attachment grounded in prestige and build strong brand equity (Paul, 2019). Stronger brand equity contributes to increased brand preference, willingness to pay higher prices and customer loyalty (Aaker, 1991). Brand equity is the effect of the brand's associations on the consumer's impressions. For example, quality, design, taste, etc. are distinctively pleasant. Symbolic meaning, on the other hand, is the psychological impact of the brand on the consumer with its intangible features. For example, it is distinctive in the emotions it evokes in the consumer, such as prestige, uniqueness, mass relevance, etc. In this study, symbolic meaning was investigated specifically in the context of conspicuous consumption. It was revealed that conspicuous consumption was affected by the perception of the brand as prestigious. Brand equity, on the other hand, was found to be affected by the high value perception of the brand’s design.

When the demographic findings of the participants were examined, it was determined that the participants were at the beginning of middle age, university graduates and from the middle income group. According to demographic findings, the research sample is the representative of the potential customer mass of premium branded products.

Table 6. Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Education Levels

Scale	High school		University		Master’s Degree		Doctorate		F	η^2(eta²)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Intention to pay premium price	3.28	1.79	3.76	1.91	3.62	1.80	4.65	1.55	4.436**	0.038

*Note: ** p<0.002*

According to the results of ANOVA analysis, a significant difference was found between doctorate graduates and high school and university graduates. Doctorate graduates have higher averages for the premium payment intention variable compared to the others.

The scales used in the study were compiled from the literature and brought together, and then the research model was created. Tests were conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the research model. Structural model results show that there is a strong relationship between brand equity, conspicuous consumption and intention to pay high prices for premium branded products.

There is a significant and positive direct relationship between brand equity and intention to pay high prices for premium branded products. This result is in line with similar studies in the literature (Ailawadi et al., 2003; Huang & Sarıgollu, 2014; Abdullah et al., 2018). The interpretation of the finding is that high brand equity reduces consumers' sensitivity to the price. Consumers are willing to pay more for premium branded products to which they attach high value. For example, a consumer's preference for a premium branded phone or automobile that is priced higher than its counterparts with similar features indicates brand equity. Consumers are willing to pay more in exchange for more functional benefits. Design is an important factor that adds value to the brand in products that are mostly standardized with their content and usage. This result is compatible with studies in the literature (Mishra, 2016; Meng & Bari, 2019).

There is a significant and positive relationship between conspicuous consumption and the intention to pay high prices for premium branded products. This result is in line with other studies in the literature (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005; Lee & Mori, 2016). Conspicuous consumption refers to purchases made for indicating wealth and status. The only way for consumers to achieve these two goals is to purchase high-priced products. In line with the research finding, the increase in prices due to the increase in conspicuous consumption is explained by the relationship between the individual and society. Consumers organize their relations with society through the products they purchase. They prefer prestigious products or brands in order to positively affect the society or the environment in which they live. This result is similar to the studies in the literature (Acikalin et al., 2009).

Finally, it was examined whether there was a change in the intention to pay high prices for premium branded products according to individual-specific conditions such as education level and income. According to the results of the study, a significant difference was found between doctorate graduates and high school and university graduates. It was determined that doctorate graduates had higher averages for the premium payment intention variable compared to the others. It is thought that this result is due to the fact that doctorate graduates have the highest status among the participants in the study. For example, it is estimated that if there was a sample that did not have dotorate graduates but was predominantly senior executives, the average of this group would be higher. As a result, those seeking high status are willing to pay more, and this group consists of people with a certain level of occupation, income or education.

The study offers a unique value to the literature by addressing brand equity and conspicuous consumption together. Both factors explain the high price of the product. There is no study in the literature that deals with the direct relationship between these two factors and price together. In addition, conducting this study during the economic recession period brings this study to the forefront in terms of both theoretical and practical contribution. The relationship between conspicuous consumption and price in economic recession is frequently mentioned in the literature. This study has managerial implications for pricing premium branded products with high brand equity in economic recession. This study is limited to brand equity and conspicuous consumption in the pricing of premium branded products. Future studies may examine the pricing of premium branded products under other factors such as brand engagement.

References

Aaker, D. A. (1991). Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name. Retrieved December 8, 2023, from https://www.inovaconsulting.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/managing-brand-equity-by-david-aaker.pdf.

Abdullah, M. I., Sarfraz, M., Arif, A., & Azam, A. (2018). An extension of the theory of planned behavior towards brand equity and premium price. *Polish Journal of Management Studies, 18* (1), 20-32.

Acikalin, S., Gul, E., & Develioglu, K. (2009). Conspicuous consumption patterns of Turkish youth: case of cellular phones. *Young Consumers, 10* (3), 199-209.

Ahearne, M., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Gruen, T. (2005). Antecedents and consequences of customer-company identification: expanding the role of relationship marketing. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90* (3), 574-585.

Ailawadi, K. L., Lehmann, D. R., & Neslin, S. A. (2003). Revenue premium as an outcome measure of brand equity. *Journal of Marketing, 67* (4), 1-17.

Amaldoss, W., & Jain, S. (2005). Pricing of conspicuous goods: a competitive analysis of social effects. *Journal of Marketing Research, 42* (1), 30-42.

Ang, S. H. (2001). Personality influences on consumption: insights from the Asian economic crisis. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing, 13* (1), 5-20.

Arvidsson, A. (2006). *Brands meaning and value in media culture.* London and New York: Routledge.

Bagwell, L. S., & Bernheim, B. D. (1996). Veblen effects in a theory of conspicuous consumption. *The American Economic Review, 86* (3), 349-373.

Bindra, S., Sharma, D., Parameswar, N., Dhir, S., & Paul, J. (2022). Bandwagon effect revisited: a systematic review to develop future research agenda. *Journal of Business Research, 143*, 305-317.

Bougenvile, A., & Ruswanti, E. (2017). Brand equity on purchase intention consumers' willingness to pay premium price juice. *IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance, 8* (1), 12-18.

Brewer, M. B. (2003). Optimal distinctiveness, social identity, and the self. *Handbook of self and identity* (Editors: M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney). New York: The Guilford Press, 480-491.

Cambridge Dictionary (2024). Heuristics. Retrieved March 31, 2024, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/heuristics?q=Heuristics.

Chenavaz, R. Y., & Eynan, A. (2021). Advertising, goodwill, and the Veblen effect. *European Journal of Operational Research, 289* (2), 676-682.

Cherry, K (2023). Bandwagon Effect as a Cognitive Bias Examples of How and Why We Follow Trends. Retrieved March 31, 2024, from https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-the-bandwagon-effect-2795895.

Christodoulides, G., & Chernatony, L. de (2009). Consumer-based brand equity conceptualisation and measurement: a literature review. Retrieved April 1, 2024, from https://publications.aston.ac.uk/id/eprint/31795/1/Consumer_based_brand_equity_conceptualizations_and_measurement.pdf.

Dall'lmo Riley, F., Pina, J. M., & Bravo, R. (2015). The role of perceived value in vertical brand extensions of luxury and premium brands. *Journal of Marketing Management, 31* (7-8), 881-913.

Dolfsma, W. (2000). Life and times of the Veblen effect. *History of Economic Ideas, 8* (3), 61-82.

Doyle, P. (1990). Building successful brands: the strategic options. *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 7* (2), 5-20.

Erdem, T., & Swait, J. (1998). Brand equity as a signalling phenomenon. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 7* (2), 131-157.

Erdem, T., Swait, J., & Louviere, J. (2002). The impact of brand credibility on consumer price sensitivity. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 19* (1), 1-19.

Farquhar, P. H. (1989). Managing brand equity. *Marketing Research, 1*, 24-33.

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobserved variable and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research, 18* (1), 39-50.

Godey, B., Manthiou, A., Pederzoli, D., Rokka, J., Aiello, G., Donvito, R., & Singh, R. (2016). Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: influence on brand equity and consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research, 69* (12), 5833-5841.

Hair, J., & Alamer, A. (2022). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in second language and education research: guidelines using an applied example. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics, 1* (3), 100027.

Hamilton, D., & Tilman, R. (1983). Conspicuous consumption: a study of exceptional consumer behavior. *Journal of Economic Issues, 17* (3), 791-799.

Henshel, R. L., & Johnston, W. (1987). The emergence of Bandwagon effects: a theory. *Sociological Quarterly, 28* (4), 493-511.

Ho, C., & Murphy, C. (2020). A little happiness goes a long way: how to grow a premium brand during a recession. Retrieved November 26, 2023, from https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2020-07/growing-a-premium-brand.pdf.

Homburg, C., Schwemmle, M., & Kuehnl, C. (2015). New product design: concept, measurement, and consequences. *Journal of Marketing, 79* (3), 41-56.

Huang, R., & Sarigollu, E. (2014). Assessment of brand equity measures. *International Journal of Market Research, 56* (6), 783-806.

Jara, M., & Cliquet, G. (2012). Retail brand equity: conceptualization and measurement. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 19* (1), 140-149.

Jasiulewicz, A. (2012). Economic crisis influence on the polish consumer. Behavior. *Overcoming the crisis: economic and financial developments in Asia and Europe* (Editors: Š. Bojnec, J. C. Brada & M. Kuboniwa). Koper: University of Primorska Press, 77-88.

Kapferer, J.-N. (1994). *Strategic brand management: new approaches to creating and evaluating brand equity* (Translator: P. Gibbs). New York: Free Press.

Kastanakis, M. N. (2010). Explaining variation in luxury consumption. Retrieved December 6, 2023, from https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/42628699.pdf.

Keasbey, L. M. (1903). Prestige value. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 17* (3), 456-475.

Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing, 57* (1), 1-22.

Kelley, H. H., & Michela, J. L. (1980). Attribution theory and research. *Annual Review of Psychology, 31* (1), 457-501.

Kim, D., & Jang, S. S. (2014). Motivational drivers for status consumption: A study of Generation Y consumers. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 38*, 39-47.

Kim, J., Bang, H., & Campbell, W. K. (2021). Brand awe: a key concept for understanding consumer response to luxury and premium brands. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 161* (2), 245-260.

Koç, N., & Armut, Ş. (2022). Ekonomik kriz: pandemi döneminde tüketici davranışları. *Journal of Management Theory and Practices Research, 3* (2), 129-139.

Kosicka-Gębska, M., & Gębski, J. (2013). Impact of economic crisis on consumer behaviour towards meat. *Oeconomia, 12* (3), 51-59.

Kotler, P. & Keller, K. L. (2012). Marketing management. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., Prentice Hall.

Kuwashima, Y. (2016). Structural equivalence and cohesion can explain bandwagon and Snob effect. *Annals of Business Administrative Science, 15* (1), 1-14.

Lai, T. C., Hsieh, C. L., & Ku, E. (2022). The gorgeous brand: understanding consumer' conspicuous consumption for luxury tourism products. *Journal of Tourism and Services, 13* (24), 108-127.

Lastovicka, J. L., Bettencourt, L. A., Hughner, R. S., & Kuntze, R. J. (1999). Lifestyle of the tight and frugal: theory and measurement. *Journal of Consumer Research, 26* (1), 85-98

Lee, K. O., & Mori, M. (2016). Do conspicuous consumers pay higher housing premiums? spatial and temporal variation in the United States. *Real Estate Economics, 44* (3), 726-763.

Leibenstein, H. (1950). Bandwagon, Snob, and Veblen effects in the theory of consumers' demand. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 64* (2), 183-207.

Levitan, L. C., & Verhulst, B. (2016). Conformity in groups: the effects of others' views on expressed attitudes and attitude change. *Political Behavior, 38* (2), 277-315.

Lim, X. J., Cheah, J. H., Ngo, L. V., Chan, K., & Ting, H. (2023). How do crazy rich Asians perceive sustainable luxury? Investigating the determinants of consumers' willingness to pay a premium price. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 75*, 103502.

Malakhov, S. (2012). Veblen effect, search for status goods, and negative utility of conspicuous leisure. Retrieved December 6, 2023, from https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/40809/1/MPRA_paper_40809.pdf.

Mallinson, D. J., & Hatemi, P. K. (2018). The effects of information and social conformity on opinion change. *PLoS ONE, 13* (5), e0196600.

Mansoor, M., & Paul, J. (2022). Mass prestige, brand happiness and brand evangelism among consumers. *Journal of Business Research, 144*, 484-496.

Marangoz, M., & Uluyol, O. (2010). Küresel ekonomik krizin tüketicilerin harcama ve tasarruf eğilimleri üzerine etkilerinin belirlenmesine yönelik bir araştırma. *Muhasebe ve Finansman Dergisi*, (45), 82-96.

Mark, T., Southam, C., Bulla, J., & Meza, S. (2016). Cross-category indulgence: why do some premium brands grow during recession?. Retrieved November 26, 2023, from https://cabcattle.com/wp-content/uploads/JBM-article-2016-Tanya-Mark.pdf.

Meng, Y., & Bari, M. W. (2019). Design perceptions for 3d printed accessories of digital devices and consumer-based brand equity. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 2800.

Mishra, A. (2016). Attribute-based design perceptions and consumer-brand relationship: role of user expertise. *Journal of Business Research, 69* (12), 5983-5992.

Netemeyer, R. G., Krishnan, B., Pullig, C., Wang, G., Yagci, M., Dean, D., Ricks, J., & Wirth, F. (2004). Developing and validating measures of facets of customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Business Research, 57* (2), 209-224.

NIQ (2016). Deeper than dollars: global perceptions about premium product. Retrieved December 6, 2023, from https://nielseniq.com/global/en/insights/analysis/2016/deeper-than-dollars-global-perceptions-about-premium-products/#:~:text=High%2Dquality%20materials%20or%20ingredients%20are%20the%20most%20commonly%20selected,(50%25%20and%2045%25%2C.

Noble, C. H., & Kumar, M. (2008). Using product design strategically to create deeper consumer connections. *Business Horizons, 51* (5), 441-450.

O'Cass, A., & Frost, H. (2002). Status brands: examining the effects of non-product-related brand associations on status andconspicuous consumption. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 11* (2), 67-88.

Omar, N. A., Nazri, M. A., Ali, M. H., & Alam, S. S. (2021). The panic buying behavior of consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic: Examining the influences of uncertainty, perceptions of severity, perceptions of scarcity, and anxiety. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *62*, 102600.

Paul, J. (2019). Masstige model and measure for brand management. *European Management Journal, 37* (3), 299-312.

Pepall, L., & Reiff, J. (2016). The "Veblen" effect, targeted advertising and consumer welfare. *Economics Letters, 145*, 218-220.

Rae, J. (1905). The sociological theory of capital: being a complete reprint of the new principles of political economy, 1834 (Editor: C. W. Mixter). New York and London: The Macmillan Company.

Saladino, V., Algeri, D., & Auriemma, V. (2020). The psychological and social impact of covid-19: new perspectives of well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*, 577684.

Saruchera, F., & Mthombeni, L. (2023). Antecedents to the conspicuous consumption of luxury fashion brands by middle-income black South Africans. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal, 27* (6), 944-964.

Schmitt-Beck, R. (2015). Bandwagon effect. Retrieved December 6, 2023, from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/9781118541555.wbiepc015.

Spry, A., Pappu, R., & Cornwell, T. B. (2011). Celebrity endorsement, brand credibility and brand equity. *European Journal of Marketing, 45* (6), 882-909.

Statista Research Department (2023). By country revenue of prestige cosmetics and fragrances market worlwide in 2022. Retrieved December 6, 2023, from https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1238727/country-revenue-of-prestige-cosmetics-and-fragrances-market-worldwide.

Stępień, B. (2018). Snobbish bandwagoners: ambiguity of luxury goods' perception. *Journal of Management and Business Administration. Central Europe, 26* (1), 79-99.

Suárez, E., Hernández, B., Gil-Giménez, D., & Corral-Verdugo, V. (2020). Determinants of frugal behavior: the influences of consciousness for sustainable consumption, materialism, and the consideration of future consequences. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*, 567752.

The Economist (2023). Is the luxury sector recession-proof?. Retrieved December 16, 2023, from https://www.economist.com/business/2023/06/01/is-the-luxury-sector-recession-proof.

Tor Kadıoğlu, C., & Yağcı, M. İ. (2021). Gösterişçi tüketimin ve motivasyonlarının yaş kuşakları ekseninde incelenmesi. *Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi, 8* (1), 479-507.

Torrance, E. P. (1968). A theory of psychological reactance by Jack W. Brehm. *The American Journal of Psychology, 81* (1), 133-134.

Tsai, W. S., Yang, Q., & Liu, Y. (2013). Young Chinese consumers' Snob and Bandwagon luxury consumption preferences. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing, 25* (5), 290-304.

Urbonavicius, S., & Pikturniene, I. (2010). Consumers in the face of economic crisis: evidence from two generations in Lithuania. Retrieved November 18, 2023, from https://etalpykla.lituanistika.lt/object/LT-LDB-0001:J.04~2010~1367178123347/J.04~2010~1367178123347.pdf.

Uzgoren, E., & Guney, T. (2012). The snop effect in the consumption of luxury goods. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 62*, 628-637.

Veblen, T. (1899). *The theory of the leisure class: an economic study of institutions.* New York: B. W. Huebsch.

Vigneron, F., & Johnson, L. W. (1999). A review and a conceptual framework of prestige-seeking consumer behavior. *Academy of Marketing Science Review,* (1), 1-15.

Voinea, L., & Filip, A. (2011). Analyzing the main changes in new consumer buying behavior during economic crisis. *International Journal of Economic Practices and Theories, 1* (1), 14-19.

Wolter, J. S., Brach, S., Cronin Jr., J. J., & Bonn, M. (2016). Symbolic drivers of consumer brand identification and disidentification. *Journal of Business Research, 69* (2), 785-793.

Yoo, B., Donthu, N., & Lee, S. (2000). An examination of selected marketing mix elements and brand equity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 28* (2), 195-211.

Yu, Y., Zhou, X., Wang, L., & Wang, Q. (2022). Uppercase premium effect: the role of brand letter case in brand premiumness. *Journal of Retailing, 98* (2), 335-355.

Yürük, P. (2010). Kriz dönemlerinde tüketicilerin satın alma davranışlarındaki değişiklikler: Edirne ilinde bir uygulama. Master's Thesis, Trakya University, Institute of Social Sciences, Edirne.

Zeithaml, V. A. (1988). Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: a means-end model and synthesis of evidence. *Journal of Marketing, 52,* 2-22.

Zhang, W., Leng, X., & Liu, S. (2023). Research on mobile impulse purchase intention in the perspective of system users during COVID-19. *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing, 27,* 665-673.

Received Date: 13 January 2024 I Accepted Date: 25 May 2024

OPUS
Journal of Society Research

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effect of Ethical Climate and Organizational Control Mechanisms on Work Engagement: A Research in the Civil Aviation Sector*

Emre Durmazpınar[1] I Fatih Yıldırım[2]

[1] Lecturer, Erzincan Binali Yıldırım Univerity, Erzincan/Türkiye
ORCID: 0009-0007-9550-682X
E-Mail: emre.durmazpinar@erzincan.edu.tr

[2] Assoc. Prof., Erzurum Technical University, Erzurum/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-3149-8791
E-Mail: fatih.yildirim@erzurum.edu.tr

Corresponding Author: Emre Durmazpınar

May 2024
Volume:21
Issue:3
DOI: 10.26466/opusjsr.1419217

Citation:
Durmazpınar, E. & Yıldırım, F.. (2024). The effect of ethical climate and organizational control mechanisms on work engagement: A research in the civil aviation sector. *OPUS– Journal of Society Research, 21*(3), 175-188.

* The first author's master's thesis was used in this study.

Abstract

It is observed that the aviation sector plays an important role in the increase of international trade to Turkiye. In addition, the aviation industry offers important benefits in terms of sustainable development, social, political, environmental, and economic factors. In particular, as a service sector, the success of the aviation industry is mainly due to human resource efforts. Employees who are committed to their work and even engaged going beyond are therefore considered to make an important contribution to their organisations. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine how ethical climate and organizational control mechanisms affect work engagement. In this direction, data were collected from 387 employees working in an airline company, which is the most valuable brand of Turkey, through a questionnaire. The results of the regression analyses conducted show that the ethical climate dimensions, especially the benevolence and principledness climate dimensions, have a significant and positive impact on work engagement, while the egoistic climate has a significant and negative impact. On the other hand, organisational control dimensions, especially input control and behavioral control, were found to have a significant and positive impact on work engagement. Output control, on the other hand, did not have a significant impact on work engagement. Thus, the importance of the climate of benevolence or principledness to be created in organisations operating in the aviation sector has emerged.

Keywords: *ethical climate, control mechanisms, work engagement, aviation sector.*

Öz

Havacılık sektörünün, Türkiye'ye yönelik uluslararası ticaretin artışında önemli bir rol üstlendiği görülmektedir. Bunun yanı sıra havacılık sektörü sürdürebilir kalkınma, sosyal, politik, çevresel ve ekonomik unsurlar arasında da son derece önemli avantajlar sağlamaktadır. Özellikle hizmet sektörü olarak değerlendirildiğinde havacılık sektörünün başarısı insan kaynağının çabasında gizlidir. Bu nedenle işine bağlı hale gelmiş hatta ötesine geçerek işine angaje olmuş çalışanların örgütlerine önemli katkılar sunacağı düşünülmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu araştırmada etik iklim ve örgütsel kontrol mekanizmalarının işe angaje olmayı nasıl etkilediğini belirlemek amaçlanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda Türkiye'nin en değerli markası olan bir hava yolu şirketinde çalışan 387 personelden anket yoluyla veri toplanmıştır. Yapılan regresyon analizlerin sonuçlarına göre etik iklimin alt boyutlarından yardım severlik iklimi ve ilkelilik iklimi işe angaje olmayı anlamlı ve olumlu olarak etkilerken egoist iklim anlamlı ve olumsuz olarak etkilemektedir. Diğer yandan örgütsel kontrol mekanizmalarının alt boyutlarından girdi kontrolü ve davranışsal kontrolün işe angaje olmayı anlamlı ve olumlu olarak etkilediği tespit edilmiştir. Çıktı kontrolü ise işe angaje olmayı anlamlı olarak etkilememiştir. Böylece havacılık sektöründe faaliyet gösteren örgütlerde oluşturulacak yardım severlik iklimi veya ilkelilik ikliminin önemi ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Etik iklim, örgütsel kontrol mekanizmaları, işe angaje olmak, havacılık sektörü.*

Introduction

The aviation business has grown to be significant for both guaranteeing travel freedom and transferring cultures internationally. In the global market, the ideas of mobility, speed, and competition are crucial. Mobility of production factors has also become important for global competition. This mobility is made possible by the aviation sector. The expansion of international trade, the significance of the transportation industry, and the advancement of capital mobility have all contributed to the significant rise of the aviation sector. Research aimed at improving the efficacy and efficiency of companies in this industry is therefore necessary. The achievements of its human resources are what make the aviation industry successful, particularly when viewed as a service sector. For this situation, it is thought that employees who are committed to their jobs and even go beyond their jobs will make significant contributions to their organizations. This study was conducted to develop a model with a few independent variables on how to create an organizational climate that promotes work engagement. The goal is to ascertain how organizational control systems and the ethical climate impact employee engagement.

Job engagement is defined as a person's dedication and physical, cognitive, and emotional commitment to his/her job (Kahn, 1990). On the other hand, it defines the employee's commitment to the organization and the job, and the joy and motivation he feels while doing his job (Özer et al., 2015). Individuals that put a lot of effort into their work believe that the things they do are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful. They are proud of the work they love (Arslan and Demir 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to create an atmosphere that attracts those who work in the aviation business, which is a service industry. As per Kahn's (1990) findings, enhancing work engagement necessitates concentrating on how individuals' work environment experiences, which mirror the psychological, social, and cultural factors impacting individuals' lives or groups' collective experiences, influence their individual participation. In this sense, it is believed that the ethical atmosphere will foster a social and psychological milieu that will raise employee engagement levels.

An organization's ethical climate, according to Victor and Cullen (1988), is made up of the collective views of its ethical content, its comprehension of its general operations, and its personnel regarding how to handle ethical issues. Every organization has a unique ethical climate since every organization is structured differently. An organization benefits from having an ethical climate since it directs the organization's decision-making process. Because of this, the organization's ethical culture is crucial to its continued existence and financial success. Determining and characterizing issues within the organization is largely dependent on the development of an ethical viewpoint. In actuality, an ethical climate directs managers during the decision-making process and allows them to view events and circumstances from many angles (Johnson, 2006). Consequently, it is believed that in workplaces where there is a positive perception of an ethical climate, employee engagement would increase.

The implementation of an internal control system serves as a means of guaranteeing the successful execution of the tasks assigned to the board of directors, managers, and other staff within the organization. The internal control system consists of the guidelines established by an organization's management to prevent mistakes, fraud, and shortcomings by conducting business in a wholesome manner (Aslan, 2010). An environment's employees are one of the supporting components that shapes ethical values. For instance, none of a company's employees—especially those in management—should act in an illegal or immoral manner at work. Since the aforementioned ethical value is one of the elements that directly influences the effectiveness and performance of the company (Kayapalı Yıldırım, 2017). This can be accomplished by applying control mechanisms correctly. Thus, it is crucial to understand how organizational control mechanisms impact employee engagement at work. There is a lack of research in the aviation industry about the relationship between control systems and the ethical climate and employee engagement. Therefore, it is thought that this research will contribute to the literature.

The significance of the study's findings is increased by the fact that international high-level authorities have established certain regulations for the civil aviation industry. Thus, the goal of the research is to assess how organizational control mechanisms and an ethical climate affect employees' work engagement in the civil aviation industry.

Literature Review

Ethical Climate

The idea of ethics is now more important than ever because the complexity of values are one of today's most complicated topics. The term "ethics," which has been used for over 2500 years, comes from the Greek word "ethos" (Brickley et al., 2002, p.1821). The system of beliefs, customs, and guidelines that specify what constitutes appropriate behaviour for each individual is referred to as ethics (Ural, 2003, p.3). A disciplined and guiding philosophy that defines good and bad, along with moral values, principles, theories, and standards of behaviour that represent the most appropriate forms of behaviour in the field of individual, group, and professional work regarding moral duties and responsibilities, is what is meant to be understood when one refers to ethics, also known as the science of morality (Kayapalı and Karabey, 2017). According to the Turkish Language Association's definition, ethics is a science that encompasses all moral conduct that members of various professional organizations are expected to uphold or refrain from (TLA, 2023). Ethics assesses whether a behaviour is right in terms of obligation, necessity, morality, goodness, and consent. It is composed of moral judgement and moral behaviour. The goal of ethics is to increase people's understanding so they can build a moral foundation for their lives, not to force them to adopt activities or behaviours that are universally approved (Ural, 2003, p.7). The individual acts on his own volition (Doğan, 2009, p.180).

The term "ethical climate" has been defined in a variety of ways in the literature. A subcategory of work climate is the idea of an ethical climate. However, it is important to discuss the definition of the term "work climate" before defining the term "ethical climate." The idea of "work climate" in this context refers to how employees identify and interpret the policies and practices of the company they work for on a psychological and collective level. Activities and procedures carried out within an organization reveal different types of climate (Schneider, 1975, p.474).

If the methods and processes that employees of the organization accept in various organizational climates have an ethical element, then this might explain the ethical working climate. Organizational procedures and practices that have moral ramifications are generally included in an ethical climate. Employees in this situation need to uphold moral principles and behave morally in all of their decisions and—above all—have to believe in these principles and behaviours in order to foster an ethical workplace culture. On the other hand, the concept of ethical climate can also be seen as a means of assessing and analysing the ethical circumstances present in an organization. Members of an organization are informed about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour by the ethical climate of the organization. Ethical climate is a form of business climate that reflects an organization's activities and methods that have ethical implications, an understanding of what constitutes good behavior. When individuals inside an organization see these as guidelines and conventions that the organization uses to make choices, an atmosphere like this develops. The organization's ethical framework, which is a component of its organizational culture, is reflected in the ethical climate. In this situation, staff members are aware of the moral climate of the company they work for and may provide hints or justifications that are improper for both the company and the individual (Akbaş, 2010, p.122).

Dimensions of Ethical Climate

The "ethical theory" of benevolence, egoism, and principledness is included in the first dimension of the model, which was created by Victor and Cullen in 1988. Individual, local, and universal notions are included in the second dimension, "Locus of Analysis". Nine distinct moral climates can be identified by categorising these two factors. These are expressed as friendship, individual interest, personal morality, Company benefit, efficiency, team interest/common interest, rules and procedures, social responsibility and laws and professional codes (Table 1).

Table 1: Theoretical Model of Ethical Climate Matrix

		LOCUS of ANALYSIS		
		Individual	Local	Cosmopolitan
ETHICAL THEORY	Egoism	Self interest	Company Benefit	Efficency
	Benevolence	Friendship	Team Interest	Social Responsibility
	Principle	Personal Morality	Company Rules and Procedures	Laws and Professional Codes

In this context, the following explanations apply to the principles included in the Victor and Cullen (1988) model's framework of ethical theory:

- ***Egoistic Climate:*** Egoism is an attitude based on personal interest. Within the egoistic climate outlined in Victor and Cullen's model, managers or staff members of businesses consider their personal interests. People prioritise their own interests in such a work atmosphere. When an organizations and commercial interests collide with one another, the organization's and business's interests are disregarded (Victor and Cullen, 1988, p.102). In an environment like this, managers and staff become less committed to the company since they are more focused on their personal goals.
- ***Benevolence Climate:*** Showing consideration for other staff members above oneself is a sign of benevolence. According to the model created by Victor and Cullen (1988), a climate type is any location where a moral environment is either maintained or present and where staff members assist and encourage one another both inside and outside the company. Employees consider the company's interests as a whole rather than just their own in such a setting. They care about the organization's or its members' interests, thus even if they are dissatisfied because they are unaware of their own interests, they are conscious of a certain ethical climate. Employees in companies with such an ethical culture tend to be more cooperative and united. All of these behaviours foster a good environment in people, which increases the frequency of well-intentioned actions and—more importantly—improves the capacity to act swiftly in response to threats both inside and outside the company (Cullen et al., 2003, p.130).
- ***Principle Climates:*** Managers or staff members make choices in compliance with the rules, regulations, and laws of their own organizations, in line with the principle climate in the Victor and Cullen (1988) model. When it comes to organizational decision-making procedures, this will take precedence. Employees at organizations that uphold these principles define and behave in accordance with their ethical convictions.

The analytical level dimension, which is the second dimension of the model created by Victor and Cullen (1988), acts as a guide in making ethical decisions. Victor and Cullen created an analytical level of measurement inspired by sociological theory. From a sociological perspective, people make decisions based on two criteria: the definition of character and the rules of behaviour of other groups. Victor and Cullen (1988) created three distinct locus of analysis in response to this circumstance. The individual level of analysis is the first of these aspects. According to this, organizations are able to use individual-level norms as a source and base their decisions on moral standards. The local level of analysis is the second dimension. According to this, the organization views the social system's rules as its resources. External norms are acknowledged as organizational resources in the last and third dimension, which is represented as the cosmopolitan level of analysis (Barnett and Vaicys, 2000, p.354).

Engagement in Work

There is no clear definition in the international literature regarding the concept called work engagement or work dedication in Turkey. The phrases "passion," "dedication," "seduction," "integration," "sincere commitment," and "attract-tion" are used when referring to the concept of commitment in the context of business (Turgut, 2011, p.156; Bal, 2009, p.548). A person's physical, mental, and emotional commitment to their work is a manifestation of their work engagement (Kahn, 1990, p.694). Work commitment refers to an employee's enthusiasm and drive for his work as well as his dedication to the company and the job (Özer et al., 2015, p.265). Individuals that put a lot of effort into their job believe that the things they do are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful. The work they enjoy is something they are proud of (Arslan & Demir 2017, p.374).

Nowadays, good organizational behaviour concepts are starting to appear more frequently in the literature due to changes in managerial attitudes. The idea of good behaviour arose in place of examining negative notions related to management. Researchers have focused on the idea of work engagement in this context because it is thought of as the positive opposite of Freudenberger's definition of burnout (Güzel & Uyar, 2019, p.45). It is emphasized in the literature that the concept of employment, which increases productivity at national, organizational, and individual levels, is known as a relatively new concept (Ravikumar, 2013, p.177).

The idea of gainful employment was first proposed in the early 1990s by the American research and consulting firm Gallup, according to Schaufeli (2012). It is said, nonetheless, that this is a novel idea in science and industry and that the topic is becoming more and more contentious. It was estimated that it would take 10 years for the idea of job engagement to be academically explained and to produce a valid and reliable measuring instrument in Schaufeli's study (Schaufeli, 2012, p.4).

It is evident from the framework of issues influencing employment that concerns impacting job commitment can be either individual or organizational in character. People's decisions at work are influenced by their mental health, physical conditions, societal ideals, and cultural viewpoints. Personal commitment may be structured at the individual level in the following ways: local managers or those involved in setting up a work environment assess the value of their job to each individual employee and cultivate a favourable perception of it. Consequently, every facet of the employee's development is encouraged. Their dedication to their job will also make them feel appreciated.

According to Attridge (2009), the decisive elements include the employee's optimism for the future, his perception that he can handle work-related responsibilities, his favourable attitudes towards the job, and its relevance. On the other hand, the definition of commitment is an employee's enthusiastic and productive involvement in the organization's job. Due to inefficient use of their time, personal energy, and care, unemployed people are unable to get the desired organizational gain (Ardıç & Polatçı, 2009, p.24). Conversely, those who demonstrate initiative and actively engage in the organization's activities advance the organization's goals (Güzel & Uyar, 2019, p.45). Burnout is a term that has been closely linked to the development of job engagement and is frequently viewed as a bad organizational behaviour. However, because it contradicts the idea of professional involvement, the concept of burnout has gained popularity (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Maslach and Leither's (1997) research created a work engagement model to prevent burnout in the workplace. Fatigue, which forms the basis of the concepts of emotional exhaustion, low personal performance, and depersonalization in the work engagement model, is evaluated as the opposite of the concepts of energy, competence, and belongingness in the work concept.

Organizational Control Mechanisms

Systems for management and control operations should be advantageous to all organizations so that their operations can advance in line with their objectives. All organizations, no matter how big or little, may observe the effects of their actions and take the appropriate measures because of these technologies, which allow them to run the business appropriately without losing their managerial abilities. Businesses may alter their operations, structure, or maintenance of the "control" function—one of the most crucial aspects of managerial functions—as the process progresses. These alterations may give control the appearance of being a professional procedure that is conducted on a regular basis. Internal control systems inside the company carry out this process, which includes the control function (Tuan and Memiş, 2007, p.87).

The tasks listed under this heading include putting top managers' rules and guidelines into practice across the organizations and implementing safety measures to avoid mistakes and hazards that might impede the achievement of the objective. Many distinct control actions are needed to accomplish this, including permission, verification, balance control, performance monitoring, maintaining values, and responsibility separation. Every type of company and every hierarchy categorization uses this approach. Apart from this system, many other systems have been set up with the intention of guiding the business and keeping an eye on these systems (Kaval, 2005, p.217). The activities of the internal control mechanism are divided into four groups. These are task separations, information processing, physical controls, and success controls (Kaval, 2005, p.128). The primary goal of the internal control mechanism's operations is to shield the company from various losses. In actuality, a wide range of control actions may be used by firms to get rid of risks that pose a danger to their performance.

Method of Research

First, the research model and hypotheses are outlined in this section. In addition, the scope of the research, how the data were collected and how the collected data were analyzed were revealed. Finally, the research findings obtained from the analysis of the data are included. An ethics committee report was received from Erzurum Technical University for this research.

Model of Research and Hypotheses

Work engagement was taken into consideration as an outcome in this study. As a result, the impact of organizational control mechanisms and an ethical climate on employee engagement at work is investigated. The following figure illustrates the conceptual relationships between the independent and dependent variables of the study model.

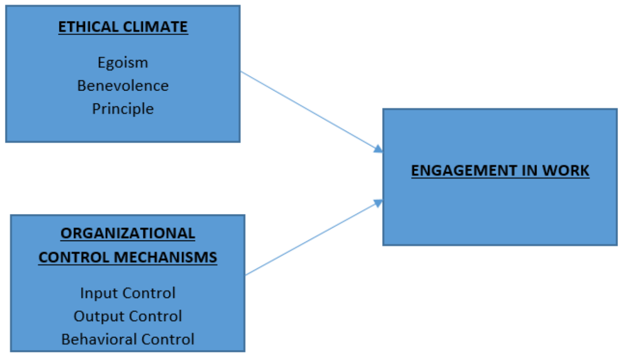


Figure 1. Conceptual Relationships Between Variables Included in the Research

The following hypotheses were formed in light of the opinions stated above:

H1: Work engagement is affected by an egoistic climate.

H2: Work engagement is impacted by a benevolence climate.

H3: Work engagement is impacted by principle climate.

H4: Work engagement is impacted by input control.

H5: Work engagement is impacted by output control.

H6: Work engagement is impacted by behavioural control.

Research's Limitations and Scope

The information utilised in this study came from a survey given to employees of a company that, as of 2023, is among the major airlines in Turkey. Before the survey was administered to the airline where the research would be conducted, it was informed that the data obtained as a result of the statements in the survey would be used in accordance with the purpose of the research and was assured that it would not be shared with any institution or organization. The main limitation of this study is its focus on employees inside a solitary airline.

Method Followed in Collecting Data and Data Collection Tool

In the research, a research and measurement method based on quantitative data was adopted and a survey was used as a data collection technique. While creating the questionnaire, theoretical and empirical academic publications on ethical climate, control mechanisms and work engagement were examined, and the scales used were selected from scales that had been used in previous studies and demonstrated high reliability and validity. Nonetheless, all of these scales were created in English originally. Therefore, in order to remove any potential issues brought about by cultural differences, the scales must first be translated into Turkish before being modified to our language. The scales were translated from English into Turkish for this purpose, then back into English, and language specialists assessed if the scales' expressions varied in the context of other cultures. It has been noted that no expression has been rendered meaningless or altered by translation. To further ensure the validity of the measures, explanatory and confirmatory factor analyses were carried out. The dependability of the results was then examined using Cronbach Alpha values. Cronbah Alpha values were found as Engagement in work 0,784, ethical climate 0,894 and control mechanisms 0,903. All values are within the desired limits (Durmazpınar, 2023).

There are four sections of the questionnaire that was utilised in the study. The employees' demographic information (gender, age, marital status, income level, total working hours, and management level) is asked about in the first part. A scale of 19 statements is used in the second section to measure the ethical climate. A scale with eighteen statements is included in the third part to measure organisational control systems. A scale with six statements that measure the degree of work involvement is included in the fourth part.

Organizational Ethics Climate Scale: The scale was taken from the research of Kayapalı Yıldırım and Karabey (2017), who adapted it from the study conducted by Victor and Cullen in 1988. The ethical climate types that are frequently seen in organisations were categorised by Victor and Cullen as egoistic, benevolent, and principled climates in their ethical climate model, and this is how they were used in our study. The Likert type scale has five points: 1 for strongly disagreeing and 5 for strongly agreeing.

The Scale of Organisational Control Mechanisms: The 5-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree - 5: strongly agree) was adopted by Kayapalı Yıldırım (2019) from a research done by Snell in 1992 to examine organizational control systems. Three sub-dimensions make up the scale: behavioural control, output control, and input control.

Work Engagement Measure: Özkalp and Meydan (2015) translated the Work Engagement Scale, which was created by Schaufeli and Bakker in 2003, into Turkish. Another 5-point Likert scale (1 being extremely poor and 5 being very good). In our study, the scale was assessed as a single dimension.

Population and Sample

The primary participants in this study are the employees of an airline that, as of 2023, is among the biggest in both Turkey and the globe. Surveys were used to gather data from employees as part of the investigation. It is estimated that the firm under consideration employs 75,000 people in total. The sample size to be selected from this research population was determined as 380, with a margin of error of 5% within 95% confidence limits (Surveysystem, 2023). The sample was chosen using random sampling techniques. A survey was sent to all 450 employees, and 395 of those questionnaires yielded feedback. After eliminating incorrect or incomplete answers, 387 surveys were included in the analysis.

Findings

Findings Concerning the Participants' Demographic Features

Findings pertaining to the research participants' demographic distribution are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that women constitute 29.6% of study participants, while males constitute 70.4%. In terms of participant age distribution, it can be observed that 9.6% of participants are between the ages of 23 and 30, 52.5% are between the ages of 31 and 38, 31.5% are between the ages of 39 and 46, and 6.4% are between the ages of 47 and older. When looking at the participant distribution based on marital status, it is evident that 40.8% of them are single and 59.2% of them are married. Taking into account how the participants were distributed in terms of the total number of working period,

Table 2. Distribution of Demographic Characteristics of Employees

Variable	Cathegory	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	272	70,4
	Female	115	29,6
Age	23-30	37	9,6
	31-38	203	52,5
	39-46	122	31,5
	47 and older	25	6,4
Marital Status	Single	158	40,8
	Married	229	59,2
Working Life	0-5 years	29	7,5
	6-10 years	61	15,8
	11-15 years	135	34,9
	16-20 years	129	33,3
	21 and more	33	8,5
Level of Income	5.000 TL - 10.000TL	33	8,5
	10.001 TL -15.000 TL	52	13,4
	15.001 TL – 20.000 TL	135	34,9
	20.001 TL – 25.000 TL	99	25,6
	25.001 TL and more	68	17,6
Manager	Yes	84	21,7
	No	303	78,3
Total		**387**	**100**

7.5% had worked for 0–5 years, 34.9% for 11–15 years, 33.3% for 16–20 years, 15.8% for 6–10 years, and 7.5% for It is evident that he has worked for at least 21 years. By taking into account the participants' income status distribution, the following groups are represented: 13.4% in 10,001 TL - 15,000 TL, 34.9% in 15,001 TL - 20,000 TL, 25.6% in 20,001 TL - 25,000 TL, 17.6% in 25,001 TL and above, and 8.5% in 5,000 TL - 10,000 TL.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The standardised loading values related to the confirmatory factor analysis applied to the scale of being engaged at work are presented in Figure 2.

When the factor loadings in Figure 2 were analysed, it was determined that there was no item below 0.30 and the factor loadings were within acceptable limits. Confirmatory factor analysis fit indices for the engagement scale are presented in Table 3.

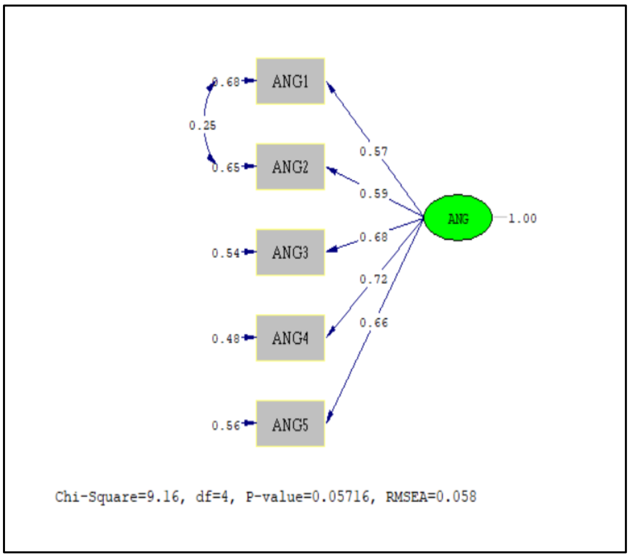


Figure 2. Factor Loadings of Being Engaged in Work Scale

The standardised loading values related to the confirmatory factor analysis applied to the ethical climate scale are presented in Figure 3.

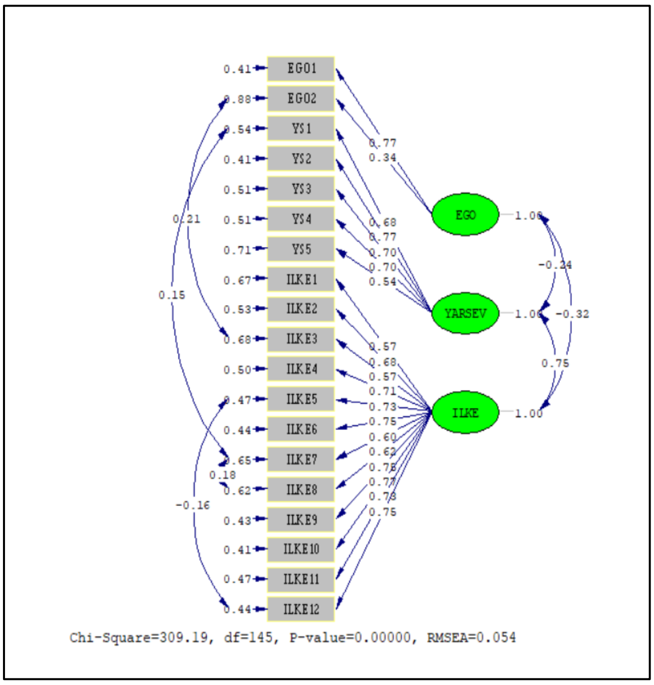


Figure 3. Ethical Climate Scale Factor Loadings

When the factor loadings in Figure 3 were analysed, it was determined that there was no item below 0.30 and the factor loadings were within acceptable limits. Confirmatory factor analysis fit indices for the Ethical Climate scale are presented in Table 3.

The standardised loading values related to the confirmatory factor analysis applied to the control mechanisms scale are presented in Figure 4.

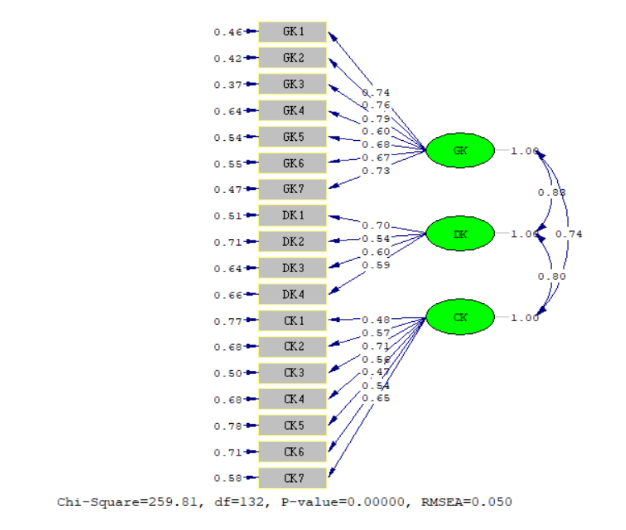


Figure 4. Control Mechanisms Scale Factor Loadings

When the factor loadings in Figure 4 were analysed, it was determined that there was no item below 0.30 and the factor loadings were within acceptable limits. Confirmatory factor analysis fit indices for the control mechanisms scale are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Fit Indices of Variables

Indices	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit	Engagement in Work	Ethical Climate	Control Mechanisms
χ2/sd	0≤χ2/sd ≤ 2	2≤χ2/sd ≤ 3	2,29	2,13	1,96
RMSEA	0,00 ≤ RMSEA ≤ 0,05	0,05 ≤ RMSEA ≤ 0,08	0,058	0,054	0,050
GFI	0,95 ≤GFI ≤ 1	0,90 ≤ GFI ≤0,95	0,99	0,92	0,93
AGFI	0,90 ≤ AGFI ≤ 1	0,85 ≤ AGFI ≤0,90	0,96	0,90	0,91
CFI	0,97 ≤ CFI ≤ 1	0,95 ≤ CFI ≤ 0,97	0,99	0,98	0,98
NFI	0,95 ≤ NFI ≤ 1	0,95 ≤ NFI ≤0,97	0,99	0,97	0,96
NNFI	0,97 ≤ NNFI ≤ 1	,90 ≤ NNFI ≤ 0,95	0,98	0,98	0,98

Source: *Celik & Yılmaz, 2013*

According to Table 3, χ2/sd , RMSEA, GFI, AGFI, CFI, NFI and NNFI index values of all variables are compatible.

Findings Regarding the Relationship Between Variables

The Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to ascertain the correlations between the variables, and the findings are shown in Table 4.

According to Table 4, Egoistic climate has a weak negative relationship with the variables of Benevolence (r= -,155, p<0.05), Principle (r= -,187, p<0.05), Input Control (r= -,251, p<0.05), Behavioral Control (r= -.183, p<0.05), Output Control (r= -.181, p<0.05) and Work Engagement (r= -.217, p<0.05). Benevolence has a moderate positive relationship with the variables of Principle (r= ,671, p<0.05), Input Control (r= ,629, p<0.05), Behavioral Control (r= ,545, p<0.05), Output Control (r= ,563, p< 0.05) and Being Engaged in Work (r=,537, p<0.05). Principle has a moderate positive relationship with the variables of Input Control (r= .704, p<0.05), Behavioral Control (r= .644, p<0.05), Output Control (r= .532, p<0.05) and Work Engagement (r= .631, p <0.05). Input Control has a moderate positive relationship with the variables of Behavioral Control (r= ,651, p<0.05), Output Control (r= ,611, p<0.05) and Work Engagement (r= ,678, p<0.05). Behavioral Control has a moderate positive relationship with the Output Control (r= .593, p<0.05) and Work Engagement (r= .550, p<0.05) variables. Output control has a moderate positive relationship with the variable of engagement in work (r= .496, p<0.05).

Table 4: Analysis of Correlation

	Variable	$\bar{x}$	Std.D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Egoist	2,5207	,90097	1						
2	Benevolence	3,5504	,73873	-,155	1					
3	Principle	3,7991	,74692	-,187	,671	1				
4	Input Control	3,9144	,79396	-,251	,629	,704	1			
5	Behavioral Control	3,7080	,76328	-,183	,545	,644	,651	1		
6	Output Control	3,6829	,61373	-,181	,563	,532	,611	,593	1	
7	Work Engagement	3,8982	,67500	-,217	,537	,631	,678	,550	,496	1

Regression Analyzes

Analysing the Impact of Principle, Benevolence and Egoistic Factors on the Engagement Variable

The findings of the regression analysis pertaining to the influences of egoistic, benevolence, and principle factors on work engagement are shown in Table 5.

According to the information presented in Table 6, $R^2 = 0.484$ was obtained. According to this value, the independent variables can explain the dependent variable, engagement, by 48%. Since the p values obtained for the input control and behavioral control variables are < 0.05, it appears that the input control and behavioral control variables have an effect on engagement. Therefore, the relevant hypotheses were accepted.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Results on the Effect of Egoist, Benevolence and Principle Variables on Work Engagement

Independ. Variables	Depend. Variables	Non-stand. B	Stand. β	t	F	R^2	ΔR^2	p
Egoist		-,073	-,097	-2,463				,014
Benevolence	**Engagem. in work**	,184	,202	3,881	96,453	,430	,426	,000
Principle		,431	,477	9,121				,000

In accordance with the data in Table 5, $R^2 = 0.430$. This number indicates that a 43% explanation of the dependent variable, engagement, can be provided by the independent factors.

Since the p values obtained for the output control variable are > 0.05, it appears that the output control variable does not have an effect on engagement.

Table 6. Regression Analysis Results on the Effect of Input Control, Behavioral Control and Output Control on Work Engagement

Independ.Variables	Depend. Variables	Non-stand. B	Stand. β	t	F	R^2	ΔR^2	p
Input Control		,446	,524	10,080				,000
Behavioral Control	**Engagem. in Work**	,142	,161	3,139	119,579	,484	,480	,002
Output Control		,088	,080	1,637				,102

The results show that the factors of egoistic, benevolence, and principle have an impact on involvement (p values 0.00 < 0.05). As a result, the pertinent theories were approved. Examining standardised β data reveals that 0.477 is the biggest beta coefficient. This result indicates that the primary variable is the independent variable that contributes most to the dependent variable when the effects of the other variables in the model are held constant. The principle variable makes the most contribution, followed by benevolence. For the egoist, the standardised β value found is negative. As a result, the dependent variable of work engagement is negatively impacted by the egoist variable.

Table 6 presents the regression analysis results regarding the effects of input control, behavioral control, and output control on work engagement.

When standardized β values are examined, the largest beta coefficient is 0.524. This obtained value shows that when the effect of other variables in the model is kept constant, the independent variable that makes the strongest contribution to the dependent variable is input control.

Table 7. Results of Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis	Results
H_1: Egoistic climate negatively affects work engagement.	*Accepted*
H_2: Benevolence climate positively affects work engagement.	*Accepted*
H_3: Principle climate positively affects work engagement.	*Accepted*
H_4: Input control positively affects work engagement.	*Accepted*
H_5: Output control positively affects work engagement.	*Denied*
H_6: Behavioral control positively affects work engagement.	*Accepted*

Discussion and Conclusion

For this study, which was conducted to determine the effect of ethical climate and organizational control mechanisms on work engagement, data was collected through a survey technique on 387 employees of a company that is one of the largest airline companies in Turkey and the world. The general results obtained by analyzing the collected data are as follows: the average of the egoistic climate, one of the sub-dimensions of ethical climate, was 2.52, the average of the benevolence climate was 3.55, and the average of the principle climate was 3.79. While the level of egoistic climate was low, the averages of benevolence and principle climate were high. Among the sub-dimensions of organizational control mechanisms, the mean of input control was found to be 3.91, the mean of output control was 3.68 and the mean of behavioral control was 3.70. In general, the average of control mechanisms is high. The average of job engagement was found to be 3.89. The high average for this concept, which is considered positive within the organizational structure, is a positive situation for the airline company.

When we look at the averages of the egoistic climate, the averages of the statements "In the institution where I work, people look out for their own interests more than other issues" and "In this institution, people mostly look out for their own interests" are quite low at the level of 2.5. This shows that the egoistic climate is low in the organization. On the other hand, the level of expressions related to benevolence, such as "People in the institution where I work, care for and want each other's well-being", "The most important issue in the institution where I work is to take care of everyone's benefit", "In the institution where I work, it is always aimed to act in accordance with the benefit of the employees", is above average. It shows that the benevolence climate in the institution is above average, although not very high. When we look at the principledness climate, the statements such as "In the organization where I work, whether a decision is in accordance with the law or not is the most important evaluation criterion", "The organization where I work expects its employees to comply with the laws and professional standards first and foremost", "In the organization where I work, employees are expected to strictly comply with legal or professional standards", "In the organization where I work, laws or professional ethical rules are the most fundamental issues that are taken into consideration" and similar statements are the statements with the highest level within the ethical climate and well above the average. It is expected that the climate of principledness is high for an airline. The reason for this can be explained as the obligation to comply with the standards imposed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). This obligation may have turned into a culture and climate over time.

When the averages of control mechanisms are analyzed, input control statements such as "Managers receive the necessary training before assuming responsibility", "They make great efforts to establish the best employment procedures", "Managers have developed job-related skills after years on the job", "Individuals must undergo a series of evaluations before being hired" are above average. In addition, statements belonging to output control such as "In performance appraisal, comparison with predetermined targets is made", "Quantitative evidence is used as the main determinant of performance", "The difference in salaries between employees shows the difference in their performance" are also above average. Statements related to behavioural control such as "Behaviours are primarily evaluated when evaluating the performance of employees", "Employees are held responsible for their own activities (what they do) regardless of the consequences", "Employees are evaluated according to certain procedures and methods", "Managers and all employees consult with each other when work-related standards are to be set" were high. Again, civil aviation authorities (ICAO) may have provided airline companies with a structure that directs internal control processes towards standardized practices.

When we look at the level of engagement of the employees, the averages of the statements such as "I feel strong and vigorous while doing my job", "I feel the desire to go to work when I wake up in the morning", "My job gives me enthusiasm", "My job inspires me", "I am proud of what I do" are quite high. This situation shows that employees love their jobs, are committed and passionate about their jobs and work in a positive environment.

Egoistic climate directly, significantly, and negatively affected the level of engagement. The higher the level of egoistic climate in which there are employees who are more concerned about their own interests, the lower the level of passion of employees who feel strong and vigorous while doing their job, who have the desire to go to work when they wake up in the morning, whose work inspires and inspires them, and who are proud of their work. Employees who are in constant conflict and harmful stress may get tired of competition and struggle and lose their passion for their work.

Benevolence climate has a direct, significantly, and positive effect on the level of work engagement. The higher the level of benevolence climate, in which the people in the organization look out for each other's well-being, especially for the benefit of everyone, the higher the level of employees who are engaged and passionate about their work. Compliance enables employees to appreciate their organizations. In addition, ethical climate is appreciated not only by employees but also by customers (Müjdelen et al., 2012).

Principle climate directly, significantly, and positively affected the level of engagement in work. The level of employees who are engaged and passionate about their work increases as the climate increases in organizations that are the most important evaluation criterion whether a decision in the organization is in accordance with the law or not, that expect compliance with laws and professional standards above all, that fulfil legal or professional standards and that take into account professional ethical rules. Yaldıran (2010) found a significant positive relationship between the variable of dedication to work and the variable of ethical climate. According to this, the existence of an organization’s value system increases work engagement. This may be caused by the fact that ethical standards eliminate uncertainty (Müjdelen et al., 2012). The fact that the principles are clear leads to the recognition of the standards for the employees, and the uncertainty that is eliminated ensures engagement in the work.

Many researchers such as Trevinno, Butterfield, and McCabe (1998), Schwepker and Hartline (2005) have found a relationship between organizational commitment and ethical climate. According to the research conducted by Ambrose, Arnaud, and Schminke (2007), job satisfaction has a strong relationship with ethical climate.

Although the relationship between output control and level of engagement was significant in the correlation analysis, no significant relationship was found in the regression analysis. On the other hand, input control had a direct, significant, and positive effect on the level of engagement. The higher the level of input control, in which managers receive the necessary training before assuming responsibility, the best employment procedures are established, and managers develop their job-related skills after years on the job, the higher the level of employees who are engaged and passionate about their work. Yu and Wai (2008) found that organizational control systems play a regulatory role in labour performance. Skilful managers who keep their expertise up to date through training, as well as assessment control systems applied when hiring skillful and suitable employees, can ensure that employees are passionate about their work. Agency theory suggests that more control mechanisms can be designed to align the interests of agents with those of principals. Specifically, Ouchi (1979) pointed out that selection and training have a socialising effect that aligns individuals' goals with their organizations (Ng, 2000; Snell and Youndt, 1995). According to the results of the empirical research conducted by You and Wai (2008), input control was found to be an important factor in creating positive organizational changes and there was an interaction between task characteristics in terms of programmed knowingness and capacity for improvement in organizational development.

Behavioural control directly, significantly, and positively affected the level of work engagement. The higher the characteristics of behavioural control, in which behaviours are primarily evaluated while evaluating the performance of employees, employees are held responsible for their own activities (what they do), employees are evaluated according to certain procedures and methods, managers and all employees consult with each other when job-related standards are to be set, the higher the level of employees who are engaged and passionate about their work. According to You and Wai (2008), in order to develop a strategy for human resources, it is necessary to understand the nature of the task before designing the type of control. To improve performance, behaviour-based control is achieved through better work. This can lead to employee engagement.

References

Akbaş, T. (2010). Örgütsel etik iklimin örgütsel bağlılık üzerindeki etkisi: Mobilya sanayi büyük ölçekli işletmelerinde görgül bir araştırma. *Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Ekonomik Araştırmalar Dergisi*, *12*(19), 121-137.

Ambrose M., A. Arnaud & M. Schminke (2007). Individual moral development and ethical climate: The influence of person-organization fit on job attitudes, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 77, 323-333.

Ardıç, K. & Polatçı, S. (2009). Tükenmişlik sendromu ve madalyonun öbür yüzü: İşle bütünleşme. *Erciyes Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 32, 21-46.

Arslan, E. T. & Demir, H. (2017). İşe angaje olma ve iş tatmini arasındaki ilişki: Hekim ve hemşireler üzerine nicel bir araştırma. *Celal Bayar Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 24(2), 371-389.

Aslan, B. (2010). Bir yönetim fonksiyonu olarak iç denetim. *Sayıştay Dergisi*, 77, 63-86.

Attridge, M. (2009). Measuring and managing employee work engagement: A review of the research and business literature. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 24, 383-398.

Bal, E. A. (2009). Bir pozitif psikoloji kavramı olarak işe gönülden adanma (work engagement) ve insan kaynakları açısından önemi. *Osmangazi Üniversitesi 17. Ulusal Yönetim ve Organizasyon Bildiri Kitabı*, 546-552.

Barnett, T. & Vaicys, C. (2000). The moderating effect of individuals' perceptions of ethical work climate on ethical judgments and behavioral intentions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 27(4), 351-362.

Brickley, J. A., Clifford, W., Smith, Jr. & Zimmerman, J. L. (2002). Business ethics and organizational architecture. *Journal of Banking and Finance*, 26, 1821-1835.

Cullen, J. B., Parboteeah, K. P. & Victor, B. (2003). The effects of ethical climates on organizational commitment: A two-study analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 46(2), 127-141.

Çelik, H. E., & Yılmaz, V. (2013). *Yapısal eşitlik modellemesi temel kavramlar uygulamalar programlama.* Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık.

Doğan, N. (2009). İş etiği ve işletmelerde etik çöküş. *Sosyal Ekonomik Araştırmalar Dergisi,* 8(16), 179-200.

Durmazpınar E. (2023). *Etik iklim ve örgütsel kontrol mekanizmalarının işe angaje olmak üzerine etkisi: Sivil havacılık sektöründe bir araştırma.* Erzurum Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi.

Güzel, Ş. & Uyar, S. (2019). İşe angaje olma kavramı, tükenmişlik ile ilişkisi ve sonuçları. *Sosyal Araştırmalar ve Yönetim Dergisi*, 1(1), 44-52.

ICAO. (2023). International *civil aviation organization: about ICAO*. https://www.icao.int.

Johnson, E. C. (2006). *Ethics in the workplace: Tools and tactics for organizational transformation.* California: Sage Publications.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal,* 33(4), 692-724.

Kaval, H. (2005). *Uluslararası finansal raporlama standartları uygulama örnekleri ile muhasebe denetimi.* Ankara: Gazi Kitapevi.

Kayapalı Yıldırım S. (2019). *Etik iklim ve örgütsel kontrol mekanizmalarının sanal kaytarma davranışı üzerindeki etkisinde örgütsel sinizmin aracılık rolü,* (Ed. Canan Nur Karabey). Ankara: Gece Akademi.

Kayapalı Yıldırım S. & Karabey C.N. (2017). Etik iklim ve örgütsel kontrol mekanizmalarının sanal kaytarma davranışı üzerindeki etkisinde örgütsel sinizmin aracılık rolü. *Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi,* 4(11), 556-594.

Maslach, C. & Leiter, P. M. (1997). *The truth about burnout.* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Müjdelen Yener, Miray Yaldıran & Sinem Ergun (2012). The effect of ethical climate on work engagement. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 58, 724-733.

Ng, P.W.K. (2000). *Control mechanisms of human resources management: The perspectives of senior executives in international joint ventures in the people's Republic of China,* PhD thesis, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Ouchi, W.G. (1979). A conceptual framework for the design of organizational control mechanisms. *Management Science*, 25(9), 833-848.

Özer, Ö., Saygılı, M. & Uğurluoğlu, Ö. (2015). Sağlık çalışanlarının işe cezbolma düzeylerinin belirlenmesine ilişkin bir araştırma. *Business and Management Studies: An International Journal*, 3(3), 261-272.

Özkalp E & Meydan P. (2015). Schaufeli ve Bakker tarafından geliştirilmiş olan işe angaje olma ölçeğinin Türkçede güvenilirlik ve geçerliliğinin analizi. *İş, Güç Endüstri İlişkileri ve İnsan Kaynakları Dergisi*, 17(3), 04-19.

Ravikumar, T. (2013). A study on impact of team work, work culture, leadership and compensation on engagement level of employees in MSMEs in India. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences,* 2(8), 175-185.

Schaufeli W. & Arnold B. (2003). *UWES utrecht work engagement scale* http://www.beanmanaged.com/doc/pdf/arnoldbakker/articles/articles_arnold_bakker_87.pdf, Erişim Tarihi: 13. 02. 2023

Schaufeli, W. B. (2012). Work engagement what do we know and where do we go? *Romanian Journal of Applied Psychology*, 14(1), 3-10.

Schaufeli, W. B. & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 25(3), 293-315.

Schneider, B. (1975). Organizational climates: An essay. *Personal Psychology*, 28, 447–479.

Schwepker Jr C.H. & M.D. Hartline (2005). Managing the ethical climate of customer-contact service employees. *Journal of Service Research*, 7, 377-397.

Snell, S.A. & Youndt, M.A. (1995), Human resource management and firm performance: Testing a contingency model of executive controls. *Journal of Management*, 21(4), 711-37.

Snell, Scot A. (1992). Control theory in strategic human resource management: The mediating effect of administrative information. *Academy of Management Journal*, 35(2), 292-327.

Surveysystem (2023). https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm Erişim Tarihi: 05.05.2023

TDK. (2023). *Güncel Türkçe sözlük.* www.tdk.gov.tr. Erişim Tarihi: 05.03.2023

Trevi–o L.K., K.D. Butterfield & D.L. McCabe (1998). The ethical context in organizations: influences on employee attitudes and behaviors. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 8, 447-476.

Tuan, K. A. & Memiş, M. Ü. (2007). İç denetimin yönetim fonksiyonlarının yerine getirilmesindeki rolü. *Muhasebe ve Finans Dergisi*, 35, 87-99.

Turgut, T. (2011). Çalışmaya tutkunluk: İş yükü, esnek çalışma saatleri, yönetici desteği ve iş-aile çatışması ile ilişkileri. *Atatürk Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi,* 25(3-4), 155-179.

Ural, T. (2003). *İşletme ve pazarlama etiği*. Ankara: Deta Yayınları.

Victor, B. & Cullen, J. B. (1988). The organizational bases of ethical work climates. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 33, 101-125.

Yaldıran Miray (2010). *The effect of ethical climate on work engagement*. Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 1-137.

Yu, Tat Wai, Billy & Wai Ming, To (2008). Effects of control mechanisms on positive organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management,* 21(3), 385 – 404.

Received Date: 23April 2024 I Accepted Date: 29 May 2024

OPUS
Journal of Society Research

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Relationship Between Object Relations and Relationship Satisfaction, Marital Adjustment, and Sexual Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Narcissistic and Borderline Personality Traits

Sait Kahraman[1] I Emel Aner Aktan[2]

[1] Asst. Prof. Dr. İstanbul Topkapı University, İstanbul/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-9615-2855
E-Mail: saitkahraman@topkapi.edu.tr

[2] Asst. Prof. Dr. Nişantaşı University, İstanbul/Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-6781-9171
E-Mail: emel.a.aktan@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Sait Kahraman

May 2024
Volume:21
Issue:3
DOI: 10.26466/opusjsr.1472521

Citation:
Kahraman, S.. & Aner Aktan, E.. (2024). The relationship between object relations and relationship satisfaction, marital adjustment, and sexual satisfaction: The mediating role of narcissistic and borderline personality traits *21*(3), 189-203.

Abstract

The aim of this study was to elucidate the psychological dynamics of marital relationships, which are among the most significant structures of society. The purpose of research was to examine the mediating roles of borderline and narcissistic personality traits in the relationship between object relations and marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. The study group consisted of adult individuals aged 18 and older. Of the total 809 participants, 407 (50.3%) are female and 402 (49.7%) are male, all of whom are married. 320 participants are in the 18-30 age range, 318 are in the 31-45 age range, and 171 are 45 years old and above. Marriage Adjustment Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSS), Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale (GRSS) Female-Male Form, Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI), Borderline Personality Inventory, and Narcissistic Personality Inventory were used as data collection instruments in the study. The data were analyzed using SPSS 27 program. Pearson Correlation Test and Process Macro 4.2 analysis methods were used. According to the research findings, a negative relationship was found between object relations and relationship satisfaction, marital adjustment, and sexual satisfaction. A positive relationship was identified between object relations and borderline and narcissistic personality traits. Furthermore, negative relationships were found between borderline and narcissistic personality traits and marital adjustment, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction. Finally, the mediation analyses conducted within the framework of the main purpose of the research, determined that object relations significantly predicted relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and marital adjustment, borderline and narcissistic personality traits partially mediated this relationship. Thus, the proposed model was supported.

Keywords: *Object Relations, Relationship Satisfaction, Marital Harmony, Sexual Satisfaction, Narcissistic Personality, Borderline Personality.*

Öz

Bu çalışma toplumun en önemli yapılarından biri olan evlilik ilişkilerine dair psikolojik dinamikleri açıklamayı hedeflemiştir. Araştırmanın amacı nesne ilişkileri ile evlilik uyumu, ilişki doyumu ve cinsel doyum arasındaki ilişkide borderline ve narsistik kişilik özelliklerinin aracı rollerinin incelenmesidir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu 18 yaş ve üstü yetişkin bireyler oluşturmaktadır. Tümü evli olan 809 katılımcının 407'si kadın (%50,3), 402'si (%49,7) erkektir. Katılımcıların 320' si 18-30, 318' i 31-45 ve 171' I 45 ve üzeri yaş aralığındadır. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak Evlilikte Uyumu Ölçeği, İlişki Doyumu Ölçeği (İDÖ), Golombok- Rust Cinsel Doyum Ölçeği (GRCD) Kadın- erkek Formu, Bell Nesne İlişkileri ve Gerçeği Değerlendirme Ölçeği (BORRTI), Borderline Kişilik Envanteri ve Narsistlik Kişilik Envanteri kullanılmıştır. Veriler, SPSS 27 programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Pearson Korelasyon Testi ve Process Macro 4.2 analiz yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre nesne ilişkileri ile ilişki doyumu, evlilik uyumu ve cinsel doyum arasında negatif yönlü ilişki tespit edilmiştir. Nesne ilişkileri ile borderline ve narsistik kişilik özellikleri arasında ise pozitif yönlü ilişki belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca borderline ve narsistik kişilik özellikleri ile evlilik uyumu, cinsel doyum ve ilişki doyumu arasında negatif ilişki saptanmıştır. Son olarak araştırmanın temel amacı çerçevesinde yapılan aracılık analizlerine göre nesne ilişkilerinin ilişki doyumu, cinsel doyumu ve evlilik uyumunu anlamlı düzeyde yordadığı ve borderline ve narsistik kişilik özelliklerinin bu ilişki kısmi aracılık rolünün olduğu belirlenmiştir. Buna göre ortaya konulan model desteklenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Nesne ilişkileri, İlişki Doyumu, Evlilik Uyumu, Cinsel Doyum, Narsisistik Kişilik, Borderline Kişilik*

Introduction

Romantic relationships can may culminate in marriage (TÜİK, 2023). Marriage is of great importance for the continuation of the human race and for physiological and psychological well-being. According to Robert J. Sternberg (2019), marriage is a combination of three elements: intimacy, sexuality and commitment. While these three elements may be sufficient for the initiation of marriage, additional factors are necessary for its sustainability. It is crucial of great importance for couples to form emotionally healthy attachments and be sensitive to each other's needs for attention in order for the marriage to endure (Estroff & Flora, 2004). Object relations theory is one of the theories that broadly explains the bonds we form with others. Object relations theorists see the mother-child dyad as the building blocks of psychological formation. This relationship is both interpersonal and intrapsychic. Object relations theory, the experience of romantic relationships cannot be separated from early mental representations. In contrast to Freud, Fairbairn (1940) argues that the need for attachment is not merely a by-product of basic instincts, but a fundamental drive in itself. By referring to the unifying power of sexual intimacy, Fairbairn also emphasises that partners are confronted with the need to satisfy each other's unconscious needs.

Object relations, which are formed during early development through the process of introjection, are among the most significant factors that shape the nature of romantic relationships. Melanie Klein's theory of object relations, based on psychoanalytic principles, suggests that the choices, experiences and patterns of intimate relationships established by an infant from the earliest stages are reflected in his or her adult relationships. In contrast to Freud's pleasure principle and instinctual theory, object relations theorists emphasise the attachment formed by the infant. This attachment is a basic need for security and satisfaction. Sensitivity, love, respect and the fulfilment of needs demonstrated by the object become positive psychological structures in the infant (Scharff & Scharff, 1991). Ideally, these needs are met during the caregiving process, although sometimes they may remain unmet (Bowlby, 1969). The non-fulfilment of needs, they can result in psychological collapse, as described by Spitz (1965), or a state of psychological deprivation. According to Klein (1923), pathologies arise from deficiencies in the satisfaction of these needs. Identification and projective identification defences, developed to cope with deficiencies and conflicts in introjected object relations, are determinants of sexual attitudes. Sexuality is a psychosomatic experience. It is not just a physiological urge, but has a subjective cognitive meaning. In marriage, the typical or perhaps even stereotypical presentation of the spouses' negatively internalised objects leads the initially idealised relationship progressing through inevitable stages of disillusionment and conflict, then finally to a form of equilibrium before entering a cycle of repeated contradictions. Borderline and narcissistic personalities are among those who experience this cycle.

Kernberg asserts that the mental representations formed through introjection during early development, particularly those related to the relationship with the mother, form the psychological structures of ego, superego and id (Clarkin et al., 2006; St. Clair, 2004). This primary object relationship is associated with libido and aggressive impulses. According to Kernberg (1999), Borderline Personality Disorder arises from innate or genetic pregenital aggression and/or inhibitory object relationship experiences during developmental processes. Kernberg suggests that these intense feelings of aggression interfere with the integration of positive and negative self and object representations in the child and result in the use of primitive defences to protect and separate the positive self and object image from aggressive feelings associated with the negative self. Primitive defences are employed to resolve intense anxiety associated with intrapsychic conflict by distinguishing between conflicting views of self and object. Kernberg (1999) also suggests a relationship between attachment, affect, and the development of borderline personality disorder, arguing that individuals who experience consistently psychologically distressing and distressing self and object experiences in early development contribute to increased negative affect or aggression associated with intrapsychic conflict. He claims that early attachment failures contribute to the development of borderline personality disorder by reducing the individual's ability to experience, regulate and control a range of affective experiences (Clarkin et al., 2006; St. Clair, 2004). In the narcissistic organisation, the main problem lies in the impairment of self-esteem in the object relationship. From this perspective, the development of the self is seen as dependent on the pre-oedipal period (Fairbairn, 1949, 1952; Kohut, 1971, 1977). Summers (1999) discusses two important roles for the caregiver in the psychological development of the child. The first is to enjoy the baby's immediate joy and pleasure and the second is to allow the child to experience painful emotions and learn to cope with them when negative situations arise. Casement (1990) states that "the baby can discover the caregiver's ability to enlighten and thus form the basis of self-esteem through the caregiver's facial expressions". This foundation forms the basis for the individual's feelings, self-confidence and ability to develop emotions. Kohut (1971, 1972, 1977) suggests that the structure of the infant's psyche depends on the nature of the caregiver's responses. This means that the infant's narcissism can develop in two ways. The method is to be accepted with the reflection of admiration in the eyes of the significant other, usually the mother. This is how the baby learns whether it is valuable or worthless. This reflection is internalised, forming a healthy sense of self-esteem and defining "I am perfect". The second way is to admire someone else, usually the father. In this way the baby learns that he too is part of the idealised and perfect. This experience of idealisation is internalised and so the 'ideal parent' is formed and becomes part of the baby. This helps to develop the baby's self-esteem and self-worth. Normal narcissism provides healthy motivation up to a certain point. Conversely, if the child has not had sufficient experience of self-reflection, there is a developmental arrest in grandiosity or idealisation, which damages the self. Such children believe that they are internally inadequate. Such individuals exhibit a lack of interest in sharing their thoughts and feelings with others. They are surrounded by feelings of inadequacy and shame. They describe this damage to their self as a fundamental flaw or as if it were their own fault (Summers, 1999). Feelings of inadequacy hide behind shame, grandiosity and exhibitionism, which can manifest as feelings of emptiness, jealousy and anger. In the absence of this internalised sense of self, the adult narcissist becomes dependent on the approval of others.

As previously indicated, object relations formed in early childhood experiences, which can shape individuals' relationships with others, can influence both personality traits in adulthood and the satisfaction and harmony derived from relationships established with others during this period. One of the most important relationships to consider when it comes to relationships with others is individuals' romantic relationships or marriage experiences. Within this framework, the compatibility of object relations, which can shape the quality of relationships and personality traits, has become crucial in determining relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and overall marital harmony. Moreover, borderline personality traits and narcissistic personality traits, expressed as personality characteristics, are seen as important variables in explaining marital relationships when determining their mediating roles. In this context, the present study aims to examine the relationship between married individuals' relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and marital harmony with object relations, and to investigate the mediating roles of borderline and narcissistic personality traits that can be shaped by object relations in this relationship. A view of the relevant literature is reviewed, it is observed that while there are numerous studies on marriage and romantic relationships, there is a paucity of comprehensive research examining the relationships between borderline and narcissistic personality traits, object relations thought to be related to these variables, marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Given that many variables , rather than a single variable, might influence the marital experience, this study can be seen as a significant contribution to the literature. The existing literature frequently emphasises the impact of early life experiences with one's parents, on the formation of object relations, affect later relationship experiences. This suggests that these variables, by influencing personality traits, may be related to marital relationships. In this context, this study is considered an important piece of research due to its potential to make a significant contribution to the (existing) literature and to offer a perspective that explains the discord and dissatisfaction that arise during the marriage process.

Method

Research Model

This research is designed in accordance with the relational survey model, which aims to examine the mediating role of borderline and narcissistic personality traits in the relationship between object relations of married individuals and marital harmony, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction. The relational survey model is suitable for this research objective as it focuses on determining the presence, degree, and direction of the relationship between multiple variables (Karasar, 2012).

Sample of the Study

The sample of the study consisted of married individuals aged 18 and above who were literate and volunteered to participate in the research. The scales used in the study were delivered to the participants via online methods, and the data were collected accordingly. Care was taken to ensure that the sample size was adequate in representing the population in terms of representativeness. For the sake of research reliability, a sampling error of +/- 0.05 was considered. At the outset of the study, data were collected from 846 individuals. However, 37 individuals who did not meet the research criteria or left the data collection instruments incomplete were excluded from the study, resulting in a total of 809 participants. The incomplete and incorrect data were discarded by the researcher. A total of 407 (50.3%) female participants and 402 (49.7%) male participants participated in the study, resulting in a total of 809 individuals. 39.6% of participants between the ages of 18-30,39.3% were between the ages of 31-45, and 21.1% were 45 years and above. All participants were married. Predominantly (64.5%), the duration of marriage falls within the range of 3-10 years.

Data Collection Instruments

Socio-Demographic Form: The socio-demographic form is designed to gather information about the participants' age, gender, marital status and duration, education level, and overall health status.

The Marriage Adjustment Scale: This scale is a 15-item scale developed by Locke and Wallace (1959) and adapted into Turkish by Tutarel and Kışlak (1999). The scale, which is of the Likert type, is evaluated with scores ranging from 0 to 6. The highest score on the scale is 60, and the lowest score is 0. The cutoff score for the scale is 43. Individuals scoring 43 and above are considered harmonious in marriage, while those below 43 are considered disharmonious. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale is 0.84.

The Relationship Satisfaction Scale: The Relationship Satisfaction Scale was developed by Hendrick (1988) with the aim of measuring satisfaction in romantic relationships. It is a Likert-type scale (Sarı, 2008). The 7-item relationship satisfaction scale has the 7th and 4th items reverse-scored. Increasing scores on the scale indicate higher satisfaction derived from the relationship. It was adapted into Turkish by Curun (2001). The internal consistency coefficient of the Relationship Satisfaction Scale is .86 (Curun, 2001).

The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale: The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale was developed by Rust and Golombok in 1986 to assess individuals' sexual relationship characteristics. It comprises 28 items and is divided into two separate forms for measuring the sexual function and satisfaction levels of both men and women. The scale comprises a total of 7 subscales, including Communication (2 items), Avoidance (4 items), Touch (4 items), Satisfaction (4 items), and

Relationship Frequency (2 items), which are common to both forms. In addition to these common subscales, the women's form includes questions about vaginismus (4 items) and orgasm disorder (4 items), while the men's form includes questions about premature ejaculation (4 items) and erectile dysfunction (4 items) (Rust & Golombok, 1986). The scale employs a 5-point Likert-type scale with items scored between 0 never and 4 always. In the scale, questions are reverse-scored. An increase in scores indicates a decrease in sexual satisfaction. The reliability of the scale is .87 for the women's form and .94 for the men's form. The validity and reliability studies of the scale for the Turkish population were conducted by Tuğrul and colleagues in 1993 (Tuğrul, Öztan & Kabakçı, 1993).

The Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory: The Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory was originally developed by Bell in 1995. The Turkish adaptation was conducted by Uluç and colleagues in 2015. The BORTTI is designed to assess the structuring in psychotic organization, personality disorders, and eating disorders. The scale consists of 90 items, which are answered as true or false. The inventory comprises two dimensions: the object relations dimension and the reality testing dimension. The object relations dimension, encompasses dimensions such as social inadequacy, insecure attachment, alienation, and egocentrism. In the reality testing dimension, there are dimensions such as uncertainty of perceptions, delusions, hallucinations, and distortion of reality. Additionally, the scale incorporates three validity indices in the scale: FREQ (frequency of inconsistent responses), INFREQ (infrequency of inconsistent responses), and inconsistent responding. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subtests within the object relations dimension were calculated as follows: 0.80 for alienation, 0.74 for insecure attachment, 0.70 for egocentrism, and 0.73 for social inadequacy. For the subtests within the reality testing dimension, the coefficients were calculated as 0.77 for distortion of reality, 0.54 for uncertainty of perceptions, and 0.70 for hallucinations and delusions (Uluç et al., 2015). In this study, the dimension of object relations in the scale has been utilised.

Borderline Personality Inventory: The scale was originally developed by Leichsenring (1999) and consists of 53 items. The Turkish adaptation was conducted by Aydemir et al. in 2006. Despite the title is "Borderline Personality Inventory," the name was changed to "Personality Inventory" so as not to influence individuals. The scale is categorical with "True" and "False" response options. Responses marked as "False" are scored as 0 points, while those marked as "True" are scored as 1 point. Items 52 and 53 are not included in the calculation. The highest score that can be obtained from the inventory is 51. The cutoff score was determined as "15/16" based on criterion validity. The Cronbach's alpha value for the Borderline Personality Inventory was determined to be 0.92.

***Narcissistic Personality Inventory*:** Raskin and Hall developed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory in 1979 with the aim of assessing individuals' narcissistic personality traits. The inventory consists of 40 items and includes 7 subscales: "leadership," "exploitativeness," "authority," "self-sufficiency," "vanity," "entitlement," and "exhibitionism." Furthmore, a 16-item abbreviated version of the inventory has been prepared (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the inventory is 0.84. The Turkish adaptation was conducted by Atay in 2009. An increase in scores obtained from the inventory indicates narcissism (Atay, 2009).

Process

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee (Number: E-49846378-302.14.1-2300015296. Date: 15.12.2023). Subsequently, informed consent forms, socio-demographic forms, the Marriage Adjustment Scale, the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSS), the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale (GRSS) Female-Male Form, the Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI), the Borderline Personality Inventory, and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory were utilised. The total of 809 participants were administered the instruments via online methods.

The analysis of the data

Data were analysed using SPSS 27 software. Firstly, the reliability coefficients for the scales were calculated, and it was determined that they were higher than 0.60. The Skewness and kurtosis values for the scales were found to be within the recommended reference range of +2 to -2 (HahsVaughn & Lomax, 2020).

Table 1. Skewness and Kurtosis Coefficients, and Cronbach's Alpha Values of the Marriage Adjustment Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale, Object Relations Inventory, Borderline Personality Inventory, and Narcissistic Personality Inventory

	Kurtosis	Skewness	*Cronbach Alpha (α)*
The Marriage Adjustment Scale	-0.02	-0.66	0.92
The Relationship Satisfaction Scale	-0.52	-0.05	0.88
The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale			
The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale – Male	-0.02	0.87	0.97
The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female	1.70	1.38	0.97
Object Relations	-0.76	0.65	0.95
The Borderline Personality Inventory	-0.13	0.66	0.92
The Narcissistic Personality Inventory	-1.00	0.18	0.88

The level and direction of correlation between the scales were investigated using Pearson correlation analysis. Recently, discussions regarding the validity of Baron and Kenny's causal steps technique, commonly used in the analysis of mediation models, have led to the adoption of a new approach in psychological research. This new approach includes a methodology proposed by Gürbüz in 2019, which is based on the bootstrap technique. For role analysis, the Process Macro 4.2 program was used. All statistical analyses were conducted with a 95% confidence interval and a significance level of $p < .05$.

Results

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

		n	%
Gender	Female	407	50.3
	Male	402	49.7
Marital Status	Married	809	100.0
Age	18-30	320	39.6
	31-45	318	39.3
	45 and above	171	21.1
Length of Marriage	0-1 year	23	2.8
	1 year – 3 year	94	11.6
	3 year – 10 year	522	64.5
	More than 10 years	170	21.0
	Total	809	100.0

Upon reviewing the results of the above findings, it can be observed that 50.3% of the participants are female, while 49.7% are male. 100% of the participants are married. The age distribution is as follows: 39.6% are between 18 and 30 years old, 39.3% are between 31 and 45 years old, and 21.1% are 45 years of age or older. With regard to their spouses, 50.6% are in the age range of 18-30, 34.6% are in the age range of 31-45, and 14.8% are 45 years and above. A total of 2.8% of the participants have been married for a period of 0-1 years, 11.6% for 1-3 years, 64.5% for 3-10 years, and 21% for more than 10 years.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Marriage Adjustment Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale, Object Relations Inventory, Borderline Personality Inventory, and Narcissistic Personality Inventory

	N	*Min*	*Maks*	$\bar{X}$	*SS*
The Marriage Adjustment Scale	809	2	58	33.80	11.99
The Relationship Satisfaction Scale	809	7	49	29.81	10.49
The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale					
The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale – Male	402	0	112	30.36	26.82
The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female	407	0	95	26.53	22.34
Object Relations	809	0	52	18.68	12.81
The Borderline Personality Inventory	809	0	50	15.97	10.04
The Narcissistic Personality Inventory	809	0	16	7.58	4.60

Upon reviewing the results of the above findings, the mean score for the Marriage

Adjustment Scale is ($\bar{X}$=33,80 SS=11,99), for the Relationship Satisfaction Scale is ($\bar{X}$=29,81 SS=10,49), for the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale - Male is ($\bar{X}$=30,36 SS=26,82), for the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale - Female is ($\bar{X}$=26,53 SS=22,34), for the Object Relations Inventory is ($\bar{X}$=18,68 SS=12,81), for the Borderline Personality Inventory is ($\bar{X}$=15,97 SS=10,04), and for the Narcissistic Personality Inventory is ($\bar{X}$=7,58 SS=4,60).

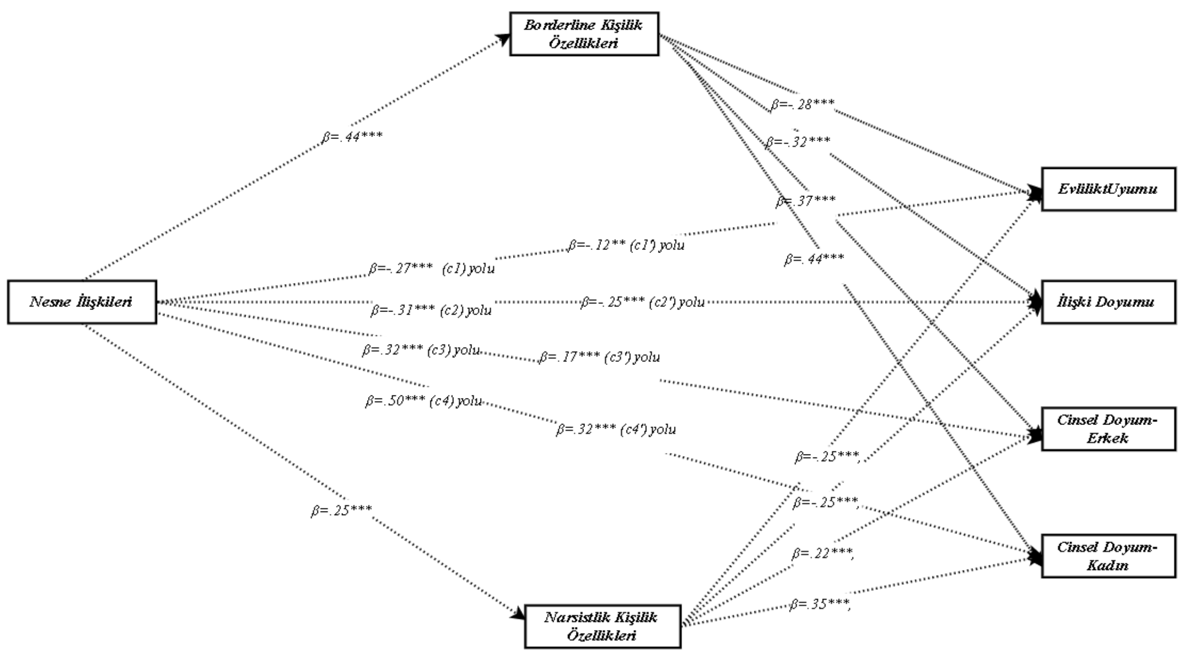
Table 4. The Relationship between the Marriage Adjustment Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale, Object Relations Inventory, Borderline Personality Inventory, and Narcissistic Personality Inventory

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1- The Marriage Adjustment Scale	1						
2- The Relationship Satisfaction Scale	.52**	1					
3- The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale - Male	-.39**	-.33**	1				
4- The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale- Female	-.32**	-.43**	-	1			
5- Object Relations	-.27**	-.38**	.32**	.50**	1		
6- The Borderline Personality Inventory	-.28**	-.32**	.37**	.44**	.44**	1	
7- The Narcissistic Personality Inventory	-.25**	-.25**	.22**	.35**	.45**	.25**	1

***p<0.01, *p<0.05 The name of the test conducted is: Pearson Correlation Test*

Upon examination of the results, it were observed that there are low to moderate negative correlations between the Object Relations Inventory and the Marriage Adjustment Scale (r=-.27, p<0.01), between the Borderline Personality Inventory and the Marriage Adjustment Scale (r=-.28, p<0.01) and between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Marriage Adjustment Scale (r=-.25, p<0.01).

It was observed that there were low to moderate negative correlations between the Object Relations Inventory and the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (r=-.38, p<0.01), between the Borderline Personality Inventory and the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (r=-.32, p<0.01) and between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (r=-.25, p<0.01). It was observed that there are low to moderate positive correlations between the Object Relations Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Male (r=.32, p<0.01), between the Borderline Personality Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Male (r=.37, p<0.01) and between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale–Male (r=.22, p<0.01). It was observed that there were moderate positive correlations between the Object



****p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05 The test used: Process Macro 4.2*

Figure 1. Mediating Role of Emotional Borderline Personality Traits and Narcissistic Personality Traits in the Relationship Between Object Relations and Marital Adjustment, Relationship Satisfaction, and Sexual Satisfaction

Relations Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female (r=.50, p<0.01), between the Borderline Personality Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale - Female (r=.44, p<0.01) and between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale – Female (r=.35, p<0.01). It was observed that there were moderate positive correlations between the Borderline Personality Inventory and the Object Relations Inventory (r=.44, p<0.01) and between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Object Relations Inventory (r=.45, p<0.01). It was observed that there was a low positive correlation between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Borderline Personality Inventory (r=.25, p<0.01).

As illustrated in Figure 1, object relations demonstrate a significant predictive capacity with regard to marital adjustment (path c1). *(β=-.27, t=-8.06, p<.001).* Subsequently, when borderline personality traits and narcissistic personality traits were included as mediating variables in the model, a decrease in the β value of object relations (path c1) was observed *(β=-.12, t=-3.08,p<.01).* These findings indicate the presence of partial mediation and that the mediation relationship is significant *(β=-.15, %95 GA [-.19, -.09]).* It is observed that object relations significantly predict relationship satisfaction (path c2) *(β=-.38, t=-11.54, p<.001).* Subsequently, when borderline personality traits and narcissistic personality traits were included as mediating variables in the model, a decrease in the β value of object relations (path c2) was observed *(β=-.25, t=-6.56, p<.001).* These findings indicate the presence of partial mediation and that the mediation relationship is significant. *(β=-.13, %95 GA [-.14, -.06]).* It is observed that object relations significantly predict male sexual satisfaction (path c3) *(β=.32, t=6.81, p<.001).* Subsequently, when borderline personality traits and narcissistic personality traits were included as mediating variables in the model, a decrease in the β value of object relations (path c3) was observed *(β=.17, t=3.09, p<.01).* These findings indicate the presence of partial mediation and that the mediation relationship is significant. *(β=.15, %95 GA [.18, .47]).* It is observed that object relations significantly predict female sexual satisfaction (path c4) *(β=.50, t=11.60, p<.001).* Subsequently, when borderline personality traits and narcissistic personality traits were included as mediating variables in the model, a decrease in the β value of object relations (path c4) was observed *(β=.32, t=6.16, p<.001).* These findings indicate the presence of partial mediation and that the mediation relationship is significant *(β=.18, %95 GA [.18, .46]).*

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study, aimed to investigate the relationship between borderline and narcissistic personality traits, object relations, marital satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. The research aimed to examine the mediating role of borderline and narcissistic personality traits on marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. Initially, findings regarding the relationship between research variables were obtained. The results indicated a negative relationship between object relations and marital satisfaction, as well as relationship satisfaction. Similarly, findings regarding the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction indicated a negative correlation between borderline and narcissistic personality traits with marital satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. The set of personality traits, represented by borderline and narcissistic personality traits, showed similar levels of association with marital satisfaction.

Marital harmony is a multifaceted construct influenced by various factors. Object relations shaped by individuals' experiences with their primary caregivers significantly impact marital harmony. Research has shown that factors such as self-esteem, coping strategies, psychological aspects, attachment styles, defense mechanisms, emotional intelligence, and social skills, which can be explained by object relations, can affect marital harmony (Bélanger et al., 2014; Chiș et al., 2022; Navid et al., 2023; Jalil & Muazzam, 2013; Nasri & Babaee, 2014). Furthermore, factors such as conflict resolution, communication patterns, and gender-role orientations in marriage also play a role in marital harmony (Heene et al., 2007; Barry, 1970; Davidson & Sollie, 1987). Research has highlited the significance of individual characteristics such as personality traits, levels of anxiety, and depressive symptoms in influencing marital harmony (Chis et al., 2022; Dehle & Weiss, 2002; Hamamcı, 2005; Nwakanma & Ofoedu, 2016).

When examining the relationship between object relations, borderline, and narcissistic personality traits with sexual satisfaction, a positive and significant correlation was found between object relations and sexual satisfaction scores for both men and women. The elevated scores suggest that object relations are not at a healthy level, indicating a higher presence of borderline and narcissistic personality traits, which are associated with sexual dysfunction. These results obtained are consistent with previous studies. Previous research has suggested the impact of specific conditions such as infertility, fibromyalgia, PTSD, and erectile dysfunction on marital satisfaction. (Navid et al., 2023; Calandre et al., 2021; Dekel et al., 2008; Nwakanma & Ofoedu, 2016). Relationship flexibility, subjective well-being, and sexuality have been defined as factors influencing marital harmony (Cihan, 2020; Scorsolini-Comin & Santos, 2012; Kazemi-Saleh et al., 2008).

Object relations based on early attachment experiences can significantly influence sexual satisfaction in relationships. Research has demonstrated that sexual satisfaction is closely associated with various factors including individual sexual desire, discrepancies in desire between partners, sexual function, and relationship satisfaction (Mark, 2012; Dundon & Rellini, 2010; Lazar, 2016). Studies have shown that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction tend to change together and have a mutually influential relationship (Dundon & Rellini, 2010; Zare et al., 2020). Furthermore, sexual satisfaction has been linked to various factors, including sexual self-esteem, sexual awareness, and sexual self-schema (Ebrahimkhani et al., 2017). Additionally, the impact of external factors on sexual satisfaction has been explored. For example, studies have indicated that the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction is significant in the context of conditions such as ovarian cancer, gestational diabetes, and prostate cancer (Aktaş & Bahar, 2022; Nelson et al., 2007; Zerach et al., 2010).

In line with the findings regarding the relationship between object relations and borderline and narcissistic personality traits, it has been observed that elevated scores indicative of dysfunctional object relations are significantly associated with higher scores indicating more frequent occurrence of borderline and narcissistic personality traits. Recent studies investigating the relationship between object relations and narcissistic and borderline personality traits have provided valuable insights. It has been demonstrated that narcissistic and borderline personality traits are interrelated and share common characteristics from various perspectives (Mustač & Marčinko 2020; Weise & Tuber, 2004). Research indicates that individuals with borderline personality traits often exhibit impulsivity and difficulties in emotion regulation, which are also commonly found in narcissistic personality traits (Koenigsberg et al., 2001). Additionally, studies highlight the relationship between specific areas of shame associated with narcissistic vulnerability, narcissistic grandiosity, and borderline-related features. In this regard, it is anticipated to be connected with object relations (Théberge & Gamache, 2022). Additionally, the correlation between borderline personality traits and various psychological constructs has been explored through comprehensive research. For example, studies have investigated the relationship between borderline personality traits and cognitive functioning, social maladjustment, aggression, and impulsivity (Kar, 2023; Underwood et al., 2011; Aslan et al., 2023). These studies shed light on the complex interaction between borderline personality traits and other psychological dimensions. Additionally, the influence of object relations on the formation of narcissistic and borderline personality traits has been an intriguing topic of investigation. Research has examined the impact of early attachment experiences on the development of narcissistic and borderline personality traits in both children and adults (Weise & Tuber, 2004; Gacono, 1990).

When examining the predictive and mediating roles, it was found that object relations negatively and significantly predicted marital adjustment.

Conversely, it was determined that borderline and narcissistic personality traits played a partial mediating role. A review of previous research, indicates that the findings of this study are consistent with those of previous stdies that have reached similar conclusions. For example, Bodenmann et al. (2006) conducted a longitudinal study on dyadic coping and marital quality, revealing that the dyadic coping behaviors of both partners are significant predictors of marital adjustment, with women's coping behaviors being particularly influential. Karaman (2021) investigated marital adjustment and sexual satisfaction in couples with sexual dysfunction, emphasizing a bidirectional relationship between sexual and marital satisfaction, indicating that sexual satisfaction predicts marital satisfaction and vice versa. Another study exploring the relationship between self-esteem, coping efforts, and marital adjustment highlighted the significant predictive role of withdrawal or avoidance-focused coping strategies in reducing marital satisfaction (Bélanger et al., 2014). Kumcağiz et al. (2020) conducted a study examining the relationship between marital adjustment and psychological well-being, finding that marital adjustment significantly predicts psychological well-being. Onabamiro and colleagues (2017) investigated self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and coping skills as predictors of marital adjustment among couples in Nigeria, demonstrating the importance of these factors in determining marital adjustment. While the mentioned studies do not directly examine the relationship between object relations and marital adjustment, variables that could be considered in the context of object relations may have a predictive effect on marital adjustment. In this regard, the partial mediating role of borderline and narcissistic personality traits supports significant connections observed in the aforementioned research.

When examining the predictive and mediating roles related to relationship satisfaction, it was found that object relations negatively and significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, borderline and narcissistic personality traits were found to have a partial mediating role. Various studies investigating the determinants of relationship satisfaction provide valuable insights. For example, a longitudinal study by Rusbult (1983) on the investment model showed that increases in rewards over time were associated with increases in satisfaction, highlighting the impact of external factors on relationship satisfaction. Additionally, Velten and Margraf (2017) found that overall life satisfaction positively predicted sexual satisfaction, indicating that life satisfaction has a broader impact on relationship well-being. Furthermore, Banse (2004) examined the link between adult attachment prototypes and relationship satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of attachment styles in predicting relationship satisfaction. Moreover, a study by Boesch and colleagues (2007) on long-term male couples' relationship satisfaction and commitment demonstrated that predictors of satisfaction encompass both personal and interpersonal factors, while predictors of commitment are primarily personal.

A study of the predictive and mediating roles related to levels of sexual satisfaction in women and men, Revealed that object relations negatively and significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. Conversely, borderline and narcissistic personality traits were found to have a partial mediating role. in order to explore the role of object relations as determinants of sexual dysfunction, it is important to consider various factors that could affect sexual satisfaction. While previous research provides valuable insights into the determinants of sexual dysfunction, the direct relationship between object relations and sexual dysfunction has been limitedly addressed in these studies. However, by synthesizing the information from these studies, we can establish connections between psychological, physiological, and relational factors that could impact sexual functioning. For example, McCool-Myers et al. (2018) emphasize the multifaceted nature of predictors of female sexual dysfunction by highlighting the influence of psychological and physiological factors. Similarly, Enzlin et al. (2009) address sexual dysfunction in the context of diabetes, indicating the role of medical conditions in affecting sexual well-being. Additionally, Nobre

& Pinto-Gouveia (2006) and Nowosielski et al. (2010) examine the emotional aspects of sexual dysfunction, highlighting the significant impact of psychological factors on sexual well-being.

The results of) the research indicate a significant relationship between object relations and sexual satisfaction, marital adjustment, and relationship satisfaction. Borderline and narcissistic personality traits mediate this relationship. Therefore, it can be concluded that object relations play a role in the development of borderline and narcissistic personality traits, and these traits are related to the satisfaction of married individuals with their marital experiences. However, it is thought that there are some limitations stemming from the research. One significant limitation is that individuals diagnosed with borderline and narcissistic personality disorders were not included in the study. Including these individuals along with the normal population and making comparisons could increase the generalizability of the research results. Similarly, it is considered a limitation that object relations were not measured using a subjective method oriented towards the psychodynamic approach in addition to the objective scale used. Therefore, it would be beneficial to conduct a study that includes these variables using different measurement tools. Another limitation is that, due to the cross-sectional nature of the research, it is not possible to emphasize a strong cause-and-effect relationship from the obtained results. The study conducted correlation and mediation analyses of the main variables, but did not consider the relationships between the demographic characteristics of the participants, such as duration of marriage, type of marriage, and whether they have children, and the research variables. The failure to control for these variables, which could have confounding effects on the levels of satisfaction and adjustment in marital life, represents a limitation of the study. It would be beneficial to repeat this study with a homogeneous group in terms of these variables. Finally, the relationship between object relations and personality traits with marital experiences was emphasized, but only borderline and narcissistic personality traits were considered. Expanding studies to include different personality traits is thought to provide a more comprehensive perspective on marital experiences.

Recommendations

In accordance with the findings of this study, it can be concluded that object relations exert a significant and negative impact on marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Furthermore, it was found that borderline and narcissistic personality traits partially mediate this effect. When considering the relevant literature, although not directly addressing object relations, it emphasizes the complex interaction of psychological, physiological, and medical factors in predicting marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual dysfunction. To comprehensively understand the role of object relations as predictors of sexual dysfunction, future research could benefit from integrating insights from studies on attachment styles, interpersonal dynamics, and emotional well-being. Researchers could conduct further studies considering the broader context of individual psychological functioning and relational dynamics to explore how object relations may influence marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction, as well as contribute to the development or perpetuation of sexual dysfunction. In conclusion, while previous research provides meaningful findings regarding predictors of marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual dysfunction, further research focusing on the relationship between object relations and relationship satisfaction, particularly considering the role of early attachment experiences in shaping individuals' sexual functions and satisfactions, is warranted. (An) Understanding the complex interaction among object relations, individual characteristics, and external factors can provide a comprehensive understanding of predictors of relationship satisfaction. It is recommended that researchers and practitioners develop interventions aimed at enhancing relationship satisfaction and promoting overall relationship well-being by considering these diverse factors.

References

Aktaş, D., & Bahar, A. (2022). The relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction in women with ovarian cancer and their spouses. *Cancer Nursing*, 45(6), 473-480. https://doi.org/10.1097/ncc.0000000000001072

Alnaes, R., & Torgersen, S. (1997) Personality and personality disorders predict development and relapses of major depression. *Acta Psychiatr Scand*, 95; 336-342.

Ames, D. R., Rose, P., & Anderson, C. P. (2006). The NPI-16 as a short measure of narcissism. *Journal of research in personality*, 40(4), 440-450.

Aslan, I., Grant, J., & Chamberlain, S. (2023). Cognition in adults with borderline personality disorder. *CNS Spectrums*, 28(6), 674-679. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1092852923001177

Atay, S. (2009). Narsistik Kişilik Envanterinin Türkçe'ye Standardizasyonu. Gazi Üniversitesi. *İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Cilt: 11 Sayı: 1, 181-196, https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/gaziuiibfd/issue/28326/301018

Atif, M., Sarwar, M., & Scahill, S. (2016). The relationship between epilepsy and sexual dysfunction: a review of the literature. *Springerplus*, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s-40064-016-3753-5

Aydemir, Ö., Demet, M. M., Danacı, A. E., Deveci, A., Taşkın, E. O., Mızrak, S., & İçelli, İ. (2006). Borderline kişilik envanterinin Türkçe'ye uyarlanması, güvenirlik ve geçerliliği. *Türkiye'de Psikiyatri Dergisi*, *8*(1), 6-10.

Banse, R. (2004). Adult attachment and marital satisfaction: evidence for dyadic configuration effects. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 21(2), 273-282. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407504041388

Barry, W. (1970). Marriage research and conflict: an integrative review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 73(1), 41-54. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0028474

Bell, M. D. (1995). *Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI) Manual*. California: WPS.

Bell, M. D., Billington, R., & Becker, B. (1985). A scale for the assessment of object relations: Reliability, validity and factorial invariance. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 42, 733-741.

Bell, M. D., Billington, R., & Becker, B. (1986). A scale for the assessment of reality testing: Reliability, validity and factorial invariance. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 53, 506-511.

Bech, P., Malt, UF., Dencker, SJ., Ahlfors, UG., Elgen, K., Lewander, T., Lundell, A., Simpson, GM., & Lingjaerde, O. (1993). Scales for assessment of diagnosis and severity of mental disorders. *Acta Psychiatr Scand*, 87 (Suppl. 372): 15. Blais

MA, Hilsenroth MJ., & Fowler, JC. (1999). Diagnostic efficiency and hierarchical functioning of the DSM-IV borderline personality disorder criteria. *J Nerv Ment Dis*, 187 : 167-173

Bodenmann, G., Pihet, S., & Kayser, K. (2006). The relationship between dyadic coping and marital quality: a 2-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20(3), 485-493. https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.20.3.485

Boesch, R., Cerqueira, R., Safer, M., & Wright, T. (2007). Relationship satisfaction and commitment in long-term male couples: individual and dyadic effects. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 24(6), 837-853. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407507084186

Bélanger, C., Schiavi, M., Sabourin, S., Dugal, C., Baalbaki, G., & Lussier, Y. (2014). Self-esteem, coping efforts and marital adjustment. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 10(4), 660-671. https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v10i4.807

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss*. Vol. I, Attachment. New York: Basic Books.

Calandre, E., Ordóñez-Carrasco, J., & Rico-Villademoros, F. (2021). Marital adjustment in patients with fibromyalgia: its association with suicidal ideation and related factors. a cross-sectional study. *Clinical and Experimental Rheumatology*, 39(3), 89-94. https://doi.org/10.55563/clinexprheumatol/pufzd6

Casement, P. (1990). *On further learning from the patient*. London: Routledge.

Chis, R., Ignat, S., Rad, D., & Macsinga, I. (2022). The mediation role of an individual's and couple's psychological factors, including parenting in the prediction of relational and marital satisfaction. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,* 19(17), 11011. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191711011

Clarkin, J. F., Levy, K. N., Lenzenweger, M. F., & Kernberg, O. F. (2004). The Personality Disorders Institute/Borderline Personality Disorder Research Foundation Randomized Control Trial for Borderline Personality Disorder: Rationale, Methods, and Patient Characteristics. *Journal of Personality Disorders,* *18*(1), 52–72. https://doi.org/10.1521/pedi.18.1.52.32769

Cihan, H. (2020). Relational resilience as a protective factor in marital adjustment of couples with cancer: a dyadic model. *Dusunen Adam the Journal of Psychiatry and Neurological Sciences.* 33(3): 281-288 https://doi.org/10.14744/dajpns.2020.00092

Curun, F. (2001). *The Effects of sexism and sex role orientaion on romantic relationship satisfaction.* (Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, Ankara). Ulusal Tez Merkezi.

Davidson, B., & Sollie, D. (1987). Sex-role orientation and marital adjustment. *Social Behavior and Personality an International Journal,* 15(1), 59-69. https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.1987.15.1.59

Dehle, C., & Weiss, R. (2002). Associations between anxiety and marital adjustment. *The Journal of Psychology,* 136(3), 328-338. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980209604160

Dekel, R., Enoch, G., & Solomon, Z. (2008). The contribution of captivity and post-traumatic stress disorder to marital adjustment of israeli couples. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships,* 25(3), 497-510. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407508090870

Dundon, C., & Rellini, A. (2010). More than sexual function: predictors of sexual satisfaction in a sample of women age 40–70. *Journal of Sexual Medicine,* 7(2_Part_2), 896-904. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2009.01557.x

Ebrahimkhani, S., Nouri, R., & Azizi, M. (2017). The impact of sexual esteem and sexual conscious on sexual satisfaction in married people. *Review of European Studies,* 9(4), 123. https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v9n4p123

Estroff Marano, H., & Flora, C., (2004). The truth about compatibility. *Psychology Today.* Retrieved April 10, 2019, from https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200409/the-truth-about compatibility.

Enzlin, P., Rosen, R., Wiegel, M., Brown, J., Wessells, H., Gatcomb, P., & Cleary, P. (2009). Sexual dysfunction in women with type 1 diabetes. *Diabetes Care,* 32(5), 780-785. https://doi.org/10.2337/dc08-1164

Fairbairn, W. R. D. (1940). *Schizoid factors in the personality. İçinde Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (ss. 3-27). Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Gacono, C. (1990). An empirical study of object relations and defensive operations in antisocial personality disorder. *Journal of Personality Assessment,* 54(3-4), 589-600. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.1990.9674022

Hahs-Vaughn, D. L., & Lomax, R. G. (2020). *An introduction to statistical concepts*. Routledge.

Hamamci, Z. (2005). Dysfunctional relationship beliefs in marital satisfaction and adjustment. *Social Behavior and Personality an International Journal,* 33(4), 313-328. https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2005.33.4.313

Heene, E., Buysse, A., & Oost, P. (2007). An interpersonal perspective on depression: the role of marital adjustment, conflict communication, attributions, and attachment within a clinical sample. *Family Process,* 46(4), 499-514. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2007.00228.x

Hendrick, S. S. (1988). A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* 50(1), 93–98.

Jalil, T. and Muazzam, A. (2013). Emotional intelligence as a predictor of marital adjustment to infertility. *International Journal of Research Studies in Psychology*, 2(3), 45-58 https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsp.2013.237

Kar, S. (2023). Borderline personality disorder and cognition: unraveling the enigma one piece at a time!. CNS Spectrums, 28(6), 653-654. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1092852923002328

Karaman, İ. (2021). Marital adjustment and sexual satisfaction in married couples with sexual functioning disorders: a comparative study evaluating patients and their partners. Dusunen Adam the Journal of Psychiatry and Neurological Sciences. 34: 172-180 https://doi.org/10.14744/dajpns.2021.00135

Kazemi-Saleh, D., Pishgou, B., Farrokhi, F., Assari, S., Fotros, A., & Naseri, M. (2008). Gender impact on the correlation between sexuality and marital relation quality in patients with coronary artery disease. *Journal of Sexual Medicine,* 5(9), 2100-2106. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2007.00724.x

Kernberg, O. F. (1970). Factors in the psychoanalytic treatment of narcissistic personalities. *Journal of the American psychoanalytic Association,* 18(1), 51-85

Kernberg, O. (1999). *Sınır Durumlar ve Patolojik Narsisizm.* (M. Akay, Çev.), Metis Yayınları.

Klein, M. (1923). The development of a child. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 4*, 419-474.

Koenigsberg, H., Harvey, P., Mitropoulou, V., New, A., Goodman, M., Silverman, J., & Siever, L. (2001). Are the interpersonal and identity disturbances in the borderline personality disorder criteria linked to the traits of affective instability and impulsivity?. *Journal of Personality Disorders,* 15(4), 358-370. https://doi.org/10.1521/pedi.15.4.358.19181

Kohut, H. (1977). *The restoration of the self. New York: International Universities Press.* Kohut, H. (1984). How does analysis cure? Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Kumcağız, H., Demir, Y., & Yilmaz, M. (2020). Evli bireylerin evlilik uyumu ile i̇yilik hali arasındaki i̇lişki. *Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi.* https://doi.org/10.15285/maruaebd.647150

Karasar, N. (2012). *Bilimsel araştırma yöntemi.* Ankara: Nobel Yayıncılık

Leichsenring F (1999) Development and first results of the Borderline Personality Inventory: A self-report instrument for assessing borderline personality organization. *J Pers Assess,* 73: 45-63

Lazar, A. (2016). The moderating effect of religiousness and spirituality on the relation between dyadic sexual and non-sexual communication with sexual and marital satisfaction among married jewish women. *Archive for the Psychology of Religion,* 38(3), 353-377. https://doi.org/10.1163/15736121-12341321

Mark, K. (2012). The relative impact of individual sexual desire and couple desire discrepancy on satisfaction in heterosexual couples. *Sexual & Relationship Therapy,* 27(2), 133-146. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2012.678825

McCool-Myers, M., Theurich, M., Zülke, A., Knuettel, H., & Apfelbacher, C. (2018). Predictors of female sexual dysfunction: a systematic review and qualitative analysis through gender inequality paradigms. *BMC Women S Health,* 18(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-018-0602-4

Mustač, F. and Marčinko, D. (2020). Social aspects of the relationship between narcissistic and borderline personality disorder. *Socijalna Psihijatrija,* 48(2), 188-209. https://doi.org/10.24869/spsih.2020.188

Nasri, L. and Babaee, H. (2014). Role of social skills in improving the women's marital adjustment in the city of sanandaj. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences,* 30, 60-68. https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ilshs.30.60

Navid, B., Malekzadeh, F., Mohammadi, M., & Omani-Samani, R. (2023). Investigating the role of defense mechanisms on marital adjustment in infertile couples based on the cause of infertility: a cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Reproductive Biomedicine (Ijrm).* 8;21(2):111-122 https://doi.org/10.18502/ijrm.v21i2.12802

Nelson, C., Choi, J., Mulhall, J., & Roth, A. (2007). Determinants of sexual satisfaction in men with prostate cancer. *Journal of Sexual Medicine,* 4(5), 1422-1427. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2007.00547.x

Nobre, P. and Pinto-Gouveia, J. (2006). Emotions during sexual activity: differences between sexually functional and dysfunctional men and women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior,* 35(4), 491-499. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-006-9047-1

Nowosielski, K., Drosdzol, A., Sipiński, A., Kowalczyk, R., & Skrzypulec, V. (2010). Diabetes mellitus and sexuality—does it really matter?. *Journal of Sexual Medicine,* 7(2_Part_1), 723-735. https://doi.org/10.1111-/j.1743-6109.2009.01561.x

Nwakanma, N. & Ofoedu, J. (2016). Depressive symptoms and marital adjustment among primary care patients with erectile dysfunction in umuahia, nigeria. *South African Journal of Psychiatry,* 22(1), 6. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajpsychiatry.v22i1.979

Onabamiro, A., Owoyele, J., & Elijah, A. (2017). Three-factor predictors of marital adjustment among couples in abeokuta metropolis, ogun state, nigeria. *Universal Journal of Psychology,* 5(5), 225-230. https://doi.org/10.13189/ujp.2017.050503

Raskin, R. N. & Hall, C. S. (1979). A narcissistic personality inventory. *Psychological reports,* 45(2), 590-598.

Raskin, R. & Howard, T. (1988). A principal-components analysis of the narcissistic personality ınventory and further evidence of its construct validity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 54(5), 890–902. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.5.890.

Rusbult, C. (1983). A longitudinal test of the investment model: the development (and deterioration) of satisfaction and commitment in heterosexual involvements.. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 45(1), 101-117. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.1.101

Scharff, D. E. & Scharff, J. S. (1991). *Object relations couple therapy.* Northvale, NJ: Jason Aranson.

Scorsolini-Comin, F., & Santos, M. (2012). Correlations between subjective well-being, dyadic adjustment and marital satisfaction in brazilian married people. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology,* 15(1), 166-176. https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_sjop.2012.v15.n1.37304

Spitz, R. (1965). *The first year of life.* New York: International Universities Press.

St. Clair, W., (2004). *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 765 pp.

Sternberg, R. J., (2019). *Duplex Theory of Love: Triangular Theory of Love and Theory of Love as a Story.* Retrieved April 3, 2019.

Summers, F. (1999). *Transcending the self. An object relations model of psychoanalytic theory.* The Analytic Press: New Jersey.

Théberge, D. & Gamache, D. (2022). Shame. *Journal of Individual Differences,* 43(4), 169-179. https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000368

Tuğrul, C., Öztan, N. & Kabakçı, E. (1993). Golombok-Rust Cinsel Doyum Ölçeğinin Standardizasyon Çalışması. *Türk Psikiyatri Dergisi,* 4(2), 83-88.

TÜİK, (2023). https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/-Index?p=Evlenme-ve-Bosanma-Istatistikleri202353707#:~:text=Y%C4%B1llara%20g%C3%B6re%20ortalama%20ilk%20evlenme,2%2C6%20ya%C5%9F%20olarak%20ger%C3%A7ekle%C5%9Fti.

Uluç, S., Tüzün, Z., Haselden, M., & Erbaş, S. P. (2015). Bell Nesne İlişkileri ve Gerçeği Değerlendirme Ölçeği'nin (BORTTI) Türkçe'ye uyarlama çalışması. *Klinik Psikiyatri Dergisi,* 18, 112-23.

Underwood, M., Beron, K., & Rosén, L. (2011). Joint trajectories for social and physical aggression as predictors of adolescent maladjustment: internalizing symptoms, rule-breaking behaviors, and borderline and narcissistic personality features. *Development and Psychopathology,* 23(2), 659-678. https://doi.org/10.1017/s095457941100023x

Velten, J., & Margraf, J. (2017). Satisfaction guaranteed? how individual, partner, and relationship factors impact sexual satisfaction within partnerships. *Plos One,* 12(2), e0172855. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0172855

Weise, K. and Tuber, S. (2004). The self and object representations of narcissistically disturbed children: an empirical investigation. *Psychoanalytic Psychology,* 21(2), 244-258. https://doi.org/10.1037/0736-9735.21.2.244

Zare, O., Simbar, M., Ozgoli, G., Bahar, A., & Majd, H. (2020). Factors related to sexual satisfaction in women with gestational diabetes in the third trimester. https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-21345/v1

Zerach, G., Anat, B., Solomon, Z., & Heruti, R. (2010). Posttraumatic symptoms, marital intimacy, dyadic adjustment, and sexual satisfaction among ex-prisoners of war. *Journal of Sexual Medicine,* 7(8), 2739-2749. https://doi.org/10.-1111/j.1743-6109.2010.01784.x