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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.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Adult Learning: Cluster Analysis of European Union Countries

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Abstract

Lifelong learning, which the European Union especially attaches great importance to for social and economic cohesion, covers not only general and vocational education and training provided through formal and non-formal education, but also learning activities in all areas of life. As an important component of lifelong learning, adult learning includes educational activities designed to develop personal and professional skills and represents the participation of adults in lifelong learning. This study aimed to group the European Union countries in terms of adult learning within the scope of lifelong learning. Thus cluster analysis was performed using Wards and k-means clustering methods, resulting in the identification of four distinct clusters of countries. The analysis identified that Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden are in Cluster 1; Belgium, the Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, and Slovenia are in Cluster 2; Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, and Romania are in Cluster 3; and Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, and Slovakia are in Cluster 4. Additionally, by assessing the similarities and differences among the groups, it was determined that the countries vary in terms of variables of the participation rate in education and internet use for any learning activity.

Keywords: Adult Learning, Lifelong Learning, Cluster Analysis, European Union Countries

Öz

Avrupa Birliği'nin özellikle toplumsal ve ekonomik uyum için büyük önem verdiği yaşam boyu öğrenme, örgün ve yaygın eğitim yoluyla sağlanan genel ve mesleki eğitim ve öğretimin yanı sıra yaşamın her alanındaki öğrenme etkinliklerini de kapsamaktadır. Yaşam boyu öğrenmenin önemli bir bileşeni olan yetişkin öğrenimi, kişisel ve mesleki becerileri geliştirmeye yönelik eğitim etkinliklerini içerir ve yetişkinlerin yaşam boyu öğrenmeye katılımını temsil eder. Bu çalışma, yaşam boyu öğrenme kapsamında yetişkin öğrenimi açısından Avrupa Birliği ülkelerini gruplandırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda Wards ve k-ortalamalar kümeleme yöntemleri kullanılarak yapılan analiz sonucunda dört ayrı ülke kümesi belirlenmiştir. Analiz sonucunda Danimarka, Estonya, Finlandiya, İrlanda, Lüksemburg, Hollanda, İspanya ve İsveç'in Küme 1'de; Belçika, Çek Cumhuriyeti, İtalya, Litvanya, Malta, Portekiz ve Slovenya'nın Küme 2'de; Bulgaristan, Hırvatistan, Kıbrıs, Yunanistan, Polonya ve Romanya'nın Küme 3'de; Avusturya, Fransa, Almanya, Macaristan, Letonya ve Slovakya ise Küme 4'de yer aldığı tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca gruplar arasındaki benzerlik ve farklılıklar değerlendirilerek, ülkelerin yetişkinlerin eğitime katılım oranı ve herhangi bir öğrenme etkinliği için internet kullanımı değişkenleri açısından farklılık gösterdiği belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yetişkin Öğrenimi, Yaşam Boyu Öğrenme, Kümeleme Analizi, Avrupa Birliği Ülkeleri

Introduction

Since the 1990s, the European Union (EU) has focused on the concept of "Lifelong Learning," and in 1996, declared it the "European Year of Lifelong Learning (Colardyn, 2001, s. 7). Lifelong Learning (LLL), which allows participation from individuals of all segments of society, facilitates personal and professional development, thereby supporting the advancement and strengthening of the community. Among the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 4 aims to ensure that every individual receives a quality education and has access to lifelong learning opportunities (United Nations, 2015). Lifelong learning is a philosophy that encourages individuals to continue their learning processes throughout their lives, and is accepted in Europe as a fundamental principle that emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge and skills throughout the individual's life. The European Union (EU) regards education as a fundamental pillar in individual, social, economic, political, and cultural domains. In this context, to achieve success in becoming a knowledge society and a competitive economy in the era of globalization, the EU has framed its educational policies through the perspective of lifelong learning, establishing numerous goals and implementing various strategies accordingly (European Commission, 2001).

In its 2003 report on lifelong learning, the European Commission highlighted the importance of facilitating access to lifelong learning and removing barriers to participation. The report emphasized the promotion of adult learning as a key element in encouraging lifelong learning (Kaya, 2014, s. 104). In this regard, adult learning has been assigned a significant role, with action plans developed to update the skills and knowledge of the adult population to enhance employability.

Adult learning involves the engagement of adults in lifelong education, making it crucial as it represents one of the most comprehensive areas of lifelong learning. It includes educational activities designed to enhance both personal and professional skills. The OECD describes adult learning as encompassing various forms of

learning pursued by adults, aiming to enhance their knowledge, skills, and competencies that are pertinent to their personal and professional development (OECD, 2019). Typically, this refers to learning that occurs after the completion of basic education and is a critical component of the European Union's lifelong learning policy. Furthermore, as the EU strives to become the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, it underscores the importance of continuing education for adults who have completed formal education and entered the workforce, in light of the rapidly evolving skill requirements of the labor market (European Commission, 2006).

The 2006 report by the European Commission reiterated the importance of lifelong learning for competitiveness and employability and introduced a specific focus on the concept of "adult learning" as a new initiative. In the plan published by European Commission in 2007, underscored the need for high-quality and accessible adult learning. The plan also addressed the necessity to increase the skill levels of the workforce, particularly in response to employment challenges posed by demographic changes, positioning adult learning as a crucial solution (Kaya, 2014).

According to the OECD, adult learning encompasses all educational and learning activities undertaken by adults to improve their knowledge, skills, and competencies within a lifelong learning framework (OECD, 2005). This definition includes not only organized educational programs but also self-directed learning, on-the-job training, and learning through daily life experiences. Adult learning aims to support individuals' social, economic, cultural, and personal development. Jarvis (2004) describes it as a process in which individuals who no longer regularly engage in full-time education participate in structured and sequential activities with the explicit goal of making changes in their knowledge, expertise, understanding, skills, appreciation, attitudes, and values. Adult learning includes a variety of learning activities undertaken after completing initial, full-time education and after entering the labor market (Rüber, Rees, & Schmidt-Hertha, 2018). Adult learning involves

various learning activities undertaken by individuals after completing their initial full-time education and often after entering the workforce. However, the scope of adult learning is broader, as it encompasses lifelong learning opportunities that address adults' needs at different life stages. It includes educational programs and activities that contribute to career advancement, personal growth, social responsibility, community service, or personal interests (Knowles, 1990; Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

The European Union characterizes education and lifelong learning as covering the comprehensive spectrum of formal, informal and non-formal learning experiences (Eurostat, 2016). Formal learning encompasses either the continuation or re-entry into structured educational systems, often resulting in a certificate that is nationally recognized. This type of learning takes place within organized and structured environments explicitly designed for educational purposes. The primary goal is the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies. It includes structured programs such as university degrees, professional certifications, or diplomas. Informal learning, in contrast, typically encompasses self-directed and intentional learning that occurs outside formal courses or institutions. Informal learning arises from everyday activities related to work, family, or leisure, and it is often unplanned from the learner's perspective. Commonly known as "learning by experience" this type of learning reflects the continuous exposure to learning opportunities inherent in daily life. It includes online courses, workshops, or seminars. Non-formal learning is positioned between formal and informal learning, and adopting a framework of varying degrees of formality rather than strict definitions may prove advantageous. This approach addresses the need for a conceptual intermediary between formal and informal learning a need that users frequently encounter. Non-formal learning typically involves general or vocational courses offered in structured settings such as adult education institutions, which are common environments for non-formal learning (Eurostat, 2016). Successful participation in non-formal learning often leads to various types of

certification, including participation certificates or credentials specific to accreditation systems within adult education organizations (Patrick, 2010). Additionally, methods used in adult learning include e-learning, face-to-face instruction, and blended learning approaches. These educational experiences cover a broad range from personal development to professional skills.

Literature Review

The aim of this study is to classify European Union countries in terms of adult learning within the scope of lifelong learning. In this context, recent studies on adult education in Europe have been reviewed, with a focus on those that share a similar objective with this study.

In Grześkowiak's (2014) article, the author examines how individuals in Poland utilize lifelong learning opportunities and the challenges they face, employing multivariate analytical methods. The study includes statistical analyses to understand the impact of various factors on participation and to identify key barriers to accessing education. The clustering procedure reveals that some of the obstacles to continuous education tend to co-occur. The article provides insights into the primary barriers encountered in the lifelong learning process in Poland and offers recommendations for developing policies to mitigate these barriers.

Boeren (2016), in her book, provides a comprehensive examination of adult and lifelong learning within the context of evolving policy environments. It approaches the subject through an interdisciplinary lens, drawing on theories and research from education, sociology, and policy studies. The book explores the factors influencing adults' participation in lifelong learning, such as individual motivations, institutional frameworks, and societal trends. Additionally, it discusses how national and international policies impact access to and engagement in lifelong learning opportunities. A key contribution of this work is its analysis of the interaction between individual agency and structural factors in shaping participation in lifelong learning.

Dumicic, Milun, and Antic (2019), in their study, were examined the impact of adult participation in lifelong learning on employability in selected European countries. The authors compare participation rates in adult learning programs across various European nations to analyze how increased participation influences job prospects. The study used Eurostat data, applying Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis to identify significant impacts on adult education, and cluster analysis to categorize countries into distinct groups. The use of Gross Domestic Product per capita alongside Adult Participation in Learning demonstrated that the most developed and wealthiest European countries are grouped together, whereas the less developed countries form separate clusters.

In their article, Crick, Broadfoot, and Claxton (2004) detail the process of developing an inventory for assessing lifelong learning skills. The study utilized factor analysis to identify dimensions and conducted K-means clustering analysis on the data to further investigate potential connections between these dimensions and distinctions among individual students. To evaluate differences between groups based on various variables, ANOVA was employed, and the results were interpreted accordingly.

In their study; Costantiello, Laureti, and Leogrande (2022) examines the factors influencing lifelong learning in Europe using data from the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS). The study applies various econometric methods, performs cluster analysis using the k-Means algorithm, and conducts Network Analysis to identify four complex and two simplified network structures. Additionally, the study compares eight machine learning algorithms for predicting lifelong learning values and finds that linear regression offers the highest prediction accuracy. The article provides insights into the impact of lifelong learning policies and practices, offering recommendations for the development of educational policies and strategies.

Hwu and Peng (2023) analyzed online learning environments by classifying students' personal traits and behaviors to identify various learner profiles. The study conducted with 2386

participants reveals a significant correlation between learning performance and permanence across three learning clusters and indicating a trend towards continuous learning. It is thought that this classification provides educators with insights into the characteristics of learning behavior, enabling more effective management and support of the learning process.

Most studies in the literature are descriptive and analyze the development of adult learning, often focusing on individual countries. However, this study emphasizes adult learning in the context of evolving education and training processes affected by technological developments and new opportunities, especially in the post-pandemic period. The study aims to classify European countries according to their approaches to adult learning. In this context, studies that are more comparative and classificatory rather than merely descriptive taken into consideration. The literature review reveals that there are no current clustering studies addressing the variables examined in the research. In this context, it is believed that the research provides current and original insights for future studies on the subject.

Method

In this study, European Union countries are examined in terms of adult learning within the scope of lifelong learning. Clustering analysis is conducted and interpreted to classify the countries based on the data obtained regarding adult learning, in order to analyze the similarities and differences between the countries.

Cluster analysis refers to a multivariate statistical technique that partitions variables or units into groups or clusters based on their shared characteristics (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). Unlike other multivariate statistical techniques, cluster analysis utilizes measures of similarity and distance, placing less emphasis on assumptions such as normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. It is generally sufficient for the sample to be representative of the population and for there to be no multicollinearity among the variables (Alpar, 2013).

In the literature, cluster analysis is classified in various ways, but it is generally categorized into two main groups: hierarchical and non-hierarchical clustering methods. Hierarchical methods involve a series of $n - 1$ clustering decisions, where n is the number of units, transforming these units into a hierarchy or a tree structure. Hierarchical clustering is divided into two primary classes: agglomerative and divisive methods. Agglomerative methods begin with each observation forming its own cluster. Then, at each step, the two most similar clusters are merged, continuing this process until a single cluster remains. Among agglomerative methods are single linkage, complete linkage, average linkage, Ward's method, median centering, and centroid methods. In contrast, divisive methods start with a single cluster that includes all units and iteratively split into two, three, and more clusters until each unit is in its own cluster. Divisive methods include techniques such as divisive analysis and automatic interaction detection (Çokluk, Şekercioğlu, & Büyüköztürk, 2014; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). Unlike hierarchical methods, non-hierarchical methods do not involve a stepwise process. Instead, observations are assigned to clusters after the number of clusters is determined. The most commonly used non-hierarchical methods include k-means, medoid, fuzzy, and density-based clustering techniques (Özdamar, 2013).

The study conducted hierarchical clustering analysis using the Ward method with Euclidean distance to identify distinct country groups among the 27 European Union (EU) member states based on selected variables related to adult learning as of 2024. Due to the absence of a predefined number of clusters based on theoretical knowledge, it is decided to apply a hierarchical clustering approach. Ward's method is chosen from among hierarchical clustering techniques because it effectively minimizes within-cluster variability by grouping units with different variance structures. Given the possible instability of clustering analysis outcomes, the k-means clustering method, which is a non-hierarchical approach, was utilized to verify the clusters and enable the comparison of results.

The Ward method incorporates an analysis of variance approach in hierarchical clustering. During the merging of two clusters, the increase in the sum of squared errors for possible combinations is calculated, and the linkage that minimizes this increase is selected to perform the clustering (Akpınar, 2014; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). The Ward method utilizes equation (1) for clustering. In this equation, N represents the number of elements in the relevant cluster, m denotes the new cluster formed by merging two clusters, k and l are the previously formed clusters, and j is the cluster to be merged with these. d_{mj} indicates the distance between cluster m and cluster j (Özdamar, 2013).

$$d_{mj} = \frac{((N_j + N_k)d_{kj} + (N_j + N_l)d_{lj} - N_j d_{kl})}{(N_j + N_m)} \quad (1)$$

The k-means method partitions a dataset of N units into a predetermined number of clusters in such a way as to minimize the within-cluster sum of squares. To perform this task, initial cluster center points are first selected. Subsequently, unit assignments to clusters are made iteratively based on these central points. The assignment process ends when the objective function is maximized, achieving minimal within-cluster variance and maximal between-cluster variance. This maximization is accomplished using equation (2). In equation (2), k denotes the number of clusters, x_{cj} represents the j th unit in cluster c , m_c is the centroid of cluster c , and N_c indicates the number of units in cluster c . In this context, a unit assigned to cluster a in one iteration may be assigned to a different cluster in the next iteration (Özdamar, 2013).

$$\sum_{c=1}^k \sum_{j=1}^{N_c} \|x_{cj} - m_c\|^2 \quad (2)$$

The study focuses on adult learning in the member countries of the European Union, and according to Eurostat, adult participation in lifelong learning is defined as the participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and lifelong learning. In this context, statistics pertaining to these individuals have been

evaluated. The variables considered in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Variables Included in the Analysis

Variable names	Variable
V1	Participation rate in education
V2	Internet use for any learning activity
V3	Education expenditures
V4	Adult population rate
V5	Adult employment rate

The most recent data published by Eurostat for all variables considered in the study were taken into account. The first variable, "participation rate in education," is sourced from the Eurostat Adult Education Survey, with the latest data from 2022 reflecting the percentage of individuals aged 25-64 participating in education and training. The data for the variable "internet use for any learning activity" pertains to 2023 and represents the proportion of individuals aged 25-64 using the internet for purposes such as taking an online course, accessing online learning materials, or communicating with instructors or students via educational websites/portals, in relation to all adults.

Table 2. Data Used in Analysis

Country names	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
Austria	58,00	31,54	4,80	55,15	77,90
Belgium	41,60	34,50	6,30	51,88	75,50
Bulgaria	20,60	13,62	3,90	52,91	79,40
Croatia	27,30	22,09	4,80	52,12	73,50
Cyprus	44,90	13,35	5,10	55,51	81,00
Czechia	45,70	27,15	4,90	50,32	84,80
Denmark	53,00	48,39	5,30	51,36	81,10
Estonia	48,10	47,25	5,80	52,97	83,60
Finland	53,10	59,22	5,50	50,74	80,00
France	50,80	25,60	5,20	48,37	76,40
Germany	60,40	25,71	4,50	54,33	82,10
Greece	16,60	14,27	3,80	53,27	70,00
Hungary	62,40	28,06	5,10	53,87	83,80
Ireland	54,80	54,62	2,70	53,22	80,20
Italy	35,70	31,66	4,10	53,14	69,10
Latvia	52,20	30,83	5,30	52,18	79,10
Lithuania	31,40	32,72	4,90	55,88	80,40
Luxembourg	50,00	45,25	4,70	57,52	78,10
Malta	46,40	40,00	5,00	59,44	82,70
Netherlands	65,20	58,61	5,10	51,76	83,80
Poland	24,30	17,51	4,60	53,84	80,10
Portugal	44,20	38,27	4,30	52,12	81,30
Romania	25,60	8,97	3,20	52,87	71,90
Slovakia	54,80	32,89	4,50	55,81	80,70
Slovenia	42,40	35,31	5,60	53,50	79,80
Spain	49,20	50,00	4,40	55,85	73,30
Sweden	73,90	51,08	7,10	50,81	84,70

The "education expenditures" variable refers to the percentage of government expenditures on education relative to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the year 2022. Since separate data on expenditures for adult education was not available, general education spending has been considered. The "adult population rate" variable indicates the proportion of individuals aged 25-64 within the total population for the year 2023. The final variable, "adult employment rate," represents the employment rate of individuals aged 25-64 in 2023. The data used in the research are compiled from the Eurostat databases and presented in Table 2.

Findings

Analyses in the study are performed using SPSS 24. The dendrogram obtained using the Wards method of the hierarchical clustering methods, is given in Figure 1.

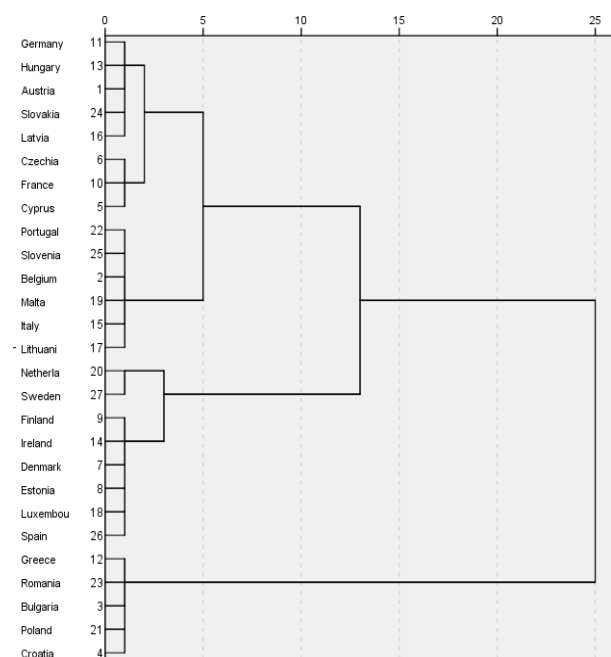


Figure 1. Dendrogram of European Union Countries According to Adult Learning

Based on the dendrogram obtained from the analysis of data on adult learning in European countries using Ward's method and the coefficients showing the distance between observations in the agglomeration schedule, it is determined that the appropriate number of

clusters is 4. The results of the k-means clustering analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. K-means Cluster Analysis Results

Cluster	Countries	Number of countries
1	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherland, Spain, Sweden	8
2	Belgium, Czechia, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia	7
3	Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Romania	6
4	Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia	6

When examining the countries in Cluster 1, which includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden, it is observed that, except for Spain, most are Northern European countries. Cluster 2 consists of Belgium, Czechia, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, and Slovenia. In Cluster 3, which includes Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, and Romania, it is noted that, with the exception of Greece, these are the most recent countries to join the European Union. Cluster 4, which includes Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, and Slovakia, is primarily made up of Central European countries with shared borders, except for Latvia.

Table 4. Cluster Centers

Variable names	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4
V1	55,91	41,06	26,55	56,43
V2	51,80	34,23	14,97	29,11
V3	5,08	5,01	4,23	4,90
V4	53,03	53,75	53,42	53,29
V5	80,60	79,09	75,98	80,00

Table 4 shows the means of the variables within the clusters. Accordingly, the participation rates in education of adults are highest in Cluster 4 and lowest in Cluster 3. In this group, the proportion of individuals using the internet for any learning activity is highest in Cluster 1 and lowest in Cluster 3. When considering general government expenditure on education as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the highest value is in Cluster 1 and the lowest is in Cluster 3. The ratio of adults to the population is very similar across all

clusters, so it can be considered nearly same. Lastly, the adult employment rate is highest in Cluster 1 and lowest in Cluster 3. Upon reviewing Table 4, it is noteworthy that the lowest values for all examined variables are calculated for Cluster 3, which includes the countries Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Poland and Romania.

Table 5. Distances Between Final Cluster Centers

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4
Cluster 1		23,072	47,340	22,714
Cluster 2	23,072		24,327	16,241
Cluster 3	47,340	24,327		33,308
Cluster 4	22,714	16,241	33,308	

Table 5 illustrates the distances between the final cluster centers. As the distance value increases, the similarity between the clusters decreases. Accordingly, the two closest clusters are Cluster 2 and Cluster 4, while the most distant clusters are Cluster 1 and Cluster 3.

In the k-means clustering analysis, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) is conducted to determine which variables are influential, and the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. ANOVA Table for K-means Clustering Method

Variables	Cluster Mean Square	Error Mean Square	F	Sig.
V1	1292,251	58,100	22,242	,000
V2	1617,595	19,324	83,708	,000
V3	,961	,768	1,252	,314
V4	,674	6,151	,110	,954
V5	27,024	17,902	1,510	,239

Upon examining Table 6, it is observed that there are no statistically significant differences among the cluster means based on the variables V3 (Education expenditures), V4 (Adult population rate), and V5 (Adult employment rate). On the other hand, significant differences are found among the cluster means for the variables V1 (Participation rate in education) and V2 (Internet use for any learning activity). To determine which clusters account for these differences, an ANOVA is conducted for these variables to further analyze the results.

First, the variable V1 (Participation rate in education) is examined, with Levene's statistic

(0.685) and its significance (0.570) indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is met. To further investigate the differences among means, Tukey's post-hoc test is performed. The findings related to these tests are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. ANOVA Results for Participation Rate in Education

Cluster	Mean	Cluster	Mean Difference	Sig.
1	55,9125	2	14,85536*	0,005
		3	29,36250*	0,000
		4	-0,52083	0,999
2	41,0571	1	-14,85536*	0,005
		3	14,50714*	0,012
		4	-15,37619*	0,007
3	26,5500	1	-29,36250*	0,000
		2	-14,50714*	0,012
		4	-29,88333*	0,000
4	56,4333	1	0,52083	0,999
		2	15,37619*	0,007
		3	29,88333*	0,000

*The mean difference is significant at the 0,05 level.

Upon examining Table 7, it is observed that there is no significant difference between the means of Cluster 1 and Cluster 4, while significant differences are found among all other pairwise cluster combinations. Notably, Clusters 4 and 1 are highlighted as having the highest mean values for participation rates in adult education. Similarly, for the variable V2 (Internet use for any learning activity), Levene's statistic (0.685) and its significance (0.570) are examined, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is met. Tukey's post-hoc test is again performed, and the findings are presented in Table 8.

According to Table 8, there is no significant difference between the means of Cluster 2 and Cluster 4, while significant differences are found among all other pairwise cluster combinations.

In assessing the distances between cluster centers, it was found that Cluster 2 and Cluster 4 are the closest, while Cluster 1 and Cluster 3 are the most distant, which aligns with previous observations. According to the results of analysis of variance (ANOVA) for k-means clustering, there were no statistically significant differences in the means of general government expenditure on education, the proportion of the adult population, and the rate of adult employment among the

clusters. However, significant differences were found in the means of adult participation in education and the use of the internet for any learning activities.

Table 8. ANOVA Results for Internet Use for any Learning Activity

Cluster	Mean	Cluster	Mean Difference	Sig.
1	51,8025	2	17,57250*	0,000
		3	36,83417*	0,000
		4	22,69750*	0,000
2	34,2300	1	-17,57250*	0,000
		3	19,26167*	0,000
		4	5,12500	0,184
3	14,9683	1	-36,83417*	0,000
		2	-19,26167*	0,000
		4	-14,13667*	0,000
4	29,1050	1	-22,69750*	0,000
		2	-5,12500	0,184
		3	14,13667*	0,000

*The mean difference is significant at the 0,05 level.

Specifically, there was no significant difference between the mean values of Cluster 1 and Cluster 4, which have the highest average rates of adult participation in education, while significant differences were observed between all other pairwise cluster combinations. This indicates that the rates of adult participation in education in the countries of Cluster 1 and Cluster 4 are statistically similar, whereas they differ significantly from those in the other clusters. Regarding the variable of internet usage for learning activities, no significant difference was found between the mean values of Cluster 2 and Cluster 4, whereas significant differences were present between all other pairwise cluster combinations.

Discussions and Conclusion

In today's world, where the value of knowledge is increasingly recognized, education has become a critical priority for countries aiming to evolve into knowledge societies and achieve economic competitiveness. As the European Union strives to become the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, it acknowledges the rapid evolution of workforce requirements and emphasizes the importance of adult learning. Adult learning plays a vital role in encouraging

individuals to engage in lifelong learning, contributing to both societal progress and economic development. By enabling individuals to enhance their skills and competencies, adult learning boosts their competitiveness in the labor market and supports economic growth. Particularly, digital skills, vocational training, and reskilling programs are essential for adapting the workforce to changing economic conditions.

The European Union promotes a culture of lifelong learning to support individuals in their personal and professional development. This approach enables individuals to adapt to evolving social and technological conditions and encourages the adoption of continuous learning as a way of life. Adult learning facilitates the enhancement of skills and competencies, thereby increasing individuals' competitiveness in the labor market and contributing to economic growth. Digital skills, vocational training, and reskilling programs are particularly crucial in ensuring that the workforce can effectively respond to changing economic circumstances.

Adult learning is a crucial tool for combating unemployment and increasing employment. Reskilling and professional development programs assist unemployed individuals in transitioning to new job sectors and enhancing their chances of finding employment. It equips adults with the necessary skills to effectively navigate the digital world. Specifically, digital literacy and technology adaptation are essential for individuals to succeed in both their professional and personal lives. Given the European Union's multicultural framework, adult learning programs help individuals communicate more effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and strengthen social cohesion.

This study aims to categorize European Union countries based on adult learning within the framework of lifelong learning. Using Ward's method and k-means clustering techniques, a cluster analysis was conducted, resulting in the identification of four distinct country clusters. Additionally, by assessing the similarities and differences between these groups, it was determined that countries vary in terms of variables such as adult participation in education

and the use of the internet for any learning activity. The results align with and expand upon existing literature, offering a comprehensive understanding of how different countries perform in terms of adult education and lifelong learning policies. By comparing these findings with prior research, the discussion emphasizes both similarities and novel contributions.

When considering the countries in Cluster 1, they are among those with the highest living standards globally. These countries excel in education, healthcare services, social welfare systems, and overall quality of life. They possess competitive, innovation-driven economies within the global market. Ranked among the top nations for educational attainment, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, and Luxembourg are included in this cluster. These countries are also among the wealthiest globally in terms of GDP per capita, with Luxembourg, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Denmark occupying the top four positions. These results are consistent with studies such as those by Dumčić, Milun, and Antić (2019), which demonstrated that wealthier and more developed countries tend to exhibit higher levels of adult participation in education. This cluster's strong performance in variables such as internet usage for learning and government expenditure on education reflects the advanced digital infrastructure and policy prioritization in these nations. Previous literature, such as Boeren (2016), highlights the critical role of systemic and institutional frameworks in enabling successful lifelong learning programs. Cluster 1 countries exemplify these dynamics, showcasing the benefits of consistent investments in education and digitalization. Despite their small populations, these nations exert significant economic influence. They are recognized for their high-tech industries, vibrant startup ecosystems, and robust digital infrastructure, frequently ranking at the top of innovation indices.

Belgium, Czechia, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, and Slovenia, have been grouped into Cluster 2 due to the similarities they exhibit across the variables considered in this study. While Belgium and Italy, in particular, have well-developed industrial and service sectors, the other

countries also demonstrate significant activity across industrial, tourism, agricultural, and service sectors. Despite varying levels of development, these nations are either close to or exceed the European average in terms of GDP per capita. With the exception of Italy, they are categorized as small to medium-sized economies within the EU. This cluster, encompassing countries like Belgium and Italy, represents nations with diverse but relatively stable economies. The findings support the observations of Grześkowiak (2014), which identified middle-performing countries facing both opportunities and barriers in lifelong learning. This cluster's balanced approach to adult learning policies suggests that while progress has been made, additional efforts are needed to align these nations with the top-performing clusters. The significance of vocational education and reskilling programs, as discussed in European Commission reports (2006, 2007), is particularly evident in these countries, highlighting the role of targeted interventions in improving adult learning outcomes.

The countries in Cluster 3 generally rank among the lowest in educational attainment within the European Union. Bulgaria and Greece, in particular, were ranked the last and second-to-last, respectively, in GDP per capita in 2023, with Croatia, Romania, Poland, and Cyprus also falling below the European average. This cluster's low performance in adult participation rates and education expenditures aligns with earlier findings, such as those by Costantiello, Laureti, and Leogrande (2022), which identified disparities in lifelong learning opportunities among less economically developed EU nations. These nations are categorized as small to medium-sized economies in Europe. Additionally, it is noteworthy that, except for Greece, the other countries in this cluster are among the most recent members of the European Union. Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece are key players in agricultural production and food exports, while Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, and Bulgaria are prominent destinations in the tourism sector. These countries rely heavily on EU funds for economic development, the enhancement of education policies, and infrastructure projects. The

heavy reliance on EU funds for development and education policies underscores the importance of external support in addressing structural barriers. As noted by Crick, Broadfoot, and Claxton (2004), the interplay between individual, institutional, and systemic factors is critical in fostering lifelong learning. For Cluster 3 countries, the development of localized and inclusive adult education programs is essential to bridge these gaps.

In evaluating Cluster 4, it is notable that it includes Germany and France, which are the most populous countries in the cluster, making it the largest in terms of total population. Germany and France, recognized as significant economic powers within Europe, are also home to leading universities and research institutions, establishing themselves as frontrunners in science and technology. Austria, known for its robust economy and high standard of living, is distinguished by its well-developed educational system. This cluster, featuring Germany, France, and Austria, illustrates the dual dynamics of economic powerhouses and emerging educational initiatives. The findings align with Hwu and Peng's (2023) analysis of the significance of continuous learning and the adaptability of adult education programs to diverse learner profiles. The strong participation rates and educational attainment levels in this cluster emphasize the importance of aligning lifelong learning policies with national economic and social goals. In contrast, Hungary, Slovakia, and Latvia, with their smaller and developing economies, are experiencing improvements in educational standards and active participation in EU educational initiatives. The presence of developing economies like Hungary and Slovakia within this cluster further highlights the potential for knowledge transfer and the dissemination of best practices.

When evaluating the results across the variables, the participation rates of adults in education are highest in Cluster 4 and lowest in Cluster 3. The proportion of individuals using the internet for any learning activity is highest in Cluster 1 and lowest in Cluster 3. When considering general government expenditure on education as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the highest value is found in

Cluster 1, while the lowest is in Cluster 3. The ratio of adults to the total population is quite similar across all clusters, and thus can be considered nearly identical. Finally, the rate of adult employment is highest in Cluster 1 and lowest in Cluster 3. Overall, it has been observed that in regions with higher population density, adult participation in education is more prevalent, and the use of the internet for learning activities, education expenditures, and adult employment rates are higher in countries with advanced education systems and higher living standards.

Policymakers should focus on increasing adult participation in education, especially in countries where participation rates are low. They should target regions with lower levels of education and economic development by implementing localized adult education programs. The results obtained from this study highlight that economically advanced countries with high living standards also possess the highest levels of education. As digital skills become increasingly important for navigating the modern labor market, EU member states should invest more in digital literacy programs and vocational training. By focusing on adult learning, countries can increase employment, enhance the digital skills of adults, and contribute to greater societal awareness. It also aids in promoting social justice and increasing opportunities for equality. Countries with strong education systems, such as those in Cluster 1 and Cluster 4, should be encouraged to share successful adult learning models with countries in Cluster 3. Education programs should include elements of cultural integration, social justice, and citizen participation, thus promoting stronger, more inclusive communities.

The study's findings highlight the need for differentiated policy strategies across clusters. For example, countries in Cluster 3 could benefit from adopting successful models from Clusters 1 and 4, focusing on digital literacy, vocational training, and workforce reskilling. The disparities identified in education expenditure and participation rates underscore the importance of equitable resource allocation and tailored interventions. As emphasized by Merriam and Bierema (2013), adult education should not only address economic

imperatives but also foster personal and societal development, encouraging active citizenship and cultural integration.

This study contributes to the literature by providing a comparative and classificatory analysis of adult learning across EU countries, using updated data and methodologies such as cluster analysis. The literature encompasses numerous studies on adult learning in Europe, with the majority being descriptive and focusing on the development of adult learning within individual countries. However, this study addresses adult learning in the context of evolving educational and training processes, particularly in the post-pandemic period, shaped by technological advancements and emerging opportunities. Rather than being merely descriptive, this research takes a more comparative and classificatory approach. Unlike descriptive studies, it offers a nuanced understanding of how countries align with or diverge from each other in terms of lifelong learning indicators. Expanding the study's scope to include additional countries with accessible data would allow for broader regional or continental analyses. Additionally, future studies could incorporate qualitative analyses to explore the lived experiences of learners and educators, enriching the quantitative findings presented here. The insights derived from this study, which may serve as a preliminary foundation for research on adult education in the European Union, are anticipated to make a meaningful contribution to the relevant literature.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Examining the Relationship Among Parental-Reported Problems, Self-Reported Problems, and Psychiatric Diagnosis in Children and Adolescents¹

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Abstract

The study aims to investigate the relationship among psychiatric diagnosis, parental reported problems, and the Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale-Child Version (RCADS-CV) results of children. The sample of the study consisted of 78 children and adolescents (36 girls and 42 boys), and statistical analyses were made using the chi-square test and Fisher's exact test. Relationships identified between the following pairs: worry problems with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), distraction problems with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), hyperactivity problems with Tic and Tourette's Syndrome, obsession problems with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), unhappiness with Major Depressive Disorder or dysthymia, and avoidance of communication with autism spectrum disorder. Furthermore, when examining the relationship between psychiatric diagnoses and diagnoses according to the RCADS-CV, we found other relationships, such as the psychiatric diagnosis of separation anxiety and RCADS-CV separation anxiety, as well as the psychiatric diagnosis of separation anxiety and RCADS-CV social phobia. Lastly, when investigating the relationship between parentally reported problems and RCADS-CV diagnoses, several associations emerged, including the relation between obsession problems and RCADS-CV OCD diagnosis, relationship problems and RCADS-CV's OCD diagnosis, unhappiness problems, and RCADS-CV's depression diagnosis. In conclusion, our findings demonstrate a substantial overlap among parentally reported problems, psychiatric diagnoses, and diagnoses based on RCADS-CV.

Keywords: Parental-reported problems, self-reported problems, psychiatric diagnosis, children, adolescent.

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, çocuklarda psikiyatrik tanı, ebeveynlerin bildirdiği sorunlar ve Çocuklarda Anksiyete ve Depresyon Ölçeği – Yenilenmiş Formu (ÇADÖ-Y) sonuçları arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmaktır. Araştırmanın örneklemini 36 kız ve 42 erkek olmak üzere 78 çocuk ve ergen oluşturmuş olup, istatistiksel analizler Ki-kare testi ve Fisher'in Kesin Olasılık testi kullanılarak yapılmıştır. Çalışma, ebeveynlerin çocukları hakkında bildirdiği sorunlar ile belirli psikiyatrik tanımlar arasında önemli ilişkiler ortaya koymuştur. Buna göre aralarında ilişki bulunan tanı ve sorun çiftleri şöyledir: Yaygın Anksiyete Bozukluğu (YAB) ile endişe sorunları, Dikkat Eksikliği ve Hiperaktivite Bozukluğu (DEHB) ile dikkat dağınıklığı sorunları, Tik ve Tourette Sendromu ile hiperaktivite sorunları, Obsesif-Kompulsif Bozukluk (OKB) ile takıntı sorunları, mutsuzluk ile Majör Depresif Bozukluk veya distimi tanılarını, otizm spektrum bozukluğu tanısı ile iletişimden kaçınma sorunlarıdır. Ayrıca, psikiyatrik tanımlar ile ÇADÖ-Y'nin işaret ettiği tanımlar arasındaki ilişkiyi incelediğinde; ayrılık anksiyetesi psikiyatrik tanısı ile ÇADÖ-Y ayrılık anksiyetesi ; ayrılık anksiyetesi psikiyatrik tanısı ile ÇADÖ-Y sosyal fobi tanısı arasında ilişki bulunmuştur. Son olarak, ebeveynler tarafından bildirilen sorunlar ile ÇADÖ-Y tanımları arasındaki ilişkiye bakıldığında, takıntı sorunları ile ÇADÖ-Y OKB tanısı, ilişki sorunları ile ÇADÖ-Y OKB tanısı, mutsuzluk sorunları ile ÇADÖ-Y depresyon tanısı arasındaki ilişki bulunmuştur. Sonuç olarak, bulgularımız ebeveynlerin bildirdiği sorunlar, psikiyatrik tanımlar ve ÇADÖ-Y'ye dayalı tanımlar arasında önemli bir örtüşme olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anne baba tarafından bildirilen sorunlar, öz bildirime dayalı sorunlar, psikiyatrik tanı, çocuk, ergen

¹ This article is based on Fatma Betül Yılmaz's master dissertation at Hasan Kalyoncu University.

Introduction

It can be argued that arriving at a psychiatric diagnosis is often easier for adults than for children. Adults who voluntarily seek psychiatric assistance tend to provide more accurate information about their issues, leading to more precise diagnostic decisions by psychiatrists. Conversely, children do not typically seek psychiatric services independently, and they may struggle to articulate the problems they are experiencing. Children are usually brought to clinics due to concerns observed by their parents. Moreover, in child and adolescent psychiatry, often a multi-informant approach is used (Booth et al., 2023). These informants may be either children themselves, parents, or teachers (De Los Reyes and Epkins, 2023). Although there is usually some alignment between parentally reported problems, psychiatric diagnoses, and the assessment tools or self-report scales used by psychiatrists, occasional discrepancies may arise. For this reason, psychiatric assessments of children based on parental observations can differ significantly from the evaluation process used for adults (Stranger & Lewis, 1993; Basgul & Topcu, 2020). In the evaluation process, achieving consensus between the child and the parents can significantly facilitate obtaining accurate results. When there is a lack of agreement between these two parties, challenges may arise in the treatment process (Yeh & Wiesz, 2001).

Research has indicated that the information provided by children and parents often differs and rarely aligns (Melton et al., 2016). One explanation for this disparity is that children and parents may offer different yet equally valid perspectives. For example, a child who exhibits unusual behaviors in a school environment may not display these behaviors at home and may exhibit typical behaviors (Mash & Wolfe, 2015). Moreover, children, due to their developmental stage, may not possess a full awareness of their psychiatric functioning. Children and parents may also have differing assessments of which behaviors are problematic, and a child's behavior may vary across different settings (Rescorla et al., 2012; Bradley & Corwyn, 2013). Besides, lack of

communication among family members may be the reason behind the discrepancy between child and parent reports (Caqueo-Urizar et al., 2022). The discrepancy may also stem from the child's developmental stage, as younger children may not accurately evaluate their problems due to a lack of cognitive maturity, while in older ages, as children become more independent, parents may decrease their contact with them, which may decrease their accuracy of evaluation (Hyland et al., 2022).

Studies have shown that self-report-based assessments yield better results in some diagnoses, while assessments based on parental statements are more effective in others. For example, when it comes to internalizing disorders, where children experience their emotions, self-report assessments tend to provide more accurate information. In contrast, for externalizing disorders, where parents play a significant role in shaping their children's behavior, parental assessments tend to be a more reliable source of information (De Los Reyes & Kazdin, 2005). Choudhury et al. (2003) found a weak correlation between child and parental reports of anxiety disorders. Similarly, Cantwell and colleagues (1997) noted that in anxiety disorders among children and adolescents, self-reported symptoms outnumber parent-reported ones. Likewise, Caqueo-Urizar and colleagues (2022) found that emotional symptoms reported more in children's self-report than their parental reports. Moreover, parent-child agreement was low both in depressive symptom severity and the diagnosis of major depressive disorder (Baumgartner et al., 2020). On the other hand, parents tend to report more symptoms in cases of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and conduct disorders. Another study investigated the relationship between children's affective disorders and parental reports. This study revealed that parents tend to underestimate depressive symptoms in children with major depressive disorder while exaggerating depressive symptoms in children with dysthymia and conduct disorder (Boerner et al., 2017). Consequently, there are differences between self-reports and parental reports depending on the type of disorder. Given this information, a critical

issue in psychopathology is determining which source of information is more relevant in assessing the problems experienced by children and their families. Additionally, Riley argues that relying solely on parents' observations is insufficient and advocates for the inclusion of self-report questionnaires for children. However, evaluating solely based on self-reports may not always be feasible, and psychiatrists should also consider the child's reactions to these self-reports (Riley, 2004). Despite the lack of consistency among children, parents, and assessment tools, gathering information from various sources remains crucial in the diagnosis and treatment process (Peeverill et al., 2021).

When analyzing the relevant literature, it becomes evident that there are limited studies addressing parent-reported problems and psychiatric diagnoses (Sheldrick et al., 2012; Eiser & Morse, 2001). Furthermore, exploring the correlation between children's self-report questionnaires (RCADS-CV) and parental observations can provide valuable insights for future research and practices. The present study aims to investigate the relationship among the issues parents observe in their children, the responses on self-report questionnaires, and the psychiatric diagnoses these children receive.

Within the scope of this research, we will seek answers to the following questions:

1. Is there a relationship between psychiatric diagnoses and those determined based on the RCADS-CV?
2. Is there a relationship between problems reported by parents and the diagnoses determined according to the RCADS-CV?
3. Is there a relationship between problems reported by parents and a psychiatric diagnosis?

Method

Participants

The research was designed based on the relational screening model, which is commonly used for examining relationships among two or more variables (Gliner et al., 2015). In this study, we examined the relationship among problems

reported by parents, the responses provided by children on the self-report scale (RCADS-CV), and psychiatric diagnoses. Psychiatric diagnoses were made by a psychiatrist based on DSM-5 criteria through a psychiatric evaluation. The study sample consisted of 3rd to 12th-grade students who sought treatment at a private child and adolescent psychiatry clinic in Istanbul. The total number of participants was 78 children, comprising 36 girls and 42 boys. In non-parametric analysis ten participants per parameter has been stated as sufficient (Aguinis and Harden, 2009), and the present study has exceeded this number to achieve a sufficient sample size. We employed the convenience sampling method when collecting data (Karasar, 2012). The data were collected from scales based on children's self-reports and scales completed by parents regarding their children.

Measures

Sociodemographic Form. This form was created by the researchers to collect the following information about the participants: age, gender, number of siblings, birth order, parental age, parents' education levels, parental status (alive or not, together or not), and any history of illness, surgery, accidents, or febrile seizures among the participants.

Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS-CV). The RCADS-CV is a clinical symptom screening scale based on the DSM-IV for assessing depression and anxiety disorders in children and adolescents. Adapted from the Spence Child Anxiety Scale, it was developed by Chorpita et al. (2000) and comprises 47 items divided into six sub-dimensions: separation anxiety, social phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and major depressive disorder. Total scores are calculated based on the six dimensions. Internal consistency values for the scale are as follows: .82 for social phobia, .79 for panic disorder, .76 for separation anxiety disorder, .76 for major depressive disorder, .73 for obsessive-compulsive disorder, and .77 for generalized anxiety disorder (Chorpita et al., 2000). The Turkish adaptation of the scale, conducted by Görmez et al. (2017), consists of 47 items with a 4-point Likert scale (Never, Sometimes, Often, Always). Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the original 6-factor structure,

with an internal consistency coefficient of .95. Internal consistency values for sub-dimensions range from .75 to .86 (Görmez et al., 2017).

Child Symptom Inventory-4: Parent Checklist.

This scale, developed by Gadow and Sprafkin (1994), comprises a total of 97 items. It assesses a range of conditions including ADHD, ODD, conduct disorder, GAD, OCD, schizophrenia, depression, dysthymia, eating disorders, autism spectrum disorder, social phobia, enuresis, encopresis, and vocal and motor tics. Parents of children aged 5–12 complete the inventory, rating the frequency of symptoms they observe in their children. The scale employs a 4-point Likert structure (Never, Sometimes, Often, Very Often). A study by Sprafkin et al. (2002) demonstrated that the scale exhibits an acceptable level of internal consistency and test-retest reliability.

Adolescent Symptom Inventory-4: Parent Checklist.

Comprising a total of 120 items, this scale was developed by Gadow and Sprafkin (2002) to assess the frequency of behavioral and emotional symptoms observed by parents in children aged 12–18. It covers a range of psychopathologies including ADHD, ODD, conduct disorder, GAD, OCD, panic disorder, social phobia, separation anxiety disorder, MDD, dysthymic disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and schizoid personality disorder (Gadow et al., 2002).

Data Analyses

Data were gathered from participants who sought treatment at a private child and adolescent psychiatry clinic in Istanbul between 2019 and 2020. The study utilized the Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale-Child Version (RCADS-CV), completed by the children, the Child Symptom Screening Inventory, completed by parents, and the Screening Inventory of Adolescent Symptoms. The first part of the Child and Adolescent Symptom Screening Inventory included the Child Adolescent Anxiety and Depression Scale diagnoses and scores, the psychiatrist's diagnoses noted in the files, and the Child and Adolescent Symptom Screening Inventory. Additionally, the complaints provided by families in the "problems

you observe in your children" section were evaluated. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics software, version 23.

Results

Demographics of Participants

As indicated in Table 1, the study group comprises 78 children: 36 (46.2%) girls and 42 (53.8%) boys.

Table 1. Demographics of participants

Variables	Groups	n	%
Gender	Female	36	46.2
	Male	42	53.8
	Total	78	100
Education Level of Mother	Primary	5	6.4
	High School	20	25.6
	Undergraduate	45	57.7
	Graduate	8	10.3
Education Level of Father	Total	78	100
	Primary	7	9
	High School	13	16.7
Parenthood Status	Undergraduate	46	59
	Graduate	12	15.4
	Total	78	100
Kin Marriages between Parents	Together	66	84.6
	Divorced	12	15.4
	Total	78	100
Birth Order of Participants	Present	4	5.1
	Not Present	74	94.9
	Total	78	100
	First	51	65.4
Number of Siblings	Second	18	23.1
	Third	9	11.5
	Total	78	100
Physical Illness	0 (Only child)	14	17.9
	1	40	51.3
	2 or more	24	30.8
	Total	78	100
Accident	Present	23	29.5
	Not Present	55	70.5
	Total	78	100
Surgery	Present	7	9
	Not Present	71	91
	Total	78	100
Total	Present	11	14.1
	Not Present	67	85.9
	Total	78	100

Note. P: Present; NP: Not Present

There were no missing data so data from all 78 participants were used. Regarding the education level of the participants' parents, a significant majority have attained a university degree (mother: 57.7%; father: 59%). It was reported that 66 (84.6%) of the participants' parents were together, while 12 (15.4%) were divorced. In 4 cases (5.1%), the parents shared a kinship bond. Among

the participants, 14 (17.9%) were only children, 40 (51.3%) had one sibling, and 24 (30.8%) had two or more siblings. When examining birth order, the majority, 51 (65.4%), were the first-born, followed by 18 (23.1%) who were second-born, and 9 (11.5%) who were third-born. A total of 23 (29.5%) participants had a history of physical illness, 7 (9.0%) had experienced prior accidents, and 11 (14.1%) had undergone surgical operations.

Is there a relationship between psychiatric diagnoses and those considered according to RCADS-CV?

In this study, we first examined the relationship between psychiatric diagnoses and those considered according to RCADS-CV. The results of the Chi-Square analysis concerning the relationship between diagnoses made by RCADS-CV and the psychiatric diagnoses of the children can be found in Table 2. As illustrated in Table 2, a chi-square test analysis was conducted to determine if there's a significant relationship between diagnoses based on RCADS-CV scores and those made by psychiatrists. For the 2x2 tables (sd=1), Fisher's Exact Test (FET) was employed when the expected value was less than 5 in any of the cells.

Table 2. Chi-square test results regarding the relationship between diagnoses determined by RCADS-CV and the psychiatric diagnoses of children

Diagnoses	Diagnosis	Separation Anxiety		Generalized Anxiety		Panic Disorder		Social Phobia		OCD		Depression	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
Diagnosis of ADHD	P	9	35	5	39	10	34	3	41	4	40	8	36
	NP	9	25	3	31	9	25	6	28	5	29	5	29
	X ² /Fet	,391		---		,146		---		---		,167	
	P	,532		1,000		,703		,167		,492		,683	
Diagnosis of ODD	P	0	4	0	4	0	4	0	4	0	4	1	3
	NP	18	56	8	66	19	55	9	65	9	65	12	62
	Fet/P	,568		1,000		,567		1,000		1,000		,525	
	P	1	9	2	8	2	8	1	9	3	7	1	9
Diagnosis of OCD	NP	17	51	6	62	17	51	8	60	6	62	12	56
	Fet/P	,438		,271		1,000		1,000		,085		1,00	
	P	5	21	4	22	9	17	6	20	6	20	3	23
	NP	13	39	4	48	10	42	3	49	3	49	10	42
Diagnosis of GAD	X ² /Fet	,325		---		2,23		---		---		---	
	P	,569		,430		,136		,053		,053		,526	
	P	1	3	2	2	1	3	2	2	2	2	0	4
	NP	17	57	6	68	18	56	7	67	7	67	13	61
Diagnosis of Social phobia	Fet/P	1,000		,051		1,000		,063		,063		1,000	
	P	3	0	0	3	0	3	2	1	1	2	0	3
	NP	15	60	8	67	19	56	7	68	8	67	13	62
	Fet/P	,011		1,000		1,000		,034		,311		1,000	
Diagnosis of MDd or dysthymia	P	3	10	0	13	2	11	3	10	1	12	6	7
	NP	15	50	8	57	17	48	6	59	8	57	7	58
	Fet/P	1,000		,339		,503		,167		1,000		,006	
	P	2	4	1	5	1	5	1	5	0	6	1	5
Diagnosis of SLD	NP	16	56	7	65	8	64	12	60	9	63	12	60
	Fet/P	,617		,490		1,000		,533		1,000		1,000	
	P	1	4	1	4	2	3	0	5	1	4	0	5
	NP	17	56	7	66	17	56	9	64	8	65	13	60
Diagnosis of Tic or Touretts's Disorder	Fet/P	1,000		,427		,590		1,000		,468		,583	
	P	1	4	0	5	2	3	0	5	0	5	1	4
	NP	17	56	8	65	17	56	9	64	9	64	12	61
	Fet/P	1,000		1,000		,590		1,000		1,000		1,000	
Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder	P	1	4	0	5	2	3	0	5	0	5	1	4
	NP	17	56	8	65	17	56	9	64	9	64	12	61
	Fet/P	1,000		1,000		,590		1,000		1,000		1,000	

Note. P: Present; NP: Not present

As the test result provides only the significance value, the p-value is presented in the table. A significant relationship was observed between the diagnosis of separation anxiety made by the psychiatrist and both separation anxiety and social

phobia diagnoses from the RCADS-CV ($p < .05$). Additionally, a notable relationship was identified between the diagnosis of MDD or dysthymic disorder given by the psychiatrist and the RCADS-CV's diagnosis of depression ($p < .05$). No

significant relationship was detected for other diagnostic groups ($p > .05$).

Table 3. Results of the chi-square test analysis on the relationship between diagnoses determined by RCADS-CV and problems reported by parent

Diagnoses/Problems		Separation Anxiety		Generalized Anxiety		Panic disorder		Social phobia		Obsessive compulsive disorder		Depression	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
The problem of worry	P	6	24	4	26	8	22	4	26	4	26	5	25
	NP	12	36	4	44	11	37	5	43	5	43	8	40
	χ^2 /Fet	,260		---		,141		---		---		,001	
	p	,610		,476		,707		,727		,727		,1000	
The problem of distraction	P	10	25	5	30	10	25	2	33	4	31	8	27
	NP	8	35	3	40	9	34	7	36	5	38	5	38
	χ^2 /Fet	1,08		1,12		,611		---		---		1,75	
	p	,299		,290		,434		,175		1,000		,186	
The problem of hyperactivity	P	0	5	1	4	1	4	0	5	2	3	0	5
	NP	18	55	7	66	18	55	9	64	7	66	13	60
	Fet/p	,584		,427		1,000		1,000		,099		,583	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
The problem of obsession	P	2	14	4	12	5	11	4	12	5	11	1	15
	NP	16	46	4	58	14	48	5	57	4	58	12	50
	Fet/p	,335		,051		,520		,080		,015		,283	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
The problem of relationship	P	10	35	2	43	12	33	4	41	2	43	10	35
	NP	8	25	6	27	7	26	5	28	7	26	3	30
	χ^2 /Fet	0,44		---		,307		---		---		2,36	
	p	,834		,065		,579		,482		,032		,124	
The problem of behavior	P	2	16	1	17	7	11	2	16	2	16	5	13
	NP	16	44	7	53	12	48	7	53	7	53	8	52
	Fet/P	,216		,673		,123		1,000		1,000		,164	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
The problem of unhappiness	P	4	14	1	17	5	13	4	14	2	16	8	10
	NP	14	46	7	53	14	46	5	55	7	53	5	55
	Fet/P	1,000		,673		,758		,199		1,000		,001	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
The problem of anger	P	0	10	0	10	2	8	0	10	0	6	1	9
	NP	18	50	8	60	17	51	9	59	9	63	12	56
	Fet/P	,105		,587		1,000		,595		1,000		1,000	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
The problem of social anxiety	P	2	4	0	6	1	5	1	5	1	5	0	6
	NP	16	56	8	64	18	54	8	64	8	64	13	59
	Fet/P	,617		1,000		1,000		,533		,533		,582	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
Inability to leave mother	P	0	6	1	5	1	5	0	6	0	6	1	5
	NP	18	54	7	65	18	54	9	63	9	63	12	60
	Fet/P	,327		,490		1,000		1,000		1,000		1,000	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
The problem of fear	P	2	4	2	4	2	4	0	6	1	5	0	6
	NP	16	56	6	66	17	55	9	63	8	64	13	59
	Fet/P	,617		,113		,630		1,000		,533		,582	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
The problem of avoiding communication	P	2	4	0	6	2	4	2	4	0	6	2	4
	NP	16	56	8	64	17	55	7	65	9	63	11	61
	Fet/P	,617		1,000		,630		,139		1,000		,260	

Note. P: Present; NP: Not present

phobia diagnoses from the RCADS-CV ($p < .05$). Additionally, a notable relationship was identified between the diagnosis of MDD or dysthymic disorder given by the psychiatrist and the RCADS-CV's diagnosis of depression ($p < .05$). No

RCADS-CV?

Furthermore, this study probed the relationship between diagnoses determined by RCADS-CV and the issues highlighted by parents. The outcomes of

the Chi-Square test analysis in this regard are displayed in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, a chi-square test analysis was conducted to determine if there's a significant relationship between diagnoses based on the RCADS-CV scale scores and the problems

expected value was less than 5 in any of the cells. As the test result only indicates the significance value, the p-value is presented in the table. According to the analysis results, significant relationships were found between RCADS-CV's OCD and the obsession problem, RCADS-CV's

Table 4. Chi-square analysis results on the relationship between psychiatrist diagnoses and problems reported by parents

Diagnoses/Problems		ADHD		ODD		OCD		GAD		Social Phobia		Separation Anxiety		MDD or Dysthymia		SLD		Tic or Tourette's		Autism	
Diagnosis/problems		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
Problem of worry	P	20	10	3	27	3	27	16	14	3	27	2	28	7	23	3	27	3	27	0	30
	NP	24	24	1	47	7	41	10	38	1	47	1	47	6	42	3	45	2	46	5	43
	X ² /Fet	2,09		---		---		8,77		---		---		1,56		---		---		---	
	p	,149		,292		,733		,003		,292		,557		,212		,670		,367		,150	
Problem of distraction	P	28	7	3	32	2	33	11	24	3	32	2	33	6	29	4	31	3	32	3	32
	NP	16	27	1	42	8	35	15	28	1	42	1	42	7	36	2	41	2	41	2	41
	X ² /Fet	14,36		---		---		,104		---		,585		,010		---		---		---	
	p	,000		,321		,171		,747		,321		,585		,010		,400		,652		,652	
Problem of hyperactivity	P	4	1	1	4	2	3	3	2	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	2	3	0	5
	NP	40	33	3	70	8	65	23	50	4	69	3	70	13	60	6	67	3	70	5	68
	Fet/p	,380		,237		,120		,326		1,000		1,000		,583		1,000		,031		1,000	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
Problem of obsession	P	8	8	2	14	6	10	8	8	2	14	0	16	2	14	1	15	1	15	1	15
	NP	36	26	2	60	4	58	18	44	2	60	3	59	11	51	5	57	4	58	4	58
	X ² /Fet	,336		---		---		2,52		---		---		---		---		---		---	
	p	,562		,185		,004		,113		,185		1,000		1,000		1,000		1,000		1,000	
Problem of relationship	P	27	18	2	43	5	40	12	33	1	44	1	44	8	37	4	41	3	42	2	43
	NP	17	16	2	31	5	28	14	19	3	30	2	31	5	28	2	31	2	31	3	30
	X ² /Fet	,557		---		---		2,13		---		---		,095		---		---		---	
	p	,455		1,000		,735		,145		,305		,571		,758		1,000		1,000		,645	
Problem of behavior	P	11	7	2	16	3	15	9	9	0	18	0	18	4	14	3	15	1	17	0	18
	NP	33	27	2	58	7	53	17	43	4	56	3	57	9	51	3	57	4	56	5	55
	X ² /Fet	,210		---		---		2,92		---		---		---		---		---		---	
	p	,647		,226		,689		,087		,568		1,000		,483		,132		1,000		,584	
Problem of unhappiness	P	11	7	2	16	0	18	8	10	0	18	0	18	10	8	1	17	1	17	0	18
	NP	33	27	2	58	10	50	18	42	4	56	3	57	3	57	5	55	4	56	5	55
	X ² /Fet	,210		---		---		1,30		---		---		---		---		---		---	
	p	,647		,226		,105		,254		,568		1,000		,001		1,000		1,000		,584	
Problem of anger	P	7	3	2	8	0	10	5	5	1	9	0	10	4	6	1	9	1	9	0	10
	NP	37	31	2	66	10	58	21	47	3	65	3	65	9	59	5	63	4	64	5	63
	Fet/P	,500		,078		,344		,287		,429		1,000		,056		,574		,506		1,000	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
Problem of social anxiety	P	1	5	0	6	1	5	2	4	0	6	1	5	1	5	1	5	0	6	1	5
	NP	43	29	4	68	9	63	24	48	4	68	2	70	12	60	5	67	5	67	4	68
	Fet/P	,080		1,000		,574		1,000		1,000		,216		1,000		,392		1,000		,337	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
Problem of inability to leave mother	P	4	2	0	6	0	6	2	4	0	6	0	6	2	4	2	4	0	6	1	5
	NP	40	32	4	68	10	62	24	48	4	68	3	69	11	61	4	68	5	67	4	68
	Fet/P	,691		1,000		1,000		1,000		1,000		1,000		,260		,065		1,000		,337	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
Problem of fear	P	2	4	0	6	0	6	4	2	0	6	0	6	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5
	NP	42	30	4	68	10	62	22	50	4	68	3	69	12	60	5	67	4	68	4	68
	Fet/P	,395		1,000		1,000		,091		1,000		1,000		1,000		,391		,337		,337	
		P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
Problem of avoiding communication	P	2	4	0	6	0	6	1	5	0	6	1	5	2	4	1	5	0	6	2	4
	NP	42	30	4	68	10	62	25	47	4	68	2	70	11	61	5	67	5	67	3	69
	Fet/P	,395		1,000		,1000		,657		1,000		,216		,260		,392		1,000		,045	

Note. ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; ODD: Oppositional Defiant Disorder; OCD: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder; GAD: generalized Anxiety Disorder; MDD: Major Depressive Disorder; SLD: Special Learning Disorder; P:Present; NP: Not Present

reported by parents. For the 2x2 tables (sd=1), Fisher's Exact Test (FET) was utilized when the expected value was less than 5 in any of the cells. As the test result only indicates the significance value, the p-value is presented in the table. According to the analysis results, significant relationships were found between RCADS-CV's OCD and the obsession problem, RCADS-CV's

($p < .05$). No significant relationship was observed between other diagnostic groups and the problems reported by parents ($p > .05$).

Is there a relationship between problems reported by parents and psychiatric diagnoses?

As illustrated in Table 4, a chi-square test analysis was conducted to determine if there was a significant relationship between the diagnoses made by the psychiatrist and the problems reported by parents. For the 2x2 tables ($sd=1$), Fisher's Exact Test (FET) was utilized when the expected value was less than 5 in any of the cells. Since the test result only provides the significance value, the p-value is included in the table. The analysis results showed significant relationships between: the anxiety problem and the diagnosis of GAD, distraction and the ADHD diagnosis, hyperactivity and tic or Tourette's disorder, obsession and the OCD diagnosis, unhappiness and the diagnosis of MDD or dysthymic disorder, communication avoidance and the diagnosis of Autism ($p < .05$). No significant relationships were found for other diagnoses and problem groups ($p > .05$).

Discussion

In this study, we explored the relationship between problems reported by parents of children attending a private psychiatry clinic and the diagnoses these children received. Additionally, we examined the relationship between diagnoses derived from the Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS-CV)—which the children completed—and both the issues raised by the parents and the diagnoses given by the child psychiatrist.

Self-report measurement tools with established validity are supportive instruments in child and adolescent clinical practice (Jeffrey et. al., 2020). In that manner, Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS-CV) was compared with both diagnosis and parents reports of children to see the possible discrepancies and overlapping. In addition, gathering information from different sources is often necessary in child

psychiatric evaluation (McDonald et. al., 2021) because every source may provide equally important information in different settings. Therefore, parent reports was compared with both children self-reports and psychiatric diagnoses. Comparing these information may ensure new insights to the nature of different diagnosis as some diagnosis heavily aligns with parents reports some, on the other hand some diagnosis more accurately in accord with self-reports.

The range of diagnoses for the children included: attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety disorder, separation anxiety disorder, major depressive disorder (MDD), dysthymic disorder, specific learning disorder (SLD), tic disorder or Tourette's syndrome, enuresis, encopresis, autism spectrum disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sexual orientation disorder, and trichotillomania. Parents highlighted concerns such as impulsivity, distraction, hyperactivity, obsession, relationship and behavior issues, unhappiness, anger, social anxiety, urinary and fecal incontinence, fear, communication avoidance, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and appetite loss. In examining the relationship between parent-reported issues and psychiatric diagnoses, we identified links between worry and GAD, distraction and ADHD, hyperactivity with tic disorders or Tourette's syndrome, and obsession with OCD.

Upon analyzing the RCADS-CV scores, a correlation emerges between feelings of unhappiness and scores indicative of depression. Further examination of the relationship between the RCADS-CV scores and psychiatric diagnoses reveals that the psychiatric diagnosis of separation anxiety disorder aligns with RCADS-CV scores for separation anxiety, generalized anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and total anxiety.

Both MDD and dysthymia are correlated with RCADS-CV depression scores. Social phobia is linked to RCADS-CV generalized anxiety scores. Separation anxiety disorder correlates with RCADS-CV separation anxiety scores. Social phobia disorder aligns with total anxiety scores on

the RCADS-CV. In conclusion, there is a substantial congruence between issues reported by families, psychiatric diagnoses, and scores on the RCADS-CV scale.

Relationship Between Psychiatric Diagnoses and Diagnoses According to RCADS-CV

The study findings indicated a notable correlation between the RCADS-CV scores for separation anxiety, generalized anxiety, OCD, and total anxiety, and the psychiatric diagnosis of GAD. Conversely, there was no discernible correlation between the RCADS-CV depression score and the diagnoses of MDD and dysthymic disorder. A recent qualitative study showed that children with depression disorders may often feel embarrassed about their feelings, which makes it harder for them to disclose their symptoms (Radez et al., 2022). Therefore, participants in the present study may underscore their symptoms of depression. In addition, this may be the result of the small sample size used in the present study. Furthermore, there was a link between RCADS-CV generalized anxiety scores and the diagnosis of social phobia, as well as between the RCADS-CV scores for separation anxiety, social phobia, and total anxiety, and the psychiatric diagnosis of separation anxiety disorder. It was observed that RCADS-CV scores did not vary in relation to the psychiatric diagnoses of ADHD, SLD, tic or Tourette's disorder, and autism. This might suggest that the RCADS-CV isn't a predictive tool for these particular diagnoses. When considering the OCD diagnosis, no significant difference emerged in RCADS-CV scores. Potential reasons could include the reluctance of children and adolescents to disclose their symptoms, prevalent lack of insight in OCD, or a predilection towards ego-dystonic OCD (Canavera, 2009). Diagnostically, a pronounced correlation was identified between the psychiatric diagnosis of separation anxiety and the RCADS-CV's diagnoses of both separation anxiety and social phobia. Moreover, a significant relationship was observed between the diagnosis of MDD and dysthymic disorder and the RCADS-CV depression diagnosis. These results underscore the reliability and validity of the RCADS-CV as an instrument that not only corroborates clinical

diagnoses but also aligns with the concerns voiced by families, especially concerning depression and separation anxiety disorders.

Relationship Between Problems Reported by Parents and Diagnoses According to RCADS-CV

Based on the research results, RCADS-CV scores did not display significant variations in relation to problems such as anxiety, distraction, hyperactivity, obsession, relationship issues, behavioral concerns, anger, social anxiety, difficulties in separating from the mother, fear, and avoidance of communication. The only distinct difference observed was in the depression score, which was higher among participants who reported unhappiness. Such findings can be attributed to the disparities between self-reports and parent-reported evaluations. For instance, the overarching anxiety focus of the RCADS-CV may explain its consistent scores across varying anxiety-related problems. Additionally, parents might use the term "obsession" not in the context of compulsive symptoms but to describe tic-like repetitive movements or their children's stubborn behavior. This perception could be a significant reason why the OCD sub-score of the RCADS-CV remains unchanged in relation to obsession-related issues. The limited sample size also likely influences these results. A study by Aras et al. (2007) revealed that 25.9% of patients at a child psychiatry clinic received a depression diagnosis stemming from unhappiness complaints. Given that children and adolescents are often referred to psychiatric clinics by their families, our research concurs with Aras et al. (2007) in suggesting a relationship between reported unhappiness and depression diagnoses according to RCADS-CV. Several studies indicate that parents tend to underreport depressive symptoms compared to the children's self-reports, while being more likely to highlight behavioral issues (Epanchin and Rennells, 1989; Edelbrock et al., 1985). This contrast from our study might stem from cultural nuances and familial dynamics specific to our region.

Moreover, we observed notable correlations between certain reported problems and their corresponding RCADS-CV diagnoses: obsession and RCADS-CV's OCD diagnosis; relationship

issues and RCADS-CV's OCD diagnosis; and unhappiness and RCADS-CV's depression diagnosis. These findings align with Rapaport et al. (2000), who noted that children often conceal their OCD symptoms, leading parents to inadvertently downplay these symptoms. Conversely, Canavera et al. (2009) found a weak concordance between children with OCD and their parents, both diagnostically and symptomatically. Yet, similar to Rapaport et al., parents reported more symptoms than children. This discrepancy could be attributed to a lack of insight into OCD or a sense of shame associated with symptom disclosure (Canavera et al., 2009). In another study, there was no observed relationship between the child's depression scales and those of their parents. Instead, parents predominantly concentrated on behavioral problems in their children, rather than emotional states like unhappiness (Epanchin & Rennell, 1989). Parental reports of emotional issues were found to be fewer than those derived from self-reports (Edelbrock et al., 1985; Caqueo-Urizar et al., 2022). The findings of this research corroborate the relationship between unhappiness and the RCADS-CV depression diagnosis, aligning with prior studies. Furthermore, the observed correlation between OCD and relationship issues is supported by the study of Piacentini et al. (2003). In their investigation into the impact of OCD on the social functioning of children and adolescents, they found that OCD caused significant familial issues for over half of the participants. Additionally, 33% of parents noted that OCD led to substantial social challenges for their children. Jansen et al. (2020) stated that difficulties in understanding social cues, and facial expressions, as well as struggles in mentalizing, are common in patients with OCD. It was also noted that parents reported more problems in home, school, family, and academic settings than their children did.

The Relationship Between Parental Reported Problems and Psychiatrist Diagnoses

This study reveals statistically significant relationships between certain parental reported problems and specific psychiatric diagnoses. These include the association between worry and a GAD

diagnosis; distraction and ADHD diagnosis; hyperactivity and a diagnosis of Tic and/or Tourette Syndrome; obsession and OCD diagnosis; unhappiness with dysthymia or major depressive disorder; and avoidance of communication with an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis. The identification of ADHD in children whose parents reported distraction problems is expected. However, the lack of an ADHD diagnosis in children reported as hyperactive, coupled with the link to tic and/or Tourette's disorder, may arise from parents equating motor movements in children with tic disorders to hyperactivity. Moreover, both ADHD and Tourette's Syndrome are neurodevelopmental disorders and their high comorbidity rates has been shown in clinical studies range between 36% and 62% (Comings et al., 1985; Jankovich and Rohaidy, 1987) and this phenomenon was explained with shared genetic structure (Yang et al., 2021). Another study noted hyperactivity symptoms in 24% of children aged 6–12 and 57% aged 12–16 with Tourette's disorder (Cavanna et al., 2013). Consequently, this study corroborates the idea that attention problems reported by parents or teachers may align with an ADHD diagnosis upon psychiatric evaluation. Another observation from this research is that while parents can recognize anxiety in their children, studies indicate families often underestimate their children's anxiety levels compared to self-reports (Caqueo-Urizar et al., 2022; Lagattuta et al., 2012). Given cultural nuances in parent-child relationships, Turkish culture, which often sees parents closely interact with their children, might allow for better detection of mood shifts. This underscores the value of cross-cultural studies in this domain. Lastly, issues identified as relationship problems align with symptoms of autism disorder (American Psychological Association [APA], 2013). The observed link between reported relationship problems and autism might be attributable to the core autism symptoms: difficulties in forming relationships and social interaction inadequacies. Guinchat et al. (2012) revealed that families can detect communication and social interaction issues in their children as early as 22.3 months old, on average. In conclusion, evaluations based on

parental reports play a pivotal role in psychiatric assessments and diagnoses, and parents' observations generally find resonance.

Implications

The present study offers a new perspective on the discrepancy between child and parent reports in child psychiatry, especially in a Turkish sample. The alignments and discrepancies in different diagnoses may provide new insights into the nature of various diagnoses, as the degree of accuracy varies across informants for different diagnoses. Furthermore, the Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale-Child Version (RCADS-CV) is mostly aligned with psychiatric diagnoses. The findings of the present study suggest that the RCADS-CV is a valid scale and may be more widely used in clinical settings.

In the future, a study design incorporating diverse psychiatric tools, particularly those examining clusters of disorders beyond anxiety, and a larger sample size would provide new insights into understanding the discrepancies among parental reports, child self-reports, and psychiatric diagnoses.

Limitations

While the insights from this study enrich the existing literature, they come with certain limitations. The study's small sample size and its confinement to a private clinic pose significant constraints. Future research would benefit from more expansive and varied sample sizes. Moreover, relying solely on the RCADS-CV and not incorporating scales for other psychiatric disorders presents another limitation. Conducting further research using diverse measurement tools will address this gap meaningfully.

Conclusion

Results from this study highlight a correlation between parent-reported problems, psychiatric diagnoses, and self-reported disorders. Given these findings, it's evident that utilizing multidimensional evaluations is crucial for diagnostic processes in clinical assessments.

Additionally, considering the variations in alignment between parental and self-reports, it's advisable to tailor or contemplate the assessment type based on the issues presented by children and adolescents.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Factors Supporting Autonomy Development in Individuals with Spina Bifida: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Studies have shown that autonomy is a strong determinant of psychological well-being and social participation for individuals with disabilities. However, the factors influencing the development of autonomy in individuals with spina bifida have not yet been elucidated. This study aimed to explore the life experiences of adults with spina bifida that influence them in building their autonomy. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine people diagnosed with spina bifida using the phenomenological research method, which is a qualitative research approach. As a result of the interviews, it was concluded that assuming responsibility, self-confidence and close relationships contributed to the participants' autonomy development. It has also been found that female participants faced additional challenges related to their gender when developing their autonomy. We expect that this qualitative study will contribute to a better understanding of the factors supporting autonomy development in youth with spina bifida. In particular, families and professionals working in this field should focus on helping children and adolescents with spina bifida to assume more responsibility at an age-appropriate level and participate in activities to increase their self-confidence. Supportive services should be developed to ensure strong family and peer relationships.

Keywords: Autonomy, spina bifida, qualitative, empowerment, well-being

Öz

Çalışmalar, engelli bireylerin psikolojik iyi oluşu ve sosyal katılımı için özerkliğin önemli bir belirleyici olduğunu göstermektedir. Ancak, spina bifidalı bireylerde özerklik gelişimini etkileyen faktörler henüz tam olarak aydınlatılamamıştır. Bu çalışma, spina bifidalı yetişkinlerin özerkliklerini inşa etmelerinde etkili olan yaşam deneyimlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nitel bir araştırma yaklaşımı olan fenomenolojik araştırma yöntemi kullanılarak spina bifida tanısı almış dokuz katılımcı ile derinlemesine, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bulgular, sorumluluk alma, özgüven ve yakın ilişkilerin özerklik gelişimine katkıda bulunduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, kadın katılımcıların özerkliklerini geliştirirken cinsiyetlerine bağlı olarak ek zorluklarla karşılaştığı tespit edilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın, spina bifidalı gençlerde özerklik gelişimini destekleyen faktörlerin daha iyi anlaşılmasına katkı sağlamasını umuyoruz. Aileler ve profesyoneller, çocukların yaşlarına uygun sorunluluklar almasına ve özgüvenlerini artırıcı faaliyetlere katılmalarına odaklanmalıdır. Aynı zamanda, güçlü aile ve akrana ilişkilerini destekleyecek hizmetlerin geliştirilmesi önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Özerklik, spina bifida, nitel araştırma, güçlendirme, iyi oluş

Introduction

The autonomy of individuals with disabilities has been discussed in a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, law, and psychology (Collins & O'Mahony, 2015). Researchers have discussed autonomy under various headings: making decisions independently of other people and situations, individualisation, having self-confidence when making decisions, meeting self-care needs, self-determination, independence, and having control and power over one's own life (Morsünbül, 2011; Oliver, 1989; Reindal, 1999; Rock, 1988; Wullink et al., 2009). The concept of autonomy within the medical field refers to the ability to make decisions independently of other people or a given situation and to govern oneself without external influence (Reindal, 1999). When researchers define autonomy in terms of disability, the ability to perform self-care activities is a key consideration (Oliver, 1989); however, people with disabilities may have different ideas about autonomy. For example, in a study conducted by Rock (1988), people with disabilities defined autonomy as the ability to maintain the control and power to make choices regarding the management of their lives. Importantly, as opposed to taking action alone and without support, autonomy is about getting help when it is needed (Reindal, 1999). In Crittenden (1990)'s model, which examines the concept of autonomy in individuals with disabilities, autonomy is defined as the capacity of individuals to take responsibility for their behaviour, make decisions about their own lives and maintain supportive social relationships.

Improving autonomy will support the right to independent living and psychological well-being of individuals with disabilities, improve their quality of life and participation in community life (Çoban, 2008; Krhutová, 2017; O'Shea & Salzer, 2020; Ünal & Gençöz, 2018). It also supports them to participate in business life and achieve economic independence (Chumo et al., 2023; Romeo & Yepes-Baldó, 2019). Through these developments, individuals with disabilities can realize their own potential in their personal lives and make a greater contribution to society.

As postulated by Bandura (1977), the theory of self-efficacy provides a powerful lens for understanding how individuals perceive their autonomy and the factors that support its development. It is an approach that describes individuals' beliefs about their ability to perform a particular task or situation successfully, and examines the effects of these beliefs on behavioral, cognitive, and emotional processes (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs and their effects on behaviors are based on four main sources. The first source is mastery experiences, whereby individuals who have succeeded in a task believe that they will succeed in similar tasks (Bandura, 2006). The second source, termed vicarious experiences, posits that individuals will enhance their belief in their own success when they observe the success of others with similar characteristics. Another factor is verbal persuasion, where encouraging or discouraging feedback provided by individuals' social environment can affect their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The last source of shaping self-efficacy is physiological and emotional states. For example, stress, anxiety, and physical health problems can downgrade the self-efficacy of individuals, while positive emotions and good health contribute to their self-efficacy (Chao et al., 2013; Warner et al., 2014). Assessing autonomy within the framework of self-efficacy allows for consideration of both personal empowerment and external support systems.

Spina bifida can be defined as a complex neural tube defect caused by closure problems within the spine and spinal cord, diagnosed before or during birth (Antolovich & Wray, 2008). The condition most commonly affects the nervous system (brain and spinal cord), urinary tract (kidney and bladder), intestines, and muscular and skeletal systems (Cevher, 2007). Spina bifida can lead to many limitations at various levels of severity such as congenital malformations of the brain, hydrocephalus, Chiari II malformation, abnormal spinal curvatures or bumps, neurogenic bladder, or muscle weaknesses. The degree of movement difficulty varies depending on the location of the sac on the back (Karaçul, 2017). Individuals experiencing problems with the kidneys and bladder have difficulty holding urine in the

bladder or emptying the bladder; therefore, they need to void urine during the day using the clean intermittent catheterisation (CIC) method (Cevher, 2007) and/or diapers. They also suffer from side problems such as infections, skin irritations and pressure sores in daily life (Beierwaltes et al., 2020; Forster et al., 2021).

Individuals with spina bifida not only require various assistive devices for mobility and regular CIC for urine monitoring but often also need support from family members and people or systems in social life (McDonnell & McCann, 2000; Tradewell et al., 2018). Needing another person's support for health management can limit activities that could be performed independently and may require a reliance on others to organize daily routines (Logan et al., 2020; Sawin et al., 2021). These situations may have a significant effect on the autonomy-related experiences of those individuals. According to our review of the literature, some studies, albeit not many, have been conducted on the autonomy of individuals with spina bifida during their childhood and adolescence and these studies focus on whether children with spina bifida have the same level of autonomy as their peers or on their medical autonomy (Friedman et al., 2009; Monsen, 1992; O'Hara & Holmbeck, 2013); however, no studies have examined the experiences of adults with spina bifida. It is crucial to discover the thoughts and experiences of people with spina bifida who have completed the transition to adulthood regarding autonomy in order to assess disease-specific needs. Autonomy enables individuals with spina bifida to develop self-management skills, increase social participation, and monitor their health conditions more effectively (Meulenkamp et al., 2019; Psihogios et al., 2015). Researching the autonomy of individuals with spina bifida is crucial for enhancing quality of life at the individual level and for developing more inclusive policies at the societal level. Therefore, the present study aimed to uncover the life experiences that have influenced the development of autonomy in adults with spina bifida.

Method

In this study, phenomenological research method, which is a qualitative approach that facilitates the investigation of participants' life experiences and how they interpret these experiences, was used (Patton, 2014). Phenomenological research focuses on uncovering the shared meanings of life experiences related to a particular phenomenon or concept, aiming to understand the essence of these experiences (Creswell, 2013). Accordingly, the phenomenological method provided an appropriate framework for understanding the life experiences that influence the autonomy of individuals with spina bifida and how they interpret these experiences. The study sought to identify common themes from these life experiences related to autonomy.

Participants

As Spina Bifida is a rare disease and affects individuals at different levels, purposive sampling method was preferred in this study. Purposive sampling is a method that allows researchers to select a sample that more closely aligns with their research aims and objectives. This approach helps to ensure the study is conducted rigorously and the data and results are reliable (Campbell et al., 2020). This study involves individuals with spina bifida who have reached adulthood because the experience of autonomy during adulthood provides a better framework for evaluation. Adults can provide extensive insights into this process, as they have completed the stages of childhood and adolescence, where autonomy begins to develop. For this reason, interviews were conducted with people over 25. The participants were reached through an organisation that supports people with spina bifida. A poster for the study and the link to the application form created via Google Forms were shared with the organisation. The association sent the poster to its members via email, and the poster was also shared on social media accounts to reach non-members. Following the announcements, individuals who were interested in participating completed the form or sent an email. Participants were contacted by the researchers to provide detailed information about

the study and to assess whether they met the participation criteria. Two people were not included in the study because they did not meet the age criteria. Ultimately, nine adults with spina bifida were selected for the study. Table 1 provides demographic information regarding the participants.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Characteristics		n (%)
Gender	Female	5 (%55,5)
	Male	4 (%44,5)
Age	26-30	5 (%55,5)
	31-41	4 (%44,5)
Education level	Primary school/ Apprenticeship	1 (%11,1)
	High school	3 (%33,3)
	Associate degree	4 (%44,5)
	Bachelor's degree	
Working status	Working	7 (%77,7)
	Not Working	1 (%11,1)
	Retired	1 (%11,1)
Marital status	Single	6 (%66,6)
	Married	3 (%33,3)
Health supports	No need	2 (%22,2)
	Orthosis / Crutches	3 (%33,3)
	Orthosis / Crutches / Wheelchair when needed	3 (%33,3)
	Wheelchair	1 (%11,1)
Bladder control	Complete control	3 (%33,3)
	No control	5 (%55,5)
	Partial control	1 (%11,1)

Procedure

A semi-structured interview form was developed by researchers, both of whom are social workers with extensive experience working with people with disabilities, based on the literature. The following steps were followed in the preparation of the semi-structured interview form in order to ensure validity and reliability. Before the semi-structured form was finalised, experts who work with individuals with spina bifida were consulted. Thus, the interview questions were reviewed and validated through expert opinion to ensure content validity. To test the reliability and clarity of the interview questions, pilot interviews were conducted with two individuals with the condition who were not included in the sample and the form

was finalised. The form included questions focusing on basic demographic information and life experiences related to autonomy. Selected interview questions can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Selected semi-structured interview questions

1. What does autonomy mean to you?
2. Which experiences have contributed to your sense of autonomy?
3. What circumstances do you believe support your autonomy?
4. What areas do you feel you can act autonomously?

During the interviews, care was taken not to be directive; participants were encouraged to elaborate on their narratives to increase data depth.

Due to the pandemic and the fact that the participants live in different cities, the interviews were conducted by video call. Zoom was used for the interviews. After approval from the participants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were completed in a minimum of 60 and a maximum of 184 minutes (resulting in a mean of 106.4 minutes). At the end of the interview, each participant was given an opportunity to provide additional information or ask questions. No material incentives were offered for participating in this study.

Ethics

We obtained approval from the University's Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee before conducting the study. Individuals with spina bifida who wanted to participate in the study were informed about the purpose, method and how the data obtained would be used. As the interviews were conducted through a video call platform, the participants gave an audio-recorded oral statement of informed consent. Participants in the study were given pseudonyms to hide their identities.

Reflexivity

During the process of this study, the researchers were also preparing a doctoral thesis on separation and individualisation in individuals with spina

bifida; the qualitative research presented in this article forms a part of the doctoral thesis. During the structuring process of the research, interviews were conducted with spina bifida association managers and professionals working with individuals with spina bifida. In addition, the researchers have personal working experiences and academic backgrounds in the field of disability. These experiences have shaped the study's construction and execution.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was conducted using thematic analysis, a method that systematically identifies, analyzes, and interprets patterns, themes, and meanings within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process was carried out following the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke. The interviews were audio recorded after permission was obtained from the participants. Then the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were read multiple times to check for spelling errors and familiarise researchers with the data. The transcripts were transferred to the MAXQDA 2022 Qualitative Data Analysis Program to facilitate the coding and analysis process. We coded the data based on how individuals with spina bifida define autonomy and how their life experiences affect autonomy. Each point expressed by the participants was combined under the codes created, which were then thematically analysed within the scope of the purpose of the study.

Findings

The analysis of the participants' responses to the semi-structured interviews resulted in the creation of three distinct categories: assuming responsibility, self-confidence, and close relationships.

Assuming Responsibility

The theme of assuming responsibility was addressed through the sub-themes of decision-making in health management, problem-solving, and supporting individuals with disabilities.

Individuals assume responsibility for their own lives through the decisions they make. Participants who were encouraged to make their own decisions as children by their family and social environment, and whose decisions were supported, stated that they did not have difficulty making decisions or expressing their preferences.

She can't do it, she can't come. Nobody thought of it that way. I would be asked first. I would say that I could or could not come. So they always gave me that right. (Derya)

Participants assumed more responsibility as their social and physical opportunities increased. Due to this, they became more autonomous. Some of them stated that starting to use a wheelchair and doing CIC on their own enabled them to act according to their own wishes and meet their own needs independently of their relatives.

During my adolescence, I started to take care of my personal needs entirely. I even cooked at home because I started to use a wheelchair. (Ayla)

When I feel self-sufficient... My story of autonomy began when I started using a catheter myself. It is not easy to live as two people. (Derya)

When faced with a problem, the participants made an individual effort and tried different solutions, thus assuming responsibility for their problems. For example, one participant (Yağmur), who did not have a high school for the disabled in her region, continued her high school education through open education. In this process, she conducted active research, came across a disability association, and spent time there regularly. Ayla, on the other hand, felt lonely when her peers started to get engaged and gradually broke ties. She took steps to create a new environment. Another participant (Barış) developed various measures to cope with his urinary incontinence problem.

I was at home since there was no high school for me. Then I discovered the association. I started spending time there. (Yağmur)

One day, while listening to the radio, I called the radio station. I said "I want to work. I want to DJ on the

radio." They said, "Let's meet." I went and met them. I spent most of my time at the radio station after that. (Ayla)

Because I was consuming a lot of liquid in the summer, I was having trouble. Later, to compensate, I always kept spare underwear. I always had my bag with me. Even now, I do. (Barış)

Furthermore, some participants assumed responsibility for supporting other disabled people. Besides raising awareness in society, they want to strengthen bonds between disabled individuals. For this purpose, they participated in non-governmental organisations and both took part in and assumed responsibility for the development of sports activities for disabled people. One of the participants involved in basketball felt responsible for supporting people with disabilities and encouraging them to participate, eagerly communicating with everyone within her reach.

I speak for people who cannot speak out. I express their wishes. I try to bring people with spina bifida together so we can get to know each other. It is easier to overcome difficulties with solidarity. (Eda)

As my teachers guided and encouraged me to be involved in this sport, I wanted to act like them and to be a guiding light for my disabled friends and I achieved. Thanks god. That's why I'm so happy... Everywhere I go, I strive to reach and contact people with disabilities. (Ayla)

Self-confidence

Self-confidence enabled the participants to exhibit behaviours that made them feel more autonomous; a belief that they could do something provided a sense of autonomy. Some discovered their capabilities through sport and their relationship with themselves has been positively affected by these discoveries. Three participants said sports increased their motivation in life and made them more self-confident.

Sports gave me self-confidence. When I started playing sports, my motivation increased. I realised that I am alive. I was only 12 years old when I started. I

travelled to Austria alone at 14. I became aware of things I could do. (Emre)

I overcame teenage depression by playing sports... Everything starts with self-confidence and sports should be one of the steps to becoming confident. (Ayla)

I felt that my health problems decreased as I played sports. I gained self-confidence. Before joining a sports club, I had a little self-doubt, but then it disappeared. (Barış)

CIC use is quite common in people with spina bifida and parental support while performing CIC can create a sense of dependency. The participants stated that they felt more self-confident and psychologically comfortable when they were able to complete the process on their own.

I couldn't take my mother everywhere. So I said I'd do it, and one day I sat down and thought about how to do it. I mean, I designed it in my head, planned it, and did it. (Emre)

As a final point, some participants stated that they had been self-confident from an early age and that this had made life more liberating for them.

I was always a kid who tried to be everywhere. I like doing everything I'm told I can't do. It's a bit about my personality. You have to say, "I'm here, I want to be here." Then, your family or friends will see this desire in you and support you. (Derya)

I've always been a self-confident person since I was a child. (Kerem)

Close Relationships

The theme of close relationships has been examined through two subthemes: primary relationships (family) and secondary relationships, which include individuals from the social environment, such as peers, teachers, and relatives. A key factor highlighted by numerous participants was their families' attitudes. The supportive attitudes of their families encouraged them to participate more in life, express their wishes, and take action. For example, some families had prepared for the challenges their children may face at school:

My family told me, "If they tell you something, pay no mind, don't listen. We love you as you are. Some people are fat, some are skinny, some can run, and some cannot run." Perhaps that's why I was able to take a stand against people a little more. (Ayla)

My mother visited and talked to the students at my school before me. She gave them information about me. She was more excited and worried than me. (Derya)

Bariş experienced contrasting attitudes from his parents. His mother supported his desire for independent actions, whereas his father argued that these wishes would not be possible. Bariş regularly mentioned how important his mother's support was to him.

The first time I wanted to buy a car, my father said, "No, you can't drive, you just got your driver's license. You'll have an accident, you'll get into trouble." But my mother said, "My son can do it. His uncles are drivers. There are many drivers in his family. He can do it too." I received a lot of support from my mother. I have driven for 17 years, never had an accident. (Bariş)

Participants also said that being supported by relatives, school, or work colleagues increased their capabilities. Structural facilities and emotional support encouraged a greater degree of engagement with social life.

I can do the impossible if given the opportunity. But opportunity must be given. Until now, my family and environment have always offered me the opportunity. (Emre)

I started working as a barber for my uncle's friend. Socialising with people was very useful for me. My master's attitude towards me was very positive: "Never think of yourself as different. Don't restrict yourself. In fact, restricting yourself harms yourself." With his support, I enrolled in school. (Bariş)

Due to both the transitional and developmental nature of adolescence and the changes in their environment, many of the participants experienced difficulties. During this period, they benefited from the support provided by their peers; the friendships developed highlighted that others were experiencing similar issues.

Where I did sports, I used to have long chats with men with disabilities. When I realised that many people were going through similar problems, I thought I should have confidence. (Ayla)

I have never experienced peer bullying. At school, I always had friends who looked out for me more than me. (Derya)

Teachers' attitudes and inclusion methods play an important role, with experiences during physical education lessons frequently mentioned. Most of the participants either waited in the classroom or watched from a distance during physical education classes; they stated that these experiences were damaging and that they would have liked to take responsibility at a level that suited their capabilities. Only a few participants were included in the class in ways that suited them, allowing them to stay together with their friends and helping them realise what they were capable of.

He knew how to behave and how to guide people with disabilities because he was always in touch with them. He knew that I could also play a sport. While they were doing physical exams, I was doing theoretical exams on basketball. After I started playing wheelchair basketball, he made me shoot free throws for the exam. (Emre)

Roles and behaviours attributed to men and women by the social environment also influence autonomy. Female participants faced more restrictions due to their gender, with the gender roles attributed to them by the social environment they lived in narrowing their range of experiences. Sometimes these limitations were overcome and sometimes they could not escape the cycle.

If I wasn't a woman, I'd be different in terms of freedom. I would be more assertive with my family about what I want. (Selin)

At first, my mother was against me playing with men. In the city where I lived, there were no other female players, so I would be the only woman on the team. My mum asked me, "Why is there no other woman player? Will you be the only one?" I said, "It's because of people like you. As you are against it, so are others' families. They don't allow their daughters to play. That's why

there are no women players. Women are stuck at home.”
(Ayla)

Discussion and Conclusion

Developing autonomy is critical for people with disabilities, especially in the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Crittenden, 1990). To support this transition, the variables affecting it need to be understood. Three categories have been identified as a result of the analysis of semi-structured interviews with adults with spina bifida to identify life experiences that affect autonomy: assuming responsibility, self-confidence, and close relationships.

People who can manage themselves and make their own decisions about their own lives are able to access the resources they need and display attitudes and behaviours enabling them to achieve their future goals (Teater, 2015). Psihogios and Holmbeck (2013) stated that adolescents and young adults with spina bifida need a transition period in which they gradually move away from parental care, assume responsibility, and move on to self-management. The transition period involves taking responsibility for the personal needs we can meet by ourselves, and then trying to solve the problems we encounter. As they transitioned from adolescence to adulthood the participants in the present study began to take on various responsibilities gradually, from personal care needs to the organisation of their social environment. When we look at Derya's experiences about taking responsibility, we can see the effect of mastery experience and verbal persuasion. Starting to use a catheter on her own made it easier for her to take responsibility in other areas. People around her did not think that she could not do it and supported her. Eda, Barış and Ayla realized their own capabilities and felt responsible. They strived to support other people with disabilities, encouraging them to play sports and partake in daily life, advanced education, and work.

Self-confidence has been discussed and defined in various contexts in the literature. Essentially, it refers to people's belief in their own abilities (Bandura, 1977; Feltz, 1988). In this study,

participants with spina bifida stated that sports contributed to their self-confidence to a high degree. Playing sports created a space in which the participants could see for themselves what they were capable of and improve themselves. Self-confidence enables individuals to have positive thoughts about themselves, to believe that they are self-sufficient, to realise that they are valuable, and to be at peace with themselves (Eldeleklioğlu, 2004). This makes it easier to feel and act autonomously. In addition to physical benefits, sport also provides spiritual benefits, offering the opportunity to socialise, have fun, feel a sense of freedom, and challenge stereotypes (Aitchison et al., 2022). This is evidenced in a study conducted by Ridosh et al. (2011) showing that wheelchair sports helped individuals with spina bifida gain independence. During our interviews, it was observed that the participants who practised sports became more enthusiastic when discussing their sporting activities. They provided more details and smiled more. Here, the effect of the mastery success experiences brought about by being involved in sports is clearly seen. Through sports, participants experienced a shift in their perspectives on life, gained positivity, and expanded their social circles, ultimately gaining self-confidence.

CIC is part of the daily lives of many individuals with spina bifida. Developing the ability to use CIC independently will improve their self-confidence and enable them to take part in social life more comfortably (Fischer et al., 2015; Sawin & Thompson, 2009). The participants' views are consistent with the literature as this process facilitated self-confidence and enabled them to remain active on an independent basis. Additionally, Derya and Kerem stated that self-confidence is a part of their character. Aside from the innate aspect, character structure is shaped in early childhood and continues to develop throughout life (Berkowitz & Grych, 2000; Lerner & Schmid Callina, 2015; Peck et al., 1960). Positive caregiver relationships during early childhood help children develop a sense of trust (Ainsworth, 1978). Sensitive and consistent caregivers support the development of children's curiosity, self-confidence, and independence (Hong & Park,

2012). This situation plays an important role in shaping children's future social relationships and personality traits (Hong & Park, 2012; Martín Quintana et al., 2023).

The development of autonomy is related to the maintenance of a support network and the development of a reciprocal adult attachment, both of which are shaped by the family system (Crittenden, 1990). Families are an important source of strength for individuals with spina bifida in terms of understanding and coping with the situations they are faced with (Ridosh et al., 2011). Accordingly, their parents' attitudes during childhood were highlighted by many of the participants. They stated that the supportive and solution-oriented approaches established by their parents enabled them to approach life in the same way. Parents' permissiveness in allowing children with spina bifida to participate in social activities and encouraging age-appropriate behaviours has a positive influence on their self-esteem (Wolman & Basco, 1994). In contrast, an overprotective attitude reduces their sense of autonomy (Holmbeck et al., 2002). One of our participants, Barış, experienced both. The overprotective attitude of his father prevented him from taking action, while the supportive attitude of his mother motivated him to do so. Individuals' perception of their abilities is more decisive than the difficulties actually experienced (Bandura, 1977). When parents care about their children's ideas and encourage them, their children are able to express their wishes and decisions more easily, thus expanding their autonomy.

According to Lister (1997), autonomy can be achieved through the human relationships that nurture it and the social infrastructure that supports it. McAndrew (1979) also argues that the coping skills of adolescents with spina bifida are not the result of the severity of their disabilities but rather of the environmental support systems available to them throughout their lives. The self-efficacy theory also states that the supportive and encouraging behaviors of others play a significant role (Chao et al., 2013). In addition to their families, children with spina bifida have frequent contact with relatives, peers, and teachers and are influenced by their attitudes. They express themselves more freely when they feel supported

by adults and understood by their peers. However, their participation in out-of-school activities with their peers is often limited (Blum et al., 1991; Roux et al., 2007). Adolescents with spina bifida have fewer positive contexts than their peers (Essner & Holmbeck, 2010); problems at school, negative perceptions of people with disabilities, and living in a small city can all negatively affect their self-esteem (Wolman & Basco, 1994). In this study, the participants showed more active participation when they were able to get help from their teachers and friends to solve problems encountered at school, and when arrangements were made in the lessons to support their unique requirements. Adolescents with spina bifida find it important for their peers with disabilities to understand their challenges, which strengthens their friendships (Roux et al., 2007). Since they shared common experiences, participants stated that communicating with friends with disabilities fulfilled their need to be understood; in addition, these friendships helped to establish community bonds.

Society's perspectives and expectations regarding men and women are often different. Men are more likely to be trusted and supported in terms of decision-making, spending time outside freely, and being able to do things; women are more likely to be expected to be more careful and to give more importance to family life. Furthermore, women encounter more obstacles in terms of achieving their goals (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eccles, 1987; Green et al., 1987; Parsons et al., 2017). One of our participants, Selin, said that if she were not a woman, she would feel more free and could express her demands more easily. Ayla, on the other hand, had to deal with her family's objections because she was the only female player on the team. Being women has limited women with spina bifida and created additional challenges as they attempt to develop autonomy.

There is a widespread belief that people with disabilities need protection and cannot manage their own lives (Aciem & Mazzotta, 2013). Despite an increase in social awareness of the capabilities of individuals with disabilities compared to previous eras, the continued stigmatization leads to individuals' withdrawal from social life. This withdrawal affects various aspects of life,

including employment, education, and social interactions (Adefila et al., 2020). One of the structural barriers to autonomy is limited access to resources. A low socio-economic level increases the risk of encountering barriers that limit autonomy. This negatively affects the autonomy of people with disabilities by limiting adequate access to education and health services, which are among the most basic needs (Burchardt et al., 2015; Clemente et al., 2022). Limited access to physical infrastructure also negatively affects capabilities. It limits the freedom to act independently (Chou et al., 2024; Iezzoni et al., 2006). This situation negatively affects mastery experiences and causes emotional difficulties, leading to a decrease in self-efficacy. Inclusive and supportive policies are needed to reduce stigmatisation and increase access to resources.

A sense of autonomy contributes to children's well-being and reduces the feeling of having an illness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Autonomy positively affects financial independence, employment, social relationships, housing, and inclusion in post-secondary education for people with disabilities (Shogren & Shaw, 2016). Because young people with spina bifida often lack independence in functions such as social participation, independent living, and employment compared to their peers, it is of great importance to help them achieve autonomy (Greenley et al., 2006). Providing them with support during childhood and adolescence to strengthen their autonomy will make their lives easier in adulthood. Within this context, while adolescents with spina bifida build their autonomy, people in their immediate circle should strive to assist them in establishing positive relationships with themselves, thus cultivating the ability to accept responsibility.

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the qualitative nature of the study inherently limits the generalizability of the findings. While in-depth interviews and detailed participant observations provided rich data, the results may not be applicable to all individuals with spina bifida, as the sample size was relatively small and geographically limited. Second, since the focus of the present study was on the factors that positively

affected the construction of autonomy, we did not include factors that had a negative effect. To better understand the concept, it would be beneficial to define the negative factors that affect autonomy. Performing future studies by determining such negative factors and taking them into account will provide the opportunity to understand autonomy better.

In the empowerment approach, which is frequently used in the field of social work, it is believed that the person knows his or her problems best (Adams, 2017). Consequently, the person is analysed cognitively, interpersonally, and politically based on his or her own story, which enables the researcher to take action in conjunction with that person. In the present study, we analysed the issue based on the meaning provided by participants who experienced the consequences of spina bifida. Autonomy can be critical during adolescence and young adulthood as perspectives on life and life plans are developed during this stage of life. When researchers work on autonomy, it would be useful for them to pay particular attention to adolescents and young adults and to conduct intervention studies to encourage greater autonomy among these cohorts. It is important to raise their self-confidence and increase their areas of responsibility. Moreover, in order to maintain healthy close relationships, it is important to have support from family, teachers, and peers. Coming together through group work will highlight the therapeutic effect of understanding similar experiences, and this togetherness will contribute to the processes of producing solutions. In addition to individual efforts, the social environment and physical opportunities should be considered when exploring the development of autonomy. Social policy practices can be developed and implemented to increase individuals' macro-level resources and expand their access to these resources. In future studies, it would be useful to investigate the problems arising from the family, social, and physical environments that negatively affect the construction of autonomy in individuals with spina bifida.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Interpersonal Communication and Gender Equality: A Study on Public Relations and Advertising Students

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Abstract

People communicate by conveying their emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and behavior through verbal, written, and non-verbal means. This communication facilitates interaction and information sharing among individuals, organizations, and societies and plays a significant role in human socialization. Communication reflects experience and knowledge accumulation and can effectively change thoughts and behavior. The content of communication can either reinforce gender inequality or promote gender equality. Through communication, individuals share their emotions and thoughts, engaging in mutual interaction, and as a result of these interactions, they can reshape both their perspectives and those of others. Gender discrimination and stereotypes lead to discrimination and gender inequality. Communication that aligns with ethical values and is free of gender bias increases trust and respect, thus forming an essential foundation for effective communication. This study aims to determine students' attitudes toward interpersonal communication and gender roles in the Department of Public Relations and Advertising. Research results reveal that interpersonal communication has a positive impact on gender perspectives. As interpersonal communication strengthens, positive attitudes towards gender roles increase. Moreover, there is no significant difference between gender and perspectives on gender roles. The view of gender roles is similar between men and women and does not vary significantly by gender. This study is expected to provide valuable insights for future research in related fields.

Keywords: Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Gender, Equality, Gender Equality

Öz

İnsanlar, duygu, düşünce, inanç ve davranışlarını sözlü, yazılı ve sözsüz yollarla aktararak iletişim kurar. Bu iletişim, bireyler, kuruluşlar ve toplumlar arasında etkileşim ve bilgi paylaşımını sağlar ve aynı zamanda insanın toplumsallaşma sürecinde önemli bir rol oynar. İletişim, kişinin deneyim ve bilgi birikiminin bir yansımasıdır ve düşünce ile davranışların değişiminde etkili olabilir. İletişim sayesinde bireyler, duygu ve düşüncelerini paylaşarak karşılıklı etkileşimde bulunur ve bu etkileşimler sonucunda da hem kendi bakış açılarını hem de başkalarının bakış açılarını yeniden şekillendirebilirler. İletişim içeriği, cinsiyet eşitsizliğini güçlendirebilir veya toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini teşvik edebilir. Cinsiyet ayrımcılığı ve stereotipler, ayrımcılığa ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliğine neden olur. Etik değerlere uygun ve cinsiyetçi olmayan bir iletişim, güven ve saygıyı artırır, bu nedenle etkili iletişim için önemli bir temel oluşturur. Bu çalışma, Halkla İlişkiler ve Tanıtım Bölümü'nde öğrenim gören öğrencilerin kişilerarası iletişime bakış açılarıyla toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ilişkin tutumlarını belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma sonuçları, kişilerarası iletişimin toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifleri üzerinde olumlu bir etkisi olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Kişilerarası iletişim güçlendikçe toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine yönelik olumlu tutumlar artmaktadır. Ayrıca, cinsiyet ile toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine bakış açısı arasında anlamlı bir fark yoktur. Toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine bakış kadın ve erkekler arasında benzerdir ve cinsiyete göre anlamlı bir farklılık göstermemektedir. Bu çalışmanın, ilgili alanlarda gelecekte yapılacak araştırmalar için değerli bilgiler sağlaması beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İletişim, Kişilerarası İletişim, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Eşitlik, Cinsiyet Eşitliği

Introduction

One of the most important factors in transforming a human from a biological being into a social being is the ability to communicate. People spend a significant portion of their time and energy establishing and maintaining relationships with others. Berelson and Steiner (1964) defined communication as the transmission of information, ideas, emotions, and skills through symbols, while Gerbner (1972) defined communication as social interaction through messages. These two definitions of communication encompass two different approaches to the concept of communication. The first approach addresses the transmission aspect of the communication process, explaining how an idea, emotion, or attitude is transferred from one person to another through the sender-message-channel-receiver linear model. The other approach emphasizes elements such as reciprocity, mutual perception, and sharing (Mutlu, 2008, pp.141-142). Communication, which is the process of producing, transmitting, and perceiving information, arises from the need for individuals to express themselves and be heard. Communication has also been defined as the conscious transfer of a message from the source to the target with the aim of creating an effect and consequently causing a behavior (Tutar and Yilmaz, 2003, pp. 5-7). Linguistic style is a person's unique way of speaking. Linguistic style is described through a series of culturally learned signals. In all communities known to linguists, the patterns that constitute linguistic style show relative differences for men and women. What is natural for most men speaking a particular language can be different from what is natural for most women in some situations. In this respect, men and women often use different ways to say what they want to say out of habit; therefore, their mutual conversations resemble intercultural communication (Tannen, 2011, pp. 68-69).

Communication is integral to the construction, perpetuation, and transformation of gender roles. It serves as a mechanism through which disparities and inequalities between individuals and social groups are formed and maintained. However, due to its dynamic nature, communication also offers

the potential for social change. Therefore, its central role in the analysis of gender is significant in academic discourse (Palczewski et al., 2019, p. 60). In educational institutions, both genders face systemic challenges, expectations, and biases rooted in gender constructs. At the collegiate level, peer cultures often perpetuate traditional gender norms, constraining both personal and professional development. Despite advancements in mitigating discrimination based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity, gendered dynamics continue to shape experiences across all levels of education, affecting both students and faculty (Fixmer-Oraiz and Wood, 2019, p. 171).

This study has the potential to significantly contribute to our understanding of these crucial issues by measuring the level of interpersonal communication and perspectives on gender equality among students in the Department of Public Relations. The research was conducted using the online survey technique with the quantitative data collection method. It was based on voluntary participation, and no questions requiring personal information were asked. The survey was prepared based on Zeyneloglu's (2008) 'Attitude Scale for Gender Roles' (ASGR) questions and tested the relationship with gender roles using Campbell and Akdemir's (2016) Interpersonal Communication Scale. The findings of this study could potentially inform and shape future strategies and policies in the field of public relations and advertising, making it a highly relevant and impactful area of research for all stakeholders.

1. Interpersonal Communication

Human relations encompass interactions, connections, collaborative efforts, and group relationships. Communication is at the core of human relations and enables individuals to understand themselves and others. Therefore, communication is the connection of people (Reece & Reece, 2018, pp.15). Communication is transferring information or understanding from one person to another. It includes the processes of generating, transmitting, and perceiving information. Communication is a system forming

the foundation of society, a tool facilitating the functioning of organizational structures, a technique influencing individual behavior, and an art necessary for social harmony (Tutar & Yılmaz, 2003, p.5). According to Gerbner (1972), communication is social interaction through messages, while Rogers and Kincaid (1981) define it as a process where participants create information and share it to reach mutual understanding (Mutlu, 2008, p.141). Among the definitions of communication, two approaches stand out. The first emphasizes the transmission aspect of the communication process, highlighting how an idea, emotion, or attitude is conveyed. At the same time, the other approach focuses on elements such as reciprocity, mutual perception, and sharing (Mutlu, 2008, pp.141-142).

Communication activities can be categorized as personal, interpersonal, group, or organizational communication. People use personal communication the most to sustain daily life (Tutar & Yılmaz, 2003, p.53). Interpersonal communication is where individuals convey messages to each other using words and body language. This can occur face-to-face or through a tool such as a telephone. It is a form of communication that creates a high feedback opportunity (Görpe, 2001, p. 52). Tubbs and Moss (1974) stated that three criteria are necessary for communication to be considered "interpersonal communication":

- Participants in interpersonal communication must be face-to-face within a certain proximity.
- There must be a mutual exchange of messages between participants, not one-way.
- The messages in question should be verbal and non-verbal; communications other than these two types, such as written correspondence, are not considered interpersonal communication (Dökmen, 2001, p. 24).

In societies composed of individuals who lack the ability to speak and discuss, people do not fully understand how to approach each other and do not develop the ability to solve problems through dialogue. Conflict, friction and chaos therefore

arise, preventing the development and progress of society (Işık, 2008, p. 11). Based on this, it can be said that effective communication methods can contribute to the formation of concepts such as a sense of equality, mutual understanding, and tolerance in people.

2. Gender Equality in Communication

Every society has socio-cultural values that distinguish between men and women and define their societal roles. These values dictate how men and women should behave and what their responsibilities are. Gender roles are the attitudes and behavior expected by society from individuals, and each individual is expected to act according to these roles (Saraç, 2013, p. 27). Gender refers to the relationship between women and men within the framework of socially and culturally constructed roles and responsibilities. These roles and responsibilities are culturally determined rather than a result of the natural division of labor and can change over time (Aksoy, 2006, p. 29).

It is thought that the emergence of the patriarchal order and language occurred at the same time, and therefore they influenced each other. Men's dominance in the public sphere socially led to the development of language in favor of men. As culture became more masculine, language also became more masculine. This situation is addressed in feminist studies and linguistic research with the concept of 'sexist language.' Sexist language is defined as a set of expressions that reflect men and women unequally and exclude women, and it is stated to be more effective against women (Guden, 2006, pp. 18-19). Based on the assumption that some professions, words, and expressions are exclusively for men, it is necessary to avoid expressions that marginalize women by unnecessarily emphasizing 'woman' before such words. Examples include woman prime minister, woman manager, woman parliamentarian, woman writer, and woman journalist (O'Neil et al., 2017, p. 2).

Gender stereotypes are among the strongest prejudices that cause gender inequality in society. Stereotypes lead to prejudices, and prejudices lead to discrimination. Discrimination is the behavioral

expression of prejudices and stereotypes (Saraç, 2013, p. 28). Gender stereotypes in communication are observed in four principal areas: character, physical attributes, roles, and professions. Men are typically represented as aggressive, competitive, and assertive, while women are portrayed as passive, cooperative, and shy. Men are depicted as the breadwinners, while women are shown as the mother/wife who cares for the family. Physical attributes and professions are also coded according to gender stereotypes (Koç Holding, 2017, p. 10). Women are expected to be more involved with their children, spouses, and household chores, to be dependent on men, emotionally quiet, calm, self-sacrificing, patient, understanding, and sensitive, while men are expected to provide for their families, establish external connections, perform physically demanding tasks such as repairs, protect and care for their spouses and children, and be emotionally stronger, brave, tough, and logical. These expectations are defined as gender stereotypes (Sarac, 2013, p. 28). However, discussing gender relations solely in terms of women's oppression and subjugation is not sufficient to analyze the ideological determination, mutual interaction, and power relations within the structure of gender roles. Moreover, it is also insufficient to identify this network of relationships (Akca and Tonel, 2011, p. 11).

Gender bias (sexism) refers to discrimination based on gender. When employers make hiring, promotion, assignment, and compensation decisions based on a person's gender, human relations and productivity will suffer (Reece & Reece, 2018, p. 352). Gender bias acts as a filter that hinders effective communication between people. These communication barriers are tied to language style. Language style includes features such as whether a person speaks directly or indirectly, quickly or with pauses, their choice of words, and their use of elements like jokes, metaphors, questions, and apologies. Language style is a set of culturally learned signals to convey what we want to communicate (Reece & Reece, 2018, p. 368). Visual, verbal, and written language set the boundaries of thoughts and behavior. It is possible to manage the change in thoughts and behavior by

controlling the content of these communication tools. The visual, verbal, and written language used has the power to reinforce and reproduce gender inequality, as well as the potential to embed gender equality in society (Koç Holding, 2017, p. 7).

Gender, culture, and communication are intrinsically interconnected, making it challenging to comprehend any one of these concepts in isolation from the others. While sex is a biological classification, gender is a socially constructed concept expressed through cultural norms and expectations. Gender identity refers to an individual's internal self-perception, gender expression is the external manifestation of this identity, and gender roles reflect societal expectations associated with a person's perceived gender. Sex and gender may not be the same for every individual (Fixmer-Oraiz and Wood, 2019, p. 19). Examining gendered forms of communication in education is necessary because education affects identity formation, self-esteem, gender and determination. First, the ways of gendering should be made visible by exploring information politics and biases in education. Next, examine elements such as teacher stereotypes, microaggressions, peer pressure and gender-based violence. Finally, it is necessary to explore the emancipatory potential of education at the micro and macro levels through teaching changes and legislation (Palczewski et al., 2019, p. 251). The conceptualization of gender has sparked significant debates in the social sciences, with Judith Lorber asserting that gender operates as a social institution categorizing individuals as "women" and "men." This viewpoint emphasizes that gender extends beyond biological distinctions, being deeply shaped by social and cultural contexts. As a dynamic construct, gender influences individual behaviors, attitudes, and identities, acting as a relational and variable framework for analyzing issues such as unequal gender hierarchies and gender-based violence. This structural approach enhances the understanding of how gender identities and expressions are negotiated in interpersonal interactions and how social norms are perpetuated. To fully grasp gender's complexities,

it is essential to look beyond individual identities and consider the broader social structures and power dynamics involved (Alıcı and Daşlı, 2019, pp. 35-36).

3. A Study on Public Relations and Advertising Students

There are 992 students in the Erciyes University Communication Faculty Department of Public Relations and Advertising, divided as follows: 239 first-year students, 241 second-year students, 218 third-year students, and 294 fourth-year students.

3.2. Method

The Ethics Committee of the Social and Humanities Sciences at Erciyes University approved the study, application number 132, on March 26, 2024, and granted permission for its implementation. The study employed a quantitative data collection method, utilizing an online survey technique. The research was conducted voluntarily, and no personal information such as addresses or identity details was required. The research was conducted in April 2024 at the Faculty of Communication building.

Table 1. Number of Students in the Department of Public Relations and Advertising

	First- Year Male Students	First- Year Female Students	Second- Year Male Students	Second- Year Female Students	Third- Year Male Students	Third- Year Female Students	Fourth- Year Male Students	Fourth- Year Female Students	Total
Public Relations and Advertising Regular Education	43	60	32	63	32	66	40	86	422
Public Relations and Advertising Evening Education	47	45	45	54	35	44	77	61	408
Public Relations and Advertising Distance Education	20	24	27	20	23	18	16	14	162

research was conducted via an internet link, and 321 students from the Department of Public Relations, Erciyes University Faculty of Communication participated in the study.

3.1. Objective

This research aims to evaluate the interpersonal communication levels of students in the Department of Public Relations and their views on gender equality, as well as the connection between these two factors. The hypotheses of the study are as follows:

H1: Interpersonal communication is influenced by gender.

H2: There is a significant difference between gender and interpersonal communication.

H2a: There is a significant difference between gender and perspectives on gender equality.

All students attending courses in the Public Relations department were asked whether they would like to participate in the research. The department's medium of instruction is Turkish, so the research was also conducted in Turkish. The survey questions were developed using the "Gender Roles Attitude Scale" (GRAS) created by Zeyneloğlu (2008) to determine students' attitudes towards gender roles. The relationships between these attitudes and interpersonal communication were tested using the Interpersonal Communication Scale developed by Campbell and Akdemir (2016). Necessary permissions were obtained for the use of the scales.

3.3. Findings

In the study, the independent variables are gender, age, class, and type of education. To conduct hypothesis tests and chi-square analyses, it was ensured that the number of participants (N) in each group met the minimum requirement for

representation. Specifically, each group had at least 20 participants.

Table 2. Personal Information

		Number	Percent
Gender	Female	225	70,1
	Male	96	29,9
Date of Birth	Born in 2000 and Before,	72	22,4
	Born in 2001-2002	121	37,7
	Born in 2003-2004	107	33,3
	Born in 2005	21	6,5
Total		321	100,0

70.1% of the participants are female, and 29.9% are male. Regarding age distribution, 22.4% were born in 2000 or earlier, 37.7% were born in 2001-2002, 33.3% were born in 2003-2004, and 6.5% were born in 2005.

Table 3. Educational Information

		Number	Percent
Year	First-Year	112	34,9
	Second-Year	72	22,4
	Third-Year	73	22,7
	Fourth-Year	64	19,9
Type of Education	Regular Education	164	51,1
	Evening Education	123	38,3
	Distance Education	34	10,6
Total		321	100,0

Regarding the distribution of participants by type of education, 51.1% are enrolled in regular education, 38.3% in evening education, and 10.6% in distance education. The distribution by class level is as follows: 34.9% are first-year students, 22.4% are second-year students, 22.7% are third-year students, and 19.9% are fourth-year students.

Table 4. Research Scale

5	Strongly Agree	Indicates disagreement and dissatisfaction.
4	Agree	Indicates partial agreement, and scores above 3 represent participation and are considered positive.
3	Undecided	Indicates participation and elevated levels of participation and is interpreted as positive.
2	Disagree	
1	Strongly Disagree	

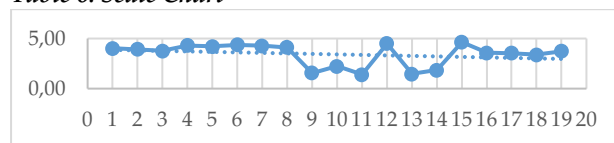
A 5-point Likert scale was used in the research, and the scale values are as follows.

Table 5. Scale Participation Levels and Reliability

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
S1 - I encourage people in my social environment to understand their feelings.	321	4,03	0,827
S2 - My friends say that it is easy to communicate with me.	321	3,93	1,021
S3 - Even people I haven't met find it easy to communicate with me.	321	3,75	1,069
S4 - My friends say that I am a good listener.	321	4,31	0,815
S5 - I enjoy being honest with others about my thoughts and feelings.	321	4,22	0,938
S6 - I have an unwavering belief that communication will increase productivity.	321	4,36	0,810
S7 - I like to use examples to make my communication process more transparent.	321	4,28	0,824
S8 - Girls should be able to live separately from their families when they gain economic independence.	321	4,12	1,051
S9 - A man's every word should be followed in the household.	321	1,55	0,843
S10 - The professions women pursue should differ from those men pursue.	321	2,24	1,162
S11 - A woman's value is increased by having two children.	321	1,41	0,894
S12 - Household chores should be equally shared between spouses.	321	4,51	0,891
S13 - A woman's husband should make decisions regarding her life.	321	1,47	0,862
S14 - In marriage, the man's level of education should be higher than the woman's.	321	1,84	1,064
S15 - Both girls and boys should benefit equally from the family's financial resources.	321	4,64	0,859
S16 - The teachers at my schools treated everyone equally, regardless of gender (female/male).	321	3,59	1,272
S17 - The administrators at my schools treated everyone equally, regardless of gender (female/male).	321	3,55	1,259
S18 - My friends at the schools I attended treated everyone equally, regardless of gender (female/male).	321	3,38	1,269
S19 - I can step outside the roles assigned to me by society based on gender (female/male).	321	3,74	1,122

When examining the scale averages, items 9, 10, 11, 13, and 14 have been perceived as negative statements and carry meanings contrary to the general framework.

Table 6. Scale Chart



Following the initial scale scores, a crucial step was taken to reverse the scores. This process, detailed in Table 7, was essential for conducting subsequent analyses based on these adjusted

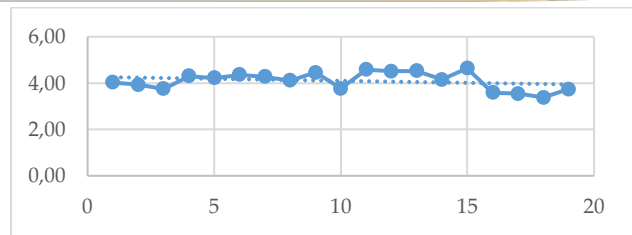
scores, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate evaluation.

Table 7. Adjusted Scale Participation Levels and Reliability

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
S1 - I encourage those in my social environment to understand their feelings.	321	4,03	0,827
S2 - My friends say that it is easy to communicate with me.	321	3,93	1,021
S3 - Even people I don't know find it easy to communicate with me.	321	3,75	1,069
S4 - My friends say that I am a good listener.	321	4,31	0,815
S5 - I enjoy being honest with others about my thoughts and feelings.	321	4,22	0,938
S6 - I have an unwavering belief that communication will increase productivity.	321	4,36	0,810
S7 - I like to use examples to make my communication process more transparent.	321	4,28	0,824
S8 - Girls should be able to live separately from their families when they gain economic independence.	321	4,12	1,051
S9 - A man's every word should be followed in the household. (Reverse: Joint decision)	321	4,45	0,843
S10 - The professions women pursue should differ from those men pursue. (Reverse: They can be the same)	321	3,76	1,162
S11 - A woman's value is increased by having two children. (Reverse: I disagree with this statement)	321	4,59	0,894
S12 - Household chores should be equally shared between spouses.	321	4,51	0,891
S13 - A woman's husband should make decisions regarding her life. (Reverse: The woman herself should make the decisions)	321	4,53	0,862
S14 - In marriage, the man's level of education should be higher than the woman's. (Reverse: It should be equal)	321	4,16	1,064
S15 - Both girls and boys should benefit equally from the family's financial resources.	321	4,64	0,859
S16 - The teachers at my schools treated everyone equally, regardless of gender (female/male).	321	3,59	1,272
S17 - The administrators at my schools treated everyone equally, regardless of gender (female/male).	321	3,55	1,259
S18 - My friends at the schools I attended treated everyone equally, regardless of gender (female/male).	321	3,38	1,269
S19 - I can step outside the roles assigned to me by society based on gender (female/male).	321	3,74	1,122

The scores in the statements have been reversed, and the scale statements have been adjusted to be interpreted similarly to the other statements.

Table 8. New Scale Chart



The study utilized two distinct scales: the first to measure interpersonal communication and the respondent's agreement with self-descriptive statements, and the second to assess gender equality. With the first scale comprising seven items and the second 12, this design allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the research topics. When calculating the Cronbach's Alpha for scale scores:

If $0.00 \leq \alpha < 0.40$, the scale is considered unreliable. If $0.40 \leq \alpha < 0.60$, the scale has low reliability. If $0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.80$, the scale is quite reliable. If $0.80 \leq \alpha < 1.00$, the scale is highly reliable.

Table 9. Interpersonal Communication Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Statistics	
	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,747	,751	7

In the Interpersonal Communication Scale, Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.74, indicating that the scale is reliable and sufficient for measuring the current situation.

Table 10. Interpersonal Communication Scale Items

	Mean
S6 - I have an endless belief that communication will increase productivity.	4,36
S4 - My friends say that I am a good listener.	4,31
S7 - I like to use examples to make my communication process understandable.	4,28
S5 - I enjoy being honest with others about my thoughts and feelings.	4,22
S1 - I encourage people in my social environment to understand their feelings.	4,03
S2 - My friends say that it is easy to communicate with me.	3,93
S3 - Even people I haven't met find it easy to communicate with me.	3,75
Average Participation Score for the Interpersonal Communication Scale	4,13

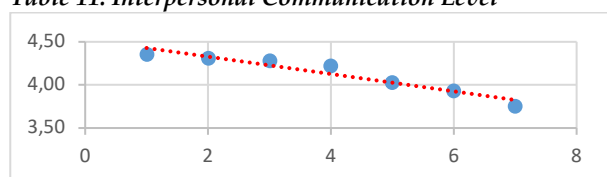
The statements and values related to the Interpersonal Communication Scale are outlined in the table above. The interpersonal

communication scale consists of seven items, with an average participation score of 4.13, which falls between '4 Agree' and '5 Strongly Agree,' indicating a very high level of participation. When we examine the scale items, the highest participation is 4.36 for the statement 'I have complete faith that communication will increase productivity,' showing the importance of communication and the high agreement of participants with this statement.

When we examine the scale items in order, the second highest participation is 4.31 for the statement 'My friends tell me that I am a good listener,' indicating a positive external perspective on individuals and the importance of listening in communication. The third highest participation is 4.28 for the statement 'I like to use examples to make my communication process clear,' showing that participants place great importance on exemplification in communication and frequently prefer to use examples in their communication activities.

The fourth highest participation is 4.22 for the statement 'I like to be honest with others about my thoughts and feelings,' showing the importance of being honest with others about thoughts and feelings and indicating that participants express their thoughts and feelings honestly in their communication.

Table 11. Interpersonal Communication Level



The proportions related to participants' interpersonal communication levels are shown in Table 11. The fifth highest participation is 4.03 for the statement 'I encourage my social circle to understand what they are feeling,' showing the high importance of social environment and communication with the social environment in communication.

The sixth highest participation is 3.93 for the statement 'My friends tell me that it is easy to communicate with me,' with a participation level

below 4 but between partial agreement and agreement.

The item with the lowest participation level in the table is 3.75 for the statement 'Even people I have not met do not have difficulty communicating with me,' indicating that the difficulty of communicating with people they have not met has the lowest score among the scale items but is above partial agreement. The scale score close to agree indicates that the most important issue to be developed in communication experts is communication techniques with people they have not met.

Table 12. Gender Scale Statements

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,744	,759	12

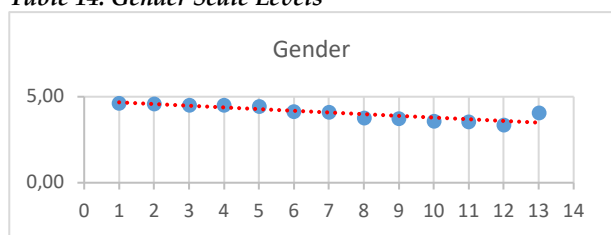
In our Gender Scale, Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.74, indicating that the scale is reliable and sufficient for measuring the current status.

Table 13. Gender Scale Level

	Mean
S15 - The family's financial resources should be equally available to both male and female children.	4,64
S11 - A woman's value increases if she has 2 children. (I disagree with this statement)	4,59
S13 - Her husband should make decisions about a woman's life. (The woman herself should make the decisions)	4,53
S12 - Household chores should be equally shared between spouses.	4,51
S9 - A man's every command should be followed at home. (It should be a joint decision)	4,45
S14 - In marriage, the man's level of education should be higher than the woman's. (It should be equal)	4,16
S8 - Girls should be able to live separately from their families once they gain economic independence.	4,12
S10 - The professions that women and men can pursue should be different. (They can be the same)	3,76
S19 - I can step outside the roles that society assigns based on gender (male/female).	3,74
S16 - Teachers at my schools treated everyone equally regardless of gender (male/female).	3,59
S17 - Administrators at my schools treated everyone equally regardless of gender (male/female).	3,55
S18 - My classmates at my schools treated everyone equally regardless of gender (male/female).	3,38
Average Participation in Gender Scale	4,08

The statements and values related to the Gender Scale are specified in the table above. The statements and values related to the gender scale are indicated in the table above. The scale consists of twelve items, with an average participation score of 4.08. The highest score on the scale is 4.64 for the statement 'Both boys and girls should equally benefit from the family's financial resources' and the lowest participation score is 3.38 for the statement 'My friends at the schools I attended treated everyone equally regardless of gender (female/male).'

Table 14. Gender Scale Levels



Participants' gender equality levels are shown in Table 14. The average participation score of the gender scale is 4.08. Among the statements above the average, the highest participation is 4.64 for the statement 'Both boys and girls should equally benefit from the family's financial resources' followed by 4.59 for the statement 'A woman's value increases with having 2 children (reverse statement).' This item is taken in reverse, showing that there is no relationship between a woman's value and having children. The participation level for this statement, taken in reverse, is 0.41. The third highest participation is 4.53 for the statement 'Decisions about a woman's life should be made by her husband (reverse statement).' The participation level for this statement is 0.47, and when the scale is reversed positively, it shows that participants do not agree with the statement that decisions about a woman's life should be made by her husband, with a high participation level of 4.53.

The fourth highest participation score is 4.51 for the statement 'Household chores should be equally shared between spouses,' indicating a high level of participation. The fifth highest participation is 4.45 for the statement 'Everything a man says at home should be done,' with a participation level of 0.55.

When the scale is reversed, the participation score for the statement 'There should be equality between men and women at home' is 4.45.

When we look at the sixth and seventh items with the same score as the average, the sixth item is 'The educational level of the man should be higher than that of the woman in marriage' with a participation level of 0.84, indicating that there is no importance in one side being superior or equal in the educational level of men and women, with a participation score of 4.16. The seventh item is 'Girls should be able to live independently from their families when they gain economic independence,' with a participation level of 4.12.

There are five items with participation levels below the average, with the eighth item being 'The professions that women and men will do should be different (they can be the same)' with a participation level of 3.76. This is a reverse item, and the participation level for the statement 'The professions of men and women can be the same' is 3.76. The ninth item is "I can go beyond the roles that society assigns to me based on gender (female/male)' with a participation score of 3.74. The tenth item is 'The teachers at the schools I attended treated everyone equally regardless of gender (female/male)' with a participation score of 3.59, which is below the expected level and falls between partial agreement and agreement. The eleventh item is 'The administrators at the schools I attended treated everyone equally regardless of gender (female/male)' with a participation level of 3.55. The last item is 'My friends at the schools I attended treated everyone equally regardless of gender (female/male)' with a participation score of 3.38. The last three items with the lowest participation scores in the gender scale reflect the experiences and observations of the participants during their educational processes. The participation scores regarding gender discrimination by teachers, administrators, and friends at the schools they attended range between 3 and 4, closer to partial agreement.

Table 15. Gender Equality Levels

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,707
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	472,036
	Df	15
	Sig.	,000

The KMO Bartlett test suitability value is 0.70 (above 0.60), and the Sig value is less than 0.05, indicating that factor analysis is appropriate.

increase productivity,' 'I like to be honest with others about my thoughts and feelings,' 'I like to use examples to make my communication process clear,' and 'My friends tell me that I am a good

Table 16. Total Variance Explained by the Interpersonal Communication Scale

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings ^a
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	2,626	43,774	43,774	2,626	43,774	43,774	2,405
2	1,236	20,598	64,372	1,236	20,598	64,372	1,861
3	,764	12,736	77,108				
4	,563	9,390	86,498				
5	,455	7,590	94,088				
6	,355	5,912	100,000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

When we look at the factor analysis, the interpersonal participation scale, which originally consisted of seven items, was reduced to six items as a result of the analysis and consists of two factors.

listener." The second factor of the scale consists of two items: "Even people I have not met do not have difficulty communicating with me," and "My friends tell me that it is easy to communicate with me."

Table 17. Interpersonal Communication Scale Pattern Matrix^a

	Component	
	1	2
S6 - I have an unwavering belief that communication increases productivity.	,807	
S5 - I enjoy being honest with others about my thoughts and feelings.	,762	
S7 - I like using examples to make my communication process clear.	,708	
S4 - My friends say that I am a good listener.	,695	
S3 - Even people I haven't met find it easy to communicate with me.		,927
S2 - My friends say that it is easy to communicate with me.		,869

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Initial Eigenvalues indicate that there are two factors with values above 1. In factor analysis, an explanation of more than 50% is expected. With two factors, our scale explains 64% after removing the 1st item from the scale. After removing item 1 from the scale, factor analysis was performed again because it loaded on both factors.

Table 18. Gender Equality Scale KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		,750
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1491,519
	Df	55
	Sig.	,000

The KMO Bartlett test suitability value is 0.75 (above 0.60), and the Sig value is less than 0.05, making it suitable for factor analysis.

The first factor of the scale includes the items: 'I have complete faith that communication will

Initial Eigenvalues consist of 3 factors above 1. In factor analysis, it is expected to explain over

Table 19. Gender Equality Scale Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings ^a
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	3,269	29,719	29,719	3,269	29,719	29,719	3,034
2	2,619	23,809	53,528	2,619	23,809	53,528	2,609
3	1,150	10,450	63,978	1,150	10,450	63,978	2,095
4	,855	7,772	71,750				
5	,720	6,542	78,292				
6	,666	6,058	84,350				
7	,544	4,949	89,299				
8	,480	4,362	93,661				
9	,324	2,947	96,608				
10	,281	2,554	99,162				
11	,092	,838	100,000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

50%, and with 3 factors, our scale explains 63.9%. When we look at the factor analysis results of the gender scale, we see that it consists of eleven items and three factors.

The items of the first factor consist of 5 items: 'Decisions about a woman's life should be made by her husband,' 'A woman's value increases with having 2 children,' 'Everything a man says at home should be done,' 'The educational level of the man should be higher than that of the woman in marriage,' and 'The professions that women and men will do should be different.' These items are reverse statements and are fundamentally aimed at measuring the level of gender equality, grouped under the same factor load.

Table 20. Gender Roles Scale Pattern Matrix^a

	Component		
	1	2	3
S13 - A woman's husband should make decisions about her life.	,863		
S11 - A woman's value increases if she gives birth to 2 children.	,849		
S9 - Everything a man says should be done at home.	,686		
S14 - A man's education level should be higher than a woman's in marriage.	,676		
S10 - The professions that a woman and a man will pursue should be different.	,481		
S16 - The teachers at the schools I attended treated everyone equally without gender (female/male) discrimination.		,945	
S17 - The administrators at the schools I attended treated everyone equally without gender (female/male) discrimination.		,945	
S18 - The friends at the schools I attended treated everyone equally without gender (female/male) discrimination.		,873	
S8 - Girls should be able to live separately from their families when they achieve economic independence.			,838
S19 - I can break free from the roles that society assigns to me based on gender (female/male).			,774
S12 - Household chores should be shared equally between spouses.			,487

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.
 a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

The items of the second factor consist of three

Table 23. Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	SSig.	95,0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	2,905	,217		,000	2,479	3,331					
2	,407	,071	,304	,000	,266	,547	,304	,304	,304	1,000	1,000

a. Dependent Variable: Communication

items: 'The teachers at the schools I attended treated everyone equally regardless of gender,'

'The administrators at the schools I attended treated everyone equally regardless of gender,' and 'My friends at the schools I attended treated everyone equally regardless of gender.' When we examine the sub-items of the factor, we see that individuals consider their educational, administrative, and friendship relationships in terms of gender throughout their educational process.

The items of the third factor consist of three items: 'Girls should be able to live independently from their families when they gain economic independence,' 'I can go beyond the roles that society assigns to me based on gender,' and 'Household chores should be equally shared between spouses.' When we look at the sub-items of the factor, we see that the roles and task distributions of men and women in society and economic independence are grouped under one factor.

Table 21. Communication and Gender Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Communication	4,1268	,57087	321
Gender	3,0026	,42644	321

In the factor analysis, item 15 was removed because it had high loadings on two scales.

Table 22. Correlations

		Communication	Gender
r	Communication	1,000	,304
	Gender	,304	1,000
P	Communication	.	,000
	Gender	,000	.
N	Communication	321	321
	Gender	321	321

A regression analysis was conducted to measure whether interpersonal communication affects gender views. There is a meaningful relationship between interpersonal communication and views on gender.

The Sig value (p=0.00) is less than 0.05,

indicating that interpersonal communication positively affects gender views.

As interpersonal communication improves, the positive perception of gender views increases.

Table 24. Group Statistics for Communication and Sex

	D3-Your Gender:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Communication	Female	225	4,1930	,46598	,03107
	Male	96	3,9717	,74234	,07576

There is a significant difference between gender and interpersonal communication. Hypothesis H2 is accepted.

Table 25. Independent Samples Test for H1

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	12,530	,000	3,226	319	,001	,22129	,06859	,08634	,35624
Equal variances not assumed			2,702	128,092	,008	,22129	,08189	,05926	,38331

The homogeneity test is less than 0.05 with $p < 0.05$ (sig2 tiled 0.008), indicating a significant difference in interpersonal communication between genders. According to the group statistics table, the participation rate in interpersonal communication is 4.1 for women and 3.9 for men. Therefore, Hypothesis H1 is accepted.

Table 26. Group Statistics for Gender and Sex

	D3-Your Gender:	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean
Gender	Female	225	3,0241	,39191	,02613
	Male	96	2,9523	,49674	,05070

There is a significant difference between gender and views on gender roles.

Table 27. Independent Samples Test for H2a

gender	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	4,108	,044	1,383	319	,167	,07182	,05191	-,03032	,17395
Equal variances not assumed			1,259	147,742	,210	,07182	,05703	-,04089	,18453

A significance value of less than 0.05 indicates a homogenous distribution. However, because $P > 0.05$ (sig2 tiled = 0.21), there is no significant difference between gender and views on gender roles. Views on gender roles do not vary according

to gender and exhibit similar characteristics for both women and men. Hypothesis H2a is rejected.

Conclusion

Human relationships encompass interaction and cooperation, with communication central to these relationships. Interpersonal communication is a process involving mutual exchange of messages and feedback. Effective communication is hampered in societies where speaking and discussion skills are underdeveloped, complicating problem-solving and creating chaos.

Effective communication methods contribute to developing concepts such as equality, understanding, and tolerance. Socio-cultural values that distinguish between men and women in societies determine gender roles and expect individuals to behave according to these roles. Gender roles are socially and culturally constructed responsibilities that can change over time. Gender stereotypes lead to gender inequality and discrimination, manifesting in character, physical attributes, roles, and professions. Gender bias affects human relationships and productivity negatively. Language styles and communication tools can reinforce or promote gender equality. The study conducted on Public Relations Department students aimed to identify levels of interpersonal communication, perspectives on gender equality,

and the relationship between these two factors.

The studies in the literature generally focus on gender perceptions, and this study is significant because it addresses both gender perceptions and interpersonal communication skills together. A

similar study was conducted to examine the effect of role-playing scenarios on university students' gender perceptions and their awareness of conflict and violence. The population of the study, which was conducted using a quasi-experimental model, consisted of 246 students enrolled in the Women's Health and Diseases Nursing course at a Faculty of Nursing during the 2018-2019 academic year. No sampling method was used, and all students in the population were included in the study. The final sample consisted of 187 students who agreed to participate. Data were collected using the Personal Information Form, the Gender Perception Scale, and the Conflict and Violence Awareness Scale. The study concluded that role-playing scenarios had no significant effect on students' gender perceptions or their awareness of conflict and violence (Kılınç et al., 2021, p. 65).

In this study, 70.1% of the participants were female and 29.9% were male. Two scales were used: one measuring interpersonal communication and personal statements and the other assessing gender roles. The first scale consists of 7 items, while the second scale comprises 12 items. Hypotheses were tested, and the following results were obtained: H1: Interpersonal communication influences gender perspective.

Results: Hypothesis H1 is accepted. Interpersonal communication has a positive effect on gender perspective. H2: There is a significant difference between gender and interpersonal communication.

Result: A significant difference has been found between gender and interpersonal communication. H2a: A significant difference exists between gender and perspectives on gender roles.

Result: Hypothesis H2a is rejected. No significant difference was found between gender and perspectives on gender roles. Women and men view gender roles similarly.

Thus, interpersonal communication has a positive effect on gender perspectives. As interpersonal communication strengthens, positive views on gender roles increase. There is no significant difference between gender and perspectives on gender roles. Perspectives on gender roles do not vary by gender and are similar

for both women and men. This study is anticipated to contribute to future research in similar areas.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Creating Impulse Buying Behavior in The Online Festival Atmosphere: A Gender-Based Evaluation

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Abstract

Impulsive buying behavior during online shopping festivals is shown by many consumers and e-commerce businesses benefit from it. However, the reasons for this behavior have not been revealed. Therefore, this study will investigate the antecedents underlying this behavior. It was also investigated whether the effect of these antecedents on the festival atmosphere differed according to gender. A total of 590 participants (294 men and 296 women) participated in the study. The analysis was conducted with PLS-SEM 4.0. As a result of the analysis, it was seen that the elements that make up the festival atmosphere differed for men and women. For women, low price, perceived novelty, perceived perishability, perceived limitation, category richness, time constraint, and perceived entertainment affected the festival atmosphere, while for men, low price, perceived perishability, perceived limitation, time constraint, and social benefits affected the atmosphere. In addition, festival atmosphere positively influenced impulse buying for both genders. Therefore, e-commerce companies should create a festival atmosphere by considering gender differences and use different variables.

Keywords: Festival atmosphere, impulse buying behavior, low price, time constraint, perceived entertainment

Öz

Çevrimiçi alışveriş festivalleri sırasında dürtüsel satın alma davranışı birçok tüketici tarafından uygulanmakta ve e-ticaret işletmeleri bundan faydalanmaktadır. Ancak bu davranışın nedenleri ortaya konulmamıştır. Bu nedenle bu çalışmada bu davranışın altında yatan öncüller araştırılmıştır. Ayrıca bu öncüllerin festival atmosferine etkisinin cinsiyete göre farklılaşıp farklılaşmadığı araştırılmıştır. Çalışmaya toplam 590 katılımcı (294 erkek ve 296 kadın) katılmıştır. Analiz PLS-SEM 4.0 ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Analiz sonucunda festival atmosferini oluşturan unsurların erkekler ve kadınlar için farklılaştığı görülmüştür. Kadınlar için düşük fiyat, algılanan yenilik, algılanan dayanıksızlık, algılanan sınırlama, kategori zenginliği, zaman kısıtlaması ve algılanan eğlence festival atmosferini etkilerken, erkekler için düşük fiyat, algılanan dayanıksızlık, algılanan sınırlama, zaman kısıtlaması ve sosyal faydalar atmosferi etkilemiştir. Ayrıca festival atmosferi her iki cinsiyet için de dürtüsel satın almayı olumlu yönde etkilemiştir. Bu nedenle e-ticaret şirketleri cinsiyet farklılıklarını göz önünde bulundurarak festival atmosferi oluşturmali ve farklı değişkenler kullanılmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Festival atmosferi, dürtüsel satın alma davranışı, düşük fiyat, zaman kısıtlaması, algılanan eğlence

Introduction

The revenue in the e-commerce market is reported to reach 3,591.00 billion US dollars in 2023 and is expected to exceed 4 billion dollars in 2024. (Statista, 2024). Shopping festivals are an important part of the revenue generated in e-commerce. Shopping festivals held in many countries (11.11, Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Singles' Day, Boxing Day, El Buen Fin, Cyber Hot Days, Diwali Festival, Harbolnas etc.) are the most important supporters of this growth in e-commerce (Chen and Li, 2020). Among all online shopping festivals, Singles' Day has become the world's largest shopping carnival, surpassing the traditional western shopping festival "Black Friday". Consumers shop more during these festivals, which also motivates retailers (Shang et al., 2020). Therefore, shopping festivals are becoming important for retailers to increase their sales, revenue, and profitability. E-commerce companies organize various promotions and events to include customers in their online festivals and reach more income. In this way, they can direct consumers to impulsive purchases (Yang & Zhang 2018). Limited purchasing time, limited number of products, and very low prices are quite effective in this process. In addition, it has been found that customers' shopping behaviors are affected by hedonic shopping motivation during online shopping festivals (Xie et al., 2023). In other words, consumers can use these festivals more due to the sense of fun and pleasure.

In their study, Yang et al. (2018) extended the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to investigate the impact of the atmosphere during the Double-11 shopping festival on Chinese people's sustainable consumption. As a result of the study, Chinese consumers showed that the atmosphere specific to China's Double-11 shopping festival is negatively related to consumers' purchase intention towards sustainable consumption. Chen and Li (2020) investigated the impact of consumers' perceived product promotion and atmosphere promotion strategies on their participation intentions during these festivals and the possible interaction between product promotion and atmosphere promotion strategies

on their intention to participate in online shopping festivals. As a result of the study, it was found that the perceived attractiveness of price promotion, the perceived category richness of promotion, the perceived fun of promotional activities, and the perceived contagiousness of audience participation significantly and positively affected consumer's participation intention. Li et al. (2020) empirically examined the antecedents of continuous participation intention using expectancy-confirmation theory and the stimulus-organism-response model, revealing that the scale of upgrading and social interaction had positive and significant effects on participants' emotional satisfaction as trust, and then identified the pleasures that lead to continuous participation behaviors. They argue that spending more money on exuberant festival buildings will not have a greater impact on participants' satisfaction as expected. Alternatively, creating a good and fair trading environment would achieve the same goal and promote the sustainability of shopping festivals. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2023) examined the effects of five perceived benefits of festivals on emotional attachment and advocacy. The results of the study showed that high levels of price, product, entertainment, and social benefits increased emotional attachment and thus increased consumers' intentions to advocate for consumer festivals. Previous studies have attempted to uncover consumer motivations related to online festivals, but no developed model has been put forward in this regard. Therefore, this research will address this gap. Accordingly, variables that may increase consumers' festival motivations will be identified. In addition, it will be investigated whether these variables differ between men and women.

In line with the gap identified in the literature, the aim of the study is to reveal the variables that increase the festival atmosphere and impulsive purchase intention of consumers during online festivals. Perceived low price, perceived novelty, perceived perishability, perceived scarcity, perceived category richness, time constraint, perceived fun and social benefits are predicted to positively affect the atmosphere of online festivals. In addition, festival atmosphere is thought to

increase consumers' impulsive purchase intention. Moreover, the differences in these relationships between male and female consumers will also be examined. The study is expected to make two important contributions to the literature. First, the importance that consumers attach to the festival atmosphere and the factors that increase consumers' impulsive purchase intention will be revealed. Thus, the factors that push consumers to buy en masse will be revealed. This will determine which variables e-commerce companies can support the festival atmosphere in the long run. Secondly, it will be revealed whether this atmosphere differs for men and women. Therefore, it will be revealed which variables can strengthen the atmosphere for women and men. Through these variables, the atmosphere for women's and men's products can be supported. This will increase the sustainability of online festivals. Thus, the continuity of online festivals, which have been evaluated as consumption frenzy and criticized in recent years, will be ensured.

2. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

The online shopping environment has continued to develop in parallel with the development of technologic environment. Online shopping, which has a great advantage over offline shopping, has developed at an increasing pace and has penetrated every aspect of daily life. With the improvement of the average standard of living worldwide, the number of online shoppers is increasing day by day (Xie et al., 2023). E-commerce is becoming not only an important shopping channel, but also a channel that can turn certain festivals into special online consumer holidays, where online festival shopping becomes part of the festival culture and strongly influences consumer online shopping habits (Zeng et al., 2022). Studies on the factors affecting consumer online shopping behavior have mainly focused on consumer characteristics (Ahn, J., & Kwon, 2022; Sutisna & Handra, 2022), online shopping behavior characteristics (Kim et al., 2023; Yulianto et al., 2021), and the shopping process (Zeng et al., 2019; Chen & Ku 2021). Similarly, online festivals

are often studied on the factors that drive mass consumer behavior and the advantages and disadvantages of online purchasing. The most prominent element among these is impulse buying behavior.

One of the most widely used theories in online shopping is the theory of planned behavior (Tang et al., 2021; Sutisna & Handra, 2022). The theory of planned behavior consistently supports the idea that people are rational beings who use all available information. People consider the consequences of their actions before deciding whether to engage in a particular behavior. Conscious buying refers to consumers' planned buying behavior. However, impulsive behaviors (Tang et al., 2021) rather than planned behaviors come to the fore in shopping festivals. Impulse buying accounts for close to 80% of global product sales (Rodrigues et al., 2021). Impulsive buying behavior tends to be unplanned, but is carried out because consumers are stimulated by positive emotions and have an immediate desire to own a particular product. Many scholars (Xu et al., 2020; Nyrhinen et al., 2024) have studied impulsive buying behavior in e-commerce. In the past, impulsive buying was originally thought to be an unplanned purchase made without careful consideration and accompanied by high emotional conflicts (Tang et al., 2021). However, later studies have suggested that impulse buying develops in conjunction with emotional reactions (Rodrigues et al., 2021; Ahn & Kwon, 2022) Therefore, this led us to the goal theory. Goal theory briefly argues that people live and behave in line with their goals. Based on this, it can be stated that impulsive purchases can also be seen as a step in achieving people's goals. In this study, these purchases will be evaluated within the scope of goal theory.

Therefore, in impulsive buying, the consumer is spontaneously and temporarily out of control and has a strong desire to buy. This situation can often be experienced temporarily during shopping festivals. Accordingly, the research model was prepared for perceived low price, perceived novelty, perceived perishability, perceived scarcity, perceived category richness, time constraint, perceived fun and social benefits,

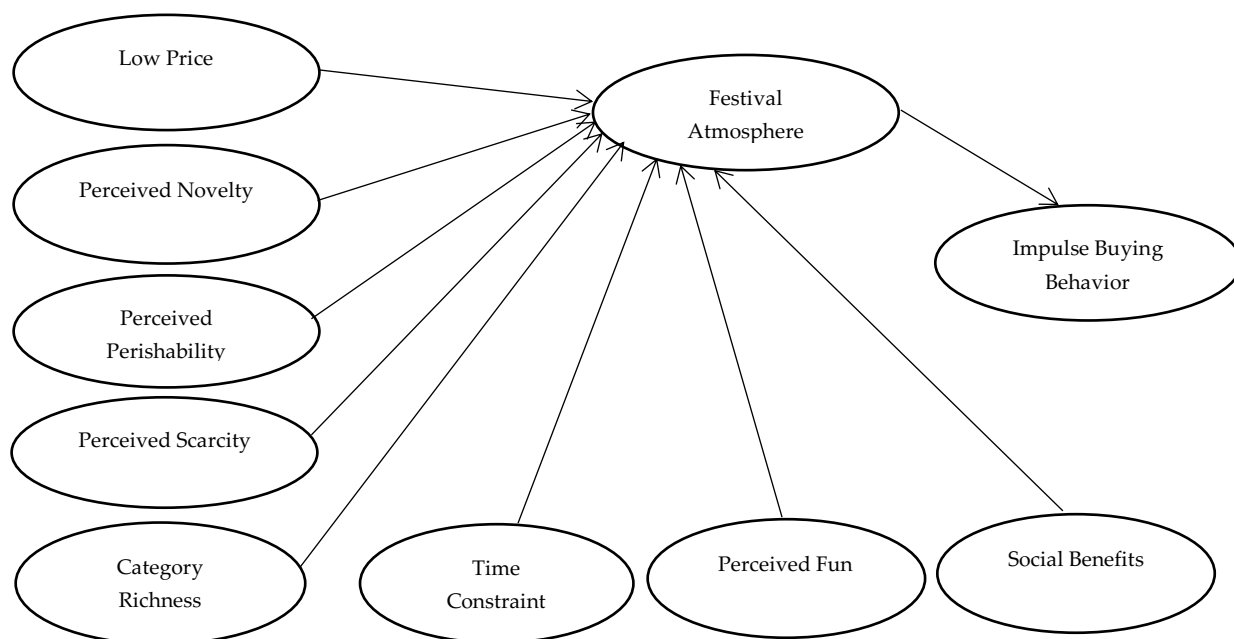


Figure 1: Proposed Model

which are thought to increase impulse buying and strengthen the festival atmosphere (Figure 1).

2.1. Impulse Buying Behavior

It is seen as an unplanned purchase when customers feel a sudden impulse to buy something quickly, which is often strong and continuous, and it is stated that impulse buying behavior can be triggered by intrinsic factors (Wu et al., 2021; Yulianto et al., 2021). In studies conducted in this direction, low price (Yang & Zhang, 2018; Kim et al., 2023), perceived novelty (Yulianto et al. 2021; Frasquet et al., 2024), perceived perishability (Dsilva, & Elangovan, 2021; Xie et al., 2023), perceived scarcity (Li, 2021; Simanjuntak & Pratama, 2024), category richness (Chen and Li, 2020; Novita et al., 2022), time constraint (Shang et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2023), perceived entertainment (Mahmuddin et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2023), social benefits (Li, 2021; Kim et al., 2023) stand out as antecedents of impulse buying behavior. Therefore, hypotheses were formed in this direction in the research.

2.2. Low Price

Low price is considered to be one of the strongest components of the festival atmosphere. Studies (Zhao et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2020; Li, 2021; Yulianto

et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2023) in this direction have found that low price is a variable that directly and positively affects the festival atmosphere. Consumers visit the website because they are impressed by the low prices (Chen & Ku, 2021). If the festival atmosphere is also good, they can make a purchase decision (Shang et al., 2020). However, there are also few studies (Ittaqullah et al., 2020) arguing that discounts do not have a significant impact on customers' impulse buying. Since it is predicted that low prices will be an important component in creating an online shopping festival environment, the hypothesis is formed as follows.

H1: *Perceived low price has a positive and significant effect on festival atmosphere.*

2.3. Perceived Novelty

It refers to consumers' encounters with new products and services (Yulianto et al., 2021). In addition, perceived novelty can also be defined as a subjective experience based on different characteristics such as unexpectedness, atypicality, innovation, and uncertainty. (Frasquet et al., 2024). Considering that consumers may encounter new products and services for the first time during festival periods, it can be stated that it is an important factor in online shopping. In addition, new forms of products can also increase willingness to buy. Also studies (Shang et al., 2020;

Frasquet et al., 2024) have revealed that perceived innovation positively affects consumers' online shopping decisions. Therefore, the hypothesis was formed in this direction.

H2: *Perceived novelty positively and significantly affects the festival atmosphere*

2.4. Perceived Perishability

This concept refers to the rapid uptake of goods by other customers during the festival and the loss of goods over time. (Yulianto et al., 2021). Festivals often use terms such as "limited-time" and "limited-stock" or "two-hour-only sale" (Xie et al., 2023). This is reflected to the consumer as perceived perishability. Therefore, consumers are directed to purchase quickly, which triggers impulse buying behavior. Customers who cannot make a purchase for this reason may feel that they have missed out. There are also studies in the literature (Dsilva, & Elangovan, 2021; Yulianto et al., 2021) showing that perceived perishability in online shopping festivals affects consumers positively. Therefore, the hypothesis is as follows.

H3: *Perceived perishability positively and significantly affects festival atmosphere*

2.5. Perceived Scarcity

A situation arising from insufficient resources and leading to a deterioration in the balance of supply and demand (Wu et al., 2021). Due to this scarcity, customers are driven to purchase more earlier and can move through the stages of the decision-making process more quickly. The fact that a small number of products are offered for sale in festival atmospheres supports this situation. Also, many studies (Wu et al., 2021; Simanjuntak & Pratama, 2024; Cengiz & Şenel, 2024) have shown that perceived scarcity can instantly affect consumer decisions. In this study, perceived scarcity refers to the scarcity of products offered at festivals. This increases the economic value of the products.. This situation is artificially created during shopping festivals. The hypothesis is formed accordingly as follows.

H4: *Perceived scarcity positively and significantly affects the festival atmosphere*

2.6. Category Richness

It refers to the types, quantities, and styles of goods that are more diverse than usual in promotional activities and thus meet the different needs of consumers (Xie, 2023). The variety of products within the categories makes consumers feel more advantageous in online shopping compared to offline shopping. Thus, product variety is also used to attract consumers to the festival environment. In many studies on online shopping (Chen & Ku 2021; Novita et al., 2022; Chen, 2022), creating categories in a diverse and deep way expands the product range and positively affects consumer decisions. Therefore, it is predicted that a similar effect will be seen in online festivals. In this direction, the hypothesis is as follows.

H5: *Category richness positively and significantly affects festival atmosphere*

2.7. Time Constraint

Time constraint occurs when festivals are held at certain times and use price, promotion, and distribution elements only for this time period (Shang et al., 2020). When consumers miss this period, they cannot access the product they want. Thus, they feel a time pressure on them. Therefore, they try to make purchasing decisions in time to avoid feeling this pressure. This is thought to be one of the most important factors that effects festival atmosphere and lead them to impulsive buying. Studies in the literature (McCullough, 2020; Chen & Li, 2020; Yulianto et al., 2021; Shao et al., 2023) also support this prediction. Therefore, the hypothesis is prepared as follows.

H6: *Time constraint positively and significantly affects festival atmosphere*

2.8. Perceived Entertainment

It is a concept that includes elements such as the information that consumers share with each other during the festival, the happiness they feel during product search, and the impulse to buy quickly (Chen et al., 2023). It is stated that this is one of the important factors in making consumers feel like a

festival (Xie et al., 2023). There are also many studies (Li et al., 2020; Mahmuddin et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023) showing that entertainment during online shopping positively affects consumer decisions. Therefore, the hypothesis is formed as follows.

H7: *Perceived entertainment has a positive and significant effect on festival atmosphere.*

2.9. Social Benefits

It is one of the elements that consumers use in order not to stay away from what other people are talking about, to feel a part of social life and to see themselves as valuable (Xie et al., 2023). This feeling is thought to be high during festival periods. Many studies (Li et al., 2020; Ahn, & Kwon, 2022; Kim et al., 2023) state that consumers turn to online festivals due to these benefits. Therefore, in the study, it is predicted that consumers' feeling of social benefit causes festival atmosphere and impulse buying.

H8: *Social benefits positively and significantly affect the festival atmosphere*

2.10. Festival Atmosphere

It is the name given to an environment that consumers support with price discounts, sales of a certain number of products in a limited time and directs consumers to buy quickly. In this process, consumers are quickly invited to participate in this event/shopping with the influence of other consumers (word of mouth, social media, etc.) (Chen & Li, 2020). Online atmosphere refers to the design of web environments that attract consumers to enter and purchase, and is seen as consumers' mood or emotions conveyed by the environment (Xie et al., 2023). During shopping festivals, consumers expect to buy products cheaper, but they realize that this program is for a limited time and that a limited number of products are offered when there are many consumers (Nyrhinen et al., 2024). Thus, it is argued that discounts during this limited time are more effective than discounts during normal times (Novita et al., 2022). Therefore, the festival atmosphere affects the impulsive purchasing

behavior of consumers. The hypothesis is formed in this direction as follows.

H9: *Festival atmosphere positively and significantly affects impulsive purchase intention*

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample design and data collection

In the study, it is expected that the variables of perceived low price, perceived innovation, perceived perishability, perceived scarcity, perceived category richness, time constraint, perceived entertainment and social benefits will affect the festival atmosphere. It is also predicted that the festival atmosphere affects impulsive purchase intention. In addition, the question of whether the created model creates a significant difference between women and men will be answered. Thus, it will be understood whether the variables affecting the festival atmosphere differ for women and men. Therefore, the model will be tested in line with these hypotheses. Our target respondents were consumers who participated in online shopping festivals. Therefore, purposive sampling was used in the study. The research will be conducted according to the structural equation model and a total of 37 survey questions consisting of 3 parts were directed to the people in our sample. It is planned to receive 346 answers in total according to the formula $8.37 \times 50 = 346$ (Tabaschnick and Fidell 2012). Data were collected via face-to-face surveys in the first three months of 2024. In accordance with the purpose of the study, 300 surveys were administered to men and women. 294 usable surveys were obtained for men and 296 for women. A total of 590 surveys were included in the analysis.

3.2. Research instrument

In the study, data was collected using a survey method in accordance with the purpose of the research. "Ethics Committee Approval" for the survey was obtained from the researcher's university. Many variables thought to constitute the festival atmosphere (perceived novelty, perceived perishability, perceived scarcity,

impulse buying behavior) were adapted from the study of Yulianto et al. (2021). In addition, the studies of Kim et al. (2023)- low price, Chen & Li (2020)-category richness, Xie et al. (2023)-time constraint, Xu et al. (2020)-perceived entertainment, Li et al. (2020)-social benefits, Yang & Zhang (2018)-festival atmosphere were used for the scales. Each item was evaluated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree.

Example item for low price scale (3 items) is "The price reduction of the product at the festival is what attracts me". An example item for perceived novelty (4 items) is "Shopping at festival offers a new experience". The example item for Perceived perishability (4 items) is as follows: "When I shop during at festival flash sales, I try to complete the transaction quickly." An example item for the perceived scarcity scale (4 items) is "I see that there are limited items at the festival" The sample item for category richness (4 items) is as follows: "The product range offered by the platforms during the festival period is quite rich". The sample item for the time constraint scale (3 items) is "The flash sales are making me rush to buy". The sample item for perceived entertainment (4 items) is as follows "It's fun to browse products and shop at the festival". The sample item selected for social benefits (3 items) is "I enjoyed spending time with other users during the festival". The item determined for the festival atmosphere scale (4 items) is as follows: "The online and offline events created a strong festival atmosphere". The sample item selected for impulse buying behavior is "I tend to buy products that I didn't plan on during the festival".

3.3. Analytical methods

The subject will be researched in line with the data obtained in the study and the data obtained as a result of the research will be analyzed according to the structural equation modeling method using SPSS and PLS-SEM programs. PLS-SEM provides an assessment of both the explanatory power and predictive accuracy of a model, minimizing the limitations of unpredictable explanations. In the study, the PLS-SEM algorithm was run using the

following settings: 3,000 as the maximum number of iterations, 10⁻⁷ as the stopping criterion and the path weighting scheme. Significance was assessed using a bootstrap routine with 10,000 subsamples and percentile bootstrap as the confidence interval method.

IBM SPSS version 22.0 and SmartPLS version 4.1.0.6 were used for data analysis. Analysis was performed using the variance-based PLS-SEM algorithm. This was because it was able to process and analyze the reflective and formative models in the model in the study. In addition, the PLS-SEM approach was able to control measurement errors in the structural model, while at the same time estimating causal patterns among latent constructs. In the study, the analysis was conducted by following the guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (2018). These guidelines were applied to both groups of participants (male and female).

4. Findings

4.1. Assessing the reflective measurement model

All constructs in the study were measured reflectively using multivariate scales that have been previously established in the relevant literature and, where necessary, slightly adapted to the research context. There are fundamental elements in assessing the suitability of many multi-item reflective models for analysis. These are Cronbach's alpha (C.A.) and composite reliability (C.R.) values for reliability, along with average variance extracted (AVE) for convergent validity and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios for discriminant validity. The study examined indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity for both groups (men and women). The values obtained can be seen in Table 1. The reliability coefficients (C.A. and C.R.) for both groups were higher than 0.70. Internal consistency and cronbach alpha values were close to each other. Therefore, the reliability of the study was proven (Hair et al., 2017). The average variance extracted (AVE) scores for both groups were higher than 0.50, indicating that convergent validity was met. We also examined HTMT values

with 95% one-sided bootstrap confidence intervals for discriminant validity. The HTMT values for both groups were below 0.90 (Hair et al., 2018). This confirmed discriminant validity.

differed significantly (Hair et al., 2018). MICOM routine was applied for measurement invariance of composite models (Henseler et al., 2016). Accordingly, since the data processing, variables and indicators of the groups were similar, construct invariance was applied. In the next step,

Table 1. Measurement Model Assessment for Man and Woman

Construct*	Loadings**		Cronbach Alpha (C.A.)		Composite Reliability (C.R.)		Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	
	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
LP1	0.87	0.94	0.86	0.93	0.86	0.93	0.67	0.81
LP2	0.81	0.89						
LP3	0.78	0.86						
PN1	0.82	0.93	0.92	0.95	0.92	0.95	0.75	0.82
PN2	0.90	0.87						
PN3	0.86	0.89						
PN4	0.86	0.92						
PP1	0.90	0.91	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.81	0.81
PP2	0.90	0.89						
PP3	0.87	0.89						
PP4	0.92	0.89						
PS1	0.79	0.89	0.90	0.94	0.91	0.94	0.71	0.81
PS2	0.87	0.90						
PS3	0.86	0.90						
PS4	0.84	0.90						
CR1	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.94	0.92	0.94	0.73	0.81
CR2	0.81	0.89						
CR3	0.87	0.88						
CR4	0.85	0.92						
TC1	0.82	0.90	0.86	0.91	0.86	0.90	0.68	0.76
TC2	0.76	0.82						
TC3	0.87	0.88						
PE1	0.80	0.91	0.89	0.94	0.89	0.94	0.67	0.79
PE2	0.86	0.87						
PE3	0.77	0.86						
PE4	0.83	0.89						
SB1	0.86	0.86	0.86	0.91	0.86	0.91	0.68	0.78
SB2	0.76	0.88						
SB3	0.84	0.90						
FA1	0.70	0.70	0.83	0.81	0.83	0.81	0.56	0.53
FA2	0.76	0.70						
FA3	0.78	0.70						
FA4	0.73	0.81						
IBB1	0.72	0.78	0.80	0.80	0.80	0.80	0.50	0.50
IBB2	0.65	0.62						
IBB3	0.74	0.67						
IBB4	0.72	0.72						

*LP: Low Price, PN: Perceived Novelty, PP: Perceived Perishability, PL: Perceived Scarcity, CR: Category Richness, TC: Time Constraint, PE: Perceived Entertainment, SC: Social Benefits, FA: Festival Atmosphere, IBB: Impulse Buying Behavior

** First values calculated for "woman" and second values for "man"

Furthermore, measurement invariance between both participant groups was assessed in the study. We also assessed measurement invariance between both participant groups. Measurement invariance was addressed to determine whether the patterns revealed by the groups in the study

correlations between the composite scores between the two groups were assessed. A correlation of less than 1 indicated a difference between the groups. Thus, compositional invariance was confirmed by showing that the null hypothesis could not be rejected. This allowed us to obtain the partial measurement variability that allows for multigroup comparisons. In addition, both groups were evaluated for common method bias. We used Harmon's one-factor analysis as performed by

Podsakoff et al. (2003). The values were 19.3% for women and 19.1% for men. These values were below the 50% threshold value. Thus, multi-structural analyses were continued for both groups.

4.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with 10 latent variables and 37 observed variables. As a result of the factor analysis, compatibility indices were obtained for the data for women (NFI= 0.90, SRMR= 0.031, p= 0.000, CFI= 0.97, TLI= 0.97) and for men (NFI= 0.888, SRMR= 0.064, p= 0.000, CFI= 0.94, TLI= 0.93). Therefore, the results reveal that the model fits the data well. In addition, the relationship between the variables in this model was examined using the correlation coefficient. The relationship between all variables is statistically significant (p<0.01). In addition, all correlation values are positive. Therefore, one of the important assumptions in SEM analysis, which is the connectedness between the relationships, has been achieved. In this study, the relationship between festival atmosphere and other variables is significant. The results in Table 2 and 3 show that festival atmosphere has the most significant relationship with impulsive buying behavior. In other words, as the festival atmosphere is positive, impulsive buying behavior increases significantly.

4.3. Structural Model Assessment

As mentioned earlier in the paper, the PLS-SEM algorithm provides a very useful framework for assessing causal-predictive links. Furthermore, the PLS program can generate T statistics for significance testing of both the internal and external model using a procedure called bootstrapping. In this procedure, a large number of subsamples are taken with replacement from the original sample to give bootstrap standard errors, which in turn give approximate T values for the significance test of the structural path. The bootstrap result approximates the normality of the data. Therefore, SmartPLS 4.0 was used to model our study, as shown in Figure 1.

As shown in Table 2 for women data, the structural model results indicate that only social benefits ($\beta = 0.024$, t-value = 0.452) not have an impact on the festival atmosphere. Low price ($\beta = 0.159$, t-value = 2.144), perceived novelty ($\beta = 0.153$, t-value = 2.538), perceived perishability ($\beta = 0.184$, t-value = 3.083), perceived scarcity ($\beta = 0.192$, t-value = 3.174), category richness ($\beta = 0.158$, t-value = 2.393), time constraint ($\beta = 0.141$, t-value = 2.573), perceived enjoyment ($\beta = 0.189$, t-value = 2.689) variables affect the festival atmosphere. has had a positive impact. Additionally, it was observed that the festival atmosphere ($\beta = 0.396$, t-value = 10.461) had a strong effect on impulse purchasing intention. Thus, H1-H7 and H9 were accepted.

Table 2. Path Analysis-Woman

Paths	Beta (B)	t	p	Sign.
H1. Low Price→Festival atmosphere	0.159	2.144	0.032* *	Yes
H2. Perceived Novelty→Festival atmosphere	0.153	2.538	0.011* *	Yes
H3. Perceived perishability→Festival atmosphere	0.184	3.083	0.002* *	Yes
H4. Perceived scarcity→Festival atmosphere	0.192	3.174	0.002* *	Yes
H5. Category richness→Festival atmosphere	0.158	2.393	0.017* *	Yes
H6. Time constraint→Festival atmosphere	0.141	2.573	0.010* *	Yes
H7. Perceived entertainment→Festival atmosphere	0.189	2.689	0.007* *	Yes
H8. Social benefits→Festival atmosphere	0.024	0.452	0.651* **	No
H9. Festival atmosphere→Impulsive purchase intention	0.396	10.461	0.000* *	Yes

*p<0.001, **p<0.0, ***p >0.05

As shown in Table 3 for man data, the structural model results indicate that low price ($\beta = 0.300$, t-value = 5.535), perceived perishability ($\beta = 0.193$, t-value = 3.792), perceived scarcity ($\beta = 0.238$, t-value = 4.313), time constraint ($\beta = 0.306$, t-value = 5.606), social benefits ($\beta = 0.164$, t-value = 2.472) positively affect the festival atmosphere. However, no effect of perceived novelty ($\beta = 0.005$, t-value = 0.073),

category richness ($\beta = 0.036$, t -value = 0.592), perceived entertainment ($\beta = 0.059$, t -value = 1.085) on the festival atmosphere was found. In addition, the festival atmosphere ($\beta = 0.301$, t -value = 5.379) strongly affects impulse purchasing behavior in men as well as in women.

Table 3. Path Analysis-Man

Paths	Beta (B)	t	p	Sign.
H1. Low Price→Festival atmosphere	0.300	5.535	0.000*	Yes
H2. Perceived Novelty→Festival atmosphere	0.005	0.073	0.942***	No
H3. Perceived perishability→Festival atmosphere	0.193	3.792	0.000*	Yes
H4. Perceived scarcity→Festival atmosphere	0.238	4.313	0.000*	Yes
H5. Category richness→Festival atmosphere	0.036	0.592	0.554***	No
H6. Time constraint→Festival atmosphere	0.306	5.606	0.000*	Yes
H7. Perceived entertainment→Festival atmosphere	0.059	1.085	0.278***	No
H8. Social benefits→Festival atmosphere	0.164	2.472	0.013**	Yes
H9. Festival atmosphere→Impulsive purchase intention	0.301	5.379	0.000*	Yes

* $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.0$, *** $p > 0.05$

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Based on the PLS-SEM results, low price was found to have a significant positive influence on festival atmosphere for both gender and supporting H1. The findings shows that while low price is one of the most important variables for men in creating a festival atmosphere, low price is also important for women, although there are variables that they find more important. Therefore, it is parallel with the study of Kim et al. (2023). Perceived novelty was found to have a significant positive influence on festival atmosphere for women but not for men. Therefore, H2 is partially supported. Yulianto et al. (2021) also demonstrated its effect in their study. Thus, it can be stated that women attach more importance to the presentation

of new products within the festival than men. Next, perceived perishability was found to have a significant positive influence on festival atmosphere for both gender and supporting H3. This result is similar to the study by Dsilva, & Elangovan, (2021). It can be stated that time limitations and fast-selling products in the festival atmosphere affect the festival atmosphere positively for both genders. Similarly, perceived scarcity was found to have a positive and significant effect on festival atmosphere for both genders and H4 was supported. Simanjuntak & Pratama (2024) and Cengiz & Şenel (2024) also obtained similar results. Therefore, keeping the number of products to a certain number and the rapid exhaustion of these products brings consumers into the festival atmosphere. Although category richness has a positive and significant effect on women's festival atmosphere, no such effect was found for men. Thus, H5 is partially accepted. It would be more beneficial if the categories of products related to women were wider within the festival atmosphere. Time constraint also significantly and positively affects the festival atmosphere for both genders and therefore H6 is supporting. As in previous studies (Chen & Li, 2020; Yulianto et al., 2021), time constraints emerged as an important element of creating a festival atmosphere in this study. Perceived entertainment is another variable that is positive and significant for women but not significant for men in creating a festival atmosphere. Thus, H7 partially supported. While women also want to have fun while shopping, men focus on more rational elements. Therefore, it can be said that hedonic elements are more prominent for women. Social benefits is the only variable that positively affects the festival atmosphere for men but not for women. Thus, H8 is also partially supported. Finally, for both genders, festival atmosphere has a positive and significant effect on consumers' impulse buying behavior and H8 is supported. Festivals are one of the key activities that drive consumers to make impulse purchases. This effect has been confirmed in previous studies (Kim et al., 2023; Nyrhinen et al., 2024). The majority of extant studies only generally examine presence or investigate one or two forms of

presence (Chen, 2021; Xie et al., 2023). Therefore, the most important finding of this study is to reveal the factors that create the festival atmosphere and to reveal the extended variables that differ in terms of gender.

5.2. Managerial Implications

The findings of this study have several notable implications for e-shoppers and e-retailers. First, as a result of the study, the variables (low price, perceived perishability, perceived scarcity, perceived scarcity, time constraint) were revealed as the prominent variables in online shopping festivals. In this direction, e-commerce companies can use these elements for both genders in the online festivals they organize. For example, consumers can be informed about low price practices before the festival through e-mail marketing and messages can be sent through mobile marketing. For perishability, consumers can be directed to buy products instantly by placing an indicator such as estimated expiration time. For the scarcity of products, the number of product sales can be estimated through artificial intelligence applications and the number of products to be offered at the festival can be determined accordingly. The duration can be kept over one day for products with high sales and hourly discounts can be organized for products with low sales. Therefore, higher sales volumes can be achieved by increasing impulse buying motivation during the festival.

Secondly, festival atmosphere was found to be effective on consumers' impulse buying behaviors for both genders. For this reason, e-commerce companies should organize online shopping festivals in order to support consumers' rational purchases and increase their impulse purchases. In addition, they should approach men's and women's products with different strategies. While men focus more on rational elements (low price, time constraint, etc.), women focus more on the hedonic elements of the festival (perceived entertainment, category richness, etc.). For this reason, in the strategies to be implemented in online shopping festivals, it may be more effective to offer more discounts, time limits, limited

number of products to male consumers, while for female consumers, new products should be introduced to the consumer for the first time within the scope of the festival, the product range within the categories should be increased and there should be elements that they can have fun. In this direction, dynamic pricing applications can be used using artificial intelligence applications for male consumers. For female consumers, it can be stated that augmented reality applications can offer a more entertaining shopping environment, especially during festivals.

Third and lastly, it is very important that the variables that will lead e-shoppers to impulsive buying during this process, unlike normal shopping processes, are designed in harmony with each other. For this reason, by utilizing current applications such as artificial intelligence applications, IoT technologies, augmented reality applications, it will be possible for consumers to participate more and be directed to impulse buying in festivals that will be prepared with different elements for men and women.

6. Conclusion

This study is the first research to reveal the creation of a festival atmosphere for women and men and the impulse buying behavior of consumers in these shopping environments. PLS-CBM and PLS-SEM are the structural equation models used in this study. As a result of the study, while low price, perceived perishability, perceived scarcity, time constraint variables generally affect both genders (women and men) in creating a festival atmosphere, perceived novelty, category richness, perceived entertainment are determined as additional features that women consumers find necessary in creating a festival atmosphere. In addition, male consumers have revealed that social benefits are an important element in creating a festival atmosphere. While social benefits are not the only effective factor in creating a festival atmosphere for women consumers, no effect of perceived novelty, category richness, perceived entertainment was found for male consumers. In addition, festival atmosphere significantly affected impulsive buying for both genders. Therefore, it

has been proven in the study that different elements are needed for women and men in creating a festival atmosphere. For this reason, it is recommended that e-commerce companies make a distinction between women's and men's products when creating a festival atmosphere and include consumers in these processes by using different elements. Therefore, marketing professionals should create separate website designs for men's and women's products at online shopping festivals. For example, an online festival environment created for women may emphasize products that sell out quickly and in small quantities, while men may emphasize low prices and limited time. In future online festival studies, conducting research on this subject by making a distinction based on gender will enable more rational results to be achieved. More detailed studies should be conducted on the hedonic and cognitive elements perceived by men and women in the online festival environment. In addition, future research should conduct qualitative research to gain deep insights into factors influencing festival atmosphere and impulse buying behavior.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Access to Rights of the Roma: Views of a Neglected Community in Türkiye

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Abstract

This phenomenological qualitative study, prepared using the purposive sampling technique, the problems, expectations and difficulties of the Roma experienced in accessing basic human rights in Türkiye assessed. A semi-structured interview form was used in data collection, and 26 Roma individuals from Izmir participated in the study with the help of in-depth interviews. All data were analyzed by being coded in MAXQDA 2020. Based on the participants' life stories, the results were discussed under the themes of Roma culture, access to basic human rights, an apolitical neglected group, and expectations of the future. It was understood that the participants basically experienced economic difficulties and problems intertwined with poverty and could not meet their basic human needs, such as housing, employment, education, and health. Accordingly, the study results demonstrated the importance of rights-based practices for the Roma.

Keywords: The Roma, human rights, basic human needs, rights-based practice, Türkiye.

Öz

Amaçsal örnekleme tekniği ile hazırlanan bu fenomenolojik niteliksel çalışmada, Türkiye'de Romanların temel insan haklarına erişimde yaşadıkları sorunlar, beklentiler ve zorluklar değerlendirilmiştir. Verilerin toplanmasında yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak derinlemesine görüşmeler yardımıyla İzmir'den 26 Roman birey çalışmaya katılmıştır. Bütün veriler MAXQDA 2020 ile kodlanarak çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular katılımcıların yaşam öykülerinden yola çıkarak; Roman kültürü, temel insan haklarına ve hizmetlere erişim, apolitik göz ardı edilen bir grup ile gelecekte beklenen temaları altında ele alınmıştır. Katılımcıların temelde ekonomik güçlükler ve yoksullukla iç içe geçmiş sorunları deneyimlediği, barınma, istihdam, eğitim, sağlık gibi temel insani ihtiyaçlarını karşılayamadıkları anlaşılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, çalışma bulguları, Romanlara yönelik hak temelli uygulamaların önemini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Romanlar, insan hakları, temel insan ihtiyaçları, hak temelli uygulama, Türkiye.

Introduction

The concept of rights, which is present in the discourse of many segments nowadays, emerges with various meanings. The definitions we encounter most frequently are the concept of rights in an abstract and concrete sense. The definition of the concept of rights in an abstract sense takes into account the acquisitions in human life and is important in terms of applicability in human life. In an abstract sense, the concept of rights explains a life that respects human values and dignity. When approaching the concept of rights in a concrete sense, we should consider the focus of human rights and start from the relationship between the individual and the state. In concrete terms, the concept of rights should cover the basic rights, living conditions, and services provided by the public to citizens, which are guaranteed by the state, for people to live in better conditions. From this point of view, rights can be considered essentially as a result of human needs. Furthermore, a holistic perspective addressing the needs of all people, citizens, and stakeholders living in a country for access to rights should be put forward by the public.

Human rights as a concept has a multidimensional structure as well as a very rich meaning and content. The emergence of new rights in almost every period, the acquisition of new rights depending on the change and development of society, the changes of rights according to societies, the fact that new rights leave old rights in the background and the relations between them, and the effects of rights on the field of law deepen the subject further (Çeçen, 2013). In this study, the importance of human rights for individuals to achieve their basic life needs is emphasized. Therefore, we will discuss the basic human rights that will protect the basic needs of people in the state. All human beings are born with certain human characteristics. However, it has been obligatory to protect and then develop them over time. Thus, the protection and development of these characteristics has formed the concept of human rights (Yıldırım & Aslan, 2019).

The Roma, claimed to be the largest minority group in Europe with a population of about 11-12

million, create a mosaic of different lifestyles and needs while sharing a different social heritage (Carter, 1996; Orton et al., 2019). The Roma, an important stakeholder and human group, are among the many different ethnic and cultural elements living in Türkiye. Their origins date back to very ancient periods of history, and they do not have a homogeneous identity structure (Yıldırım, 2019). There are thoughts that the Roma population in Türkiye migrated to the country from India or Egypt, but some sources say that the Roma living in Türkiye migrated from Greece in the 1920-1930s through population exchange (Genç et al., 2015). The existence of different tribes, such as Rom (Western Anatolia), Dom (Southeast Anatolia), and Lom (Eastern Black Sea), and their spread to the regions can be mentioned for Türkiye (Kolukırık, 2005; Kolukırık, 2008). All these peoples have been defined as the Roma in Anatolian geography throughout history (Uğurlu & Duru, 2010).

Although the Roma in Türkiye have equal citizenship rights with constitutional regulations, they used to experience significant problems in terms of socioeconomic rights. It is known that the Roma have a low level of education and cannot acquire sufficient qualifications for citizenship rights, have economic difficulties, irregular jobs, and low income, cannot work in secure jobs, cannot give up the nomadic lifestyle in certain regions, and cannot reach healthy housing (Topuz, 2010; Balkız & Göktepe, 2014). This current situation has formed the starting point of the study. Examining the Roma from this aspect can present important data. The objective of the present study is to make a scientific contribution to the problems of accessing rights of the Roma living in Türkiye.

Additionally, in the review of the international literature, it was surprising that there were few studies on the Roma (Réger & Gleason, 1991; Hancock, 1999; Leeson, 2013; Clark, 2014) and the available studies mostly addressed the issues of child welfare (Réger & Gleason, 1991), poverty (Kornblum & Lichter, 1972), and stigmatization (Clark, 2014). In the national literature, it is a significant problem that studies conducted with the Roma (Topuz, 2010; Ünalı, 2012; Balkız &

Göktepe, 2014; Okutan & Turgut, 2018; Öksüz et al., 2018) were included in the scope of certain main themes such as education, citizenship, culture, and poverty and there were enough studies focusing on their rights and access to public services. Hence, the main objective of the study was the problems, expectations and difficulties of the Roma experienced in accessing basic human rights in Türkiye assessed .

1. Methods

1.1. Participants and Criteria for the Study

The methodological tendency of this study was based on the qualitative research design. In the study, a phenomenological approach was employed to more easily reveal the opinions of the Roma on how they evaluate their needs, problems, public service expectations and the difficulties they experience in accessing basic human rights in Türkiye. Purposive sampling was the sampling technique of the study. The choice of purposive sampling made it easier for researchers to acquire an understanding of certain types of case studies for review (Neuman, 2012: 324). Izmir, which is among the cities with a dense Roma population in Türkiye, was selected as the study area. Considering the population density of the Roma, their distribution in Izmir and its districts, and their location relative to the city center, Izmir was divided into three regions: East-South, West-North, and Center.

The three districts identified in red on the map in Figure 1 were addressed in connection with the regions from which Izmir province is separated. Buca district/Göksu neighborhood representing the southeast of Izmir, Karşıyaka district/Örnekköy neighborhood representing the northwest of Izmir, and Konak district/Tepecik neighborhood representing the center of Izmir were preferred as the data collection field in this study.

The administrators of the Roma Community Youth Education and Development Association in Izmir were interviewed to identify the study participants. By taking their opinions, 26 Roma individuals living in the districts shown on the map and in the neighborhoods in these districts that we have mentioned above participated in the sample. In the inclusion criteria, attention was paid to the fact that the participants were over the age of 18 and their genders were equally distributed. Almost equal numbers of females and males over 18 years of age and in different age groups and of different genders participated in the sample from each neighborhood. The total number of interviews specific to each neighborhood was as follows:

- 24 participants from the age group of 18-60 (10 females and 14 males, paying attention to the equal distribution of gender characteristics and conditions as much as possible),
- 2 participants aged 60 and over (2 females),
- Since there are three neighborhoods from three districts in total, Örnekköy



Figure 1: İzmir Research Area

neighborhood = 10 participants / Göksu neighborhood = 8 participants / Tepecik neighborhood = 8 participants.

The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 67, and their mean age was $\bar{x}=42.73\pm 7.97$. Of the participants, 23.07% (n=6) did not receive any education. Of the participants, 50% (n=13) were primary school graduates, 19.23% (n=5) were high school dropouts, and only 7.7% (n=2) were university graduates. Of the participants, 73.07% (n=19) were married, 19.23% (n=5) were single, and 7.7% (n=2) were widowed. Most participants, 88.46% (n=23), worked in traditional low-paid jobs that disregard human labor, such as millet growing-basket making-scrap collecting-flower selling, seasonal agricultural work, cleaning, playing music, and working at funfairs, which are common among the Roma. Only three participants (11.54%) worked in jobs that were socially accepted and respected in Türkiye. Two of these three participants were civil servants in local governments, and the other was a chemist.

1.2. Procedures

The study was initiated with the ethical approval of Manisa Celal Bayar University Health Sciences Ethics Committee dated 04/08-2020 and numbered 20478486-050.04.04-. A field work permit dated 03/07/2020 and numbered 2020/6 was received from the Roma Community Youth Education and Development Association for data collection. Individual interviews with the participants invited to the study were based on volunteerism. The participants who agreed to participate in the study were informed about the study's purpose, details, and possible benefits prior to the interview and signed the "Informed Voluntary Consent Form."

The data were collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview form in line with the main purpose of the study. First, a pilot study was conducted with two participants using a semi-structured interview form. After the pilot study, the feedback received from the participants was re-evaluated, and the semi-structured interview form was revised and finalized. The data collection process was continued with the final version of the form. The

interviews were recorded with two voice recorders simultaneously based on permission and the notes taken by the interviewer during the interview. Ultimately, the interview durations varied between 60 and 93 minutes. Additionally, all interviews were completed within a six-month period from January to June 2021. Due to ethical considerations, the participants' real names were not used in the study, and abbreviations were included. "Participant 1, Male, Örnekköy" referred to the first participant interviewed, and the interviews were ordered.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in the building of the Roma Community Youth Education and Development Association in Karşıyaka-Örnekköy neighborhood, in the South Neighborhood Representative's Office in Konak-Tepecik neighborhood, and in Buca-Göksu neighborhood in the interview settings generally deemed appropriate by the association. The in-depth interviews were continued until the information acquired from the participants was repeated and theoretical saturation was reached, and eventually the actual sample group of the study emerged. The semi-structured form and in-depth interviews allowed us to understand the individuals and their environmental conditions in detail, with reflections on their narratives and statements (Kümbetoğlu, 2012). It was attempted to transfer the evaluation of different rights such as economic, housing, health, and education in the three neighborhoods in the study and the life summaries of the Roma in terms of their access to rights to sufficient statistical analysis.

1.3. Limitations

The current study had some limitations. The first was related to reflections from the data collection field and interview hours. The majority of the Roma community in Türkiye wake up late because they work until late at night in the street economy and informal jobs, such as flower selling, playing music, millet growing, and working at funfairs. In the interviews with the participants, some difficulties were frequently experienced due to the time problem and setting the interview appointments. Moreover, nightlife continued in

the Roma neighborhoods, and it was known that there was substance use in the neighborhoods selected as the data collection field. This prevented the researchers from being present in the data collection field after a certain hour and made the researchers have security concerns.

The third limitation was related to the significant factors limiting the researchers regarding the Roma people's trust issues and compliance with the study. The fact that the Roma became bored quickly in the in-depth interviews with the participants caused the interview durations to be shorter than expected. On the other hand, the Roma community addressed non-Roma people in Türkiye as "Gaco" due to their experiences of social exclusion and discrimination and did not trust them. Fortunately, the fact that one of the researchers had several years of working and practice experience in the Roma neighborhoods in Izmir balanced this limitation. Additionally, it facilitated the adaptation of the Roma to the interviews. Finally, some important issues should not be overlooked in interpreting our study results. We employed a qualitative design to understand and evaluate the need of the Roma for access to rights. Such a study design may make it difficult to explain the actual or the social, or to screen for the direction of causal relationships. However, it does not help to explore longitudinal changes in the need for the Roma in Türkiye to access rights. Hence, there is a need for more research and longitudinal studies focusing on the Roma. Nevertheless, it can be thought that the present study, which was performed with the Roma in Türkiye, may help other intercultural studies.

1.4. Statistical Analysis

The obtained data were deciphered in the computer environment and converted into text using transcription marks. The notes taken by the researchers during the interview were also evaluated to increase the quality of the data obtained from the interviews. As a result, all qualitative transcripts took 407 pages and 1186 lines. For their processing and analysis, the data were coded in MAXQDA 2020, subjected to thematic analysis, and divided into meaning units.

The resulting themes were discussed among the researchers at every stage of the process until a consensus was reached to confirm the accuracy of scientific interpretation.

2. Findings

The study findings were evaluated by reducing them to four themes and meaning units. Figure 2 shows the meaning units and themes obtained as a result of the data evaluation:



Figure 2: Themes/Meaning Units

Repetitive sentences and words were mostly written in bold in the interviews conducted during the study. This method was followed to provide convenience to the reader, strengthen the reader's mastery of the subject, and make the researchers feel that they are a part of the qualitative research process.

2.1. Theme 1: Roma Culture

The participants' views on the Roma culture were discussed by combining three meaning units: identifying the origin, gypsies are nomadic, and being a Roma.

2.1.1. Meaning Units 1: Identifying the Origin;

Although some participants accepted the definition of gypsy, the majority rejected this definition and expressed themselves as the Roma.

One participant described himself/herself as both a gypsy and a Roma. Except for two participants, all participants stated that the gypsy expression was not correct and the concept of gypsy had a stigmatizing emphasis. The participants indicated that the gypsy expression evoked the concepts of theft and crime more and said that they preferred the Roma as their origin:

"...Well, our community generally prefers the term Roma because people mostly use the term gypsy to refer to thieves, ominous, vulgar people..." (Participant 2, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...Actually, there was no difference between gypsies and the Roma based on ancient times. But when you say gypsy, something happens, they regard us simpler, as thieves, ominous, this and that. But when you say the Roma, it is regarded as neater and more organized among the people. That's why we accept being the Roma, not gypsies..." (Participant 9, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.1.2. Meaning Units 2: Gypsies Are Nomadic;

The participants summarized the difference between gypsies and the Roma through their nomadic status. They expressed that gypsies were nomadic, while the Roma lived in a more organized way. It was remarkable that the participants used the definition "they are different / they are others," when explaining the difference between gypsies and the Roma:

"...Now, we are not actually gypsies. We know ourselves as the Roma for years. According to our research, the adjective gypsy is the nickname given to oneself, as we say, nomads were called like this. For example, those in horse-drawn carriages, without a home. For example, one leaves from here and takes his family with him on horse-drawn carriages, stays in a field for 3-5 days. This is actually the adjective gypsy... They are different." (Participant 3, Male, Tepecik Neighborhood).

"...The gypsy life is normally related to tents, is less organized, like more relaxed people, in other

words, in an unmodernized way. But we have quite a lot of differences from them, like the Roma...They are different..." (Participant 1, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.1.3. Meaning Units 3: Being a Roma;

It was revealed that the participants talked about their cultural belonging and produced some metaphors while expressing their feelings about being a Roma:

"...The Roma are the colors of the world. They have transferred to a more settled life. They have a certain family, a certain order, a certain income level. Or there are those with certain jobs. There are musicians, those who go to house cleaning, repair shoes. Those who have a fixed salary." (Participant 20, Male, Tepecik Neighborhood).

"...They are very innocent. I mean, you've visited the Roma neighborhoods, there are such innocent children. We are a forgotten community, no one has taken care of, which continues only on parents and race..." (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...Well, being a Roma is a very nice feeling (laughs). The Roma are straightforward. I mean- they are hot-blooded, they are very hospitable. They like to travel and dance. You know, they are not like that, the Roma are natural people, straightforward..." (Participant 8, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.2. Theme 2: Access to Basic Human Rights

The research results revealed that the Roman community has almost no access to basic human rights. It was seen that the fact that the Roma have primarily housing problems is an important barrier to their access to other human rights. The problems they experienced in accessing education, health, and employment rights were parallel to the problems they experienced in accessing the right to housing. However, above all, discrimination was the root problem.

2.2.1 *Meaning Units 1: They Discriminate Against Us;*

Most participants stated that they were discriminated against because they were the Roma. The participants' memories of discrimination were embodied in issues such as the problems they faced due to discrimination when entering a job:

"...For example, we are going to enter a job, they ask, are you a Roma? Do you have children? So they are prejudiced, they don't hire us. They think about whether we will do something. Will we do any harm? Will we take their money and leave? So they look at us badly. That's why people are afraid of looking for a job inevitably and withdraw from life..." (Participant 6, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...When we first came to Izmir, we used to work in agriculture around Seyrekköy. The people there didn't want us, although we worked for them, they stoned our tents. I am always discriminated again." (Participant 3, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.2.2. *Meaning Units 2: Housing: Roma Neighborhood;*

Most participants stated that they could not access hygienic conditions and educational environments due to their housing conditions. It was remarkable that all participants had either acquaintances or neighbors staying in the tent. The statements of the participants, who also had the experience of living in a tent, regarding the difficulties they experienced drew attention:

"...You say the right to housing: Most Roma people already live in tents. What right to housing? How can you reach education in an environment where you can't live?" (Participant 25, Female, Tepecik Neighborhood).

"...How can a person not experience difficulties? Imagine a tent without electricity or water, without anything. Imagine a tent without a toilet or bathroom. How can you manage? We didn't have water, we used to go for a kilometer away, fill our water, cook our food and drink our tea with it. We used to take a bath once a week. We used to carry the water to a part of the tent, stretch a cloth, enter and take a bath. Do you think this is life?" (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

It was seen that the participants generally adopted the neighborhoods they lived in, but they also experienced different problems other than access to basic rights in their neighborhoods. The increased substance use in Roma neighborhoods and the dangers it has brought about are the prominent issues among the different problems specified by the participants. Moreover, some Roma individuals stated they were considering moving from their neighborhoods due to this problem. On the other hand, there was no discrimination in the neighborhoods compared to the outside world since people from the same culture and sharing this culture live in Roma neighborhoods:

"Since I live in a Roma neighborhood, there is no much discrimination in our neighborhood because we all know and embrace each other..." (Participant 23, Female, Tepecik Neighborhood).

"...The Roma are a closed community, in the form of a neighborhood, ghetto. Apart from that, the Roma have a saying; the friendship of a gaco¹ is above the knees, I have never asked for help from anyone else in these matters... For the Roma community, being safe means being in the Roma neighborhood. No Roma is safe outside of the Roma neighborhood. At least, being outside the Roma neighborhood means being exposed to social exclusion and discrimination..." (Participant 3, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

¹ The term "gaco" is a description used by the Roma for persons outside the Roma cultural circle. The term "gaco," which has also entered the Turkish spoken language, also

has the meanings of "lover, mistress, foreign man, foreign woman."

“...You have to stay 3-4 months in the Roma neighborhood to understand what it means living here. **You have to see all this dirt.** There is nothing to say, Roma neighborhoods are very bad. Nobody has education, the majority are illiterate. It is a normal life; one eats what he finds, daily. There is every way, this is the way of life. So it's a troubling situation... **There is a lot of quarrel, there is a lot of noise, there is a lot of drug dealing.** I don't want my children to grow up in such an environment and see what is happening here. If I get the chance, I will immediately move from the Roma neighborhood.” (Participant 19, Male, Tepecik Neighborhood).

2.2.3. Meaning Units 3: Right to Health;

When the health issue comes to the fore, citizens are expected to have some level of knowledge. However, some participants in the present study had no knowledge of the health system and health institutions. The participants' relationship with the health system and health institutions did not go beyond their communication with the health personnel. Additionally, some participants emphasized that they were exposed to social stigma in hospital settings:

“...I don't know anything, so I can't even get an appointment, I ask for help from those who know, they take me to the hospital. I talk to the doctor when I enter his room. So I ask the doctor in a language that I can understand. For example, doctors talk to you in medical language, I don't understand it. **Doctor, could you please explain in a language I can understand? He says okay and explains to me...**” (Participant 10, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

“...Here, around Tepecik, hospitals are problematic. They put everyone in the same pot because you're dirty, for example. They are approaching you in a directly insulting way. They behave like this, go there, wait there...” (Participant 19, Male, Tepecik Neighborhood).

Poverty was another problem experienced by the participants in accessing the right to health. They had to continue to work due to financial impossibility when experiencing health problems

and could not buy vitamin-rich foods when they got sick. Actually, the Roma in Türkiye were introduced to the health system in a full sense owing to the green card application:

“...We don't have problems with medications, but when we get sick and **do not receive vitamins, you need to have good food. We don't have that, you can't get quality foods.** Well, there is a problem there. They say, you will not work at work, but how will you not work? They say, you will rest, but there is no rest, go back to work. You cannot make a living when you are not working because...” (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

“...First, economic difficulties. We, the Roma, started to go to the hospital when the green card project in health emerged for the poor and those with payment difficulties in Türkiye. Because before, we couldn't go because we didn't have money...” (Participant 3, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.2.4. Meaning Units 4: Right to Education;

The issue of continuing education was a complete dilemma among the Roma. Most of our participants were uneducated, just like the general Roma community in Türkiye. The majority of our participants indicated that the access of Roma children to education was not equal to other children due to economic reasons. Moreover, it was important for them to present their experiences at school due to financial inadequacies and situations from their own educational life:

“...But people without financial means, unfortunately, cannot achieve this. Some send their children to public schools, **keeping thinking:** “I will send this child to public school, but I have to put pocket money in this child's pocket every day, how can I manage this?”” (Participant 14, Male, Göksu Neighborhood).

“...There is something like this; some due to financial problems, some because they don't want to study or because they shy away from it. For example, there are secondary schools in Roma neighborhoods. But because non-Roma people enter a high school or a university, some don't want to enter

such an environment by their own will. Some cannot afford to enter those environments financially..." (Participant 7, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...Have we not suffered poverty? I didn't have shoes on my feet. Sometimes I didn't even have slippers, we slept a lot in the tent. Children, mothers, siblings. One of my siblings was crying so much to go to school. But my mother always resented him because we didn't have an opportunity..." (Participant 15, Male, Göksu Neighborhood).

Child labor is a common problem among Roma children who cannot continue their education. Roma children have to work, and the lack of access to the right to education creates new problems feeding each other:

"The inability to continue education is actually a common problem. Some do not even send their children to public schools so that children can contribute to the family economy and work..." (Participant 14, Male, Göksu Neighborhood).

"...Some drop out in primary school, some in secondary school, so the man has to work. A person says, I won't study, I will work, I'll help my family..." (Participant 1, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...The child is forced to work after a certain age. He helps with work somehow, either he takes the paint box and goes painting or takes the carriage and goes to scrap collecting. So he starts struggling to earn an income. What good can come from this child? No school, no education. He won't get a job when there is a job opportunity someday. His parents are scrap collectors. You see, the child is continuing the same profession as a scrap collector for years. After that, he is uneducated. Of course, the child remains uneducated. Won't children study if you give them a good education opportunity? They will..." (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

The participants stated that working in seasonal agricultural work also affected the disruption of Roma children's education. Some participants said that their children could not attend school due to seasonal work:

"...None of us could go to school. There is still seasonal labor, people in Örnekköy still go to

cherry farming, tomato farming, pepper farming, go to hoeing. At that time, children cannot access education opportunities in any way..." (Participant 3, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...For example, the time for olives is coming. You go to olive grooves. You get permission from the school. So what's happening? The child is again away from school for two or three months. Well, this time, there is nothing left in that child, there is no love for school. The child gets poor notes from the exam, the lesson, and fails the lessons. It clearly hinders the child's right to education..." (Participant 8, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...Children go to tangerine and grape farming. For example, we took our daughter from school. Tangerine harvest starts around October-November. We take a month off; the work takes two to three months, tree pruning. We couldn't send our daughter to school. Now, they will go to grape collecting. The work is still going on..." (Participant 4, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

It drew attention that most participants also experienced discrimination in their school life. Whereas some participants mentioned their negative memories of school life, some participants expressed their opinion in favor of Roma children continuing their education despite all the difficulties:

"...We were beaten a lot. At that time, not many Roma children were receiving education at schools. How can I tell you? There were at most 50 Roma children in a 400-person school. We used to go to school, but either we were constantly ostracized, we were beaten a lot by the teacher, or we were fighting with other children every day. What do you expect from such an environment..." (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...So were we humiliated? We were humiliated. But now my only wish is that people like us educate the children of the Roma community..." (Participant 10, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.2.5. *Meaning Units 5: We Have No Income;*

The lifestyles of the Roma affect their job choices. In the neighborhoods where the research was conducted, it was understood that the participants were engaged in works identified with the Roma community: forging, tinsmithing, scrap collecting, paper collecting, seasonal agricultural work, basket making, working at funfairs, flower selling, fortune-telling, playing music, and door-to-door selling. It is obvious that these jobs are low-income, insecure, and irregular. Especially seasonal agricultural workers work informally:

"...Now you already know, 80% live in an area, without a job, without insurance. Seasonal agricultural work is like that, and you don't have a record. No one working in seasonal agriculture has any social security..." (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...There are tribes among the Roma. There are basket makers. There are tinsmiths. There are the Roma who do farming. I mean, my father was a farmer because I worked in the fields since childhood. Then I got married and worked in cleaning jobs. I didn't enter into anything like that, I mean, I didn't enter society much like that..." (Participant 10, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...Since machines are used in agriculture, children are not preferred in every sector nowadays. For example, the cotton business has ended, why? Machines emerged. They used to employ workers from here, they used to come and take workers... Or, there used to be a funfair as well. Working in an amusement park, entertainment, I mean, related to children. They used to go there as well, they used to travel for 9 months. For a long time, there are people here who work just as basket makers, work at funfairs, and as door-to-door sellers. When they all used to go somewhere, they used to go far from home. They didn't return for 9 months.... Working at funfairs was called the profession far from home... After a while, it was prohibited to work at funfairs. Then we went to fields, vineyards, orchards, plains..." (Participant 4, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

The majority of the participants had to migrate because they were engaged in seasonal agricultural work. It has been observed that also migrant lifestyle and seasonal agricultural jobs made difficult the access of the participants to the rights:

"...Of course, it is seasonal. Tobacco harvesting, tobacco planting, cotton, cotton hoeing, grapes and olives, etc. All of these are the traditional works of the Roma people. We could not work, we could not live anywhere. We were rooted a lot in manual work. We used to go to olive grooves, cotton fields, hoeing a lot. We couldn't see beyond ourselves because we worked so hard in such works, in the field work... We didn't know anything about health or education..." (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...There are those who go to tomato farming. They go to Çanakkale. They go to olive grooves, around Edremit. It becomes quite intense... Housing is in tents during seasonal migration. Who knows the importance of education, who knows about health services among the Roma..." (Participant 4, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.3. Theme 3: An Apolitical Neglected Group

2.3.1. *Meaning Units 1: Is There Participation in Political Rights?;*

It was surprising that most participants wanted to listen to the questions on political rights directed to the study participants again and again. It has been examined that the research participants got surprised and had difficulty with understanding the political questions. It can be said that most participants are not aware of political rights. Concerning political rights, it was seen that the participants were generally aware of the right to vote, they voted, and they did not mention political rights other than the right to vote:

"...I don't think I have a right other than my right to vote (she paused here and contemplated for a long time) because no one has the right to have a say among the Roma. Even if they say something, they ignore it. For example, the Roma cannot file a petition.

Participation in political rights? Especially if you are a Roma?" (Participant 23, Female, Tepecik Neighborhood).

*"...Although every politician comes and says, "We love you," we know they don't like us. They always ignore us in the end. **We have always been deceived by provisions, we have been deceived by votes.** Somehow, someone tricked us... **because we are a crowded but unorganized community...**" (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).*

"...The Roma are not aware of their political rights. Therefore, they don't participate in politics. Actually, no one reads the bylaw of parties and says, "Oh, look, this party will do this, I will vote for it..." (Participant 20, Male, Tepecik Neighborhood).

"...I vote. I never miss it. At that time, when I'm going to vote, I'll vote for the one I'll like at that time... I want Türkiye to be governed well and those who run the country not to ignore us..." (Participant 10, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.4. Theme 4: Expectations of the Future

The fact that the Roma have basic problems, such as poverty, education, health, and employment, and that they live in their neighborhoods in the social sphere showed that they saved the day in terms of their expectations of the future. It was a sad experience to learn that the Roma did not expect or dream about the future beyond the problems of accessing rights.

2.4.1. Meaning Units 1: We Cannot Dream;

*"...You know, it never crossed my mind what I think about the future. We don't have an opportunity due to some problems... **We cannot dream.**" (Participant 4, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).*

"...Well, if you knew our situation regarding the future, if you understood what we were going through, you wouldn't be able to think too much as well. My only hope is that my children will take care of me. The future is just this..." (Participant 10, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

The following statement of a Roma individual expressing the discrimination experiences that prevented the participants from dreaming actually summarized most of the problems experienced by the Roma community in Türkiye:

*"...Even the dreams of the Roma are standard. I mean, when you do research about our children, when you ask them, what professions you think of in the future, they think of scrap collecting because their parents do scrap collecting. **We cannot dream a lot. We cannot dream big dreams. Because every time we dream, social class and economic discrimination hinder our dreams...** For example, the retirement rate in the Roma community is very low because we work here and there, in insecure jobs. We can't dream even of retirement. About access to which rights should we talk, dream, think?..." (Participant 3, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).*

3. Discussion

This phenomenological study, based on a qualitative research design, evaluated the problems, expectations and difficulties of the Roma experienced in accessing basic human rights in Türkiye assessed. The results were generally consistent with previous research because the problems of the Roma had to be very well identified culturally. However, our study revealed slightly different results than previous research.

In general, Romani citizens in Turkey basically; They experience problems in accessing housing, education, employment, health and some basic rights and services. These problems essentially trigger each other. For this reason, Turkey has a Strategy Document and Phase 1 Action Plan for Roma citizens prepared in six different areas: education, employment, housing, health, social service, social assistance and general policies. The strategy document, consisting of 34 actions and 78 activity areas, aims to facilitate Roman citizens' access to rights and services (ASHB, 2023). In fact, the difficulties that Roma people experience in accessing basic human rights in our country are also at the center of social policies. However, there is also a need for new, unifying and inclusive social policies regarding Romani citizens and measures that will prevent inequalities based on differences

from turning into social inequalities (Pirpir et al., 2017). Bringing to the whole society an understanding that can eliminate stigma, prejudice and social exclusion practices will be a positive step towards solving many problems specific to Romani citizens (Çetin, 2017).

In a study covering a total of 178 Roma, 130 of whom were adults and 48 of whom were children, through in-depth interviews and focus group studies in the provinces of Artvin, Izmir, Edirne, Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa (Adaman et al., 2022), it was found that Roma in general had access to employment and social assistance. It shows that there are additional problems in education, housing, health and gender inequalities. Research results of different studies indicate that despite all the measures taken, a significant portion of Roma, most of whom work in unregistered jobs, cannot adequately benefit from rights and services (Adaman et al., 2022; Uştuk & Güleç, 2021; Akgül, 2010). Moreover, other studies (Kende et al., 2021; Bačlija & Haček, 2012) mention that in an electoral democracy, both national and European-oriented policies offer limited opportunities to ensure adequate representation of novels, ensuring that novels have equal opportunities and participate effectively in public life. argues that conditions should be created for their participation.

On the other hand, while these views, most of which are advocated on the basis of modern policies, promote the integration, rights and equal opportunities of Roma people, they impose the recognition of permanent structural stigma and increasing social injustice on Roma people using hypocritical approaches (Ram, 2014). The failure to create flexible practices for Roma people to access rights and services, but treating this situation as a problem, displays a contradictory attitude in order to maintain the secondary position of the Roma population (Kóczé, & Rövid, 2017). However, the potential positive effects of expanding the Roma community's access to rights and services; There are also studies arguing that it is hindered by limited resources, blurred state-civil society relations, and a culture of polarization in both European and Turkish societies (Sayan & Duygulu, 2022; Selimovic, 2022; Ivasiuc, 2020; Trehan, 2009).

In the literature review, some studies (Hancock, 1999; Hajiov & McKee, 2000; Dişli, 2016) specifically mentioned the origin of the word gypsy. Moreover, the Roma in many countries of the world were known by names such as Gypsies, Zigeuner, Gitanos, Heiden, and Cigani (Dişli, 2016). In the present study, although many participants were uncomfortable with the use of the gypsy expression based on stigmatization and discrimination, it was seen that there were also those who accepted the gypsy expression politically. Even in defining the word gypsy, the Roma emphasized the nomadic status of the others from their own culture. Thus, the majority of the participants living in Izmir preferred to use the word Roma as their origin rather than the gypsy definition. Our participants defined gypsies as a nomadic and homeless subgroup that still exists nowadays. The Roma name has more positive, understandable, acceptable, and non-prejudiced meanings in Türkiye (Kolukırık, 2005; Ünalı, 2012; Kaya & Kaya, 2019).

A number of improvements should be made in meeting the economic, social, cultural, educational, and accommodation needs of Roma citizens to prevent them from withdrawing from social integration networks and reach normal living conditions. Especially the education process of Roma children must be closely monitored. Another study performed by Titova et al. (2019) in Tatarstan is parallel to our results. It was stated that more than a third of children belonging to local Roma groups in Tatarstan were illiterate. As in Türkiye, Roma children in Tatarstan also experienced problems adapting to school culture and rules for various reasons (Öksüz et al., 2018). Therefore, schooling rates should be increased to raise the general cultural levels of children, and those who can receive high school and university education should benefit from equal opportunities in education. Thus, it would be easy for the Roma generation to become visible in the public sphere and benefit from public services (Genç et al., 2015). Similar studies (Topuz, 2010; Potar et al., 2011; Hajiov & McKee, 2000; Dunajeva, 2021) showed that the Roma were among the marginalized groups in numerous countries of the world and

their access to rights should be supported in the context of equal and active citizenship.

The Roma were deeply affected by socioeconomic problems. The reasons for their inability to work in secure jobs, not having a worthy occupation, not being able to live in healthy environments, and not having regular income were their informal and marginal jobs. Other studies (Genç et al., 2015; Panayiotopoulos & Zachariades, 2017; Fırat & Açıkgöz, 2020) also supported this finding, and all of these increased the risk of social exclusion of the Roma. In the labor market, the fact that the Roma turned to informal and marginal jobs made it difficult for them to make a living and access economic and social opportunities. The Roma community in Türkiye comprehended the importance of vocational formation, education, and employment, although late. However, contrary to this situation, the level of knowledge of the Roma community of political rights consisted only of knowing their right to vote. Nevertheless, the declaration of Türkiye as a candidate country to the EU in 1999 and the beginning of negotiations with the EU in 2005 brought Roma rights back to the agenda in Türkiye (Akdemir, 2014). As a result of the "European Union Harmonization" process in Türkiye, the right to organize was given to different identities, but the Roma community could not organize among themselves (Akgül, 2010).

On the other hand, health policies aiming to reduce health inequalities for the Roma should be harmonized with education, economy, labor market, housing, environmental, and regional development policies and comprehensive policy frameworks allowing effective integration should be created within a plan (Fesüs et al., 2012; Fırat & İlhan, 2019). The Roma groups living in all European countries and Türkiye found themselves among the poorest minority groups who could not access basic rights, such as education, health, and housing, mainly because they did not have a land or homeland connection to support them and were among the disadvantaged groups in their countries (Bucuroiu, 2013; Özateşler, 2013).

The most general result of the current study was that the spiral of poverty is a situation that cannot be ignored among the Roma because their poverty is actually ethnic poverty, representing a

fate that haunted them from birth to death, from Roma neighborhoods to education, from accessing health services to being forced to live on a low income. It is a natural inference that the Roman community, sharing such a common destiny, cannot dream and have no expectations of the future. It is a humanitarian problem that the Roma are deprived of the financial and spiritual resources necessary for their survival. The present study showed that the Roma community could not benefit from basic citizenship rights such as housing, education, health, and political rights and could not access public services. In line with the principle of social justice and equality, the results of this study drew attention to the fact that rights-based studies were conducted with the Roma community in Türkiye.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Implication for Practice

This investigation of the need for the Roma in Türkiye to access rights stressed the charismatic impact of individual participant views and also revealed some problems. Developing quality legal regulations and social policies for the Roma in Türkiye would be a tremendous step as a starting point. This research and Strategy Document and Phase 1 Action Plan for Romani Citizens (Including activities prepared in 6 different areas as education, employment, housing, health, social services, social assistance and general policies) should be associated. Thus, the evaluation of the difficulties the Roma in Türkiye experienced in accessing rights was an important research area. Moreover, the study results demonstrated that the needs and expectations of the Roma in Türkiye were also a neglected area of research, and their thoughts could be a productive resource. The assumption that the Roma should have a greater say in the policies that would be formed concerning their expectations was also strengthened. The reason for this was the understanding that the participants basically experienced economic difficulties and problems intertwined with poverty and could not meet their basic human needs, such as housing, employment, education, and health. Professionals and

policymakers who will work with the Roma community should make multidimensional plans in micro, mezzo, and macro dimensions while addressing their problems and needs. It is possible to solve the intertwined problems of the Roma through interdisciplinary cooperation and approaches based on human rights. Accordingly, the study results demonstrated the importance of rights-based practices for the Roma community. It also has been acquired that Roma do not know about the relation with the state and protection of human rights. In this regard, future research may emphasize the importance of rights-based practices for the Roma community.

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysis of Discourses on “Divorce and Male-Related Infertility” in an Online Forum with Focus on Social Support: Women’s Club

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the types of social support provided by forum members in response to questions posed by women with infertile spouses on the Women’s Club forum, specifically within discussions centered on divorce due to infertility. Topics and comments on the subject of “divorce due to male-related infertility” in the Women’s Club forum between 2008 and 2023 were analyzed. Five topics and 487 comments were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis, and 458 different codes emerged. The codes were grouped into four themes: informational support, emotional support, intellectual and critical support, and relationship improvement support. Consequently, women considering divorce due to male-related infertility are provided informational, emotional, and relationship-focused, and querying social support through the forum. These types of social support indicate factors that may affect marital adjustment during the infertility process. Therefore, it is recommended that experts who provide professional support to these couples should pay attention to these factors and that the scope of psychosocial services currently provided in Turkey should be person-specific to cover the social support needs of these couples.

Keywords: infertility, marital adjustment, social support, divorce, online support groups, thematic analysis

Öz

Çalışmanın amacı, Kadınlar Kulübü forumunda eşi infertil olan kadınların infertilite sebebiyle boşanma odaklı sorularına forum üyelerinin verdikleri yanıtlar üzerinden sosyal destek türlerini incelemektir. 2008-2023 yılları arasında Kadınlar Kulübü forumunda “erkeğe bağlı infertilite nedeniyle boşanma” konusuyula ilgili başlıklar ve yorumlar analiz edilmiştir. Beş konu başlığı ve 487 yorum tümevarımsal tematik analiz yoluyla analiz edilmiş ve 458 farklı kod ortaya çıkmıştır. Kodlar dört tema altında toplanmıştır: bilgi desteği, duygusal destek, entellektüel-eleştirel destek ve ilişki geliştirme desteği. Sonuç olarak erkek kaynaklı infertilite nedeniyle boşanmayı düşünen kadınlara forum aracılığıyla bilgi, duygu, ilişki ve sorgulama odaklı sosyal destek sağlanmaktadır. Bu sosyal destek türleri, infertilite sürecinde evlilik uyumunu etkileyebilecek faktörlere işaret etmektedir. Bu nedenle, bu çiftlere profesyonel destek sağlayan uzmanların bu faktörlere dikkat etmesi ve Türkiye’de hâlihazırda sunulan psikososyal hizmetlerin kapsamının bu çiftlerin sosyal destek ihtiyaçlarını karşılayacak şekilde kişiye özel olması önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: infertilite, sosyal destek, evlilik uyumu, boşanma, çevrimiçi destek grupları, tematik analiz

Introduction

Despite social changes, fertility maintains its importance in the collective consciousness, and parenthood is perceived as an important part of social life. One of the primary factors strengthening the marital union is the presence of a child (Sezgin & Hocaoglu, 2014). At the intersection between the desire to give birth to a child and the difficulties experienced in becoming a parent, infertility has always been perceived as an important problem that needs to be solved due to its undesirable consequences for couples.

Infertility is the failure to conceive within a year despite having sexual intercourse regularly without using a contraception method. It is estimated that approximately 48 million couples struggle with infertility worldwide, and it is reported that this number is increasing (Kiani et al., 2020; Akdeniz et al., 2021; World Health Organization (WHO), 2023). WHO recognizes infertility as a global public health problem and draws attention to its potential to threaten healthy relationships, and the well-being of individuals and societies (Boivin et al., 2007).

Approximately half of infertility cases are related to male reproduction, and it is estimated that at least 30 million men struggle with infertility all over the world (Agarwal et al., 2015; Jungwirth et al., 2019). However, most of the time, although the difficulty in reproduction may stem from either of the spouses, women are exposed to medical procedures more, spend more effort to adapt to the treatment process, and face more psychosocial difficulties of the infertility process (Cousineau & Domar, 2007; Öskan-Fırat & Hotun-Şahin, 2022). The fact that women are first held responsible for any problem experienced in reproduction within the socio-cultural context, that male infertility causes more social stigma since it contradicts the perception of ideal masculinity, and therefore male infertility cases are usually hidden, which intensifies the problem (Sylvest et al., 2018; Hanna & Gough, 2020).

Why Online Support Groups? Infertile, Social Support and Marital Adjustment

To understand the motivation that drives women with infertile spouses to seek advice from online support groups, it would be useful to describe the infertility process in which social support, stigmatization, concealment, social support, and marital adjustment mutually influence each other.

Infertility confronts individuals with many problems. In the literature, more attention is paid to the psychological and sexual problems that individuals are faced with during the infertility process, and social problems remain in the background. Psychological problems such as grief, depression, stress, anxiety, anger, shock/denial, disappointment, guilt, feeling of inadequacy, self-confidence anxiety and loss of control (Dhillon et al., 2000; Rosen, 2002; Hasanpoor-Azghdy et al., 2014), and sexual problems such as sexual inadequacy and sexual dissatisfaction encountered during this process have been frequently emphasized (Gümüşay et al., 2020; Yüksekol et al., 2023). In addition to these problems, weakening of family ties, domestic violence, insensitive questions asked by family members and friends, social isolation, and lifestyle changes are among other serious problems experienced in the social dimension (Cousineau & Domar, 2007; Mumtaz et al., 2013, Sternke & Abrahamson, 2015; Daibes et al., 2018; Naab et al., 2019). One of the most serious social problems is the lack of social support (Martins et al., 2014).

All these problems caused by infertility may affect marital adjustment. Marital adjustment is the satisfaction that couples get from their union and marriage (Chen et al., 2007). Deterioration of marital adjustment occurs due to negative changes in the basic dynamics of the relationship, making it difficult to cope with crises encountered in the marriage and to maintain the marriage (Şener & Terzioğlu, 2002). Ongoing incompatibility can trigger the divorce process. It has been reported that there is an inverse relationship between stressful life events and marital quality, and that the infertility process adversely affects marital adjustment (Monga et al., 2004; Ramezanzadeh et al., 2006; Gümüşay et al., 2020). For examples,

couples may unfairly blame each other or themselves during the infertility process (Egelioglu Cetişli et al., 2014). At this point, negative emotions can be directed towards the spouse who is the cause of infertility medically (Mumtaz et al., 2013). Such process makes it difficult for the couple to contact emotionally with each other, triggers communication problems, weakens family ties, and can cause disagreements, conflicts, and violence between them (Folkvord et al., 2005; Sarı & Erciyes, 2021).

In addition, the expectations, attitudes and pressures of the family and the environment can affect marital adjustment. In their study (2008), Taşçı et al. reported a significant difference between the scores obtained from the Marital Adjustment Test developed by Locke and Wallace by the participants and their being pressured by the environment to have children. Additionally, the social environment's pressure causes the fertile spouse to think of leaving the infertile spouse or, conversely, the infertile spouse to suffer from fear of abandonment (Özkan 2004:571). For example, in a study in which the effects of the infertility process were comparatively analyzed, it was reported that the intervention of others in the marriage, and their encouraging the fertile spouse to divorce the infertile spouse and remarry were more common in couples struggling with infertility (Amiri et al., 2016). Therefore, in this process, couples often need psychosocial support and guidance. Inadequate social support may lead to the end of marital union.

Social support is defined as resources provided by social networks to improve an individual's ability to cope with stress (Yalçın, 2015). In the literature, emotional, instrumental and informational dimensions of social support are generally emphasized (Lin & Shorey, 2023). The infertility process brings challenges and generates a need for coping with uncertainties and seeking social support (Unnithan, 2019). These needs extend beyond pursuing treatment or obtaining information about the treatment process, encompassing efforts to manage psychological and relational impacts as well (High & Steuber, 2014).

In several studies in the literature, it has been indicated that social support provided during the infertility process can protect individuals from the

negative effects of infertility (Peterson, 2002; Schmidt et al., 2005). However, couples can hide the infertility process and their problems from their families and social circles. Although this hiding provides a protected area, it also causes couples not to benefit from social support, makes it difficult for them to cope with the problems they are faced with, and affects the quality of the relationship between them (Slade et al., 2007; Pearce et al., 2024).

In this context, interacting with individuals who share similar experiences and accessing practical information about infertility treatments represent the most sought-after forms of social support for individuals experiencing infertility (Read et al., 2014). Support communities facilitate interactions among people with comparable backgrounds and experiences (Hughes et al., 2020). Today, these communities are easily accessible online (Sorumunen et al., 2020), taking the form of discussion forums, blogs, Facebook groups, and Instagram pages. These platforms, characterized by features such as anonymity and asynchronicity, simplify the process of seeking and accessing support. Many platforms allow users to create online pseudonyms separate from their real identities, enabling them to feel more comfortable discussing sensitive topics. This can serve as a vital form of support for users experiencing isolation, loneliness, or stigmatization (Boivin et al., 2022).

At this point, the fact that the need for psychosocial support and guidance is not sufficiently met by existing support resources may cause women with infertile husbands to seek advice and information from online support groups about two phenomena, namely "male infertility" and "divorce".

Current Study

The fact that primarily, women are held responsible for reproduction without diagnosis, that male infertility is stigmatized more because it contradicts the ideal perception of masculinity, and that it is therefore hidden more, increases the problems faced by women with infertile spouses. However, the search for studies in which life experiences of women who had infertile spouses were directly investigated revealed a gap in

Turkish literature, because in Turkey, male infertility is often hidden from the family and social circles. Therefore, scientific research should be conducted on the experiences, problems and coping processes of women who have infertile spouses. The present study aimed to investigate the types of social support provided by forum members in response to questions posed by women with infertile spouses on the Women's Club forum, specifically within discussions centered on divorce due to infertility.

To achieve this goal, the Women's Club, the most established one among the women's sharing and support forums in Turkey, was chosen due to its wide use and strong community interaction. Inductive content analysis was used to better understand, explore and explain women's experiences.

Method

In this qualitative study, the topics and comments regarding infertility and divorce included in the Women's Club, an important women's sharing and support forum in Turkey, from June¹ 2008 to November 2023 were investigated.

The Women's Club forum was founded in 2001 as stated in the "Who Are We?" tab and has 600,000 women members. Members use pseudonyms instead of their names. Members who share are aware of the online visibility of the forum. The forum includes posts such as women's, mothers' and children's health, aesthetics, healthy nutrition, beauty, care, cosmetics, sexuality, recipes, venue suggestions, product reviews that remain on women's agendas. Forum members share their questions and experiences by opening new topics or answering opened topics.

Procedure

Data Collection Process

In order to obtain the data, the following four keyword phrases were used: "infertility and

divorce", "childlessness and divorce", "infertility and separation", and "childlessness and separation". Eight topics on infertility and divorce were reached. Three of the topics were not included in the study because they were about female infertility. Five topics and comments on male infertility and divorce were recorded in a Word file. Information on the topics is provided in Table 1.

Ethical Issues

Since the posts shared on the message boards of the women's club forum site are open to the public, the study was conducted without obtaining permission from the forum owner or the participants. In accordance with ethical decision-making guidelines regarding internet research, none of the pseudonyms, names of individuals, and other identifying information were included in the study in order to protect the identities of forum members (Rodham & Gavin, 2006; Convery & Cox, 2012).

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the MAXQDA program used in qualitative research was used. Five topics and 487 comments were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis. The aim in this analysis is to reduce and group the data in order to answer the research questions using categories and themes (Kyngäs, 2020). In the content analysis, first, the data set determined in line with the purpose of the study was read effectively. The ideas presented by the data and considered important by the researcher were coded in a data-oriented manner. The code list was reviewed repeatedly, and in the analysis, the focus was on at the theme level. Then, potential sub-themes were determined and the coded contents were collected under sub-themes. Non-functional coding was eliminated and removed from the data set. The themes formed by grouping the sub-themes were defined and named.

¹ The first post on the subject of divorce due to male-related infertility was made in 2008 in the women's club forum, which was established in 2001.

Table 1. Topics on male-related infertility and divorce

Topic	Content of the Topic	First Comment Date	Last Comment Date	Total comments
1. Childlessness and separation	"Hi girls, would you break up with your husband if you found out that you wouldn't have children because of a problem with him?"	June 9, 2008	June 14, 2008	38
2. My elder brother wants to divorce his wife.	"Hi, my elder brother loves children very much and it has been 4 years since they got married. Unfortunately, they can't have children. They underwent in vitro fertilization (IVF). He underwent testicular sperm aspiration. Four tubes of sperm were taken and four interventions were performed. Unfortunately, it didn't work. They didn't give up and changed hospitals and doctors. He did some research and went to the best doctor. He had another operation but this time his doctor said, "there is no live sperm, you can't have children". His psychology was completely damaged, he doesn't eat, doesn't drink, barely speaks. He told his wife, I am preventing you from becoming a mother. I have no right to take this away from you, let's get divorced. Although his wife says "no, medicine has advanced a lot, and we should never lose our hope and faith in God", my brother has lost all his hope and wants to get divorced. I am very sad; if you have any information on this subject, please share it."	August 15, 2008	August 19, 2008	28
3. Has your husband wanted to divorce you because he could not have a baby?	"Hi girls, We have been married for 9 years and we cannot have a baby because of my husband's sperm count. My husband's psychology has completely changed in the last 3-4 months. At first, he said, "let's get divorced." He said, "I don't want to prevent you from being a mother." When I said no, then he did everything he could to make me move away from him. Coming home late at night, not answering my calls, constant business trips, etc. He has probably made new girlfriends too because his phone is always in his pocket and on silent mode. Have your husbands had such problems?"	January 2, 2012	April 6, 2021	10
4. Is there anyone who got divorced because they could not have children?	"Hi, we have been married for 3 years and we cannot have children. My husband is azoospermic. He underwent Testicular Sperm Extraction (TESE) last year but the result was negative. What he told me was, let's try the Rosi technique, if it doesn't work we will get divorced."	July 18, 2020	March 25, 2023	92
5. Divorce due to infertility	"Hi, I have been married for 12 years and I am 35 years old. My husband has azoospermia. We tried IVF a few times but we did not get any results. Sperm cannot be found. Finally, we have given up hope. My egg reserves are weak. My husband is completely against the idea of adopting a child. We are not very good at sex either. I have been depressed for more than 2 years. I am scared, I cannot get divorced because I do not have a regular income. We have completely given up having the treatment again. If any of you says, "try again; don't lose your hope and faith in God", this is not possible. My husband is a good person; his income is good. I am ashamed to write this; my living conditions are very good. The problem is, I want to get divorced but I am scared. I do not know how to start from scratch. I will somehow hold on to life, but I'm not sure if I'm doing the right thing. I have no chance of adopting a child. I really, really want to be a mother. I will be completely unable to have children tomorrow, I am getting older. On the other hand, I think that there are no decent men to trust these days. I'm not a flirtatious type either, I cannot trust anyone. I wanted to pour my heart out to you. Thank you in advance for your giving me advice and sparing your time for me."	July 17, 2022	February 18, 2023	319

In the final stage, the sub-themes and themes agreed upon by the researchers were reported, which ensured the validity and reliability of the qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The original form of the data was adhered to, the contents were presented with direct quotations when necessary, and at the end of the quotations, the codes were given in parentheses, which increased the validity of the authenticity.

Results

Five topics and 487 comments were analyzed, and 458 different codes emerged. The codes were grouped into four themes: informational support (92 codes), emotional support (114 codes), relationship improvement support (74 codes), and intellectual and critical support (178 codes). The social support provided by other members of the

Women's Club to women who opened topics on male-related infertility and divorce in the forum comprised three dimensions: information, emotion, relationship, and critical questioning. The MAXMAPP Graph containing the themes and sub-themes of the research is given in Figure 1.

faceted pressure for adoption”, “Do you think it is easy to adopt a child? There are many procedures”, “There are people who wait for years to adopt a child; not everyone has the right to adopt a child”. After they expressed their concerns, other forum members mentioned other alternatives such as new

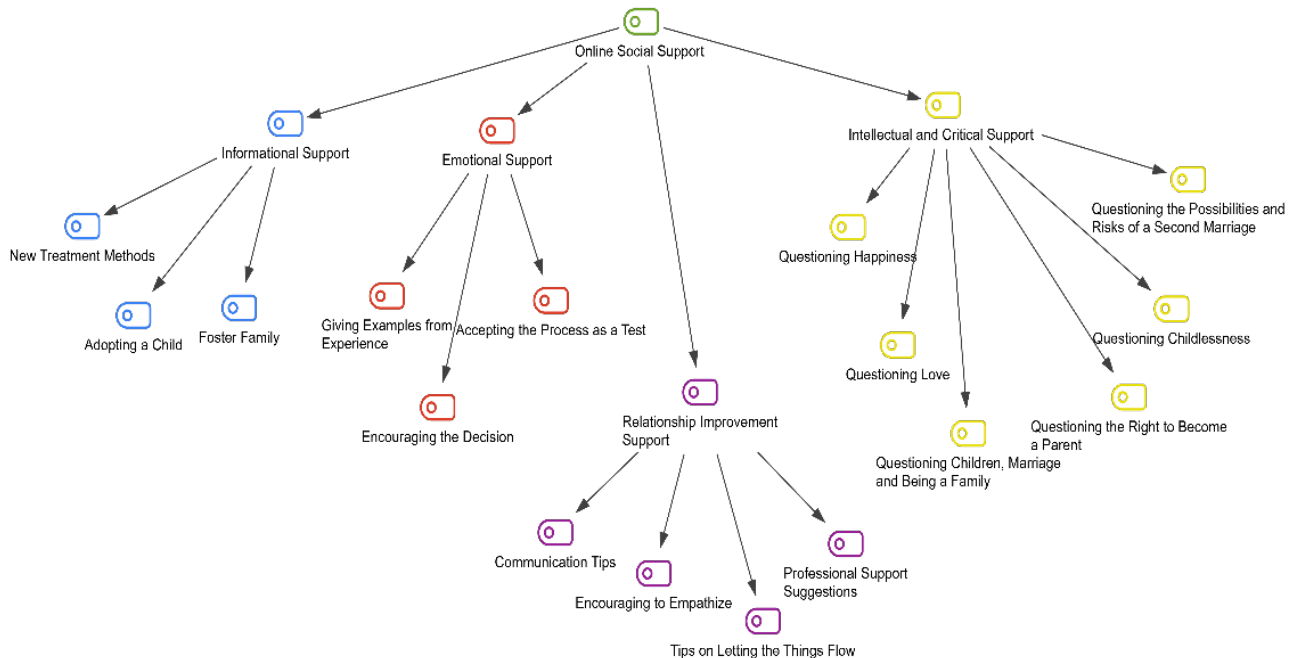


Figure 1. MAXMAPP Graph

Informational support

As presented in Figure 1, 20,1% of the social support provided by other members of the forum to couples considering divorce due to male-related infertility was informational support.

In this theme, forum members exhibited approaches aimed at offering information with alternative solutions to the member who opened the topic regarding having children, and making them accept that these solution suggestions would work out. For example;

If all methods have been tried, why shouldn't adopting a child be on the agenda? It is our human duty to adopt homeless children and it is a great good deed. Embracing an adopted baby will be good for you too (Adopting a child).

Among the alternative solution suggestions made by the members in their comments, the one with the highest rate in the coding was the suggestion to adopt a child. However, the members who opened the topic shared their concerns about adoption as follows: “There is multi-

treatment methods and being a foster family as solutions.

The doctor mentioned sperm donation. At first, we immediately opposed it, but our marriage was on the verge of ending. We hovered between adoption and donation. In adoption both the mother and father are strangers, but in donation at least the mother has the right to be a mother (New Treatment Methods).

In my opinion, adopting a child is difficult. However, you can be a foster family. Your husband is not a father; he is a brother. You can take care of the adopted child like a mother (Foster Family).

From the comments, it was determined that adoption, the first alternative way to have a child, caused anxiety due to psychosocial, cultural and procedural difficulties. In this sub-theme, members suggested the member who opened the topic to accept sperm donation or become a foster family, and the focus was on solving the childlessness problem concretely and reducing social stigma, thus improving well-being and/or marital quality of the member who opened the topic.

Emotional Support

As depicted in Figure 1, 24.9% of the social support provided by other members of the forum to couples considering divorce due to male-related infertility was emotional support. In the emotional support theme, codes determined were as follows: giving examples from experiences, encouraging the decision, and accepting the process as a test.

My aunt didn't have a child for 7 years but now she has two daughters aged 21 and 15. We should not lose hope in God. If God wishes, it will happen. (Giving Examples from Experience)

Once you make your decision, everything will fall into place, don't worry, of course you may experience a difficult process, but in the end, this will not last a lifetime, of course your life will be in order after the divorce. (Encouraging the Decision)

There are things that cannot be explained in life. God knows the reason, if He does not allow something to happen. Wouldn't it be more devastating if the child were undutiful, or if the child were disabled from birth? (Accepting the Process as a Test)

The forum members who provided emotional support focused on providing motivation for the couple to continue their process without losing hope, or encouraging them to implement the decision they made. In addition, their giving examples from experiences and accepting that God uses difficulties to test your faith draw attention to optimism and spirituality in coping with the infertility process.

Relationship Improvement Support

As presented in Figure 1, 16.1% of the social support provided by other members of the forum to couples considering divorce due to male-related infertility was relationship-centered supports. At this point, although informational support and emotional support affect the couple's relationship, the focus is not directly on the relationship. In the relationship improvement support theme, empathy promotion, communication tips, professional support suggestions and tips on letting the things flow were coded. For example;

When I put myself in the other person's shoes, if my spouse left me because I didn't have a child, I would be

very upset. I would feel inadequate and incomplete. (Encouraging to Empathize)

I am writing as someone who has the same problems. I think our problem is not being understood, so I recommend that you explain yourself clearly. Tell him "The problem between us is not your having azoospermia, but your creating a barrier. I'm worn out..." Maybe, such a healthy conversation may help (Communication Tips)

The issue of not having children is not a situation that can be easily accepted and digested by either a woman or a man. Expert help will be useful. (Professional Support Suggestions)

Encourage your elder brother and sister-in-law to take a vacation; it will help them. Tell them, "let the things flow." (Tips on Letting the Things Flow)

Intellectual and Critical Support

As presented in Figure 1, 38,9% of the social support provided by other members of the forum to couples considering divorce due to male-related infertility was intellectual and critical support.

In this theme, forum members exhibited approaches aimed at questioning the acceptances and attitudes of the member who opened the topic or sharing the possible advantages and disadvantages of different perspectives. For example;

I witness it in my social circle, and it makes me very sad. People are conditioned as `Marriage is equal to Baby`. Establishing a family does not necessarily mean having children... In my eyes, a family or home is formed when two people get married. (Questioning Children, Marriage and Being a Family)

There are several advantages of being childless. Being able to have unprotected sex freely, going to bed when you want, getting up when you want, and walking around when you want. (Questioning Childlessness)

Why is the member who opened the topic being lynched? It's easy to say, they've been trying for 12 years. Doesn't everyone say, "being a mother is every woman's right" as far as it concerns them? I think being a mother is also the right of the member who opened the topic and has been longing for a child for years. (Questioning the Right to Become a Parent)

Do you love him or is it really just a comfort zone and a habit? If it's the second option, your husband will

never be enough for you, and maybe the reason you want to be a mother so much is because of the void in your heart that your husband can't fill." (Questioning Love)

Do you believe that all your problems will be solved when you leave your spouse and somehow have a child from someone else? Do you think you will be happy then? (Questioning Happiness)

Let's say you divorced your husband, you may not have someone else in your life right away, or you may have someone else in your life but he may not be suitable for marriage, or you may get married and still not have children. Positive situations are possible but you need to think about everything. (Questioning the Possibilities and Risks of a Second Marriage)

As stated in the aforementioned quotations, in comments made by the members, childlessness, parenthood, marriage, being a family, second marriage, love and happiness are questioned. In these quotations, the focus is on the improvement of well-being, and/or quality of marriage by providing the member who opened the topic from a new and different perspective because the forum members wanted to provide significant support with their comments aimed at gaining a different perspective for individuals who wanted to end their marriage in terms of combating the pressures and stigmatization caused by equating marriage and being a family with having children.

The common point of these findings is to improve the marital adjustment of the couple with relationship-focused tips that will make it easier to cope with the psychological and relationship problems caused by the difficulties encountered in the infertility process.

Discussion

The findings of the present study, in which the aim was to determine the support provided by other forum members based on the responses they gave to divorce-related questions asked by women whose spouses were infertile during the infertility process, point to three main areas of discussion.

As reported in several studies, the infertility process can negatively affect marital adjustment and cause the couple to consider divorce (Monga et al., 2004; Gümüşay et al., 2020). Within this context, in a number of studies, it has been

reported that social support protects individuals from the negative psychosocial and interpersonal effects of the infertility process and helps them manage the process effectively (Slade et al., 2007; Schick et al., 2016). Online forums offer new social support on a sensitive issue such as divorce due to infertility. Indeed, many couples do not share their infertility process with their social circles due to social stigma (Kırca & Pasinlioğlu, 2013; Arya & Dibb, 2016; Babore et al., 2017). In such a situation where sufferers cannot access existing social support, the forum may help individuals considering divorce due to infertility to alleviate the feeling of social isolation they experience and to benefit from social support, which can also be explained by the theory of weak ties (Granovetter, 1982). Weak ties, which refer to relationships other than close relationships, are valuable in enabling couples to access to various sources of information and advice. It is thought that relationships established through the forum enable couples to make evaluations more objectively and encourage them to share sensitive issues more comfortably, because they do not have such relationships in their daily life (Walther & Boyd, 2002). In Turkey, the aforementioned forum, which strengthens weak ties resulting from the lack of professional support and peer groups during the infertility process and from the limited access and ensures the anonymity of members, fills the gap by allowing individuals to share their experiences without fear of stigmatization. In previous studies, it has been reported that weak ties and anonymity are at the center of online experiences (Malik & Coulson, 2008; Guthrie & Kunkel, 2016; O'Connell et al., 2021).

Secondly, through the online forum, forum members provide informational support, emotional support, intellectual-critical support, and direct relationship improvement support to individuals considering divorce due to infertility. In the present study, it was determined that in providing informational support, the focus was on gaining the person different perspectives about childlessness, being a parent and being a family etc., and offering her alternative solutions such as adoption, foster care etc. In similar studies, it was observed that online informational support was

provided in a wide range, including the treatment process (doctor's advice, medication, insurance...), lifestyle changes (nutrition, supplements, sports...), alternative options (adoption...) and private issues (sexuality...) (Steuber & Solomon, 2008; Lee, 2017; Chiew & Jan, 2018; Grunberg et al., 2023). The reason why some of the informational support types emphasized in these studies were different from the informational support types determined in the present study was that the scope and purpose of the present study was limited to divorce due to infertility.

In addition, the members of the online forum provided emotional support to the member who opened the topic regarding motivation, facilitating decision-making, and encouragement. Similarly, in several studies, it was reported that online support received from peers with similar experiences provided courage, better decision-making, and feelings of control (Malik & Coulson, 2008a; Beeder & Samplaski, 2019; Erčulj & Žiberna, 2022; Pearce et al., 2024). This emotional support is important because it provides individuals with motivation to continue their processes or facilitates coping.

In addition, the members of the online forum provided support to the member who opened the topic in terms of encouraging empathy, peer-to-peer communication, and professional support, which directly improves the relationship. As reported in several studies, online forums contribute to the development of their members' relationships with their partners by providing support to them (Malik & Coulson, 2008b). Although it is known that professional support is effective in terms of establishing healthy relationship during the infertility process (Frederiksen et al., 2015), it is emphasized that professional support is not a common support option (Read et al., 2014), which is also the case in Turkey. In their study conducted in 2021, Sarı and Erciyes reported that none of the participants received family counseling and that some couples considered divorce due to infertility. At this point, online support gains importance in an environment where there are barriers preventing individuals from accessing professional support for their problems during the infertility process.

The findings also highlight a distinct form of social support-termed intellectual and critical support-which extends beyond traditional categories such as informational or emotional support. This type of support enables online forum members to critically examine values and social norms, offering a deeper and more reflective form of assistance. Unlike the conventional types of social support discussed in the literature, this finding underscores the potential of social support to impact individuals at a more profound level. Intellectual and critical support helps individuals reassess social norms, personal values, and life choices. It encourages forum members to critically reflect on concepts such as children, family, childlessness, parenthood, second marriage, love, and happiness. By fostering this critical evaluation, it empowers forum members to reconsider dominant narratives, develop alternative and liberating perspectives, and reframe their decisions within a broader context of solidarity. This type of support thus provides women with opportunities to construct empowering narratives, and redefine their identities in a more inclusive and supportive framework.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the four types of social support provided to individuals empower them to take on a more active role in overcoming the psychosocial and interpersonal effects of infertility, which reflects Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) active problem-focused coping style. Hence, it can be concluded that the support provided in online support groups is not limited to informational, emotional and relationship-based support, but can also help members develop coping styles which are more functional.

Finally, in the findings of the present study, attention is drawn to issues that may affect marital adjustment during the infertility process through the support provided to the individual who opened the topic. First, in contexts where having a child is associated with female and male gender roles, childlessness can be equated with not fulfilling the roles of femininity/masculinity or not being able to be a family, causing childless couples to experience pressure (Küçükkaraca & Pekasıl, 2023), which can affect marital adjustment by exposing the couple, household and society to stigmatization. Secondly, the lack of consensus in

alternative solution suggestions can affect the relationship. Adoption, being a foster family, and sperm donation are among the issues which prevent couples from reaching consensus in many societies. The concerns created by these alternative solutions have been reported in a number of studies. In Fahami et al.'s study conducted in 2010, the anxiety about adoption was stated as follows: *"Many people, even my husband, suggested adopting a child, but I don't want to adopt a child. I am afraid that the child will reject us when he or she grows up, or his or her real parents suddenly show up and take him or her away from us, and then I will be upset even more. Moreover, even though we are the biological children of our parents, what have we done to help them? Thus, how someone else's child do anything to help us?"* In some studies, concerns about sperm donation have been reported as well (Kaya & Şahin, 2019). In addition, emotional reactions caused by the problems emerging during the infertility process affect marital adjustment by making it difficult for spouses to empathize with each other and causing communication problems, which is consistent with the findings of other studies in the literature (Özkan, 2004; Coşkuner Potur et al. 2019).

Conclusion

The infertility process deeply affects the relationship between couples and can cause some couples to consider divorce. Social isolation, stigma, hide the infertility process causes couples to distance themselves from their existing social support networks. When social support, coping, well-being and the well-being of the relationship are taken into account together, in Turkey, the women's club forum provide significant online social support to couples intending to divorce due to infertility. The individuals' sharing two difficult-to-share topics thanks to the anonymity provided by the internet, and their feeling that they belong to a group and receive informational, emotional, relationship-focused, and intellectual and critical social support from members are of great importance in the infertility process.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations can be made to those working in this field. First, online support networks where

individuals with similar experiences can share sensitive issues should be increased, issues shared here should be monitored by professional experts, and individuals should be provided with professional support when necessary. Second, the number of experts such as social workers, marriage and family therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses who provide professional support and infertility counseling to couples during the infertility process should be increased, and access to them should be facilitated. It is important for these experts to provide different perspectives to the individual/couple, and to pave the way for the production of alternative discourses by eliminating the discourses that equate family or marriage with having children. In addition, while offering alternative solution suggestions to the couple, they should analyze the level of openness to adoption or foster care and the sociocultural factors affecting the level of openness, should be familiar with the adoption and foster care procedure, and should be able to respond to the couple's concerns about adoption or foster care. Finally, it is also recommended that the scope of the psychosocial services currently provided in Turkey should be patient-centered to cover the needs of couples struggling with infertility.

In light of the current findings, suggestions can be made for future research in terms of methodology and content. In terms of methodology, online support forums have the potential to provide significant data to researchers. Researchers can benefit from the anonymity of online support forums and can obtain comprehensive data on sensitive content in the field of social services more easily. They can also plan structured focus group studies in these forums. In terms of content, it should be investigated what the motivations are for individuals to use online support platforms, specifically for infertility, and whether disclosing themselves in online communities provide benefits or harms to individuals and community members.

Limitations

First, while the use and importance of online spaces in researching sensitive issues is increasing, the forum where the data obtained from the study does not represent all the experiences lived by individuals considering divorce due to male infertility in Turkey before diagnosis and during the treatment process. In addition, demographic information of women who opened topics or made comments, other than the gender variable, were not obtained. These two situations can be considered as limitations of the present study conducted online.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Brand Strategy on the Instagram, the Visual Platform of Social media: A Study on Starbucks

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Abstract

Instagram offers brands the opportunity to promote themselves effectively with online opportunities. The purpose of this study is to reveal the visual brand strategy of Starbucks, one of the most valuable brands in the world, on Instagram. In the study, according to the research of Brand Finance company, 'Starbucks', the world's most valuable brand in the restaurant category in 2022, was selected as a sample. Starbucks brand's 12 visual posts with the highest monthly interaction on Instagram Türkiye account in 2022 were analysed in the context of framing theory. The research is based on Lavoie's (2015) study 'Instagram and Branding: A Case Study of Dunkin' Donuts'. Starbucks' Türkiye Instagram posts were analyzed according to visual and text analysis categories. This study is important in terms of the strategy of Starbucks in terms of visual and text use in Instagram Türkiye posts, as a guide for those working in the field of brand and marketing. The analysis revealed that Starbucks' Türkiye Instagram account includes more product names than brand names and that the brand adopts a rational brand strategy. It was observed that Starbucks' Türkiye Instagram account uses frames that highlight the product and corporate identity (corporate color and logo).

Keywords: Social media, Instagram, Starbucks, brand, strategy, visual

Öz

Instagram, markalara çevrimiçi olanaklar ile kendilerini etkili bir biçimde tanıtmaya fırsatı sunmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, dünyanın en değerli markalarından biri olan Starbucks'ın Instagram'daki görsel marka stratejisini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Çalışmada Brand Finance şirketinin araştırmasına göre, 2022 yılı restoran kategorisinde dünyanın en değerli markası olan "Starbucks" örneklem olarak seçilmiştir. Starbucks markasının Instagram Türkiye hesabı üzerinden 2022 yılı aylık olarak en yüksek etkileşime sahip 12 görsel paylaşımı çerçevelene teorisi bağlamında incelenmiştir. Araştırma Lavoie'in (2015) "Instagram and Branding: A Case Study of Dunkin' Donuts" çalışması temel alınarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Starbucks'ın Türkiye Instagram paylaşımları görsel ve metin analizi kategorilerine göre ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışma Starbucks'ın Instagram Türkiye paylaşımlarında görsel ve metin kullanımı açısından stratejisinin, marka ve pazarlama alanında çalışanlara yol gösterici olması yönünden önem taşımaktadır. Yapılan analizde Starbucks'ın Türkiye Instagram hesabında marka isminden daha fazla ürün ismine yer verildiği ve markanın rasyonel bir marka stratejisi benimsediği tespit edilmiştir. Starbucks'ın Türkiye Instagram hesabında ürün ve kurum kimliğinin (kurumsal renk ve logo) öne çıkarıldığı çerçevelerin kullandığı görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal medya, Instagram, Starbucks, marka, strateji, görsel

Introduction

Today, with the widespread use of social media platforms and their use by many people, brands are able to communicate effectively with consumers through these platforms. According to Clow & Baack (2016, p.258), brands frequently use social media to interact with their customers. Another important factor is to increase the memorability of the brand for the customer. For this reason, many brands use more than one social media network. One of the best known of these social media networks is Instagram. Instagram is a social media platform that allows people to share photos and videos, and where people can comment and interact.

Instagram, a photo and video sharing platform, was established in 2010. The name Instagram comes from the combination of the English word 'instant' and the 'telegram'. Among many software, Instagram has become popular because of its ability to edit photos and add effects to photos in an easy way. In addition, Instagram allows people to be included in the system and to communicate with these people without any intermediaries (Türkmenoğlu, 2014, p.96). Through this platform, brands can have the opportunity to interact directly with their consumers by sharing photos and videos about their products or services.

Starbucks, which has many stores in different countries, is a global coffee shop chain with a history of nearly 50 years. It opened its first store in Türkiye in 2003 and has stores in 65 countries (Starbucks). This study aimed to reveal what kind of brand strategy Starbucks, the world's most valuable global brand of 2022, created through Instagram, a visual social media network. In this context, the study focuses on how Starbucks shares visually and textually on its Türkiye Instagram account and the impact of these shares on brand strategy. The purpose of this study is to analyze the visual and textual elements used in Starbucks' Instagram account in the context of framing theory and their impact on brand strategy. It is thought that the study will contribute to the strategy that brands will follow on Instagram, a social media platform.

Visual Platform of Social Media Instagram

Social media platforms can appeal to different people from all walks of life and enable people to communicate without intermediaries. According to Clow & Baack (2016, p.254), social media, which has developed rapidly and has many popular applications today, are comprehensive sites that do not have demographic distinctions such as gender, age, race, income and education level. People communicate through these sites, learn what other people are doing, share moments from their own lives or make friends. Each social media network appeals to different individuals and the visitors of each social media network differ from each other in terms of demographic characteristics. Therefore, marketing experts make detailed analyses on how to use these sites for a brand.

Through social media, brands bring together communities that are difficult to bring together and can easily connect with them. To connect with consumers via social media, brands organize various activities and share on online channels. However, brands can respond to thoughts, feelings, perceptions, opinions and experiences from consumers throughout the day (Güçdemir, 2017, pp.106-107).

Instagram, one of the most widely used platforms of social media, was established in 2010. Instagram is a photo and video sharing platform. However, it offers the ability to apply filters to photos and to share and receive photos via a smartphone application. It also allows easy sharing of these photos on other social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter (Yeniçiktı, 2016, p.95). Instagram posts are public by default. However, users can keep their accounts private so that only their approved followers can see them. When posts are shared on Instagram by adding hashtags, the posts become discoverable. By clicking on hashtags in mobile applications, all posts using the hashtags can be seen in a stream. Additionally, users can add and tag other users (Boy & Uitermark, 2015, p.8). Hashtags, which are created by placing a '#' sign at the beginning of a word or a group of words on Instagram, are also important in terms of advertising and marketing. Consumers who click on the hashtag that brands

or organizations add under the image on their Instagram accounts can see all posts with that hashtag together and thus consumers can come together under that hashtag.

When looking at social media usage data for 2022, the year the study was conducted, it is seen that Facebook had 34.40 million users in Türkiye at the beginning of 2022. YouTube had 57.40 million users in Türkiye in early 2022. YouTube ads alone reached 82.1 per cent of internet users in Türkiye. Instagram was recorded to have 52.15 million users in Türkiye at the beginning of 2022 (Yıldız, 2022). In this regard, according to the research data, it is possible to say that Instagram was the most used social media platform after YouTube in Türkiye in 2022, when the research was conducted.

Starbucks and Brand Strategy

A brand is a distinctive name and/or symbol that helps one or a group of sellers identify goods and services and differentiate these goods or services from their competitors. In this way, the brand indicates to consumers the origin of the product and is able to stand out from its competitors (Aaker, 2007, p.25). Brand Strategy is a concept associated with making rational decisions to ensure that the brand is recognized by the consumer. Brand strategy is created in order for consumers to recognize the different types of products in the market and for consumers to want to buy a particular product. Brand strategy is defined as a tool that conveys the consumer's brand preference (Karpat Aktuğlu, 2009, pp.115,117-118).

A global brand is defined as a brand that transcends cultural origins and appeals to consumers living in different countries and having different cultures (Hollis, 2011, p.48). Starbucks, one of the world's most valuable global brands, was founded in 1971 as a small store offering coffee beans in Seattle's historic Pike Place. Named after a character in the novel *Moby Dick*, Starbucks is inspired by the maritime tradition of the old coffee merchants and their love for the open sea. In 1981, Howard Schultz joined the company. In 1983, Howard Schultz travelled to Italy and in line with his experiences there, he aimed to create a place

where people could come together and host their conversations. Since then, Starbucks now has over 21,000 stores in 65 countries and is the world's number one company in coffee purchasing and roasting (Starbucks, e.t. 15.05.2024).

While marketers attribute the attraction created by Starbucks since the 1990s and the fact that Starbucks has become a brand that coffee drinkers prefer in the first place (the feeling of being in Starbucks) to the timing of the brand's entry into the market and its success in the strategic selection of marketing elements, Schmitt & Simonson (2000, pp.96-100) explain it with Starbucks' successful aesthetic approach Starbucks attracts customers with its unique style. Because although it has a determined, conventional, consistent, organised and systematic vision, it uses different elements to create a visual stimulation. While Starbucks appears to have an abstract and stylised style, it has a very understandable structure.

One of the key elements of Starbucks strategy has been branding. The company has made significant investments to provide a standard appearance to its stores, products, food and beverages. Starbucks removed the words "coffee" and "Starbucks" from its logo in 2011 when it planned to shift focus beyond coffee to other beverages and food products. The Starbucks logo is one of the most recognizable logos in the world. However, the brand has a significant social media network. This is due to the need to better engage with the target audience and be visible on platforms where target or future customers spend time online. The brand has an active Facebook page, a Twitter account, an Instagram page, a Google+ community, a Pinterest page and a video channel on YouTube. The brand invests heavily and believes strongly in mobile marketing. It has embraced digital innovation by developing and launching a Starbucks app to pay for products, tip baristas, and earn and redeem rewards (Roll, 2021).

Framing Theory

Framing Theory is based on the work of Marvin Minsky, a mathematician, computer scientist and the originator of the concept of "artificial intelligence", on general cognitive frameworks in

the 1970s. Developing in an interdisciplinary manner, Framing Theory has its roots in the work of Gregory Bateson, Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in Psychology, and Erving Goffman, Todd Gitlin, William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani in Sociology. This approach was carried to media research by Gitlin, developed by Entman and adapted to the fields of journalism, media, impact research and corporate communication. In addition, framing theory is gaining importance in political science and economics in social sciences, as well as in cultural sciences and linguistics research (Alver, 2022). The framing theory was first proposed by Goffman as "Frame Analysis". According to this theory; people interpret what happens in their world in the context of their primary frame. This frame is considered primary because it is taken for granted by the user. Its usefulness as a frame is not seen as dependent on other frames. Framing theory suggests that how something is presented to an audience (called a "frame") influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure the meaning of the message. Framing is the way a communication source describes and structures any information that is being communicated. Framing is an inevitable part of human communication - we all bring our own frames to our communications (Mass Communication Theory, 2017).

Media news is predefined and frames it by presenting it in a narrow context. Frames are designed to enhance understanding, but can also be used as cognitive shortcuts to connect stories to the bigger picture (Arwolo, 2017). Framing means that the media focuses the audience in the direction of certain events. The framing of news affects the way audiences receive news (Alver, 2022).

The basic premise of *framing theory* is that an issue can be viewed from multiple perspectives and constructed to have implications depending on different values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorganize their thoughts about an issue. In the field of communication, framing theory first identifies a topic or event. The second stage

constitutes a certain attitude towards the purpose of the research. The third stage continues with the creation of the coding table in order to define a preliminary set of frames regarding the subject. Finally, content analysis is carried out by identifying mass media sources such as newspapers, magazines, websites and television (Chong& Druckman, 2007, pp.104-107).

Framing theory proposes two main frames for advertising: Positive and negative framing. Positive framing focuses on the positive consequences of the product brand, while negative framing focuses on the negative consequences of the product brand. For example, a meat product that is 75 percent lean (positive framing) is 25 percent fat (negative framing). Accordingly, consumers may pursue positive outcomes or turn to competitors to avoid negative outcomes. (Tsai, 2007: 364). Framing theory helps to understand the branding styles of companies. Framing theory is the discovery of the relationship between the brand and the message elements of companies in traditional and social media in order to understand the framing brand strategy (Lavoie, 2015, p.80). Accordingly, within the scope of this study, in order to understand Starbucks' Instagram brand strategy, visual and textual message elements will be analyzed in the context of framing theory and their relationship with the brand will be examined.

Method

In this study, *framing theory* was adopted in terms of revealing brand strategy and visual and textual elements, based on the posts of Starbucks, one of the most valuable brands in the world, on Instagram, a visual social media platform. In the research, 12 content selected as the most interacted monthly content on the Türkiye Instagram account of Starbucks, one of the most valuable brands in the world in the restaurant sector in 2022, are analysed in the context of framing theory. In the study, visual and textual content on Starbucks Türkiye Instagram account was coded and the presence of frames was examined using content analysis management. The coded posts were then categorized and the frames obtained were explained by including quotes and codes. The

determination of the content to be included in the research was based on the period between January 2022 and December 2022 (12-month period). The 12 items with the highest number of comments, one from each month of 2022, were included in the research. A coding table was created based on Lavoie's (2015) study "Instagram and Branding: A Case Study of Dunkin' Donuts" for 12 contents on the Starbucks Türkiye account on Instagram, a visual-heavy social media platform, according to the framing theory approach. The coding table prepared for Lavoie's (2015) study is handled in the form of visual and text analysis categories.

In the visual analysis category, the research was organized into 6 categories based on the 12 contents with the most interaction on Starbucks's Türkiye Instagram account, based on Lavoie's (2015) study: visual type (photo or video), brand logo, corporate color, product visual, emotional connotation of the visual, social responsibility/special days.

In the text analysis category, the research was organized in 6 categories as brand name, hashtag (tagging), product name, use of slogans, social responsibility/special days, and number of comments, according to the 12 contents with the most interaction in Türkiye's Instagram account, based on Lavoie's (2015) study.

Purpose and Problem of the Research

The aim of this study is to reveal the visual and textual elements used in Starbucks' Instagram account in the context of framing theory and the impact of these elements on brand strategy.

The research problem of this study is 'What is the impact of highly interactive visual and textual content in Starbucks Türkiye Instagram account in terms of brand strategy in the context of framing theory?'

The sub-problems of the research are as follows:

- What kind of visual content does Starbucks Türkiye share on its Instagram account?
- What kind of textual content does Starbucks Türkiye share on its Instagram account?

Reliability and Validity

This study was conducted by examining the impact of Starbucks' visual and textual content on Instagram, a social media platform, in terms of brand strategy. In this study, Starbucks' content on Instagram within 12 months was analyzed. Two coders, one of whom was the researcher himself, performed the coding of the research data. In order for the coding to be valid, the coders performed the coding process independently of each other. According to the Cohen Kappa analysis performed to determine the consistency between the data of the coders within the scope of the study, it was determined that there was an average compliance value of 0.95 (Table 2). According to the evaluation result, there is almost perfect agreement between the coders (Table 1). This reveals the reliability and validity of the study.

Table 1. Cohen Kappa Coefficient Table

Cohen Kappa Coefficient (κ)	
< 0	Less than chance agreement
0.01- 0.20	Slight agreement
0.21- 0.40	Fair agreement
0.41- 0.60	Moderate agreement
0.61- 0.80	Substantial agreement
0.81- 0.99	Almost perfect agreement

Source: Anthony Viera ve Joanne Garrett: 2005, 362

As a result of the evaluation, the following data were obtained at the cohen kappa coefficient point for each table.

Table 2. Evaluation of The Tables According to Cohen Kappa Coefficient

	Cohen Kappa Coefficient (κ)
Visual Analysis of Starbucks Türkiye Instagram Content, 2022	0.96- Almost perfect agreement
Textual Analysis of Starbucks Türkiye Instagram Content, 2022	0.94- Almost perfect agreement

It is seen that there is a close average level of agreement between the coders in terms of reliability. This reveals the reliability and validity of the research.

Field, Sample and Limitations of the Research

The field of this study consists of brands that are in the category of the most valuable brands in the world and which are active in Türkiye and have accounts on Instagram.

The sample of the research consists of the posts of 'Starbucks', which stands out as one of the most valuable brands in the world in the restaurant category of the international brand evaluation organization Brand Finance company in 2022 (Ranking the Brands, 2022; Uçar, 2023). The 12 contents with the most interaction on Türkiye's Instagram account in 2022 were included in the sample. Purposive sampling method is used in the study. According to this method, the person/objects taken as a sample are selected from among the people/objects that can give the most appropriate response to the researcher's purpose (Aziz, 2008, p.55).

In the study, due to the limited visibility of like numbers on Instagram, the content with the most interaction was determined according to the highest number of comments. However, taking into account the duration and cost of the research, the scope of the research included the posts within a one-year period. In addition, since the brand did not have a regular post in 2023 (no posts were made in some months), the content in 2022 was included in the study.

Findings

In this study, the 12 contents with the highest interaction rate based on comments on the

Starbucks Türkiye official Instagram account between January 2022 and December 2022 are examined according to visual and textual categories, based on Lavoie's (2015) analysis table.

Within the scope of this research, when the content in the Starbucks Türkiye account is analysed in terms of the type of visuals in Table 3, it is determined that 3 illustrations, 3 videos and 6 photographs were used. The content with the highest interaction rate was included in the study, and among these, photographs had the highest number of shares as an visual type.

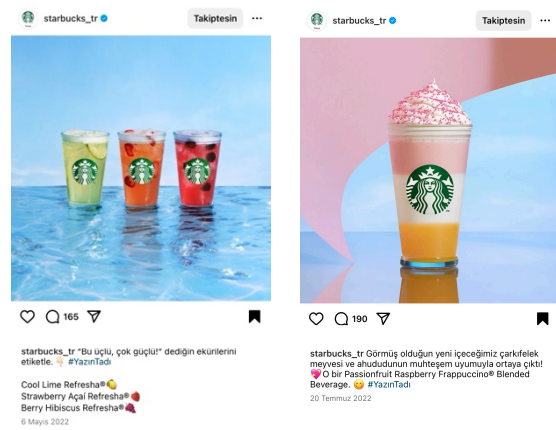


Figure 1. Starbucks Türkiye Instagram May 2022, July 2022 (Bibliography: https://www.instagram.com/starbucks_tr_/2022)

According to the visual analysis table created within the scope of the research, it is seen that the brand logo is included in all but one of the contents (Figure 1).

Table 3. Visual Analysis of Starbucks Türkiye Instagram Content, 2022

Month	Type of Visual	Brand Logo	Corporate Color	Product Visual	Connotation of Visual	Social Responsibility/Special Days
January	Illustration	-	+	-	Emotionally	New Year
February	Video	+	+	+	Emotionally	-
March	Illustration	+	+	-	Emotionally	Barista Day
April	Video	+	+	+	Rationally	-
May	Photograph	+	-	+	Rationally	-
June	Illustration	+	+	-	Rationally	-
July	Photograph	+	-	+	Rationally	-
August	Photograph	+	+	+	Rationally	-
September	Video	+	-	+	Emotionally	-
October	Photograph	+	-	+	Emotionally	-
November	Photograph	+	+	-	Rationally	-
December	Photograph	+	+	+	Rationally	New Year

Month	Hashtags	Brand Name	Product Name	Use of Slogans	Number of Comments
January	#StarbuckstaYeniYil	-	-	-	276
February	#BuluşmaNoktamızStarbucks (#OurMeetingPointStarbucks)	-	+	Strawberry& Vanilla Oat Latte, Honey& Hazelnut Oat Latte ve Dark Cocoa& Orange Oat Latte sabırsızlıkla seni bekliyor! (Strawberry & Vanilla Oat Latte, Honey & Hazelnut Oat Latte and Dark Cocoa & Orange Oat Latte are waiting for you impatiently!)	94
March	-	+	-	-	111
April	-	+	+	Unutamayacağın bu lezzeti kaçıрма! (Do not miss this unforgettable flavour!)	148
May	#YazınTadı (#TasteofSummer)	-	+	Bu üçlü çok güçlü! (This trio is too strong!)	165
June	#YazınTadı (#TasteofSummer)	-	-	-	316
July	#YazınTadı (#TasteofSummer)	-	+	-	190
August	#YazınTadı (#TasteofSummer)	-	+	Evet beklenen an geldi! (Yes, the expected moment has arrived!)	689
September	#SonbaharınTadı (#TasteofAutumn)	-	+	Özlenen lezzetler geri döndü! (The missed flavours are back!)	207
October	-	-	-	-	663
November	-	-	-	Geliyor gelmekte olan (It's coming, it's coming)	331
December	#HerYudumdaYeniYil (#NewYearEverySip)	-	+	Geçen senenin sevilen lezzetlerinden White Chocolate Chestnut Latte yeniden aramızda! (White Chocolate Chestnut Latte, one of last year's favourite flavours, is with us again!)	78

The corporate color of the Starbucks brand is dark green. While it was observed that this color was included in 8 posts, it was determined that corporate colors were not included in 4 posts. It is seen that product visuals are frequently included in the posts that were analysed visually. It was determined that 8 of the Starbucks Instagram posts used product images, while 4 did not include product images.

When the connotations of the visuals on the consumer are considered, it is seen that they are mostly close emotionally and rationally. In the posts shared on its Instagram account, Starbucks Türkiye creates a rational connotation in 7 of the posts and an emotional connotation in 5 of the posts through visuals.

According to the content of Starbucks Türkiye's official Instagram account, in the category of social responsibility/ special days, it is revealed that the posts with the highest engagement were made in January and December regarding the new year. In addition, it was found that Starbucks, a coffee chain store, made a special post for 'Barista Day' in



Figure 2. Starbucks Türkiye Instagram March 2022
(Bibliography: https://www.instagram.com/starbucks_tr/, 2022)

March (Figure 2). According to the data obtained from the findings of the study, it was observed that the Starbucks Türkiye Instagram account of the year 2022, which was considered within the scope of the study, did not include any posts related to social responsibility.

Within the scope of the research, when the textual posts on Starbucks' Türkiye Instagram account in Table 4 were analysed, it was found that

hashtags were used in all but 4 posts. In Starbucks' use of hashtags, it is seen that “#yazıntadı” is used the most. In addition, the brand's memorability is ensured by using hashtags with the brand name such as ‘#StarbuckstaYeniYıl’ and ‘#Buluşma-NoktamızStarbucks’. In addition, by sharing the brand name with the hashtag, the visibility of the brand increases and the content becomes more easily accessible.

Within the scope of the content with the highest interaction rate included in the research; the brand name is not seen in the textual part of a large part of the category of brand name use in textual posts. It was analyzed that only 2 posts included the brand name. There is no brand name in 10 of the textual contents. Additionally, 5 of the textual posts did not include the product name, while 7 included the product name. When the brand name is included as a hashtag in the posts, it is seen that the brand name is not included in the text. However, it is seen that product names are also included in slogans more often.

the highest number of comments according to months are carried out, it is seen that there is the highest interaction with ‘689’ comments in August. In this content, the brand promotes a new product. In this content, the product promoted by the brand is a mini cake. In this content; brand logo, corporate color and product image are included. Visually, photography is used and has a rational connotation. The post includes the product name, the slogan “Evet beklenen an geldi!” and the hashtag “#YazınTadı”. However, the month with the lowest interaction was December with ‘78’ comments. In this post of the brand, a product that is released periodically is included. The product promoted in this content is a type of flavored coffee. In this content; brand logo, corporate color and product image are included. This content has a new year theme. Photography is used visually and has a rational connotation. Along with the product name, the slogan “Geçen senenin sevilen lezzetlerinden White Chocolate Chestnut Latte yeniden aramızda!” and the hashtag “#HerYudumdaYeniYıl” were used in the post.

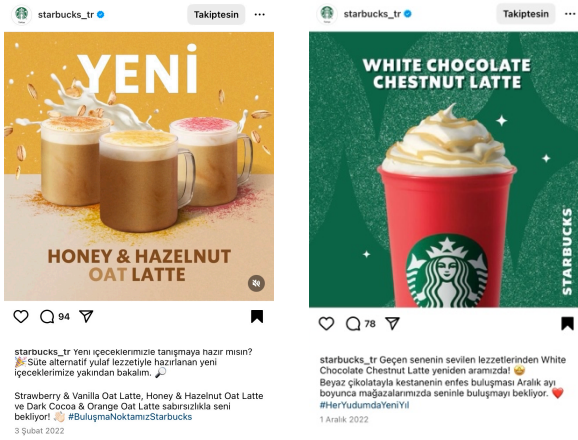


Figure 3. Starbucks Türkiye Instagram February 2022, December 2022 (Bibliography: https://www.instagram.com/starbucks_tr/, 2022)

When the textual contents of Starbucks Türkiye's official Instagram account are analysed in terms of the use of slogans, it is seen that 5 of them do not contain slogans and 7 of them include slogans. It is seen that the slogans in Instagram posts are generally related to products (Figure 3).

Within the scope of the research, in this study, in which the visual and textual analyses of Starbucks Türkiye Instagram content of 2022 with

Conclusion

According to the data obtained from the study, it has been determined that the Instagram Türkiye account, which is a visual platform of the Starbucks brand, is used effectively in terms of Starbucks' brand strategy. According to current data, the brand has “242B” followers on its Instagram Türkiye account. It is possible to say that Starbucks has implemented a product-oriented strategy based on the use of product names and product images on its visual platform, Instagram.

When Starbucks Türkiye Instagram account is analysed in the context of framing theory, it can be said that the brand has a product-oriented approach when the majority of its posts are considered in terms of brand strategy. However, the fact that the product name or product is referred to in most of the slogans used shows that there is a consistent approach in terms of brand strategy. Albers-Miller & Royne Stafford (1999) investigated the use of rational and emotional appeals in advertisements in different countries and found that rational use was more common in

product advertisements. In this regard, the fact that Starbucks Türkiye's Instagram account mainly includes rational connotation shows that it is consistent in terms of brand strategy. The purpose of creating emotional or rational connotations in consumers is to move them to purchase and to interact with the brand (remember, buy and share). Emotions are fundamental elements to improving decision-making and purchasing performance. Emotional connotation is based on touching emotions by creating a deep bond with the target audience (Gedik, 2024, p.146). Rational connotation is based on information and cause-effect relationship. Based on the findings obtained from the data of the study, according to Eşiyok (2017: 647), it is said that rationality is used more frequently in the food and household appliances sector.

When the Starbucks Türkiye Instagram account is considered in terms of framing theory; it is possible to say that the study analyzes how it affects the brand strategy visually and textually, and uses special message frames that are product-oriented and highlight the corporate identity (corporate color and logo). When the results of the analyses of the visual content in the Instagram account of Starbucks Türkiye 2022 are considered; the fact that the product image, corporate color and corporate logo are predominantly included confirms that the brand has a strategic communication. The content includes images of new or seasonal products. Sullivan (2000, p.69) states that explaining the product to the target audience with words is not as effective as explaining it by showing it. In this context, Starbucks Instagram Türkiye posts strategically support this situation.

The brand aims to stay in the minds of consumers by prioritising its identity. The Starbucks logo, a global brand, can be easily recognized anywhere in the world. In this context, in line with the brand strategy, it is thought that the logo is used on Instagram, a social media platform. In the content shared by Starbucks on its official Türkiye Instagram account, the brand logo is usually placed on product packaging. According to Okay (2013: 126); one of the issues that should be considered in corporate logos is that the logo

should be perceivable by the target audience in media with different dimensions. In this context, even if the Starbucks logo is used on the packaging, the logo can be easily recognized by the consumer.

Institutions create the main focus of their identity by using a certain color or a set of colors as an element of their visual identity. Color is a dominant element in corporate and brand identity. Brands strategically include the corporate colors and/or colors compatible with the corporate color in the corporate logo and in the unique colors of the products, corporate uniforms, spatial designs, packaging, etc.. It has been observed that the corporate color is usually highlighted by using a contrasting color in the posts. It is seen that energetic and extroverted colors such as red, orange and yellow are used in Instagram content in contrast to green, the corporate color of Starbucks with its calm and introverted features (Schmitt & Simonson, 2000, pp.110-113).

It provides reliability and credibility as well as providing memorability by using mostly photographs in product images in its posts on its Instagram account. According to Book & Schick (1998: 90), photographs as a visual type can be more easily distinguished by the target audience than illustrations. For this reason, photographs are included in many advertisement visuals. Photographs are considered more reliable and credible than illustrations. Furthermore, the photos illustrate the use of the product. As in many other media, photographs used in social media are the images that offer the closest images of how the products look like.

As a result of the data obtained from the analysis of the textual content of the Starbucks Türkiye Instagram account during the period in which the account was analysed, it is possible to say that a strategy to reach more people is followed by using hashtags predominantly in the use of text. Hashtags categorize messages, improve search capabilities, and allow organizations to connect messages to existing community knowledge and actions. It is this community element that underlies the power of the hashtag (Bruns & Burgess 2011). Thanks to the hashtags added to Instagram content, the brand can reach more people. In addition, the hashtags '#BuluşmaNoktamız-

Starbucks' and '#StarbuckstaYeniYil' are intended to strategically create the feeling of being at Starbucks.

It is seen that the brand name is not included much in the textual content. It is thought that this is due to following a product-oriented strategy. In addition, giving unique product names together with slogans shows that the brand is strategically successful in terms of ensuring memorability. In this context, it can be said that the brand follows a product-oriented strategy. "Strawberry& Vanilla Oat Latte, Honey& Hazelnut Oat Latte ve Dark Cocoa& Orange Oat Latte sabırsızlıkla seni bekliyor!", "Unutamayacağın bu lezzeti kaçıрма!", "Özlenen lezzetler geri döndü!" and "Geçen senenin sevilen lezzetlerinden White Chocolate Chestnut Latte yeniden aramızda!" are slogans referring to Starbucks' new or seasonal products. According to marketers, Starbucks discovered an unmet need and shaped its strategy accordingly. Starbucks has uniquely combined marketing elements to become a pioneering brand, using the brand to create unique identities such as the "frappuccino" (Schmitt& Simonson, 2000: 96). In this context, similarly, it is seen that it continues the same strategy in Instagram posts and incorporates unique identities into its brand in the use of slogans.

When the visual and textual analyses of the study conducted on Starbucks Türkiye Instagram account contents are considered in general, the strategy of the brand is focused on product and brand identity. The brand has adopted a predominantly rational form of content framing. In addition, Starbucks, one of the the world's most valuable brand and a global brand, shows that it has an effective brand strategy with the use of hashtags, product images, corporate colors and logos, and the creation of slogans from the brand's unique product name and content in the content of its Instagram Türkiye account.

The limitations of this study include the fact that the number of likes on Instagram is hidden, and as a result, only the interactions based on the highest comment can be determined. In addition, considering the duration and cost of the research, only one-year posts were included in the scope of the research. However, considering the year of the

research, since the brand did not post regularly in 2023, its posts in 2022 were included in the study. This study examines "The impact of the most interactive visual and textual content on Starbucks Türkiye Instagram account in terms of brand strategy in the context of frame theory". In this context, a comparison of local and international brands can be realized in future studies. However, by looking at brands' other social media accounts, such as Facebook and Twitter, more evidence can be gathered and more precise conclusions can be drawn in terms of brand strategy. In conclusion, as a result of the research, the product and corporate identity (corporate color and logo) frames applied by Starbucks on its Instagram account in Türkiye can be strategically guiding for other brands and marketing professionals.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effect of Individuals' Attitudes Towards Food Waste on Their Intention Not to Waste: The Mediating Role of Moral Norm

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of individuals' attitudes towards food waste on intention not to waste and the mediating role of moral norms in this relationship. The study, which was created within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), addressed the main factors shaping individuals' intentions not to waste food. In the data collection process, an online survey form was used to reach participants and the survey was delivered to the participants via digital means. A total of 423 valid surveys were used in the analyses. According to the results obtained, attitudes towards food waste do not affect intention not to waste food, while subjective norms and perceived behavioral control affect intention not to waste food. In addition, attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control affect moral norm, and moral norm affects intention not to waste food. However, according to the indirect effect analysis results, moral norm has a mediating effect on the effect of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control on intention not to waste food. In this context, awards can be given to individuals or businesses that demonstrate good practices in order to strengthen moral norms (for example, certificates for restaurants that reduce waste). Awareness programs can be created for different segments of society (students, housewives, restaurant workers, etc.) that emphasize the moral dimensions of food waste.

Keywords: Food Waste, Attitude, Moral Norms, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Öz

Bu çalışmada, bireylerin gıda israfına yönelik tutumlarının israf etmeme niyetine etkisi ve bu ilişkide ahlaki normların aracı rolü incelenmiştir. Planlı Davranış Teorisi (TPB) çerçevesinde oluşturulan çalışmada, bireylerin gıdaları israf etmeme niyetlerini şekillendiren ana faktörler ele alınmıştır. Veri toplama sürecinde, katılımcılara ulaşmak için online anket formu kullanılmış ve anket dijital yollarla katılımcılara iletilmiştir. Analizlerde toplam 423 geçerli anket kullanılmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlara göre, gıda israfına yönelik tutumlar gıda israf etmeme niyetini etkilemezken, sübjektif normlar ve algılanan davranışsal kontrol gıda israf etmeme niyetini etkilemektedir. Ayrıca, tutum, sübjektif normlar ve algılanan davranışsal kontrol ahlaki normu etkilemekte ve ahlaki norm da gıda israf etmeme niyetini etkilemektedir. Bununla birlikte, dolaylı etki analizi sonuçlarına göre, ahlaki norm; tutum, sübjektif normlar ve algılanan davranışsal kontrolün gıda israf etmeme niyetine etkisinde aracı etkiye sahiptir. Bu doğrultuda, ahlaki normu kuvvetlendirme adına iyi uygulamalar sergileyen bireylere veya işletmelere ödülleri verilebilir (örneğin, israfı azaltan restoranlara sertifika). Toplumun farklı kesimlerine (öğrenciler, ev hanımları, restoran çalışanları vb.) yönelik, yiyecek israfının ahlaki boyutlarını vurgulayan bilinçlendirme programları oluşturulabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gıda İsrafı, Tutum, Ahlaki Normlar, Planlı Davranış Teorisi (PDT)

Introduction

Unconscious and intensive consumption culture also brings about the concept of waste. Food waste, perhaps the most common waste element, has become a problem that threatens our future. It is not possible to prevent food waste completely, but it is possible to minimize it with external interventions (Kibler et al., 2018). Although consumers have the most important role in waste, there are many institutions that deal with such problems. One of these is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The aim of this institution is to put an end to food waste. According to FAO, every year, approximately 30% of the 4 billion tons of food produced for consumption is wasted, that is, thrown away (Sezgin and Ateş, 2020). According to the information in the 2023 waste report of the Turkish Waste Prevention Foundation, it is stated in the 2021 food waste index report that 61% of food waste occurs in homes, 26% in the service sector, and 13% in the retail sector. According to the results of research conducted in Turkey, it is stated that 42% of food waste occurs in homes, 39% occurs by producers, 4% occurs by retailers, and 14% occurs by the catering sector (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2024; Türkiye Foundation for Waste Prevention, 2024). According to Dölekoğlu (2017), food waste occurs in different dimensions in developed and developing countries. The unequal sharing of food is one of the factors that causes food waste. Especially in developed countries, food waste is at the highest level and it needs to be prevented with appropriate methods.

It can be stated that there are many reasons why individuals waste food, such as personal, social, economic, etc. The reason for trying to determine the problem of food waste is to reveal the relationship of this behavior with other behaviors (Barr et al., 2001). In studies conducted on how waste can be prevented and reduced, it is seen that food waste is caused by reasons such as lack of awareness etc. (Thyberg and Tonjes, 2015). The most common food waste is that made by households. Developing countries in particular tend to waste more food than low-income countries because they can afford to buy more food

(Porpino et al., 2015). Food waste occurs in developed countries as the waste of edible food at the end consumer level. It is stated that this waste is a big problem and especially the extra food purchased causes waste (Gönültaş et al., 2020). One of the reasons for the increase in food waste is that the approaches used to estimate the true extent of food waste are inconsistent and that is why solution methods cannot be developed (Tekiner et al., 2021). Likewise, Just and Swigert (2016) stated that food waste is seen not only in developing countries but also in developed countries and that food waste can be prevented at home using simple methods.

There are many reasons why individuals waste food, such as the society they live in, the family structure they grew up in, personality, habits, etc. This study aims to determine the effects of individuals' attitudes towards food waste on their intention not to waste food. In addition, determining the mediating role of individuals' moral norms in this effect is among the aims of the study. In the study, the behaviors of consumers that affect their intention not to waste were evaluated within the scope of Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model.

Moral norms are social and individual beliefs that determine what is right or wrong and what their moral responsibilities are. In an environment where individuals' attitudes, social pressures (subjective norms) and perceptions of behavioral control are shaped by moral norms regarding food waste, understanding how these norms serve as a mediator allows the correct targeting of the main factors that affect individuals' behaviors. In order for efforts to raise awareness about food waste and change social norms to be more successful, it is necessary to understand how moral norms affect people's decisions. The mediating role of moral norms may be important in promoting more sustainable and long-term behavioral changes against food waste in different segments of society, especially in groups such as youth and women.

Based on this, this study aims to find answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: Do attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control have an effect on intention not to waste food?

RQ₂: Does moral norm have a mediating role in the effects of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control on intention not to waste food?

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Effects of Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behavioral Control on Non-Waste Intention

Many individuals are actually aware that they are wasting food and make purchases that they do not need (Daysal and Demirbaş, 2020). Consumers' planning and shopping routines are seen as important determinants of food waste (Stefan et al., 2013). There are many studies using the TPB model to reveal food waste behaviors. (Mondéjar-Jiménez et al., 2016; van der Werf et al., 2019; Heidari et al., 2020). Graham-Rowe et al. (2015) stated that the TPB model would be useful in determining food waste behaviors. According to the results of the study conducted by Aktaş et al. (2018), attitudes towards food waste have an effect on the intention not to waste food. According to Russell et al. (2017), attitudes towards food waste have no effect on the intention not to waste food, while subjective norm and perceived behavioral control have an effect on the intention not to waste food. According to the results of the study conducted by Chen (2023), negative attitudes towards food waste, subjective norm towards reducing food waste and perceived behavioral control positively affect the intention not to waste food.

In line with the literature review and the objectives of the research, the following hypothesis was formed.

H₁: Attitude towards food waste has an impact on intention not to waste food.

There are various studies in the literature that address the effect of subjective norms regarding food waste on the intention to reduce waste. Graham-Rowe et al. (2015) examined the role of subjective norms on the intention to reduce food waste in the context of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and stated that the influence of the social environment significantly affects individuals' intentions to reduce food waste.

Similarly, Russell et al. (2017) analyzed the effect of subjective norms on food waste behavior and emphasized that social pressure and expectations have a direct effect on the intention not to waste. Mondéjar-Jiménez et al. (2016) also addressed the importance of subjective norms on reducing waste among young individuals and concluded that pressure, especially from friends and family, increases individuals' intention not to waste. Stefan et al. (2013) stated that subjective norms play a role in food waste behavior and that pressure from the social environment has a significant effect on individuals' intention not to waste.

These findings have been supported by other studies. Stancu et al. (2016) revealed that the effect of subjective norms on individuals' intention not to waste is an important factor along with perceived behavioral control and attitude. Van der Werf et al. (2019) analyzed the food waste behaviors of households in Canada and found that subjective norms play an effective role in the intention to reduce food waste. Heidari et al. (2020) examined the intention to reduce the food waste of households in Iran and stated that social pressure and social approval contribute to individuals' decision not to waste. These studies reveal the decisive effect of subjective norms, that is, expectations from individuals' social environment, on the intention not to waste food.

H₂: Subjective norm towards food waste has an impact on intention not to waste food.

When the literature is examined, a number of studies addressing the effect of perceived behavioral control regarding food waste on the intention not to waste emerge. In their study, Graham-Rowe et al. (2015) examined the role of perceived behavioral control within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) regarding the intention to reduce food waste. Their findings showed that individuals' beliefs and abilities to control waste are associated with stronger intentions to avoid waste. Similarly, Russell et al. (2017) emphasized that as individuals develop a belief in their abilities to control waste, the likelihood of them engaging in waste avoidance behavior increases. Similarly, Stancu et al. (2016) found that perceived behavioral control significantly affects individuals' food waste

behavior. Their findings revealed that when people perceive themselves as more capable of preventing waste, they are more inclined to exhibit this behavior. In addition, Aktaş et al. (2018) indicated that consumers' perceived ability to control food waste is a critical factor in their intention not to waste food. They also found that positive perceptions further strengthen this intention.

Misiak et al. (2020) found that individuals' attitudes towards food waste are associated with their perception of behavioral control, and this perception of control increases their non-waste behaviors. Porpino et al. (2015) examined the effect of perceived behavioral control on food waste in low-income households, revealing that perceived control plays a critical role in reducing waste. Finally, Wang et al. (2021) examined the positive effect of perceived control on intention not to waste food during the COVID-19 process and showed that individuals with high perception of control are more determined in their intention not to waste even during crisis periods. These studies emphasize the positive effect of perceived behavioral control on individuals' intention not to waste food and support this hypothesis.

H₃: Perceived behavioral control towards food waste has an impact on intention not to waste food.

Effects of Attitude, Subjective Norm, and Perceived Behavioral Control on Moral Norm

Attitude refers to individuals' general tendencies or a positive and/or negative evaluation towards a particular behavior and moral norms involve a person's perception of whether a particular behavior is morally right or wrong (Ajzen, 1991). Research shows that individuals' positive attitudes towards food waste can affect their development of moral norms (Stefan et al., 2013). For example, Stancu et al. (2016) state that attitudes towards food waste shape individuals' intentions not to waste and that attitudes encourage behaviors based on moral norms. Individuals' negative attitudes towards food waste have been associated with environmental responsibility and ethical values. Additionally, they have increased the tendency to comply with moral norms (Russell et al., 2017). Therefore, positive attitudes towards

food waste can contribute to the strengthening of moral norms.

H₄: Attitude towards food waste has a positive impact on moral norm.

Subjective norm refers to the tendency of individuals to behave in accordance with the expectations of those they consider important (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). In the context of food waste, subjective norms are one of the important elements that affect the process of individuals forming moral norms (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008). Graham-Rowe et al. (2015) stated in their research that family and friends' expectations about food waste contribute to individuals' behaviors not to waste. In addition, studies such as Yazdanpanah and Forouzani (2015) show that subjective norms can create a moral norm in individuals to reduce food waste. In food waste, increasing environmental responsibility awareness strengthens the influence of society on individuals in this regard and contributes to the development of moral norms.

H₅: The subjective norm on food waste has a positive effect on the moral norm.

Perceived behavioral control refers to individuals' perceptions of their abilities and possibilities regarding whether performing a behavior is under their control and is shaped by factors that facilitate or suppress the performance of the behavior. In summary, perceived behavioral control refers to individuals' perceptions of competence and control over performing a certain behavior (Ajzen, 2002). In studies on food waste, it has been shown that perceived behavioral control has an effect on individuals' moral norms towards not wasting. For example, Koivupuro et al. (2012) stated that when individuals' control over reducing food waste is high, their moral responsibility to perform this behavior increases. Linderhof et al. (2019) emphasize that perceived control is an important factor in individuals' support for moral norms towards food waste. This shows that individuals with high levels of perceived behavioral control tend not to waste more due to moral norms.

H₆: Perceived behavioral control over food waste has a positive effect on moral norm.

Direct and Indirect Effects of Moral Norm on Non-Waste Intention

Moral norm is whether the behaviors exhibited are morally appropriate or not. Norms shape our behaviors and have the ability to influence our decisions (Sarikhani and Ebrahimi, 2022). Therefore, it can be said that moral norms have an effect on many of our behaviors. One of these situations is the behaviors of individuals towards food waste. The higher the moral norms of individuals, the more inclined they are to not waste food (Wang et al., 2021). According to the study conducted by Arslan and Aydın (2019), in addition to different variables, moral norm also has a significant effect on the intention not to waste food. According to the results of the study conducted by Karakaş (2019), moral norm has a significant effect on the intention not to waste food. According to Misiak et al. (2020), people who evaluate the act of wasting food as immoral exhibit food wasting behavior less. However, in reality, it was determined that they do not waste less food than people who do not evaluate the act of wasting

to reduce food waste, and customers' moral judgments mediate this situation.

The following hypotheses were created in line with the literature review and the objectives of the research.

H7: Moral norm has an impact on the intention not to waste food.

There are several studies in the literature supporting the mediating role of moral norms in the effect of attitudes towards food waste on intention not to waste. Misiak et al. (2020) showed that individuals' perception of food waste as a moral problem strengthens their intention not to waste. When individuals see food waste as immoral, these attitudes positively affect their intention not to waste. Similarly, Arslan and Aydın (2019) found that moral norms are an important element in the intention to prevent food waste and support individuals' intention not to waste by positively affecting their attitudes. Liu et al. (2019) revealed that moral norms strengthen the effect on intention not to waste by reinforcing individuals' positive attitudes towards preventing food waste.

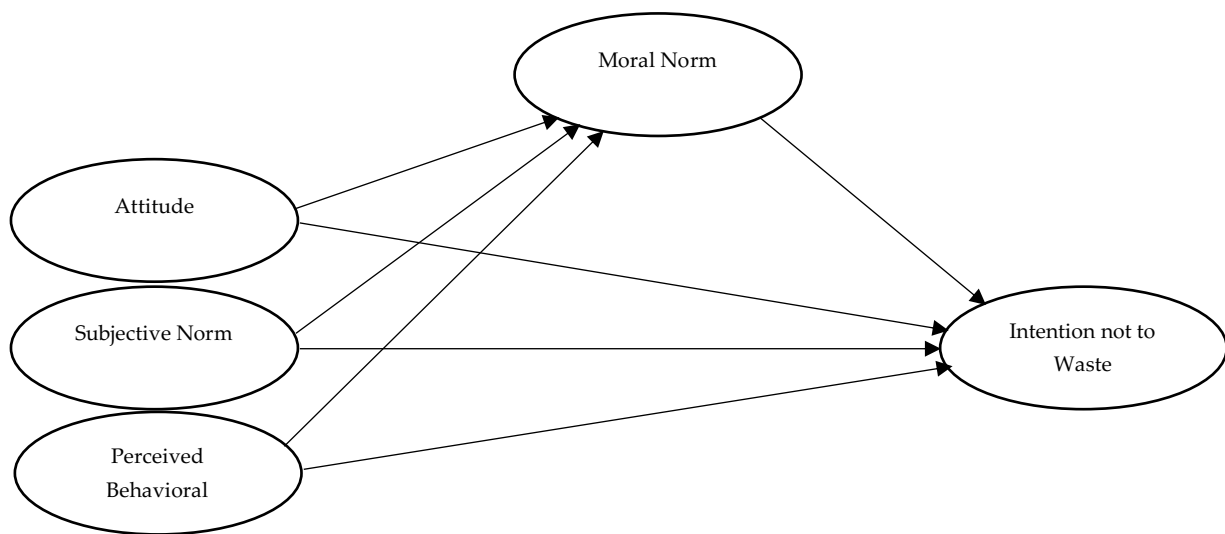


Figure 1. Research Model

food as immoral. In the study conducted by Teoh et al. (2022), it was concluded that moral norm affects food waste. According to the study conducted by Bhatti et al. (2019), moral norm does not significantly affects the intention to reduce food waste. According to Ding (2022), the perceived competence of restaurant customers to reduce food waste positively affects their intention

Teoh et al. (2022) showed that moral norms increase individuals' intention not to waste by interacting with anti-waste messages spread on social media. These studies clearly emphasize that moral norms play a mediating role, strengthening the effect of individuals' attitudes towards food waste on their intention not to waste.

H₈: Moral norm has a mediating role in the effect of attitude towards food waste on intention not to waste food.

H₉: Moral norm has a mediating role in the effect of subjective norm towards food waste on intention not to waste food.

H₁₀: Moral norm has a mediating role in the effect of perceived behavioral control towards food waste on intention not to waste food.

The model created within the scope of the research objectives is as follows.

Methodology

In the method section of the research, the scales used in the research, the data collection method, the analyses used, and research ethics were discussed.

Scales Used in the Study

The attitude towards food waste, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control statements used in the study were prepared within the framework of the "theory of planned behavior" (Ajzen, 1991). The study of Stancu et al. (2016) was used for the scales moral norm and intention not to waste.

Data Collection Method

Within the scope of the research, the survey form was prepared online and delivered to the participants and the data was collected in this way. The online survey form was delivered to individuals aged 18 and over with different demographic characteristics via platforms such as e-mail and social media. The attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control used in the research, as well as the statements regarding moral norms and intention not to waste, were prepared using 5-point Likert type (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neither Agree, Nor Disagree, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree). In addition, the participants were asked about their lifestyles as well as demographic variables. A total of 423 usable data was used for analysis within the scope of the research. The data obtained in the research were collected between December 2022 and January 2023.

Analyses Used

In this study, the data analysis process was carried out using SPSS and SmartPLS software. First, descriptive analyses were conducted to see the distribution of demographic variables and the general structure of the data. Then, explanatory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA and CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) were applied to examine the relationships between variables. For reliability and validity tests, values such as Cronbach's Alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extraction (AVE) were calculated to test the consistency of the measurement structure of the model.

Research Ethics

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of research ethics. Information was provided about the purpose, scope and rights of the participants and informed consent was obtained from the participants. Data were collected through an online survey, and the identity of the participants was kept confidential and anonymity was ensured. All data obtained were analyzed only within the scope of this research and were not shared with third parties. The research was conducted with ethical approval from the Bursa Technical University, Science, Engineering and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. During this process, full compliance with the principles of research ethics was ensured and the confidentiality and privacy of the participants were protected.

Findings

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic information about the participants (gender, age, income, education level, occupation, marital status and lifestyle) is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Findings

Gender	Frequency	%	Marital Status	Frequency	%
Male	221	47,8	Single	230	54,4
Female	202	52,2	Married	193	45,6
Education Level	Frequency	%	Income	Frequency	%
Primary School Graduate	44	10,4	5000 TL and less	125	29,6
High School Graduate	118	27,9	5001-7000 TL	66	15,6
Associate Degree Graduate	60	14,2	7001-9000 TL	53	12,5
Bachelor's Degree Graduate	156	36,9	9001-11000 TL	64	15,1
Master's Degree Graduate	40	9,5	11001 TL and above	115	27,2
Doctorate Graduate	5	1,2	Occupation	Frequency	%
Lifestyle	Frequency	%	Private Sector	103	24,3
I live alone	48	11,3	Student	88	20,8
I live with my family (My spouse; my children; my mother and father; etc.)	343	81,1	Civil Servant	87	20,6
I live with my friends (Co-worker; schoolmate; etc.)	32	7,6	Unemployed (Not Working)	40	9,5
			Self-Employed	38	9,0
			Worker	25	5,9
			Housewife	24	5,7
			Retired	15	3,5
			Farmer	3	0,7
Total	423	100	Total	423	100

The number of returned surveys within the scope of the research was 441. However, after excluding 18 surveys filled out incorrectly, analyses were conducted with 423 usable surveys. According to the data in the table, 47.8% of the participants are male and 52.2% are female. In terms of marital status, 54.4% are single and 45.6% are married. When we look at the level of education, 36.9% have a bachelor's degree, 27.9% have a high school degree, 14.2% have an associate's degree, 9.5% have a master's degree, and 1.2% have a doctorate degree.

In terms of income distribution, 29.6% of the participants are in the income group of 5000 TL and below, while 27.2% earn 11001 TL and above. In terms of employment status, 24.3% work in the private sector, 20.8% are students, 20.6% are civil servants and 9.5% are unemployed.

In addition, the average age of the participants is 32.8. According to the data, 81.1% of the participants live with their families, 11.3% live alone, and 7.6% live with friends.

After examining the demographic characteristics of the individuals participating in the study, descriptive statistics regarding the statements used in the study were determined.

Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics Regarding the Scales Used in the Research

Within the scope of this research, 5 different variables were considered. Descriptive statistics for the scales used to measure these variables are presented in the table below.

When Table 2 is examined, the 3 statements with the highest averages are attitude3, attitude1 and attitude5, respectively. The 3 statements with the lowest averages are subjective4, subjective5 and subjective3, respectively.

Testing the Measurement Model

After this stage, explanatory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, CR (composite reliability), AVE (Average variances extracted), HTMT ratio and Fornell-Larcker Criterion were examined in order to determine the validity and reliability levels of the scales used in the research.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	Statements	Avg.	S.D.
att1	It is important for me not to waste food	4,624	0,845
att2	Wasting food is not welcomed by our society	4,104	1,064
att3	Wasting food is bad	4,638	0,870
att4	I usually try not to waste food	4,459	0,912

att5	We can contribute to our budget by not wasting food	4,546	0,914
att6	I do not leave food on my plate	4,232	1,029
att7	I put as much food as I can eat on my plate	4,284	0,999
att8	I buy as much as I need when buying any food product	4,187	1,021
att9	I use any food in different ways instead of throwing it away	4,078	1,038
att10	Excess food should not be thrown away, it should be consumed later	4,260	0,997
subj1	My family and people around me do not waste food	3,853	1,038
subj2	Many people who are important to me expect me not to waste food	3,991	1,086
subj3	People around me can influence me not to waste food	3,844	1,131
subj4	My family and friends warn me not to waste food	3,664	1,294
subj5	My environment and friends think that I should not waste food	3,697	1,219
subj6	My family informs me about the importance of not wasting food	4,012	1,147
cont1	It is very easy not to waste any food	4,059	1,050
cont2	It is in my hands not to waste any food	4,349	0,929
cont3	Without wasting food There are many alternatives to consider	4,492	0,884
cont4	It is easy to prepare enough food so that you don't throw away too much	4,284	0,939
cont5	It is very easy not to buy more than you need	4,213	1,052
norm1	Wasting food makes me feel guilty about people who don't have enough food	4,349	0,976
norm2	Wasting food makes me feel guilty about the environment	4,267	0,969
norm3	Wasting food makes me feel guilty	4,234	1,020
int1	I intend not to waste food	4,416	0,877
int2	My goal is not to waste food	4,482	0,790
int3	I will try not to waste food	4,447	0,855

First, explanatory factor analysis was performed and a total of 27 statements were included in the factor analysis. The KMO value was 0.952 and the Bartlett significance level was 0.000. According to the KMO and Bartlett tests, factor analysis can be applied to this data set (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2015). The factor analysis results are shown in Table 3.

To determine the factor structures of the scales, explanatory factor analysis was performed first. Structures with an eigenvalue greater than 1 were accepted as factors. The variance explained by the factors ranged from 10.26 to 35.94. The alpha values of the scales also ranged from 0.872 to 0.940. The expression Attitude2 was removed from the scale because it had a low factor loading.

When the table is examined, 5 different factors emerged in accordance with the research model. The factor loadings of the statements forming the factors are seen to be between 0.621-0.805 for attitude, 0.520-0.892 for subjective norm, 0.595-0.806 for perceived behavioral control, 0.697-0.821 for moral norm and 0.637-0.725 for intention.

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Statements	Factors					Eigenvalue	Explained Variance	Cronbach Alpha
	Attitude	Subjective Norm	Per. Beh. Cont.	Moral Norm	Intention			
att4	,805							
att1	,799							
att5	,777							
att3	,775							
att7	,776					4,863	35,94	0,940
att6	,710							
att8	,698							
att10	,627							
att9	,621							
subj4		,892						
subj5		,862						
subj3		,710						
subj6		,696				3,094	22,86	0,872
subj2		,544						
subj1		,520						
cont5			,806					
cont4			,718					
cont2			,708					
cont1			,678			2,480	18,33	0,918
cont3			,595					
norm3			,821					
norm1			,740			1,707	12,62	0,923
norm2			,697					
int1				,725				
int3				,676		1,388	10,26	0,934
int2				,637				

After this stage, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed and the CFA results are given in the table below.

The confirmatory factor analysis results in the table show the construct validity and factor loadings of the variables used in the study. In the Partial Least Squares (PLS) based CFA, factor loadings are expected to be above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). The loadings of the Attitude factor vary between 0.747 and 0.898, and high loadings indicate that this factor has good construct validity. The Subjective Norm factor has factor

loadings ranging between 0.758 and 0.799, which indicates that the statements related to subjective norm are consistent and reliable.

Table 4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Statements	Attitude	Subjective Norm	Per. Beh. Cont.	Moral Norm	Intention
att1	0.898				
att10	0.766				
att3	0.850				
att4	0.857				
att5	0.866				
att6	0.784				
att7	0.840				
att8	0.795				
att9	0.747				
subj1		0.758			
subj2		0.799			
subj3		0.764			
subj4		0.775			
subj5		0.790			
subj6		0.779			
cont1			0.836		
cont2			0.907		
cont3			0.859		
cont4			0.889		
cont5			0.847		
norm1				0.930	
norm2				0.930	
norm3				0.931	
int1					0.932
int2					0.945
int3					0.944

The factor loadings in the Perceived Behavioral Control factor vary between 0.836 and 0.907, and these high loadings indicate that the construct validity is strong. The factor loadings for all statements in the Moral Norm factor are quite high (0.930-0.931), which indicates strong convergent validity. The Intention factor was structured with loadings between 0.932 and 0.945, which shows that this factor is in high compliance with the measured expressions. In general, it is seen that all factors have high factor loadings.

After this stage, the validity and reliability of the scales were continued with various analyses. First, CR (Composite Reliability) and AVE

(Average Variance Extracted) coefficients were examined.

Table 5. CR, AVE and Alpha Coefficients

Variables	Alfa	CR	AVE
Moral Norm	0.923	0.925	0.866
Per. Beh. Cont.	0.918	0.921	0.754
Intention	0.934	0.936	0.884
Subjective Norm	0.872	0.882	0.605
Attitude	0.940	0.943	0.679

Alpha values for Attitude (0.940), Intention (0.934), Moral Norm (0.923), Perceived Behavioral Control (0.918) and Subjective Norm (0.872) are quite high (≥ 0.70), indicating that all variables are reliable (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). High reliability coefficients indicate that the measurement tools work consistently and will give similar results in repeated measurements.

The composite reliability (CR) values for Attitude (0.943), Intention (0.936), Moral Norm (0.925), Perceived Behavioral Control (0.921) and Subjective Norm (0.882) were above the reliability criterion of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). This indicates that the measurement items of each variable are compatible with each other and measure the concepts accurately.

The AVE values for Attitude (0.679), Intention (0.884), Moral Norm (0.866), Perceived Behavioral Control (0.754) and Subjective Norm (0.605) are above the validity criterion of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). This means that each of these variables can explain at least half of their total variance, indicating that construct validity is achieved.

Table 6. HTMT Ratio

Variables	Moral Norm	Per. Beh. Cont.	Intention	Subjective Norm	Attitude
Moral Norm					
Per. Beh. Cont.	0.755				
Intention	0.776	0.794			
Subjective Norm	0.562	0.605	0.601		
Attitude	0.686	0.770	0.714	0.598	

The HTMT ratio is a modern method used in discriminant validity testing. This ratio measures the similarity (or difference) between two variables. The generally accepted threshold value

is for the HTMT value to be above 0.85. Since this condition is provided, it can be said that there is a strong discriminant validity between the variables (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 7. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Variables	Moral Norm	Per. Beh. Cont.	Intention	Subjective Norm	Attitude
Moral Norm	0.930				
Per. Beh. Cont.	0.698	0.868			
Intention	0.723	0.740	0.940		
Subjective Norm	0.533	0.568	0.563	0.778	
Attitude	0.640	0.716	0.672	0.569	0.824

The Fornell-Larcker criterion is used to test the discriminant validity between the variables in the model. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) value of each variable should be higher than its correlations with other variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As a result, this table shows that each variable exhibits a different structure within itself and is sufficiently separated from other variables.

After all these results, it can be said that the scales used in the study provide sufficient validity and reliability conditions.

After this stage, the structural model was tested.

Testing the Structural Model

Before proceeding to the analysis of the structural model, some information about the fit of the model was examined. The fit of the structural model shows the extent to which the independent variables of the model explain the dependent variables and how well the model fits the data in general. Measures such as R-square, F-square and SRMR were used to evaluate this fit.

The R-square values used to evaluate the fit of the structural model show that a large portion of the dependent variables are explained by the model. R-square was calculated as 0.541 for Moral Norm and 0.654 for Intention. This shows that the model explains 54.1% of Moral Norm and 65.4% of Intention, thus having a good fit (Hair et al., 2010). In addition, the SRMR value is 0.069, which

indicates that the model is generally compatible with the data (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

According to F-square (effect size) values, the effect of Perceived Behavioral Control on Moral Norm shows a medium effect with 0.193, and the effect on Intention shows a medium effect with 0.121 (Cohen, 1988). The effect of Subjective Norm on Intention has a low effect size with 0.020, which shows that subjective norms do not have a significant effect on intention. The effect of Moral Norm on Intention is medium with 0.145, and it can be said that moral norms have a significant effect on intention (Cohen, 1988).

Table 8. Direct Effects Analysis

Relationships Between Variables	Std. Beta	T Value	P Value	Hypotheses	Result
Attitude -> Intention	0.161	1.689	0.091	H ₁	Rejected
Subjective Norm -> Intention	0.106	2.269	0.023	H ₂	Accepted
Per. Beh. Cont. -> Intention	0.334	4.597	0.000	H ₃	Accepted
Attitude -> Moral Norm	0.240	3.198	0.001	H ₄	Accepted
Subjective Norm -> Moral Norm	0.144	2.949	0.003	H ₅	Accepted
Per. Beh. Cont. -> Moral Norm	0.445	6.122	0.000	H ₆	Accepted
Moral Norm -> Intention	0.330	5.868	0.000	H ₇	Accepted

The effect of attitude on moral norm is significant (Std. Beta: 0.240, T: 3.198, P: 0.001), which supports hypothesis H₄. However, the effect of attitude on intention (Std. Beta: 0.161, T: 1.689, P: 0.091) was not found significant. In this case, hypothesis H₁ was rejected. It is seen that attitude has no significant effect on intention, but its effect on moral norm is significant (H₈).

The effect of subjective norm on moral norm (Std. Beta: 0.144, T: 2.949, P: 0.003) and its effect on intention (Std. Beta: 0.106, T: 2.269, P: 0.023) are statistically significant. These findings support hypotheses H₅ and H₂. While subjective norms have a significant effect on individuals' moral norms, their effect on intention is also low-level significant.

The effect of perceived behavioral control on moral norm (Std. Beta: 0.445, T: 6.122, P: 0.000) and intention (Std. Beta: 0.334, T: 4.597, P: 0.000) are also highly significant, which ensures that hypotheses H₆ and H₃ are accepted. Perceived behavioral control positively affects both moral norms and intentions of individuals.

According to the analysis results, the effect of moral norm on the intention not to waste food (Std. Beta: 0.330, T: 5.868, P: 0.000) is quite strong and significant. This supports hypothesis H₇ and shows that moral norms positively affect individuals' intention not to waste food.

As a result, hypotheses H₂, H₃, H₄, H₅, H₆ and H₇ were supported, but hypothesis H₁ was rejected. While moral norms and perceived behavioral control are effective on the intention not to waste food, attitude has no direct effect.

Table 9. Indirect Effects Analysis

Relationships Between Variables	Std. Beta	T Value	P Value	Hypotheses	Result
Attitude -> Moral Norm -> Intention	0.079	2.806	0.005	H ₈	Accepted
Subjective Norm -> Moral Norm -> Intention	0.048	2.460	0.014	H ₉	Accepted
Per. Beh. Cont. -> Moral Norm -> Intention	0.147	4.335	0.000	H ₁₀	Accepted

According to the path analysis results for indirect effects, the indirect effect of attitude on the intention not to waste food through moral norm was found to be significant (Std. Beta: 0.079, T: 2.806, P: 0.005). This shows that hypothesis H₈ is accepted.

Similarly, the indirect effect of subjective norms on intention through moral norm is also significant (Std. Beta: 0.048, T: 2.460, P: 0.014), leading to the acceptance of hypothesis H₉.

The indirect effect of perceived behavioral control on intention through moral norm is quite strong (Std. Beta: 0.147, T: 4.335, P: 0.000), therefore hypothesis H₁₀ is accepted. In general, it is seen that moral norm plays an important mediating role in the effect of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control on intention.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the factors affecting individuals' intentions to prevent food waste by focusing on the mediating role of moral norms within the framework of Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The findings of the study emphasize that moral norms, perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and attitudes are critical in shaping intentions to prevent food waste. The results show that moral norms and

perceived behavioral control have significant direct effects on intentions to prevent food waste, while attitudes have an indirect effect through moral norms. Subjective norms play a smaller but significant role.

Perceived behavioral control emerged as a significant determinant of both moral norms and intention to prevent food waste. This finding suggests that individuals who believe they have the ability to control food consumption and waste are more likely to comply with moral norms and intention to prevent food waste. Furthermore, the strong positive relationship between moral norms and intentions to prevent food waste highlights how important personal ethical standards are in guiding environmentally friendly behaviors. As individuals internalize their moral obligations, they are more likely to take actions to reduce food waste.

Although attitudes towards food waste did not have a significant direct effect on intentions, the indirect effect through moral norms was found to be significant. This suggests that although attitudes towards food waste do not directly lead to behavioral change, they do guide intentions by influencing individuals' moral frameworks. In addition, subjective norms, which represent the social pressures and expectations of significant others, had a small but statistically significant effect on both moral norms and intentions.

Ajzen and Fishbein, who developed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), suggested that attitudes generally affect behavioral intentions. However, they also acknowledged that this relationship may not always be strong or direct. Similarly, Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) examined in detail the complexity of the relationship between attitude and behavior and the situations in which this relationship may be weak. In their various studies, Ajzen and Fishbein accept the existence of situations where attitude does not affect intention or its effect is weak. In support of these, Zaikauskaitė et al. (2023) determined that attitude has a strong effect on intention. However, when the moral norm variable was added to the model, it was found that the effect of attitude on intention weakened. In addition, Teoh et al. (2022) found that attitude had no effect on intention in their study on social media and food waste.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms the utility of the TPB model in explaining food waste behaviors while highlighting the mediating role of moral norms. The findings suggest that intentions to prevent food waste are largely influenced by individuals' moral beliefs, not just external pressures or internal attitudes. Addressing these factors is critical for designing effective interventions to reduce food waste at the household and societal levels. Accordingly, policymakers can emphasize the moral dimensions of reducing food waste. Additionally, communication strategies can appeal to intrinsic motivations by emphasizing the attribution of responsibility and personal norms and foster a sense of ethical obligation to reduce food waste.

Discussion

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on food waste reduction, highlighting the importance of moral norms, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms in shaping intentions to prevent food waste. Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study extends previous research by highlighting the mediating role of moral norms between attitudes, subjective norms, and intentions.

As in the studies of Aktaş et al. (2018) and Stancu et al. (2016), perceived behavioral control emerged as one of the most important determinants of both moral norms and intentions to prevent food waste. This suggests that individuals who believe they can control their food consumption are more likely to engage in behaviors aimed at preventing food waste. In practice, interventions aimed at increasing individuals' perception of control—for example, providing tools for better meal planning, portion control, and efficient use of leftovers—can significantly reduce food waste. This finding is also consistent with the work of Graham-Rowe et al. (2015) emphasizing the importance of perception of control in TPB-based models.

This study's emphasis on moral norms provides a deeper understanding of why individuals choose to reduce food waste. Moral norms, that is, personal perceptions of right and

wrong, significantly mediate the relationship between attitudes and intentions. This is consistent with the findings of Wang et al. (2021) and Arslan and Aydin (2019), where moral norms were identified as a strong predictor of intentions to prevent food waste. Individuals who view food waste as morally wrong are more likely to act on these beliefs, even if their general attitudes are not very strong against food waste. This finding highlights the importance of moral messages in campaigns to reduce food waste.

Interestingly, the direct effect of attitudes on intention to prevent food waste in this study was not found to be significant, which contradicts the previous findings of Russell et al. (2017) who found a significant relationship between attitudes and intentions. However, the indirect effect of attitudes through moral norms suggests that attitudes can affect intentions when framed in a moral context. This finding is also consistent with the study of Chen (2023) who stated that even if attitudes do not directly lead to behavioral change, they can affect intentions by shaping individuals' moral frames.

The role of subjective norms was found to be weaker compared to perceived behavioral control and moral norms, but still significant through its indirect effect through moral norms. This suggests that social influences alone are not sufficient to drive behaviors aimed at reducing food waste, but may strengthen individuals' moral beliefs. Porpino et al. (2015) emphasized the role of subjective norms in food waste behavior, but found a stronger direct effect than observed in this study. This suggests that subjective norms may have a more pronounced effect in cultures or contexts where social pressure for consumption habits is stronger.

The findings of the study also support the arguments made by Just and Swigert (2016) and Gönültaş et al. (2020) that food waste in developed countries is often caused by overconsumption. In these contexts, individuals may be tempted to waste due to a sense of abundance. This study suggests that even in societies with high consumption levels, moral norms and perceived behavioral control play a balancing role in food waste. Campaigns that focus solely on economic or environmental benefits may not be sufficient;

instead, individuals' moral beliefs can be appealed to and a stronger behavioral change can be encouraged.

Finally, although Bhatti et al. (2019) argued that moral norms do not significantly affect intention to reduce food waste, the findings of this study suggest the opposite. A strong mediating effect of moral norms suggests that it bridges the gap between individuals' perceptions and intentions to prevent food waste. This discrepancy may be due to cultural or methodological differences and suggests that more comparative studies should be conducted in different contexts to better understand the role of moral norms in food waste behaviors.

In conclusion, this study suggests that perceived behavioral control and moral norms are key drivers of intentions to prevent food waste. Instead of interventions that only address practical barriers, interventions that also mobilize individuals' moral beliefs about the importance of reducing food waste should be designed. These findings can guide policy makers and campaign designers in developing more effective, multifaceted strategies to reduce food waste at the household and community level.

Future Research

This study provides valuable insight into the psychological mechanisms underlying food waste intentions, as well as several suggestions for future research to further understand this phenomenon. First, longitudinal studies would be useful to examine how moral norms, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms influence food waste behaviors over time. Additionally, further research could be conducted to understand how demographic variables such as age, income, and household size respond to interventions aimed at reducing food waste.

In addition, future research could expand the scope of the TPB model to include additional variables such as emotional factors (e.g., guilt or shame related to food waste) and environmental awareness. These factors could better explain why even individuals with strong moral norms may continue to waste food. Finally, cross-cultural

studies comparing food waste behaviors across regions could reveal how cultural norms and moral beliefs vary across societies and how these differences affect food waste reduction strategies.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, data were collected using self-reported measures, which may introduce social desirability bias. Participants may have underreported socially unacceptable behaviors, such as food waste. Second, the study was conducted in a specific cultural and geographic context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or populations. Future research should replicate this study in different cultural settings and examine the consistency of the findings.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to identify causal relationships between variables. While the TPB model provides a theoretical framework for understanding food waste intentions, a longitudinal design may provide stronger evidence of causality. Finally, although the sample size was sufficient for the analyses conducted, future studies could use larger sample sizes to increase the robustness and generalizability of the findings. Addressing these limitations in future research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors driving food waste behaviors.

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