

Year 2025
Issue 71

E-ISSN: 2645-8772

Journal of Economy, Culture and Society



İSTANBUL
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Issue 71 • June 2025

Indexing & Abstracting

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Publisher Istanbul Universtiy Press

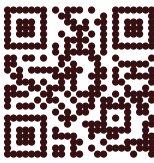
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✉ iupress@istanbul.edu.tr

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Publication Type Periodical



Authors bear responsibility for the content of their published articles.

The publication language of the journal is English.

This is a scholarly, international, peer-reviewed and open-access journal published biannually in June and December.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

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Opening the Black Box of AI: A Sociological Study of AI as a Network



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Abstract

This study provides a sociological understanding of the production of AI, which is underexplored in the sociology of AI. To achieve this, the study focuses on the AI development process. Utilizing Actor-Network Theory (ANT), this study demonstrates how the development of AI creates a network consisting of both human and nonhuman actors. The sociological literature focuses on how AI is adopted in various social contexts, identifying the social effects of its introduction and use. We investigate AI itself, showing the values and politics that constitute AI sociotechnical systems in the United States. Based on interviews with software engineers residing in Northeastern USA who work on AI and music platforms, the study highlights how humans and nonhuman actors and social forces such as capitalism and imperialism co-produce AI systems. Engineers' technicality-bound worldview plays a crucial role in their interpretation of AI and the drive for efficiency and profit are foundational values that justify including nonhuman actors such as generative AI platforms and datasets as participants in AI networks. This ultimately results in the production of AI sociotechnical systems that recreate values central to capitalism and imperialism.

Keywords

Sociology • Actor-Network Theory • Artificial Intelligence • Science and Technology Studies (STS) • Software Engineering

Author Note

This article is derived from the corresponding author's PhD thesis supported by TÜBİTAK 2214-A International Research Fellowship Programme for PhD Students.



“ Citation: Erbay, B. & Joyce, K. (2025). Opening the black box of AI: A sociological study of AI as a network. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1467424>

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Opening the Black Box of AI: A Sociological Study of AI as a Network

The advancements in both hardware and software technologies and continuous digitalization in societies around the world have led to an unprecedented progress in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). As a result of this progress, we now experience an AI-bound world, with AI use bringing significant transformations and challenges in different social spheres (Perc et al., 2019; Joyce & Cruz 2024). One of the most visible and significant impacts of AI can be observed in the labor market, where automation driven by AI is reshaping traditional employment structures (Ford, 2015; Ozer et al., 2024). As AI systems are adopted, they frequently displace and change human labor (Acemoglu et al., 2022; Ozer & Perc, 2024).

Within sociology, there is a growing body of literature that investigates the societal impact of AI adoption, examining if the technology use exacerbates inequalities. Scholarship within the sociology of AI has created important knowledge that shows societal impact in fields such as work, law, security and entertainment. It also demonstrates how humans, as reflexive actors, both accept and reject the AI output. Critical analysis of the values and politics embedded in the design and content of AI platforms, however, tends to be ignored in this literature. This is not surprising. Questioning AI is not easy for non-tech experts since it is perceived as a 'black box'. When a technology is "black boxed" its inner workings are unclear or taken for granted and its main value is that it is perceived to work in a correct and efficient way (Latour, 2000). These traits associated with AI rise not solely from the complexity of algorithms and the extensive, distributed knowledge and expertise needed to understand how they operate but also from how scientists themselves talk about AI and the massive amounts of data they process every second; the more complex algorithms get, the more opaque or black boxed they get (Pasquale, 2015; Burrell, 2016). This opacity shrouds AI systems in a myth, which promotes exaggerated expectations for their future impact (Natale & Ballatore, 2020; 2023). It also creates a perception of AI as a technological force that possesses a human-like intelligence and autonomy, obscuring the actual 'reality' of AI. This misinterpretation results in a lack of understanding of the human labor, decisions, and values involved and results in ascribing a human-like nature to AI, in the end forming a "black box society" that is governed by algorithms seemingly incomprehensible to humans (Pasquale, 2015). Expanding the sociology of AI to examine the design of AI platforms challenges the black boxing of AI, demonstrating which values are embedded in the design and content of AI.

In this paper, we aim to provide sociological insight into the AI development process by identifying the values and politics embedded in AI sociotechnical systems. To achieve this, we use a science and technology studies (STS) approach to study AI as a network consisting of humans, nonhumans, beliefs and ideologies. Built on the foundational idea that technology possesses a social and political character (Winner, 1980; Verbeek, 2005) with a certain form of agency embedded in it, interacting directly with humans in constituting society (Callon, 1986; Verbeek, 2005; Latour, 1994; 2000), STS calls for analyzing technology as a sociotechnical system, challenging the rooted technology/society dichotomy in classical and mainstream sociology. This view asserts that technology is not isolated from the social and political environment; on the contrary, it inherently possesses a social and political nature—indeed, technology and society co-produce each other (Jasanoff, 2002). Drawing on insights from the semi-structured interviews with software engineers who work in the field of music AI, we draw on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to show how human and nonhuman actors co-constitute (Latour, 2005) AI networks together. Building on sociological criticisms of ANT's neglect of power and social contexts (Fine, 2005; Gille, 2010; White, 2013), we advance ANT in a way that can answer



macro-sociological questions such as how major social forces like capitalism and imperialism are embedded in the actors and actions that constitute the AI network.

The essay is structured as follows: We begin with a literature review on the sociology of AI to highlight both contributions and gaps. We then discuss how STS can help sociologists understand AI as a dynamic, ever-changing network. This review and discussion provides the paper's framework. Next, we provide a methodological outline for the paper, which involved in-depth interviews conducted with software engineers who work on AI and music platforms and who reside and work in the Northeastern USA. In the findings section, we highlight how the technical-rational worldview of engineering affects how software engineers interpret generative AI, such as ChatGPT, and datasets. After examining how engineers comprehend AI in a strictly technical sense, we discuss AI as a network in the frame of ANT, highlighting how humans and nonhuman actors (generative AI and datasets) interact with each other in AI development. These interactions are shaped by major social forces, ideologies and beliefs, leading to the creation of a technology that recreates values central to capitalism and imperialism.

Theorizing AI: How STS Can Help Sociology Unlock the Black Box of AI?

The United States holds a leading position in the development of AI, both economically and culturally, largely due to the influence of Silicon Valley. This has led researchers globally to examine and analyze the relationship between AI development and the prevailing ideology of Silicon Valley (Lee, 2018; Gray & Suri, 2019; Sadowski, 2020). The constitution of AI in the USA is shaped by the influence of Silicon Valley's neoliberal ideology, which emphasizes technological innovation as a central driver of economic growth and societal advancement. This ideology, deeply embedded in US science and technology policy, has shaped AI development through the entanglement of academic science, industry, and government. The transformation of American universities into engines of economic growth (Berman, 2012) AI, like other technological fields, emerged within this market-oriented framework, reflecting the values of efficiency, entrepreneurship, and market-driven solutions that characterize Silicon Valley (Cohen, 2019; Sadowski, 2020).

Berman's analysis of how universities increasingly aligned their research with market needs reveals the shift toward a market-based model of academic science, where the commercial potential of technologies like AI became the driving force behind research. AI development within this space mirrors this transformation, as research is no longer driven solely by scientific curiosity but by its potential for economic return. The commercialization of research translates scientific inquiry into products shaped by venture capital and market imperatives (Kleinman, 2003; Jeske, 2022). In AI, this has led to the commodification of AI systems, where corporate interests and investment have defined not only the direction of research but also the very framing of AI as a solution to societal challenges and a way for AI practitioners to make money through patents and technology transfer.

The political economy of AI reveals how innovation, though framed as neutral, is deeply tied to commercial interests. As academic research becomes increasingly entangled with industry and the desire to be entrepreneurial, the boundaries between public knowledge and science blur, leading to a blind faith in technology stemming from the technochauvanistic approach of engineering (Broussard, 2018). Thus, AI becomes part of a larger sociotechnical system that reflects and perpetuates the neoliberal values of competition, growth, and profit. In other words, the constitution of AI in the US is not merely a technical process but a sociopolitical one, shaped by Silicon Valley's ideology (Cohen, 2019). This process has profound social and political implications, as AI becomes a mechanism for reproducing capitalist values and maintaining global



technological dominance (Lee, 2018; Sadowski, 2020). Rather than existing as a neutral tool, AI serves to reinforce systems of power and inequality, perpetuating the very structures that define the neoliberal and technical worldview embedded in its creation.

The ever-growing literature in the sociology of AI, which is a relatively new subfield of sociology, studies how AI impacts society and how people use AI-in-practice. Similar to early sociological studies of the Internet and its reinforcing effects on social inequalities (called the digital divide) (DiMaggio et al., 2004; Selwyn, 2004; Van Dijk, 2005; 2006), the sociology of AI investigates the relationship between AI, power and social inequalities (Noble, 2018; Benjamin, 2019), identifying how AI systems discriminate people among class (O'Neil, 2016; Dyer-Witheford et al., 2019; Eubanks, 2018; Katz, 2020), gender (Benjamin, 2019; Hashemi & Hall, 2020), race and ethnicity (Benjamin, 2019; Hanna et al., 2019; Obermeyer et al., 2019). The effects of this digital discrimination are widely analyzed in the sociology of AI as well since classifying and labeling people by class, gender, race and ethnicity has historically been used as a means for the centralization of power around the ruling elite. More and more gigabytes of data have been extracted and monetized through algorithmic processes every day, creating a form of digital capitalism that serves both as a tool for exploitation and surveillance at the same time (Zuboff, 2019; Sadowski, 2020). Brayne (2020), for example, has shown how data-driven tech companies practice their power on police departments through monopolization of big data in the USA. The sociology of AI has built a far-reaching corpus of studies on the triangle of AI, inequalities and power due to the extensive works of many scholars around the world (Zajko, 2022; Liu, 2021).

In addition to reinforcing present inequalities and situating power, the sociology of AI investigates how AI might change or have already transformed work. This scholarship varies from critical analysis of predictions about robots taking over human jobs, the consequences of automation throughout the job market and the predictive after effects of this dystopian process (Rhee, 2018; Vicsek, 2020; James & Whelan, 2021) to how algorithms change and reconfigure labor as capitalistic values of efficiency and profit maximization demands (Shestakofsky, 2017; Kellog et al., 2020), how algorithms govern work environment detrimental to workers, like forcing workers to keep pace with algorithmic systems in work to maximize efficiency and productivity (Crawford, 2021; Newlands, 2021). Using ethnographic methods, scholarship has critically examined how workers use (or do not use) AI platforms, demonstrating the rich ways people interact with AI systems at work (Brayne and Engele, 2021; Brayne, 2020; Christin, 2020; Ticona and Mateescu, 2018; Sachs, 2019; Shestakofsky and Kelkar, 2020; Shestakofsky, 2017). Although organizations may hope that AI use leads to the triumph of Silicon Valley ideology over all (Sadowski, 2020), this scholarship shows that humans are reflective actors who make decisions about when and where to use AI output and that AI use usually does not replace human labor but rather reconfigures what counts as work.

This body of work recognizes AI as central to their analysis. How AI became capable of creating social change is mostly addressed through reference to algorithms, which can be defined as the main components that guide AI systems to desired outcomes (Lupton, 2015; Sheikh et al., 2023) and their power to shape various social spheres. Sociologists and social theorists consider algorithms as entities that control and sort datasets, possessing distinct contexts, allowing AI to make judgments and perform certain actions based on these contexts (Beer, 2013; 2017). Algorithms act as “filter bubbles”, technological things that decide what Internet users will encounter based on information such as location, clicking behavior, and search history (Pariser, 2011, 2013). This process results in algorithms sorting, filtering and suggesting what people should listen (Airoldi et al., 2016; Karakayali et al., 2018), what news they should read (Bucher, 2012; Rieder,

2017), who they should meet, flirt and fall in love with (Slater, 2013) and so on. Through algorithmic power, the asymmetric power relations in societies are reproduced. Life itself becomes algorithmic. In the end, algorithms become the deciding parts of the codes that make up the AI systems, gaining a social and political character in this process (Beer, 2013; 2017; Airoidi, 2022).

Although making substantial contributions, the aforementioned studies do *not* turn the sociological lens onto the making of AI itself. What remains to be answered are questions such as how is AI created? Which social interactions occur in this process, for example, who builds these systems and for whom (Joyce et al., 2021)? Which social forces are salient? What is the intersection of AI platforms with these powers (Burrell & Fourcade, 2020)? Social scientific research on AI focuses on a *pre-conceptualized* machine intelligence, identifying its use and societal impact, rather than shifting the lens to investigate the ecosystem of humans and nonhumans constituting AI (Jaton, 2020; Kajava & Shawney, 2023). This, can be said in a sociological sense, is *black boxing redux*. As Pasquale states, opaque algorithms and AI systems are conceptualized as black boxes throughout society, uncomprehensible for non-experts of specific scientific fields, thus becoming technical entities residing in their own domain, far from society (Pasquale, 2015). In this sense, *black boxing redux* is what happens in previous sociological studies of AI because the question of the values embedded in AI processes is not adequately explored. Sociologists bracket the AI system, focusing on its effects rather than its construction. In this paper, we focus on the sociological dimensions of AI itself. Rather than highlighting the effects of AI use on society, we investigate the very values and politics that co-produce AI, music, and creativity. We do this by drawing on science and technology studies theories and methods.

Science and technology studies (STS) unlock the black box of AI because it offers an approach that focuses on the technology itself as the object of study. Emerging in the 1970s in diverse sites, STS calls for social sciences to exceed the dichotomy between technological and social, emphasizing the sociotechnical nature of technology (Sismondo, 2010). Built on the works of scholars like Haraway (1991), Akrich (1992), Latour (1993; 1994; 2000; 2005), Callon (1984; 1997), Law (Callon & Law, 1997), and Woolgar (Woolgar, 1985; Latour & Woolgar, 1979), STS calls for a departure from conventional sociological studies of a technology's impact to studying how values and politics comprise the design and use of a technology. Using STS demonstrates how AI is a sociotechnical system, consisting of humans, non-human actors, data and algorithms (Jaton, 2020; Roberge & Castelle, 2021; Joyce et. al, 2021; Kajawa & Shawney, 2023). In other words, STS takes AI into the center of analysis, rather than comprehending it as a means in human-to-human relations in wider social contexts. It offers a toolbox for sociology by reformulating the question from how AI is embedded in social to how social is embedded in AI, thus offering insights into the values and politics that constitute particular AI systems.

We use Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as the main theoretical lens. As famously noted by Latour, what we call society is a network consisting of networks which are populated by humans and nonhumans alike (Latour, 1993; 2005). Taking an ANT approach means identifying the human and non-human actors that bring a particular technology or scientific claim into being. Debates on ANT are not fully settled to this day as scholars question and criticize its methodological and theoretical shortcomings. Such criticisms focus on how ANT assumes humans are rational actors and how ANT overlooks the unique aspects of human agency in favor of nonhumans, thus, reducing social phenomena to interactions between actors and neglecting the broader social contexts and power relations indispensable for societies to operate (Fine, 2005; Gille, 2010; White, 2013).

Bearing these criticisms in mind, we advance ANT by combining its unique focus on human and nonhuman actors with a sociological analysis of the broader social forces that impact actors in the creation of AI music-related platforms. In doing so, we combine the rich insights of sociology with STS's emphasis on the technology itself as the object of analysis. In doing so, we challenge *black boxing redux*. We theorize AI as a network consisting of people, algorithms, data, beliefs, ideologies and techniques to provide a sociological understanding of the values and politics that co-constitute the AI platforms related to music.

Data and Method

This study aims to illuminate the embedded social, political and economic power relations that shape AI development. In alignment with the aim of this study, we focus on the developers of AI and algorithms, in particular to music composition algorithms that are written, coded and deployed by AI practitioners. As mentioned above, we offer an understanding of AI as a network consisting of software/computer engineers, algorithms, data and programming languages (softwares). Findings indicate that the development of AI is a multifaceted process consisting of complex layers of interactions between humans and nonhumans, who are both bearers and at the same time, consequences of certain values, beliefs and ideologies embedded within them. In this context, qualitative methods, which are useful to describe and understand how social interactions constitute phenomena (Marvasti, 2003) forms the basis of the research.

A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit participants with expertise in AI development for music, ensuring that the data collected was rich in relevant insights. The research includes in-depth interviews with 20 software/computer engineers with at least a Master's degree in the field, all residing in the USA, supplemented by fieldwork at AI music conferences and workshops. To obtain in-depth qualitative data, engineers specifically involved in designing music composition algorithms were selected as participants. No gender or age quotas were applied. 14 of the 20 participants identified as men and 6 of the 20 participants identified as women, representing the asymmetric gender diversity of the field (Chang, 2019; Campero, 2021). 5 of 20 participants worked in the private sector and 15 of them were academics. The primary data collection tool used in this study was semi-structured interviews, chosen specifically for the method's suitability in achieving the project's descriptive and exploratory objectives. The interview guide includes questions categorized into four key topics: the characteristics of software/computer engineering education, the conceptualization of AI and algorithms, AI development in action, and the intersection of AI and music. The interview guide was used with all interviews. The interviews had a duration of 45-60 minutes and were conducted in person. Before the interviews, all participants were given advanced information about the research and were provided with an informed consent form. Audio recordings were conducted during the interviews. Detailed notes were taken during interviews with participants who did not provide consent for audio recording. Ethics committee approval was obtained before the research. Interviews were coded for reoccurring themes and saturation of reoccurring themes was reached.

In the next section, we describe how engineers imagine AI and how they understand the process of creating code for an AI system. Throughout the interviews, engineers repeatedly highlighted AI and the decisions they made in terms of the choice of training data as a technical matter with little understanding or interest in the socio-political dimensions of their work. Analysis of interview data also reveals the key human and nonhuman actors in the creation of AI platforms.

Findings

Imagining AI: Exploring the Perspective of AI Practitioners

Across all of our interviews, engineers imagined and conceptualized AI as a highly technical system. When discussing their choices when creating an AI system, participants repeatedly referred to a desire to increase accuracy and efficiency—two key values of engineering. Algorithms and training data, the main parts that bring AI into being are understood through the lens of the technical, accuracy, and efficiency. Participants do not see their decisions (or the impact of their decisions) as social.

When asked to describe the terms AI, algorithms and data in their own terms, without using textbook definitions, engineers—usually after a long pause while the respondent considers the question, and after the common phrase of “this is actually a great question, I have never defined it in my own words” - tend to give an explanation that highlights AI as an accurate, efficient machine. One respondent exemplifies this when he explains, “It is actually a system that approximates human behavior in the most accurate way. It has algorithms, based on certain mathematical models which charts the way for the system to follow and data, which is the source that these algorithms process and probabilitate th outcomes” (P3, Academic). Another respondent likened AI to a car, “The thing about AI is, it is actually a category of computational systems having a goal to mimic humans. You have your algorithms as the engine of AI and the data, that is the fuel for your engine. Think of AI as a car, when fuel is not efficiently processed by the engine, you are left in a desparate situation. Either you cannot complete your travel from your point of departure to your arrival, or you do it in an undesired way, the cost of your travel might exceed your money or you might end up there late. You lost money, you lost time. (...) It is the same thing with ML projects, you need to efficiently process the data to have the most accurate outcome” (P6, Company owner). Here again, we see the entanglement of the technical with accuracy and efficiency.

Accuracy is often intertwined with efficiency, as it is commonly referred together with mathematical and statistical models that call for a certain degree of expertise in natural sciences, which has a foundational effect on the perception of precision and efficiency in the world of engineering (Noble, 1977; Lucciarrelli, 1994; Newberry, 2015). In a sense, efficiency lays the groundwork for accuracy in AI systems. Participants overwhelmingly noted that when it is efficient and accurately meets the need, AI is working correctly. Efficiency, the main value of classical engineering (Faulkner, 2015; Newberry, 2015), is reproduced in software engineering as well.

When asked what algorithmic bias is, 14 of 20 participants emphasized the technical and its connection to accuracy. One participant noted, for example, “I mean, [algorithmic bias] is simply a deviation, the algorithm doing things in a way that you don’t expect it to do. It deviates from your way, you know? Resulting in an undesirable outcome that might take longer to get or with reduced accuracy, something like that” (P10, Private Sector). When asked if they provided a technical or social description of algorithmic bias and why that description came to their mind, the same participant answered right away, with a clear, one-word answer followed by an interesting question: “Technical. (...) What is [algorithmic] bias in sociology? You guys know how to code?!” (P10, Private Sector). For our participants, the people who write, code and develop algorithms, algorithmic bias is a systematic deviation, a set of errors and loops that hinders the efficiency of the outcomes of algorithmic data processing (Danks & London, 2017; Fazelpour & Danks, 2021)

Key findings indicate that the perception of engineers on AI is heavily shaped by a technical-rational worldview, underlining efficiency as both the main value in engineering and the main goal to be achieved

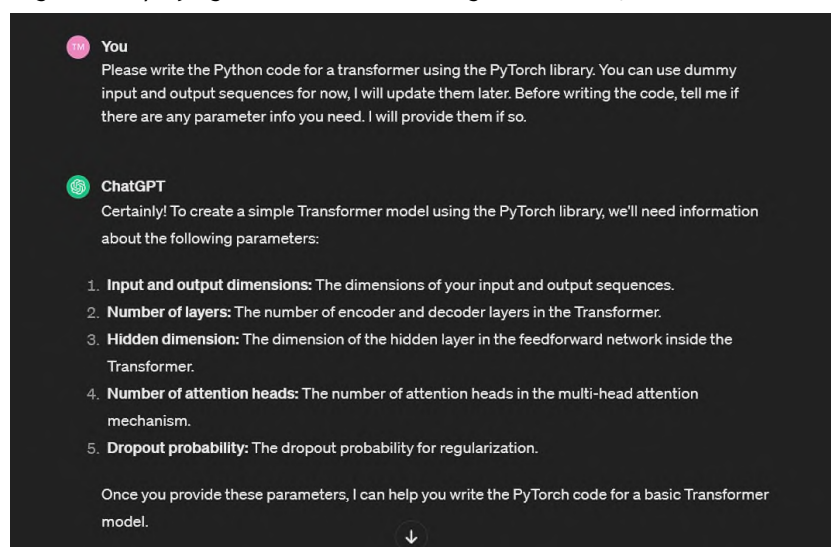
in AI systems. In this regard, the findings align with previous research on engineers, which show that the drive for efficiency is an indispensable part of engineering identities built on a technical/social dichotomy (Hughes, 1986; Bucciarelli, 1994; Newberry, 2015). In practical terms, incorporation of this dichotomic nature of engineering subtly dictates software engineers to conceptualize AI as a technically mediated, accurate and efficient technology for data processing, often overlooking the social aspects that constitute this technology, in the end, juxtaposing them with the technical aspects of AI rather than the social aspects as tech experts with a limited understanding of the social aspects. The following section will present how engineers perceive generative AI and datasets in their own work.

Sidekick or an Unlikely Hero? Engineers' Interpretation of Generative AI Platforms in Their Works

AI development can be broken down into two phases: algorithm coding and training. In order to understand the initial coding phase, participants were asked to provide a chronological explanation on how they code and train algorithms in their work. 15 out of 20 participants stated that, at the very beginning of AI development, they use generative AI software to generate code for a specific project. For the engineers that we interviewed, generative AI, in particular ChatGPT, was an important member of their team. They often began the coding process by consulting ChatGPT and then would go back and forth with ChatGPT as they continued to refine the code. A participant exemplified this pattern when he explained, "First thing I do. Hmm... First, I go and ask ChatGPT how to write the code in the [coding] language that I am using, have myself a solid ground to work on." (P1, Academic).

Figure 1

Engineer Employing ChatGPT as a knowledge source (P13, Academic)

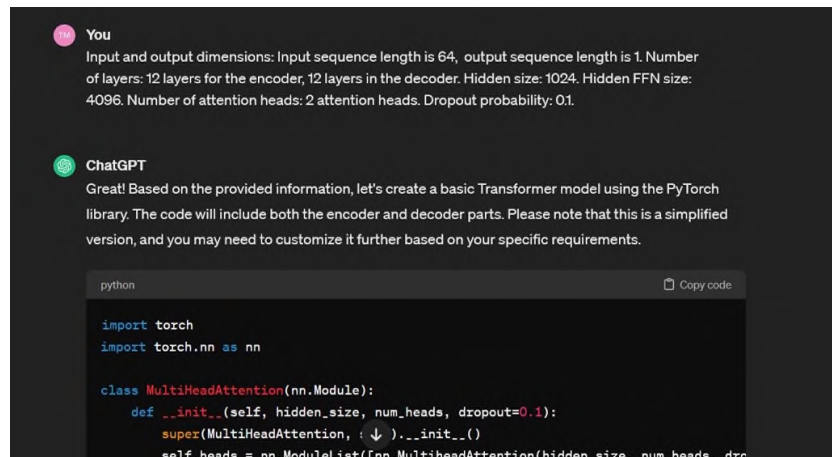


When asked why they used ChatGPT, participants often explained that "it is a time saver" as they often referred to market needs on being time and labor efficient as a must. A participant exemplifies this pattern when she notes, "You know, actually nobody codes from scratch anymore. It saves you so much time using ChatGPT and Copilot. In our company, we use ChatGPT as a tool to sketch ideas and Copilot to write codes fast and complete. Sometimes it will take days or even weeks to find an error in your code and correct it. If you do it on your own, you have to go through thousands of lines [of codes], map them and detect errors.

This is a fast-growing industry; you actually race against time in completing a project. [Using AI] is a must in this business, if I am to be honest” (P6, Company owner).

Figure 2

Engineer providing details for ChatGPT to make it write the code (P13, Academic)



All participants (20 out of 20) reported using ChatGPT to sort out errors in the code. Again, the reason for using ChatGPT was related to achieving maximum time efficiency. Exemplifying this response among participants, one noted, “More often than not, the code has some errors and flaws in it (...) In a large scale project, you have maybe tens of thousands of lines of code written to get your algorithm to work. It is literally impossible to go back, find the error, correct it and try giving it a go again, because there will always be errors. If you try to do it on your own you will need the whole time in the world!” (P13, Academic).

Engineers tend to not question what values are embedded in ChatGPT and other generative AI platforms. When asked if they know how ChatGPT works and what effects it might have on their projects, all participants reported that they do not know how ChatGPT works. As one participant stated, “No one knows how ChatGPT works. You can only assume it. OpenAI does not disclose [the technicalities of] its models and the truth is, even if they went all-open, it is too complex to understand how a system that big works. (...) But the most important thing is that: their models are trained on certain data before they are out and they are not open on which data it is and how they collected it” (P4, Academic).

Throughout the interviews, it is observed that the drive for achieving maximum efficiency has become the major value for engineers’ perception of the technologies they both create and use. As the previous section has highlighted, the effect of the efficiency-driven character of engineering identities has a constitutional effect on how engineers perceive AI. Their perceptions of the use of generative AI platforms in their works show a different aspect of efficiency fetishism. Engineers employ ChatGPT in their works to meet the market demands, which they conceptualize as a highly competitive one. ChatGPT gives them a tool, or a source of knowledge, to efficiently complete their works in a time and labor efficient way that the field itself demands. At the intersection of efficiency-based engineering identities (Newberry, 2015; Faulkner, 2015) and the alienating effect of the tech-driven pursuit of efficiency constituting the market/field (Braverman; 1974; Marx, 1992/1867), participants’ view of ChatGPT detaches the platform from its social aspects, reducing it to a mere technology used for efficiently handling business. The social is overlooked in favor of efficiency once more.

Fuel for the Machine: How Do Engineers Interpret Datasets in Their Work?

The second phase of AI development involves using datasets to train algorithms to identify patterns. To understand the training phase and how engineers perceive datasets, they were asked to explain what data is and how they use it in their work. When thinking about the training data, the participants emphasized approximation and consistency. As one participant noted, data is a cluster of knowledge that needs to be processed with correct technical approaches:

“Data is basically approximating what we do not know. To make sense of it, you use certain ML methods to process the data and the algorithms start to learn and discriminate between what data holds. Your model must meet the data [it processes], that is the main point of AI development; finding the right approach to data” (P1, Academic).

Participants were asked if they use their own data or ready datasets provided by certain communities or corporations. In all cases, participants stated that they do not use their own data but instead used datasets from other sources. When asked which datasets they mainly use in their music AI works, answers provided by the vast majority of participants show that datasets utilized as the main source of training data by engineers who aim to develop music composition algorithms actually resemble a monopoly in the field of music AI:

“LAKH and Wikifonia” (P2, Academic).

“LAKH, mainly. Wikifonia is also good” (P11, Private Sector).

“LAKH and sometimes Music21” (P4, Academic).

The most mentioned dataset emerged as LAKH. It has a description on its website as “the Lakh MIDI dataset is a collection of 176.581 unique MIDI files, 45.129 of which have been matched and aligned to entries in the Million Song Dataset”. Basically, this dataset has approximately 180.000 sound entries and almost 46.000 of them are aligned to Million Song Dataset, featuring the metadata of a million contemporary songs. As mentioned above, this resembles a monopoly; one dataset dominating the field of music AI.

When participants were asked if they have an opinion on why certain datasets are dominating the field of music AI, none of the participants provided a clear answer as it is seen that they interpret having premade datasets as a conventional way of doing work, providing consistent data for their AI models. This situation is exemplified in terms of consistency by the engineers, leaning on qualities assessed with technology once more. In other words, the technical-rational worldview of engineering is again at play in conceptualizing and using training data in AI. When asked why they build AI models on other people’s data sets, the majority of participants pointed out to the consistency they are trying to achieve, using terms “input” and “output” mostly. For participants, the goal is to generate consistent models that would take data as input and provide ‘meaningful’ outputs. A participant illustrates this point of view when he explained, “Think it as this: you have your input, which is data and your end goal is having meaningful outputs based on this input, like estimations. You might think this as the human mind; this is coffee, what’s meaningful for me is the taste of coffee, not its color, right? This is why you start by deciding on your data. If you wish to have an opinion on coffee, you need to learn what coffee tastes like in order to determine which one is best for you. If you try to estimate coffee by its color, it won’t do anything good, right?” (P16, Academic).

When pressed to think about how inequalities are built into training data, participants reported that algorithms without bias is a non-achievable ideal since it is impossible to have unbiased data to train algorithms and AI systems. Moreover, even if there is an AI system running on algorithms free of bias, the system will not reflect the actual world, making it both less accurate and less useful. As one participant

explained, “Unbiased AI systems or algorithms in terms of that is not achievable. Why, you ask? It is simple because the training data is biased. It is human data. So, humans are biased, right? We cannot expect to have unbiased data from humans. In theory, first, you’ll need the data of all people who are actually present in the world. Second, you’ll need maybe thousands of months, maybe years to label these data accordingly. Third, there is no computer that can actually process that amount of data, maybe with quantum computers in the future, but not today. Also, what is the point of that? If we can do that, we do not need AI” (P7, Academic).

After being asked if they know who made the datasets they use in their work and the origin of the sounds in the datasets, all participants reported that they did not know who made their dataset, the dataset’s origin, if musicians were involved in the creation of the dataset and if there were any copyright issues. Not only did they not know about these issues, they were also not major concerns. Exemplifying this perspective, one participant noted, “it is open source, anyone can contribute to it. Can be a musician or not, it is based on a digital form of sound so it is not actually sound. (...) Copyright is a hard thing, a big issue in music AI. You cannot use licensed content in your work. But people always find a way [to short circuit licensing issues] (laughs)” (P6, Company owner).

For participants, training data is a cluster (or many clusters) of information, which provides the basis for AI—it needs to be processed using correct technical tools and approaches to achieve consistent outcomes. The technicality imbued worldview of engineering seems to have a crucial effect on how engineers perceive data, as in engineers’ minds, it is detached from its social and political aspects and reduced to a technological tool to achieve the best possible outcomes with maximum consistency and efficiency. Although participants recognize the politics of data sets when pressed, they consider this issue as outside their purview. In the next section, we will present an analysis of AI as a network consisting of humans and nonhumans, showing how they co-constitute AI together with certain ideologies embedded in.

Understanding AI through Actor Network Theory (ANT)

Through the analysis of the interview data and fieldwork notes, an understanding of the actors in the AI network emerges. In a sociological sense, working with generative AI can be understood as the first step of the process of AI being formed as a network. Generative AI platforms, in particular ChatGPT, are employed as sources of knowledge by participants in their networks. As described in ANT, nonhuman actors (actants) in a network gain agency through their capacity to manipulate and change human action (Latour, 1993; 2005). In the context of AI, agency in a network is defined by its capacity to connect the other actors together (Jaton, 2020). AI intervention does not stop there, though. Employed at the beginning, generative AI becomes a participant in the project as it is used by participants to correct mistakes and debug the algorithm. In the process, through a set of interactions back and forth, generative AI becomes a participant of the network; human and machine agency working together, lines blurring, with a new, sociotechnical hybrid formed (Latour, 1993, 2000; 2005).

As ANT provides the necessary conceptual framework and tools to depict how this hybrid network, one comprised of human and nonhuman actors, is formed, a key sociological question remains unanswered since it does not question if nonhumans in networks have a social and political character embedded in them or how these actors politically shape the network (Fine, 2005; Gille, 2010; White, 2013). To advance ANT, both human and nonhuman actors that form the network should be addressed in terms of the following questions. How does the interaction between engineers and generative AI affect the process of AI development? How are social forces embedded in the network and who (as human and nonhuman) brings what to the network? Capitalism is a central context that shapes the development of AI (Gray & Suri, 2019; Crawford,

2021; Ozer et al. 2024). Efficiency, which is analyzed as a central theme and one of the founding values of capitalism (Marx, 1992/1867), is crucial to this context.

Studies on generative AI have shown that many questions still need to be answered in terms of what values are embedded in these technologies. Based on an extensive literature review, some scholars have observed seven controversies and risks generative AI technologies, including a) no regulation in AI market, b) lack of quality control and algorithmic bias, c) job displacement, d) personal data violation and surveillance e) social manipulation and weakening ethics, f) widening socio-economic inequalities, and g) AI-related technostress (Wach et al., 2023). Based on our observations, these controversies and risks incorporated in generative AI systems are not unknown to engineers as none of the participants have answered the question if there is a possibility of achieving unbiased algorithms. As mentioned above, engineers are aware of algorithmic bias, but they conceptualize it in a different way than sociologists, underlining the technicalities intrinsic to the field. This conceptualization, combined with the drive for efficiency, makes engineers employ generative AI in their network as a source of knowledge, or even a teammate without an extensive consideration of its social and political characteristics with capitalist values embedded in them.

Consequently, generative AI becomes an actor in AI development. It can be considered as a mediating actant in terms of ANT, manipulating and altering human action on the course, resulting in a process that differs from what would have happened without their intervention (Latour, 1993; 2005). Engineers employ generative AI to save time and achieve maximum efficiency, with AI gaining agency in terms of amplifying human action with its speed. The final product will not be the same if there was no intervention from generative AI as it acts as a source of knowledge to engineers, charting the way for AI development. In this sense, the lines between human and machine are blurred, thus creating a sociotechnical hybrid (Latour, 2000; 2005; Jatón, 2020). At the intersection of capitalist values such as meeting market demands, exploitation of labor and data violence, the sacrifice of ethics for the need to achieve maximum efficiency and profit embedded within both human and nonhuman actors, the network becomes a co-process of humans and nonhumans, operated by the capitalist drive of efficiency acting as the foundational value. In this sense, engineers adopting the worldview of engineering become the deacons of capitalism (Noble, 1977) embedded in technological efficiency and neutrality (Faulkner, 2015; Newberry, 2015). One crucial part of AI must be addressed in terms of these to fully understand this network, that is, training data, the fuel for the AI engine.

The AI network continues to expand by including training data to feed the algorithms after the initial coding phase. There are two main algorithm training approaches in ML methods. The first is reinforcement learning, in which algorithms train under human supervision, and the second is profoundly named as deep learning, which employs large numbers of labeled data inducted into AI algorithms to make them learn on their own (Sheikh et al., 2023). Besides technicalities, data can be assessed as the part that determines what an AI algorithm will learn. In sociology, data is widely considered as how high-tech empires built on exploitation of labor of many people making little or no money for labeling volumes of data used in training algorithms (Fuchs, 2010; Gray & Suri, 2019; Mühlhoff, 2020) and how cultural bias is transmitted into AI systems (Katz, 2020; Airoidi, 2022).

In terms of ANT, data becomes yet another non-human actor in the network, playing its role in shaping the network. The dataset functions as a comprehensive repository of musical compositions that shape the algorithm's advancement and influence the algorithm's understanding of music theory and structure, as well as its ability to generate compositions. Incorporating these datasets into the development process requires balancing the interests of the software engineer, the algorithm, and the dataset. The engineer needs

to assess the dataset's appropriateness for their goals, adjust the algorithm to efficiently learn from the dataset, and the dataset's composition impacts the direction and emphasis of the development work. The use of datasets for algorithmic training significantly affects the originality and distinctiveness of the music it generates; thus, it gains agency in terms of ANT (Latour, 1993; 2005). It exerts an influence on the creative process by assimilating specific musical information and prejudices into the algorithm, thereby affecting the final outcome to reflect the characteristics of the dataset. The network continues to expand with the addition of a new nonhuman actor. Engineer, ChatGPT and datasets are now seem to be merged in one another, creating the final form of the hybrid AI network (Latour, 2005).

As we navigate our way through the complex relationships and interactions constituting AI-in-practice, the conceptual and methodological toolset of ANT made it possible to depict the actor network of AI development. Here we advance ANT by situating human and non-human actors like engineers, generative AI and datasets within social forces such as the ideologies of capitalism; the drive for efficiency, rationality and technicality to bring the unseen into light. The research indicates that capitalism is not the only power structure at play in the network. There is one more power structure embedded in the final product, the music composition algorithm itself: Western imperialism.

The conceptualization of data as a neutral tool by participants poses a question that can be briefly formulated as follows: What kind of music do they compose? Is it biased? To answer that question, participants were first asked what kind of music their algorithms compose or transcribe best. All participants gave the answer as Western music, none of them mentioned an AI algorithm composing Eastern music as their work. As vastly explored in the sociology of music, music has been utilized by colonial forces and the capitalist elite to institutionalize Western imperialism (Gilroy, 1995; Turino, 2000) and capitalism (Adorno, 1988; 2001/1944) in societies, using instruments, music schools, musicians and the music itself as a form of art.

In order to elucidate how these two major social forces are embedded in the network of music AI, the participants were asked if it is possible to compose non-Western music (like Turkish, Persian, Chinese, Indian music, representing the middle or far East) using their algorithms. The main themes once more emerge as efficiency and consistency of data and algorithm produce together, showing the intertwinement of capitalism and Western imperialism in the network of AI:

"Of course it won't work correctly because it is not based on that music. [By that] I mean the data. To compose good Eastern music, you must train your model on Eastern music data. It will be irrelevant I think, a bad song." (P3, Academic).

This returns us to the question of data and the effects of the social and political character embedded within it. According to the participants, most datasets comprise sound files representing Western popular music and related subgenres as data; in other words, the abovementioned monopoly over data imbues it with Western music, incorporating Western imperialism within. Thus, imperialism becomes the political character of data, which is transmitted to the AI network by one of the actors shaping it. The question, then, becomes as this: why is there not a reliable source of data for non-Western music? Yet again, the intersection between major social forces and actors of AI network are at interplay as answers provided by participants make two themes emerge resting on embedded capitalism and imperialism both in human and nonhuman, first being standardization:

“Well, microtonal music is difficult to annotate as data, the commas make it hard [to label and process as data]. There are many notes in Eastern music. Some people need to dedicate real labor to this. This is the main reason [of lack of non-Western music data] I think.” (P2, Academic).

Findings indicate that the main reason for Western music being the dominant mode of music in music AI is closely linked with the rationalization of music. Openness to standardization, which rests upon order, predictability and stability in Western music harmonies and tonalities, makes Western music a rationalized institution, giving way for it to be the dominant mode of music both in the East and the West, instilling capitalist bureaucratization and imperialist power structures into music (Weber, 1958/1921). This sociological feature of Western music is carried into the digital world through music composition AI algorithms, reproducing imperialism in a digitalized and subtle mode.

The second theme, closely interlinked with the standardization of music composed by AI, can be described as getting aligned with capitalist interests. When participants asked to what is their end goal with their AI algorithms and if these technologies are capable of creating artistic music, the answers are surprisingly diverse, yet resembling each other. Engineers tend to classify artistic music as a humane form of music, reflecting human creativity. What music AI composes is classified as background or elevator music, which is a form of commercial music used as jingles in stores, TV series, or background music of any kind. The end goal seems simple: selling big. One participant who is a PhD student working as a teaching assistant in a university describes his goal as follows:

“Well, I do not get paid enough in my job. There is no money in the music business, though. My endgame is selling my product to big companies, this is how you get paid. Streaming services, for instance, they pay good money for jingles, or stores, malls, the background music. This is where the money is at” (P4, Academic).

The same goes for private businesses as well:

“Our aim is to help people create music, yes. But music AI is not at a level that can actually generate good, artistic music. It is used for background music mostly; the music you listen while shopping or an opening jingle for a TV series, maybe some atmospheric music in movies” (P10, Company owner).

According to engineers, AI is not capable of producing artistic music, which suggests that “music” and “musicians” may remain largely unaffected by automation. However, questions remain about the implications for studio musicians—the often unseen contributors who create background music typically designed to enhance an atmosphere or mood without drawing focus away from the main activity or setting, such as in restaurants, stores, or films and the musicians whose music has been annotated as training data to feed AI systems. This raises issues about capitalism’s role in the AI landscape, with AI expanding labor market transformations creating new social challenges and amplifying inequalities (Ozer et al., 2024; Acemoglu et al., 2022) to benefit corporate interests. These challenges, besides the macrostructural economic changes, mainly stem from the conceptualization of AI technologies by AI practitioners. As mentioned above, engineers tend to perceive data purely as a technical resource, often overlooking the complex ethical considerations of stakeholders. When asked if they were aware of the ethical concerns associated with the datasets used to train AI models, such as issues of consent and compensation for musicians, the responses were often vague and ambivalent. One engineer stated, for example, “I do not know, to be honest. I see where you’re coming from—data privacy is a concern, yes... In short, yes, it is not possible to get consent from everyone, and maybe there are some people—musicians—who might feel upset about it” (P1, Academic). Engineers’ focus on the technical aspects of technologies helps produce a lack of attention to and knowledge about how to navigate the ethical aspects of AI.

Moreover, the issue of compensating musicians whose work is used as training data for music AI also appears unresolved. When asked if musicians were compensated for their contributions to training data, responses often signaled acceptance of the lack of paid work. One participant remarked, "Well, of course, not everyone's getting paid. That part is true. But no one is getting paid, man. I told you before, there is no money in the music business. Who's going to pay the musicians? Me? I don't get paid either!" (P4, Academic). In this context, musicians are increasingly becoming a source of low-cost or unpaid labor in the AI industry, a shift that exemplifies broader transformations in labor that exacerbate inequalities within the job market (Ozer & Perc, 2024). This dynamic mirrors what Gray and Suri (2019) describe as "ghost work"—the often invisible, undervalued labor force that supports AI systems, largely unrecognized and undercompensated for their contributions.

Ultimately, music AI emerges as a highly standardized product of an AI network, co-produced by engineers, generative AI models, and datasets—all of which carry embedded social and political power dynamics in the form of values and beliefs. Primarily generating Western-centric popular music, music AI sociotechnical systems reflect and reproduce existing power asymmetries, subtly reinforcing the Western influence in the digitalized music landscape. This network of human and non-human collaborators is imbued with capitalist values, including efficiency, technicality, and profit maximization. In this context, the drive for maximum efficiency often supersedes ethical considerations, relegating musicians to the invisible labor force, or "ghost work," which constitute music AI.

Conclusion

In this paper, we investigated the production of AI as a sociotechnical system. To understand how AI is developed and how it gains its social and political character, we utilized ANT as our theoretical framework, suggesting that AI can not be understood solely based on technical or social viewpoints. Using ANT's concepts of hybridity and networks shows how AI is developed as a network through the interconnected work of both human and nonhuman actors. To advance ANT in a way that can answer macro sociological questions, we examined the social forces that co-produce the interactions of human and nonhuman actors and the development of AI platforms.

Adopting this viewpoint showed that AI algorithmic bias is not solely based on engineers' cultural and political dispositions. Instead, bias is produced through a complex set of interactions between social contexts (e.g., capitalism and imperialism) and human and nonhuman actors. In the processes of writing/coding and training algorithms, nonhuman actors such as generative AI and datasets play a crucial role, mediating the process we named as AI network. Engineers, who have adopted the main values of capitalism such as achieving maximum efficiency, reliability and profit, and promote technological neutrality, utilize ChatGPT as a source of knowledge in the process of AI development. This use in turn affects their modes of thought and practices, creating a hybrid network in which human and machine agencies become inextractable throughout continuous interactions. With ChatGPT, which is also a black box to engineers, the AI network not only gains its first nonhuman actor but throughout all these interactions the values and ideologies of capitalism are introduced into the network, altering the network's course of action to prioritize the desire to achieve maximum efficiency and profit. With the introduction of homogeneous datasets, the network expands not only by being a hybrid entity with increased complexity but also by bringing imperialism into the network as an embedded social force. The end result: whether intentional or not, the music composition algorithm equals the values, courses of action, and social and political characters of capitalism, imperialism, and the interactions of human and nonhuman actors.

This study contributes to the sociology of AI literature by providing a framework for sociologists to open the black box redux of AI. To help imagine more just AI sociotechnical systems, it is crucial to challenge the technological/social dichotomy and identify the values and politics embedded in the choices that comprise the content and design of AI systems. Thus, this paper is also a call for sociologists to engage with STS more and bring sociotechnical systems into question using sociological methods. It is our hope that this paper will serve the community of sociology as a steppingstone to explore AI as a network within different social contexts other than the US.



Ethics Committee Approval	Ethics approval was obtained from Aydın Adnan Menderes University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research Publication Ethics Board (Date: 01.12.2023, Decision: 09/18).
Informed Consent	Consent was obtained from the participants' parents.
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- B.E., K.J.; Data Acquisition- B.E.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- B.E., K.J.; Drafting Manuscript- B.E.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- K.J.; Final Approval and Accountability- B.E., K.J.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Examine the Relationship between Health Literacy Level and Over-the-Counter (Otc) Product Consumption During the Period of the Global Pandemic Caused by Covid-19



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Abstract

This study contributes to the literature by examining the relationship between individuals' health literacy levels and their consumption of over-the-counter products. The sample of the study consisted of 416 individuals aged 18 years and over, who were reached through Google Forms and patients and their relatives who were hospitalized in the emergency and units of Prof. Dr. Süleyman Yalçın City Hospital in Istanbul. The data were analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation models were used statistically.

The study revealed a positive correlation between health literacy and customer satisfaction. In addition, fear of COVID-19 was found to have a positive effect on customer satisfaction. Another factor found to have a positive effect on customer satisfaction was perceived economic value. Perceived economic risk was found to have a significant negative effect on perceived economic value. Fear of COVID-19 was found to have a positive effect on perceived risk. As a result, it was concluded that studies to increase the health literacy of individuals are necessary to increase customer satisfaction in the consumption of health products.

Keywords

Over-the-counter Medicines · OTC · Health Literacy · COVID-19 · Customer Satisfaction

Author Note

This study was prepared by Dr. Muhammed Esat Çetin under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Veysel Bozkurt based on his doctoral dissertation titled written in 2022 "The Effect of the Health Literacy Level of Individuals on the Consumption of Health Products in the Covid-19 Process".

The Editor-in-Chief was not involved in the evaluation, peer-review and decision processes of the article. These processes were carried out by the member editors of the editorial management board.



Citation: Çetin, M. E. (2025). Examine the relationship between health literacy level and over-the-counter (Otc) product consumption during the period of the global pandemic caused by Covid-19. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 21-37. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1520365>

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Examine the Relationship between Health Literacy Level and Over-the-Counter (Otc) Product Consumption During the Period of the Global Pandemic Caused by Covid-19

The consumption of health products in the health expenditures of individuals has a significant role in numerous areas of healthy life, including treatment, protection, nutrition and exercise in daily life. In particular, the concept of self-medication has led to a rise in individual health expenditures in recent times. Individuals purchase over-the-counter (OTC) products, particularly from pharmacies, because of their own experiences, recommendations or internet research (Çetin, 2022).

The rise in health expenditure may reduce the allocation of funds for basic living expenses. Conversely, an excessive increase in health expenditure may have a detrimental effect on the standard of living. Factors such as the lack of health insurance or difficulties in accessing health services can contribute to individuals resorting to self-medication. From another perspective, self-medication refers to the purchase of medicines directly from pharmacies for the treatment of simple illnesses that do not require an appointment to be examined or that do not require a hospital visit (Ogasawara et al., 2000). The phenomenon of self-medication is becoming increasingly prevalent across the globe (Baracaldo-Santamaría et al., 2022). Consequently, the OTC drug market is expanding in terms of both the number of products available and the number of consumers purchasing them. Research is being conducted to assess the advantages and risks associated with self-medication (Ogasawara et al., 2000). In light of the aforementioned considerations, research on the concept of self-medication is becoming increasingly important (Baracaldo-Santamaría et al., 2022).

For individuals to have easy, effective and efficient access to health services, it is necessary to increase their health knowledge, improve their understanding and evaluation capacities on health issues and, in other words, to enhance their health literacy (Sørensen et al., 2012). In recent times, states and international organizations have sought to facilitate individuals' access to health services, increase their use of health services, and utilize the facilities and capabilities of health systems more effectively and efficiently in accordance with the concept of health literacy. In this context, the definition of health literacy proposed by the World Health Organization is of particular significance: "Health literacy is linked to literacy and refers to the knowledge, motivation and competence of people to access, understand, evaluate and apply health information to make judgments and decisions in daily life to maintain or improve quality of life throughout their lives through health services, disease prevention and health promotion." (Nutbeam & Kickbusch, 1998). As the definition indicates, the objective of enhancing health literacy encompasses not only the provision of information but also the promotion of an active attitude change.

The consumption and saving behaviors of individuals are influenced by extraordinary processes. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the demand for health products is also noteworthy. In consumer behavior, the shift toward online purchasing has been a notable change (Sheth, 2020). The analysis of the reasons for the relationship between individuals' consumption of health products in extraordinary periods and crises, and the comparison of the effects of this relationship in different groups, production planning and market processes of health products, which play a vital role in the provision of health services, is of great importance for individuals to access these products in a healthy way (Zwanka & Buff, 2021). The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of an individual's health literacy level on their consumption of health products during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The health products analyzed in this study are limited to OTC health products whose consumption is increasing. In the study, the consumption behaviors of consumers were also examined with regard to their economic dimensions. In this sense, the statements of the perceived value and perceived risk scales were adapted to evaluate the economic dimensions of consumers' perceived risk and value. In addition, the purchase intention and consumer satisfaction scales were also adapted from the ready-made scales. The fear experienced by individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic was evaluated using the COVID-19 Fear Scale. Additionally, the Health Literacy Scale was employed to assess health literacy.

Method

Research Sample

One of the reasons for working on the sample is to overcome the cost difficulties of working on the universe of the research, as well as the time and space difficulties. In scientific studies, it is aimed to work on sufficiently large samples representing the universe. The aim is to collect valid and reliable data rather than collecting a lot of data (Karasar, 2012). The sample size table provided by Tutar and Erdem (2020) in their literature on sample size in quantitative research indicates that a sample size of 384 is required for a population size of more than 100,000 people at a 95% confidence interval (Tutar & Erdem, 2020).

While collecting data both face-to-face and via google-form, volunteers participating in the survey were selected in both survey groups, and all individuals over the age of 18 who consumed over-the-counter health products were included in the study. During the Covid-19 outbreak, which continued during the period when the data were collected, due to the fear of individuals from the outbreak, the researcher took the necessary precautions and collected data face-to-face in the hospital. Data were also collected via google-form so that participants could answer the questionnaire more easily under pandemic conditions.

Table 1

Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-25 Years	100	24,04
	26-33 Years	111	26,68
	34-41 Years	87	20,91
	42-49 Years	57	13,70
	50 Years and Older	59	14,18
	Missed	2	0,50
	Total	416	100,00
Marital Status	Single	172	41,3
	Married	227	54,6
	Divorced/Widowed	17	4,1
	Missed	0	0,0
	Total	416	100,00
Gender	Woman	199	47,8
	Male	215	51,7
	Total	416	100,00
Education Status	Primary and Below	19	4,6

		Frequency	Percentage
	Secondary Education	79	19,0
	University	240	57,7
	Master's Degree and Above	76	18,3
	Missed	2	0,5
	Total	416	100,00
Profession	Own business	35	8,4
	Public Sector	121	29,1
	Private Sector	107	25,7
	Housewife	35	8,4
	Student	57	13,7
	Unemployed	19	4,6
	Others	42	10,1
	Missed	0	0
	Total	416	100,00
Income Status	Less than 1500 TL*	84	20,20
	1501-3000 TL	57	13,70
	3001-5500 TL	116	27,90
	5501-8000 TL	94	22,60
	Over 8001 TL	60	14,40
	Missed	5	1,20
	Total	416	100,00

*TL: the Turkish Lira

A total of 240 patients and their relatives who applied to the emergency department of Prof. Dr. Süleyman Yalçın City Hospital and were admitted to the hospital wards were surveyed face to face. In addition, 230 people received a questionnaire via the Google-form, and 217 questionnaires were answered. Of the total 457 questionnaires, 41 were excluded from the analysis because the participants did not answer most of the questions or marked inappropriately. A total of 416 questionnaires were used in the application. The socio-demographic data of the participants are presented in [Table 1](#).

Data Collection Tool

To determine the variables and to determine the most appropriate scales for use in the study, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature was conducted, and the scales that could be employed were evaluated. The suitability of the scale expressions for use in our study and the opinions of experts were considered in the selection of the scales. The statements of the original scales translated into Turkish and used in different studies were compared, and the statements were adapted to our study. The results of these studies created a questionnaire, which was organized around the scales. The 5-point Likert expressions of the Purchase Intention, Customer Satisfaction, Perceived Risk and Perceived Value and COVID-19 Fear scales are organized as follows: 1-strongly disagree, 2-strongly disagree and 3-undecided. The 5-point Likert expressions of the Health Literacy Scale are as follows: 1-very difficult, 2-difficult, 3-undecided, 4-easy, 5-very easy. The questionnaire is composed of three sections. In the initial section, respondents are informed about the questionnaire and the concept of OTC medications is elucidated in detail. They were then asked

to indicate which OTC medications they believed were effective in determining their decision to purchase OTC health products. The second section of the questionnaire comprises the scales. This study comprises 40 statements, which are divided into six distinct sections. The first section encompasses the Perceived Value, Customer Satisfaction, Perceived Risk, Purchase Intention, Health Literacy and COVID-19 Fear scales. The second section comprises a series of questions about the demographic data of the respondents, including whether they have had the disease, their vaccination status and their level of trust in pharmaceutical companies. The third and final section comprises a series of questions about the respondents' experiences of the disease and their views on the efficacy of vaccines.

The scale statements provided in the questionnaire were developed following the pilot study, with the sole inclusion of economic dimensions. In the measurement of health literacy, the TSOY-32 scale, developed by Okyay & Abacıgil (2016), comprises two dimensions: "Treatment and Service" and "Disease Prevention/Health Promotion". In the present study, the 16-statement "Disease Prevention/Health Promotion" dimension of the scale was employed to examine the impact of this process on the consumption of health products and the protection of individuals from the SARS-CoV-2 virus, particularly during the ongoing pandemic. (Okyay & Abacıgil, 2016). To measure the fear of COVID-19, two different scales were employed: the scale created by Ahorsu et al (2020) and the scale created by Bakioğlu et al (2021). (Ahorsu et al., 2020; Bakioğlu et al., 2021). To ascertain the perceived value of the subject matter, the studies of Lee et al (2012) and Yeşilyurt (2018) were consulted, with the five statements in our study being adapted accordingly (Lee et al., 2012; Yeşilyurt, 2018). The four statements used to measure patient satisfaction were adapted from Oliver (1980), Sütütemiz (2005) and Yeşilyurt (2018).

Data Analysis

In this study, IBM SPSS Statistics 21 and AMOS 24 software were used to analyze the data collected through the questionnaire. This involved the application of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) followed by the use of structural equation models. CFA was used to validate the scales used in our study and to test the fit of the data. Considering the effectiveness and advantages of structural equation models in examining situations that cannot be measured directly, such as perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, structural equation modeling was used in our study.

Findings

Validity and Reliability

In the scale development and utilization process, CFA was performed separately for the scales to be used. The goodness of fit values of each scale were found to be above the acceptable limits in the CFA (Table 2). The covariances between the error terms are shown in the structural equation model table. Furthermore, following the removal of each item from the analysis due to inappropriate factor loadings, the analysis was repeated and the factor loadings were re-examined (Table 4).

Table 2

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Values

	P değeri	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA	Hoelter.05
Customer Satisfaction	0,026	3,636	0,992	0,959	0,994	0,996	0,08	342
Health Literacy	0	3,761	0,946	0,904	0,955	0,966	0,082	161
COVID-19 Fear Scale	0	4,904	0,97	0,907	0,975	0,98	0,097	160

	P değeri	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA	Hoelter.05
Perceived Risk	0,043	2,725	0,992	0,961	0,992	0,995	0,064	397
Perceived Value	0,004	4,494	0,987	0,937	0,99	0,992	0,092	241

Cronbach's alpha is the most commonly used coefficient to reflect reliability because it considers reliability consistently and across all statements. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha reflects the correlation between the questions. In our study, Cronbach's Alpha values of the scales were calculated. A Cronbach's Alpha value approaching 1 indicates the reliability of the statements. In general, a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.80 or higher is set as a highly reliable value.

In a model, the combined reliability value (CR) and the average variance explained (AVE) provide crucial data for the construct validity of the model. A CFA model is expected to meet the conditions of $AVE > 0.5$, $CR > 0.7$, and $CR > AVE$ for its validity and reliability (Karaman, 2023; Yaşlıoğlu, 2017). Upon analysis of the Cronbach's Alpha, AVE (Average Variance Extracted) and CR values, the data demonstrate robust validity and reliability (Table 3).

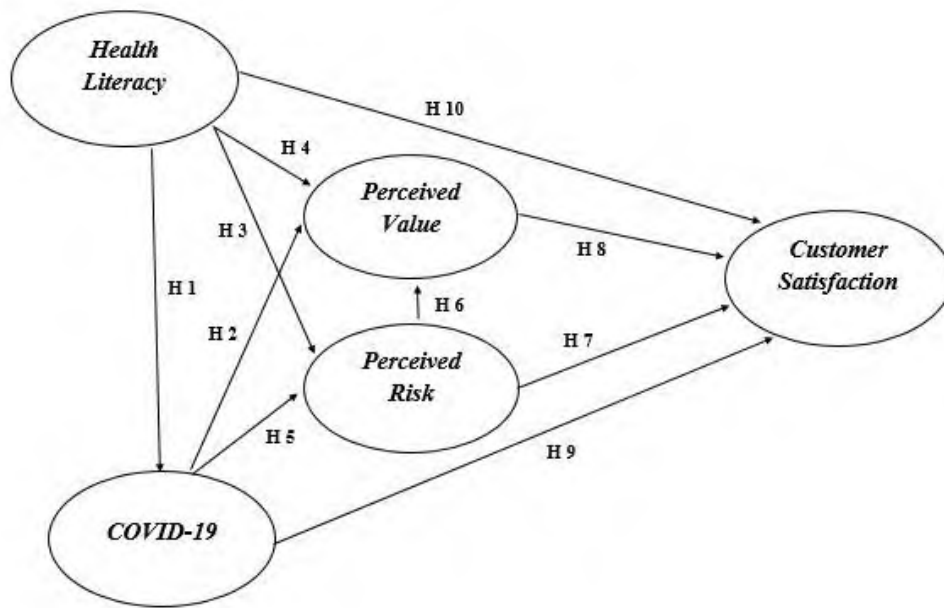
Table 3

Cronbach's Alpha, CR and AVE values

	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	CR	AVE
Perceived Value	0,887	0,875	0,588
Perceived Risk	0,867	0,853	0,542
Health Literacy	0,92	0,908	0,501
COVID-19 Fear Scale	0,894	0,88	0,518
Customer Satisfaction	0,921	0,92	0,741

Testing the Model with Structural Equation Modeling

In the process of testing the structural model of our model, the hypotheses are indicated with arrows. The statistically significant ones were evaluated with their p-values, goodness of fit values, standardized regression coefficients, and the statistically insignificant ones were removed from the model. The theoretical model of the model established to be examined with structural equation modeling is given below.

Figure 1*Hypothesis diagram of the Theoretical Model*

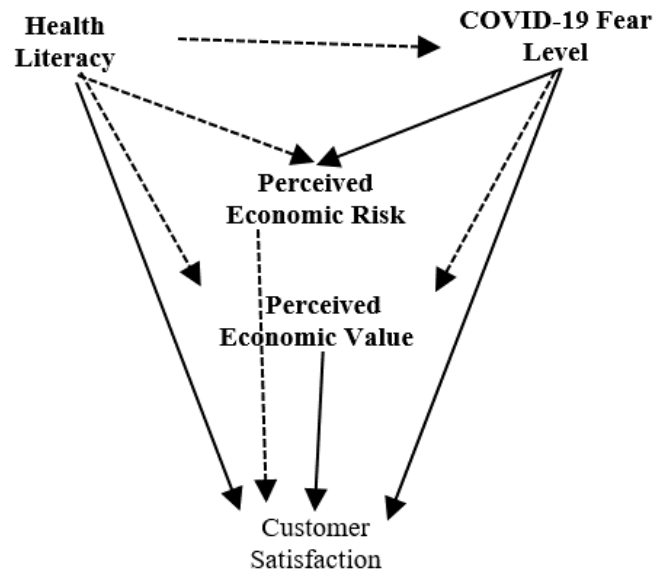
H1: Health literacy negatively affects fear of COVID-19, H2: Fear of COVID-19 positively affects perceived value, H3: Health literacy positively affects perceived risk, H4: Health literacy positively affects perceived value, H5: Fear of COVID-19 positively affects perceived risk, H6: Perceived value negatively affects perceived risk, H7: Perceived risk negatively affects customer satisfaction, H8: Perceived value positively affects customer satisfaction, H9: Fear of COVID-19 positively affects customer satisfaction, H10: Health literacy positively affects customer satisfaction (Figure 1).

Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis H1 assumed that health literacy has a statistically negative effect on the fear of COVID-19. The standardized regression coefficient obtained in the structural equation model was -0.036 , the p value was 0.488 , and the hypothesis was rejected at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, there was no significant effect of health literacy on the level of fear of COVID-19. The H2 hypothesis assumed that the fear of COVID-19 has a statistically positive effect on the perceived value. The standardized regression coefficient obtained in the structural equation model was -0.015 , the p value was 0.769 , and the hypothesis was rejected at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, the fear of COVID-19 did not have a significant effect on the perceived value. Hypothesis H3 assumed that health literacy has a statistically positive effect on perceived risk. The standardized regression coefficient obtained in the structural equation model was 0.053 , the p value was 0.335 , and the hypothesis was rejected at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, there was no significant effect of health literacy on perceived risk (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Figure 2

Model Results Table (The dashed arrows indicate the rejected hypotheses, the solid arrows indicate the accepted hypotheses.)



Hypothesis H4 assumed that health literacy has a statistically positive effect on perceived value. The standardized regression coefficient obtained in the structural equation model was 0.057, the p value was 0.284 and the hypothesis was rejected at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, health literacy did not have a significant effect on perceived value. Hypothesis H5 assumed that the fear of COVID-19 has a statistically positive effect on customers' risk perceptions. The standardized regression coefficient obtained in the structural equation model was 0.143, the p value was 0.008, and the hypothesis was accepted at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, the fear of COVID-19 positively affects the perceived risk. In other words, as the fear of COVID-19 increases, the perceived risk level also increases.

Hypothesis H6 hypothesized that the perceived risk has a statistically negative effect on the perceived value. The standardized regression coefficient obtained in the structural equation model was -0.217 with a highly significant p value, and the hypothesis was accepted at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, the perceived risk has a significant effect on the perceived value. As the perceived risk increases, the perceived value levels decrease. Hypothesis H7 assumed that perceived risk has a statistically negative effect on customer satisfaction. The standardized regression coefficient obtained in the structural equation model was 0.071, the p value was 0.103, and the hypothesis was rejected at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, perceived risk has no significant effect on customer satisfaction. Hypothesis H8 hypothesized that perceived value has a statistically significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. The standardized regression coefficient obtained in the structural equation model was 0.678 with a good p value, and the hypothesis was accepted at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, the perceived value positively affects customer satisfaction. In other words, as perceived value increases, customer satisfaction levels also increase.

Hypothesis H9 assumed that the fear of COVID-19 has a statistically significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. The standardized regression coefficient obtained in the structural equation model was 0.109, the p value was 0.007, and the hypothesis was accepted at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, the fear of

COVID-19 positively affects customer satisfaction. In other words, as the fear of COVID-19 increases, customer satisfaction levels increase. Hypothesis H10 assumed that health literacy has a statistically significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. The standardized regression coefficient obtained in the structural equation model was 0.081, the p value was 0.05, and the hypothesis was accepted at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, health literacy positively affects customer satisfaction. In other words, as health literacy increases, customer satisfaction also increases (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Table 4

Model statements, confirmatory factor analysis factor loadings, and composite reliability/average variance extracted (CR/AVE) values.

Scale Expressions	Standardized regression coefficient	CR/AVE values
1. Compared to other products I could buy, these health products (over-the-counter medicines) were a good investment.	0,662	AVE: 0,588 CR: 0,875 CR>AVE
2. Given the price and the costs , I believe it is a sound decision to purchase these health products.	0,769	
3. I found these health products to be reasonably priced.	0,753	
4. These health products were a great low-cost purchase.	0,677	
5. Given the cost of shopping, it was a good decision to buy these health products.	0,942	
1. I did not make the best use of my money by buying these health products (non-prescription medicines).	0,617	AVE: 0,542 CR: 0,853 CR>AVE
2. It would be a smarter move for me to meet my needs by buying different health products.	0,732	
3. I am worried that I am not getting what I am paying for.	0,896	
4. I am concerned that I won't get the full benefit from these health products.	0,767	
5. I am concerned that the health products I buy might cause me to experience physical symptoms such as tension, headaches, or anxiety.	0,635	
2. Research and find information about conditions that can be harmful to your health, such as being overweight, high blood pressure, etc.	0,734	AVE: 0,501 CR: 0,908 CR>AVE
3. Understand health warnings about conditions that can be harmful to your health, such as being overweight and high blood pressure.	0,772	
4. Research and find information on how to deal with unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and inadequate physical activity.	0,813	
5. Understand health warnings on how to deal with unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and inadequate physical activity	0,808	
6. Research and find information about the health screenings you should have in relation to your age, gender, and health status (such as breast screenings for women and prostate screenings for men)	0,788	

Scale Expressions		Standardized regression coefficient	CR/AVE values
7. Understanding the information recommended to be healthier in sources such as the internet, newspapers, television, radio, etc.		0,736	
10. To evaluate the positive and negative features of the environment you live in (such as home, street, neighborhood) that affect health		0,566	
11. Finding information about what can be done to make the environment you live in (such as home, street, neighborhood) healthier		0,536	
12. Evaluate which of your daily behaviors (such as exercising, eating healthy, not smoking) affect your health.		0,692	
15. Advising your family or friends to be healthier		0,562	
1. I am horrified of the coronavirus (COVID-19).	Fear of COVID-19	0,583	
2. Thinking about the coronavirus makes me uncomfortable.		0,557	
3. My hands get cold and sweaty when I think about the coronavirus.		0,913	AVE: 0,518
4. I am afraid of losing my life due to the coronavirus.		0,697	CR: 0,880
5. I get nervous or worried when I see stories and news about the coronavirus on social media.		0,779	CR>AVE
6. I cannot sleep for fear of catching the coronavirus.		0,696	
7. When I think I will catch the coronavirus, my heart starts to race.		0,752	
1. These health products (non-prescription medicines) fully meet my expectations.	Customer Satisfaction	0,818	
2. I think I can meet my needs better with these health products than with other products.		0,844	AVE: 0,741
3. I think I did the right thing by choosing these health products that I need.		0,901	CR: 0,920
4. These health products satisfy me in every way.		0,879	CR>AVE

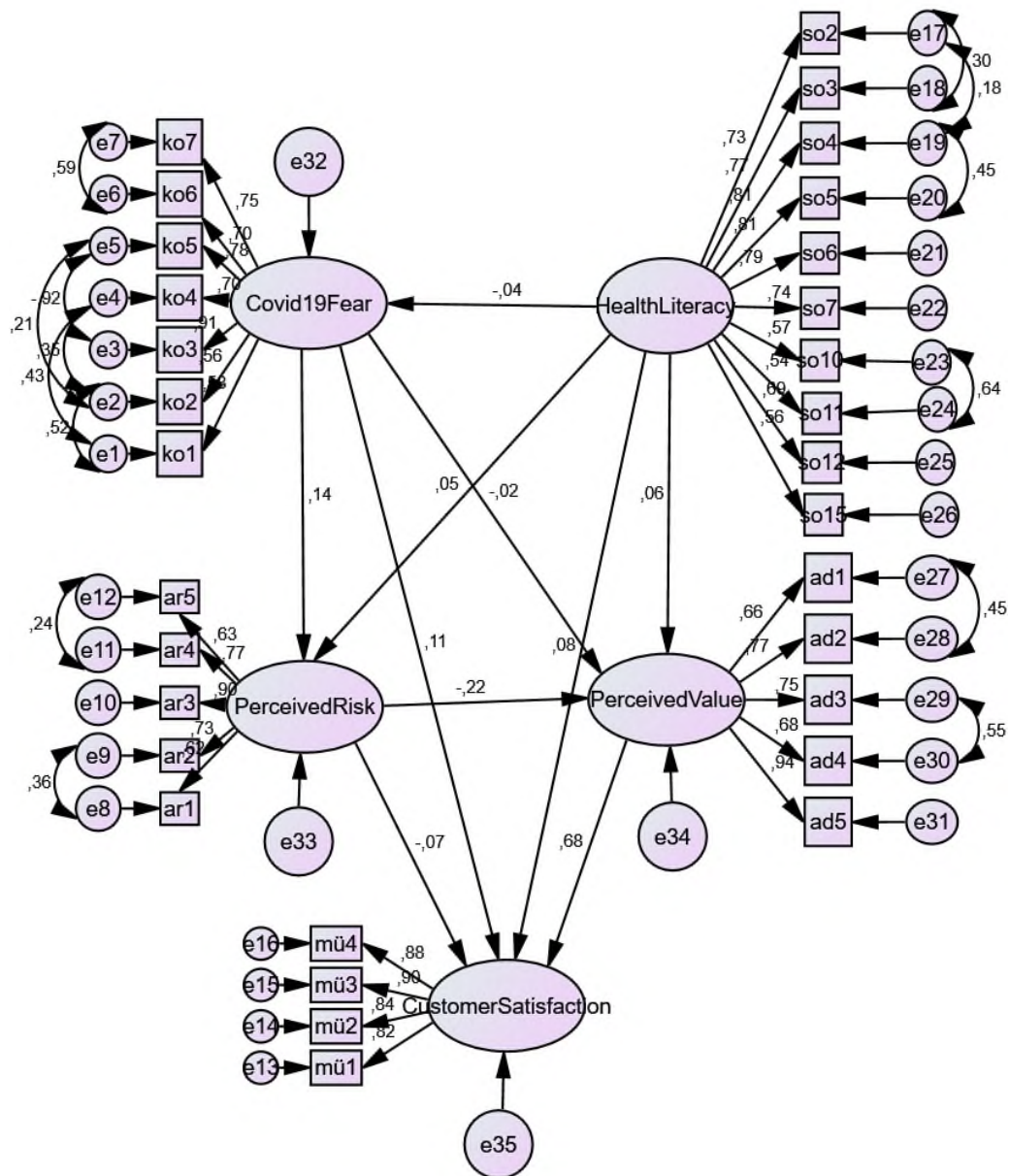
Discussion

The results of the structural model indicate a positive relationship between individuals' health literacy levels and their satisfaction with the services provided by OTC drug retailers. Additionally, the findings suggest that customers' fear levels regarding the COVID-19 also have a positive impact on their satisfaction with these services. The relationship between the positive outcomes that patients anticipate from health services, their satisfaction, and individuals' health literacy levels has been reported in the literature. In their study on organizational health literacy, Hayran and Özer (2018) demonstrated a positive correlation between health literacy and patient satisfaction. They further asserted that patients hospitalized in university hospitals exhibit higher satisfaction and health literacy levels than those in other hospitals, whereas both satisfaction and health literacy levels of patients in state hospitals are comparatively low (Hayran & Özer, 2018). The findings of our study align with those of previous research in this field. Our hypothesis that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between health literacy and customer satisfaction

was accepted at the 0.05 level of significance, with a standardized regression coefficient of 0.081 and p-values of 0.05 obtained in the structural equation model (Hypothesis H10).

Figure 3

Structural Equation Model and Standardized regression coefficients



There is a positive correlation between health literacy and customer satisfaction. In other words, as health literacy increases, customer satisfaction also increases. Individuals with higher health literacy possess greater knowledge about the benefits and side effects of the products they use, and they are more likely to have a positive opinion of these products than individuals with lower health literacy. This is consistent with the findings of studies on patient communication and health literacy in the literature (Wynia & Osborn,

2010). Similarly, the positive correlation between fear of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and customer satisfaction is corroborated by the existing literature. Patients who were able to obtain the necessary medications during the pandemic demonstrated higher levels of satisfaction with health care organizations than those who could not do so (Deriba et al., 2020). The level of fear experienced by individuals in relation to the COVID-19 has been identified as a significant factor influencing customer satisfaction. In this study, it was assumed that there is a statistically significant effect between fear of the COVID-19 and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, it was accepted that there is a significant effect at the 0.05 level with a standardized regression coefficient of 0.109 and p-values of 0.007 obtained in the structural equation model (Hypothesis H9). Accordingly, fear of the COVID-19 positively affects customer satisfaction. According to the model, as fear levels increase, customer satisfaction also increases. Likewise, individuals' perception of economic value has a significant effect on customer satisfaction. Accordingly, an increase in the perceived economic value increases customer satisfaction. The relationship between customer perceived value perception and satisfaction is consistent with the literature (Eskiler & Altunışık, 2015; Özbekler, 2019).

The most significant impact of the fear of contracting the COVID-19 on individuals is the pervasive state of uncertainty. In general, situations such as the unpredictability of the methods of combating the disease, especially in the early periods, the fact that the disease may result in death in some individuals while some individuals survive with mild symptoms, and the economic crisis caused by the pandemic environment force individuals to balance more between using more health products to protect their health and increasing economic concerns during the period of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19. Considering these circumstances, it is reasonable to hypothesize that fear of the COVID-19 will influence economic risk perception (Thomas & Feng, 2021). Similarly, the perception of economic value, in contrast to the perception of risk, is a subjective phenomenon that is influenced by the individual's experience and assessment of the worth of the product in question. As previously discussed, the impact of the COVID-19 virus varies considerably from person to person, potentially leading to diverse evaluations of the economic value associated with the disease. However, the underlying risk persists, albeit to varying degrees across individuals.

The study conducted by Yeşilyurt (2018) on the relationship between perceived risk and patient satisfaction revealed that the perceived risk levels of patients did not exert a significant negative effect on their satisfaction (Yeşilyurt, 2018). Similarly, the results of our study indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between perceived economic risk and customer satisfaction with OTC drugs. However, in our study, hypothesis H5 proposed that fear of the COVID-19 has a statistically significant effect on customers' perceived risk levels. This hypothesis was accepted at the 0.05 level of significance with a standardized regression coefficient value of 0.143 and a p-value of 0.008 obtained in the structural equation model (Hypothesis H5). Consequently, fear of the COVID-19 positively affects perceived risk.

The findings of our study indicate that fear of the COVID-19 did not have a significant impact on individuals' perceptions of economic value. Conversely, the perception of economic risk had a significant effect on the perception of economic value. In the model, it was assumed that the fear of COVID-19 had a statistically positive effect on the perceived value of customers (H2 hypothesis). However, this hypothesis was rejected at the 0.05 level of significance with a standardized regression coefficient value of -0.015 and a p-value of 0.769 obtained in the structural equation model. Consequently, the hypothesis that fear of the COVID-19 would have a significant effect on perceived value was rejected. However, hypothesis H6 proposed that perceived risk would have a statistically negative effect on perceived value, and this hypothesis was accepted at the 0.05 level of significance with a standardized regression coefficient value of -0.217 and a

highly significant p-value (H6 hypothesis). Therefore, it can be concluded that perceived risk has a significant effect on perceived value, consistent with the literature (Agarwal & Teas, 2001).

As the perceived risk increases, the perceived value levels decrease. The literature has examined the perceived economic and health risks in the context of the ongoing pandemic (Nisa et al., 2021). As previously outlined in the model, there is a negative correlation between economic risk perception and economic value perception. Consequently, as individuals' economic risk perception levels increase, their economic value perception will correspondingly decrease. This is because, as economic risk rises, individuals tend to question whether the products they purchase are worth the expense they incur. In contrast, the perceived economic value level of individuals has a positive effect on customer satisfaction, which supports the existing studies on the economic dimension of perceived value and satisfaction (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2009). The study tested the H7 hypothesis, which posits that perceived risk has a statistically negative effect on customer satisfaction. The results of the structural equation model yielded a standardized regression coefficient value of -0.071 and a p-value of 0.103 , which led to the rejection of hypothesis H7 at the 0.05 significance level. Consequently, perceived risk has no significant effect on customer satisfaction. However, it is hypothesized that there is a statistically significant positive effect between perceived value and customer satisfaction, and this hypothesis is accepted at the 0.05 level of significance with a standardized regression coefficient value of 0.678 and a good p-value obtained in the structural equation model (Hypothesis H8).

The study indicates that while the fear level associated with the pandemic and the perceived economic value have a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction, the negative effect of the perceived economic risk on the perceived economic value provides an important insight into the indirect effects of the fear associated with the pandemic on customer satisfaction.

A number of studies in the literature have indicated that an increase in health literacy is associated with a reduction in fear of contracting the COVID-19 (Köksal, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the findings of our study indicate that there is no statistically significant correlation between an individual's level of health literacy and their level of fear associated with the COVID-19. Those with high levels of health literacy are more likely to be aware of the risks associated with uncertainties such as the lack of clarity in treatment protocols and the fact that different variants of the virus cause varying degrees of disease severity in different individuals, particularly in the early stages of the outbreak. These insights may result in heightened levels of fear of COVID-19 among individuals with high health literacy, directly proportional to their awareness of the associated risks. Conversely, a negative correlation between health literacy and fear of COVID-19 may be attributed to factors such as the difficulty in comprehending the gravity of the situation among individuals with limited health literacy and the challenge in interpreting medical treatments and precautions.

From another perspective, the low knowledge, motivation, and competence of individuals with low health literacy about COVID-19 may prevent these individuals from realizing the magnitude of the danger and desensitize them more to the danger. In such cases, the level of fear of COVID-19 may be lower than that of other individuals. In our study, we hypothesized that health literacy does not have a statistically significant effect on the fear of COVID-19, and this hypothesis was rejected at the 0.05 significance level with a standardized regression coefficient value of -0.036 and a p value of 0.488 obtained in the structural equation model (Hypothesis H1). Accordingly, there was no significant effect of health literacy on the COVID-19 fear level. This result is consistent with the result of a study by Shaukat et al. (2021) that found

no association between health literacy and fear of covid-19 but found it associated with health-protective behaviors (Shaukat et al., 2021). Despite the literature studies described above, it can be thought that the lack of a significant effect of individuals' health literacy levels on the fear of COVID-19 in our study may provide different perspectives to the studies that can be conducted in this sense.

The level of health literacy is associated with individuals' use of medicines and their comprehension of prescriptions and drug contents. These factors constitute aspects of health literacy. Additionally, Song et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between reading and comprehending the labels of OTC drugs and health literacy. Their findings indicated that high health literacy was positively correlated with reading and understanding drug labels (Song et al., 2017). In hypothesis H3, it was posited that there is a statistically positive effect of health literacy on perceived risk. The results of the structural equation model yielded a standardized regression coefficient value of 0.053 and a p-value of 0.335, which led to the rejection of hypothesis H3 at the 0.05 significance level. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant effect of health literacy on perceived risk in the context of this study. Similarly, the H4 hypothesis of the study proposed that health literacy has a statistically positive effect on perceived economic value. However, this hypothesis was rejected at the 0.05 significance level with a standardized regression coefficient value of 0.057 and a p-value of 0.284 (H4 hypothesis). Consequently, the study did not yield any significant evidence to support the hypothesis that health literacy affects perceived value.

The reason why there is no effect between individuals' health literacy levels and their perception of economic risk and value may be that health literacy provides individuals with the awareness to make more informed choices in their health product preferences. The expression measured by perceived economic risk and value perceptions is, in general, price-satisfaction risk and value, which means that the product purchased is worth the expense spent and the price paid is worth the price paid. Whether health literacy, which is expressed as knowledge, motivation and competence, has a positive or negative effect on economic risk and value may vary with the motivation that knowledge provides to individuals. In particular, the fact that the value and risk perceptions of individuals who are motivated by their knowledge and experience about the harmful and side effects of drugs and individuals who are motivated by their knowledge and experience about the benefits and protective effects of drugs are different may explain the lack of a statistically significant effect between health literacy and risk and value perception levels. In addition to all these, the fact that customers' health literacy levels have a positive effect on satisfaction can be explained by their selectivity and motivation in product preferences, as mentioned above. This situation is important in terms of providing ideas for future studies.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to examine the influence of individuals' health literacy levels on their consumption of health products during the pandemic caused by the COVID-19. To achieve this, the effect of perceived risk and the economic dimension of perceived value on customer satisfaction in individuals' preferences for OTC medicines was measured with a survey study. A structural equation model was constructed using the data obtained. First, a CFA was conducted, during which some statements and the "purchase intention scale" were excluded from the model. This was because the goodness of fit values could not be calculated and did not provide acceptable goodness of fit values, as stated in the analysis and findings section. Subsequently, the scales pertaining to health literacy, fear of contracting the virus, perceived value, perceived risk and customer satisfaction were subjected to structural equation modeling following the completion of the CFA, given that the fit values were deemed to be satisfactory.

The study revealed a positive correlation between health literacy and customer satisfaction. In other words, an increase in health literacy is associated with an increase in customer satisfaction. Similarly, an increase in the fear of contracting the virus is associated with an increase in customer satisfaction. Another factor that positively affects customer satisfaction is the perceived economic value. In other words, as the perceived value increases, customer satisfaction levels also increase. However, the perceived economic risk did not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction.

The perception of economic risk exerts a substantial negative influence on the perception of economic value. As perceived economic risk increases, individuals tend to perceive lower levels of economic value. The fear of contracting the COVID-19 has been found to have a positive effect on perceived risk. In other words, as the fear of COVID-19 increases, so too does the perceived level of risk. However, the fear of contracting the virus did not have a significant effect on the perceived economic value.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted individuals' consumption behavior, as discussed in the third section. Since there is no significant effect between individuals' health literacy levels and their perceived economic risk and value levels, it is expected that health literacy will guide health product sellers and health service providers in reducing the perceived economic risk and increasing the perceived economic value in the consumption of health products. The fact that increasing health literacy levels increases consumer satisfaction, independent of perceived economic risk and value, shows that individuals' health literacy affects the satisfaction of consumers of health products in other ways. These results are important in terms of guiding studies on the reasons affecting consumer satisfaction.

Limitations and Recommendations

In this study, a face-to-face questionnaire was administered to individuals who had sought treatment at the emergency room of Prof. Dr. Süleyman Yalçın City Hospital, as well as to patients and their relatives who were hospitalized in the hospital units. Furthermore, the Google survey method was employed to reach individuals who had used OTC drugs through social networks, thus expanding the sample group. It is possible to conduct different studies with different sample groups and to compare the resulting data.

Furthermore, this study aimed to gain insight into the consumption of health products by using OTC medicines. Accordingly, further studies could be conducted with different health products.

In the construction of the questionnaire, consideration was given to the inclusion of items on the "Disease Prevention/Health Promotion" dimension of the health literacy scale. The study also incorporated the economic dimensions of the perceived risk and perceived value scales. It is possible to renew the model by including different dimensions in future studies. Furthermore, our study examined the relationship between individuals' health literacy and consumption of health products during the pandemic caused by the COVID-19. Note that the results may vary if the study is conducted at a different time point.

The objective of ensuring consumer satisfaction is to reduce the incidence of unnecessary and harmful drug use. Furthermore, it will result in a reduction of unnecessary applications of individuals to health service providers, thereby facilitating the reallocation of resources to more urgent services in times of crisis. It may therefore be recommended that the necessary policy decisions be taken and implemented with a view to expanding the studies carried out for the general population, with a view to increasing the level of health literacy.

The correlation between the level of fear of the COVID-19 and the level of perceived economic risk suggests that the risk of price satisfaction, or the risk perception of getting the value of the price paid when

purchasing medicines in times of crisis, has increased. This situation may necessitate the implementation of additional policies to address the concerns of all individuals regarding spending on health products, particularly in times of crisis.



Ethics Committee Approval	The obtained the necessary official permissions from İstanbul University's Ethics Committee (Date: 29.06.2021, decision: 2021/157).
Informed Consent	Consent was obtained from the participants.
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest	The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Clientelism in Public Employment in Turkey



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Abstract

This study aims to examine political clientelism, which can be defined as the distribution of public resources to the advocates through political powers, with its recent dimension in Turkey. In Turkey, a new dimension of clientelism has started to be mentioned with the conservative politics that has been effective especially as of the 2000s. This research focuses on the clientelistic relations experienced in recent appointments to positions such as district governors, judges, prosecutors, and auditors, which are also defined as the white collars of the public in Turkey. Research data were collected in 2019 with Ankara and Adıyaman face-to-face and telephone calls from various provinces of Turkey. Data were collected from 29 candidates (2 focus group interviews and 19 in-depth interviews) who were candidates for the aforementioned positions and were previously candidates. The research is based on the data obtained from the subjective experiences of the candidates who applied to the mentioned positions from various provinces of Turkey in 2019 and before. According to the findings, widespread relationships of clientelism have been identified in the appointment processes to the mentioned positions. Internal regulations of public institutions such as security investigation, interviews, and reference are used as effective tools in such relations.

Keywords

Public employment in Turkey • clientelism • favoritism • merit • trust

Author Note

This article is derived from PhD dissertation entitled “A Sociological Assessment of Clientelist Relations in Public Employment”, conducted under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Serap SUĞUR at Eskişehir Anadolu University.



“ Citation: Özel, M. & Suğur, S. (2025). Clientelism in public employment in Turkey. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 38–56. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1444579>

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Clientelism in Public Employment in Turkey

Clientelism is a very common and important form of relationship and transaction of business in almost all areas of social life in Turkey. In fact, especially in the fields of work, health and education, clientelism is very important for obtaining all kinds of services-employment, appointment, promotion, vacancy, etc.-from public and private institutions and organizations, and for maintaining our daily life practices. Clientelism, which is known to be a widely used method in the distribution of public resources and in public employment, especially by political powers, has always been an important subject of interest in sociology with its relational dimension as well as degeneration and corruption.

The form of clientelism, which is based on asymmetric power relations in the context of unofficially transferring public resources from top patrons to advocates in inferior positions for loyalty, has always been one of the most important determinants of politics-bureaucracy relations in Turkey. In this study, this form of clientelism is examined with sociological concepts, methods of analysis, and perspectives.

Analysis of such relationships made by different disciplines in terms of psychological effects, legal regulations, efficiency, management and organization, leadership, organizational communication, etc. is beyond the scope of this research.

Therefore, this study is limited to examining the social networks of unemployed graduates and how these networks are mobilized to create employment opportunities in the public sector on the basis of factors such as labor/labor market, social class and gender, faith, ethno-religious origin, and regional belonging.

The issues/problems that led to the research, emerged during the research and guided the research are as follows;

- How are clientelistic relations perceived and interpreted in the Turkish society?
- Is there a culture of clientelism in the Turkish society?
- How is clientelism practiced in Turkey?
- What is the relationship between clientelism and trust?

Research method

In this research, clientelistic relations in public employment and how these relations are constructed are discussed from a relational sociological perspective. Clientelism, which stands out instead of the principle of equal opportunity and the principle of merit in public employment, is discussed and interpreted by focusing on relational processes, context and social networks within the framework of the relational sociological approach, which constitutes the main methodological theme of the study and emphasizes the process-based relational unity of social structures and agency.

In this study, unemployed people with bachelor's and/or master's degrees in social sciences who are looking for a job in the public sector were selected as the population and sample of the study. It was thought that the focus group interview technique would minimize the influence of the researcher on the participants. However, during the fieldwork, the candidates did not want to participate in the focus group interviews, fearing that it would harm the security investigation and interview they would undergo during their job applications, and even if they did participate, they hesitated to share their real thoughts. For this reason, it

was deemed appropriate to switch to the in-depth interview technique after the first two pilot focus group interviews where themes started to emerge.

At the beginning of the research process, the participants did not want to share their sincere and real thoughts even in one-on-one in-depth interviews due to the fear that it would have a negative impact on the security investigation, which is very decisive in job application and appointment to the positions in question. For this reason, the decision to interview new graduates who were candidates for the positions subject to the research, which was considered in the early stages of the research, was abandoned. Instead, in-depth interviews were conducted with participants who felt that they were victims of nepotism and had not been appointed to the positions in question despite repeatedly applying for them and being successful in the written exams. In addition, since most of the participants did not agree to be audio-recorded, and those who agreed were seen to be hesitant to show their real thoughts, the data were recorded by taking notes instead of audio recording.

Ankara is the most preferred city for graduates of related fields (Faculty of Law, Faculty of Administrative Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, etc.) who want to be appointed to public positions, as it is an exam center and has effective tutoring centers to prepare for the exams. For this reason, Ankara was of primary importance in this research.

Qualitative researchers focus on how a sample reflects social life rather than its representativeness. The main purpose of sampling in this type of research is to collect specific examples that can clarify or deepen understanding. The concern of qualitative researchers is to find examples that will enhance what they learn about the processes of social life in a particular context (Neuman, 2014, p. 320). Therefore, in this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability-based sampling technique. The basic rule regarding the number of samples in qualitative research is that “the researcher feels that the data and findings that have begun to emerge have reached a point of saturation. This means that the researcher starts to see the same things from the analysis and findings” (Meriam, 2013, p. 207).

One of the common strategies to ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research is member checking or member questioning. This strategy (participant verification) expects reaching out to some of the people from whom the data were obtained and getting feedback from them about the findings (Meriam, 2013, p. 205). Accordingly, in this study, the interviewees were contacted again during the data analysis process.

This study is based on the data of a qualitative field study, first-hand information, statements and descriptions of participants who have personally experienced and witnessed favoritism. In this respect, it is a very original study and one of the first studies in the field. This study is based on the subjective experiences of candidates who applied for judges, prosecutors, district governors, inspectors, experts, and other (A) group positions in 2019 and before. Since the aim was to understand these nepotistic relations in their own context, the in-depth interview technique was used in the study to minimize the influence of the researcher on the participants.

The universe of the research consists of the jobless graduates who applied to the Group (A) positions in the public sector but could not get the job. Saturation, in which it is possible to identify social networks and that can also be defined as a sampling technique (Lin, 1999, p. 38), was used and the participants who met the criteria for the sampling were included. The data were collected through 19 in-depth interviews and 2 focus group studies conducted face-to-face with 29 candidates, 16 women and 13 men, who were candidates for the mentioned positions but could not get the job in Ankara, Adıyaman and various provinces

of Turkey. Data collected from participants were grouped as themes and subcategories and were analyzed and interpreted descriptively and systematically through the emerged pattern.

Conceptual background

Clientelism is a very broad and comprehensive phenomenon that is difficult to define conceptually. Although there is a large literature consisting of studies conducted by different academic disciplines dealing with clientelism in various dimensions in social sciences, due to the lack of communication between disciplines and the inadequacy of conceptual relations established about the issue, in social sciences to define these kinds of relations, a wide variety of different conceptualizations and definitions such as “patronage,” “protectionism,” “clientelism,” “favoritism,” “nepotism” etc. can be found.

Despite the definitional problems, clientelism in the political dimension is explained from a structural and pragmatic perspective in most disciplines in the sense that the political party that comes to power generally rewards its advocates by appointing them to public offices and by allocating public resources among them. “Political clientelism” is defined as the distribution of predominantly public resources to those who belong to the same political affiliation and/or supporters of a political party, or to give priority and privilege to this group in this sharing, in order to create supporters in the political sense and to ensure its continuity.

Political clientelism, which is often expressed with the concepts of patronage or clientelism in sociology, is defined as unequal but mutually beneficial superior-subordinate relations from a relational sociological perspective.

Relational sociology, whose traces are seen in the works of Weber and Simmel in classical sociology, and is represented in the approaches of thinkers such as H.C. White, P. Bourdieu, C. Tilly, M. Emirbayer and M. Archer, in contemporary sociology, comprehends society and social phenomena not as a static and solid objective reality—thing-apart from individuals in the essentialist sense, but as an ongoing process, a network of interactions. For this reason, sociological analysis focuses on the relational dynamics and mutual social interaction processes that constantly reconstruct society, without falling into the trap of focusing on neither the agent nor the structural problem in classical sociology (Dépelteau and Powell, 2013).

In politics, clientelistic relations occur and continue in the form of an exchange of intangible and/or tangible values between the parties. For the patron, the gains obtained in this relationship are, in the simplest sense, at least potential gains, while for the client, the gains are usually clearer. Although clientelism is distinguishable from other forms of corruption such as bribery because it generally does not include a direct material exchange, it is often considered as a form of political corruption in the literature in the context of the use of patronage networks and clientelistic relationships to gain access to state resources, that is, the exploitation of public resources for private interests. The favoring of political power’s advocates and voters in appointments and promotions to civil services is seen as one of the most common examples of corruption in public administration, and one of the most important problems of public administration and bureaucracy (Aktan and Acar, 2021, p. 4).

Historically, while patron-client relations have been seen mostly in pre-modern societies, research has shown that they are seen in different forms in almost all contemporary societies, but in Latin America, Southern Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, these relations are more prevalent as a model of social exchange that structures some aspects of societal life, such as the flow of resources and processes of interpersonal institutional exchange and interaction (Roniger, 1983, p. 63-64).

The political debates on this issue, which began to appear in the literature in the 1960s and 1970s, focused on underdeveloped and/or developing countries and were predominantly conducted from a comparative perspective with “advanced democracies” taken as the ideal type. The dominant theme in important examples of these debates is the analysis of the linear evolution of this type of relationship, which is presented as a pre-modern form of relationship, toward the modern, its reflections on modernity, or its decline and changes in post-modern developed societies. As Sayarı (1977, p. 103) quotes Lande and Scott, some social scientists later felt that political loyalties in developing countries could not be satisfactorily analyzed from the theoretical perspectives derived from the historical evolution of Western Europe and North America. Later studies of the social foundations of politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America found that the representation of interests in these societies tended toward clientalist relations that operated through vertical ties/networks, largely cutting across the horizontal solidarity that was the initial form of these representations (ibid. 104).

Today, studies on this topic continue with this trend and in addition to it, with various frameworks at the micro and macro level, from banking to tourism, from human resources to corruption and current political problems focusing on flaws in democratic functioning.

Looking at the international studies on clientelism, Sayarı (2011, p. 655-670) provides a historical trace of the studies on clientelism and patronage and draws attention to the necessity of two socio-economically unequal parties for the relationship to take place, which is also mentioned in most of these studies. In this context, some socio-economic and cultural characteristics/differences that should be present on both sides of the nepotism relationship lead us to the concept of social capital, which will be taken as the unit of analysis in this study. Stoke (2007, p. 604-627), who conducted a similar study, explains the studies on favoritism, which he states has more negative consequences than bribery, as two waves.

According to his findings, while studies in pre-democratic societies were mostly concerned with anthropology, studies in democratic societies have evolved toward sociology and economics. According to Kitscelt (2000, p. 845-879), who draws attention to the voluntarism and reciprocity in these relations, this type of relationship also involves exploitation and domination. Studies have found that clientelistic relations are more prevalent in weak and ineffective states where poverty is widespread and the need for protection and security is evident. A review of studies on such states reveals that the relationship between poverty and clientelism is paradoxical.

A review of macro-analytical studies on clientelism reveals that the majority of both national and international studies point to social/political transformations in specific countries and/or communities.

According to Kaufmann (1974, p. 285), the distinctive features of clientelism, which he defines as a special type of bilateral exchange relationship that takes different forms in different cultures, are unequal power and status between actors, a reciprocity based on material or immaterial interests, and a particular and private relationship that is weakly bound by laws and social norms.

This relationship is based on rational economic calculations rather than blind and alternating loyalty and is more prevalent in the absence of institutionalized democracy, transparency and legal procedures (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2002, p. 3).

According to Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984, p. 48-49), in their important study of patron-client relationships from many different parts of the world, there are 9 key characteristics of patron-client relationships:

- These relations are particularistic and widespread,
- The interaction on which these relations are based is characterized by the simultaneous exchange of different types of resources, which can be instrumental, such as political ones, and economic (support, votes, protection); loyalty, solidarity, reciprocity,
- The exchange of these resources is often organized stereotypically.
- Such relationships are built on a strong, unconditional and long-term relationship of trust.
- Closely related to the previous point, in such relationships, the socio-psychological requirement is quite strong (such as loyalty, reciprocity, commitment, personal honor), although more dominant and pronounced in classical patronage and looser in modern political mechanisms.
- While these relationships are more binding, they are often contrary to the formal laws of the country and depend more on informal agreements.
- Despite their durability over almost a lifetime, such relationships are in principle entered and exited voluntarily,
- These relationships are vertical, between individuals or the networks to which they belong,
- Clientelistic relationships are based on a powerful element of inequality and/or power differentials between the parties.

Clientelistic relationships (boss-client relationships), which share the basic characteristics mentioned above, can take different forms in different cultures. According to the authors, these different types of relationships can be distinguished in two contexts: the organizational one, which is embodied in different formal contexts; and the place of these relationships in the broader institutional contexts of their societies (ibid. p. 48-49). A similar binary classification is that of Theobald (1983, p. 141) cited by Weingrod. The first type of this classification is clientelist relationships, which involve a hierarchical relationship, relate to rural societies and are discussed mostly by social anthropologists; the second type relates to policy-oriented resource allocation policies, which are discussed mostly by political scientists.

Although the patron-client relations, which Eisenstadt (1984) emphasizes that they develop in close relation with the structure of trust in society, and the development of clientelism-type relations that largely reflect its definitional characteristics are generally explained by economic and political underdevelopment or low-level political modernization in the early literature, comparative studies on the issue have also revealed that clientelistic relations, which constitute an important component of central institutional arrangements in many societies such as the Mediterranean, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, continue their existence despite the changes in economic development and the structure of political organization. Research shows that the continuity of these relations are specific types of social formations that are closely related to certain types of cultural orientation, especially in the center-periphery relations in these societies (Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1984, p. 204-205). When the studies of researchers such as Roniger (1983), Abdalla et al. (1998) and Loewe et al. (2007) are examined, it is seen that clientelistic social relationship models are more common in societies with “paternalistic,” “patrimonial” and “particularistic” structures such as Turkey.

Clientelism in the Turkish society

Clientelism is a phenomenon frequently observed in Turkey as in many contemporary societies. Turkey is known as a country in which there are very strong networks of clientelistic relations, which structure the flow of state resources in general and change in parallel with the evolution in the center-periphery system,

and various forms of paternalistic and protective social relations that originate them. Also, in the international literature on the issue, Turkey is mentioned together with other Muslim Middle Eastern countries where non-Western modernities or late modernities are experienced and the most important examples of particularistic, hierarchical and widespread social arrangements known as clientelism are seen (Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1984, p. 1). In Middle Eastern societies, which were part of the Ottoman Empire for a period of time in history, including Turkey, generally clientelistic relations and paternalistic and protective traditional community-type social relations that originate them can be quite determinant in public life. Undoubtedly, the effects of the Ottoman culture on the peoples of the Middle East, which brought the idea of community into force as a form of structuring (Karpat, 2006, p. 90) and was structured as a body of communities until the nineteenth century, must have played an important role.

Evaluating the issue specific to Turkey from a historical and political perspective, Heper, Keyman and Ayata indicate in their analyses that clientelistic relations in Turkey have continued through different forms, symbols, methods and identities, from the pre-Republican period until today (Heper and Keyman, 1998, p. 259-277; Ayata, 1996, p. 40-56). According to other studies on the issue, the patronage relations between the feudal agrarian elite known as *ayan* and the peasants in the Ottoman Empire have a very important social function both as a tool of governing in terms of public administration and in terms of its patrimonial and particularistic roots. However, from the twentieth century, wealthy small-town merchants known as *eşraf* and the landowner aghas began to replace *ayan* in social influence (Lewis, 1993, p. 440-444). The system of aghas, which existed at the local level, especially in rural areas, had an important place in clientelistic relations. With the national policies implemented for modernization after the establishment of the Republic, the system of aghas started to decline and by the transition to the multi-party period, it started to leave its place to other patronage systems, especially to the political patronage.

Kıray (1995, p. 66) also stated that before modernization and industrialization in Turkey, there were strong patronage relations between aghas-chiefs and peasants in rural areas and that in the 1950s, new patronage relations based on fellow-townsmanship developed among the ones migrated to town with the industrialization and urbanization. Then, especially in the 1970s, the patronage system became much more complex due to the establishment of the well-known political patronage system (Kıray defined this as the most important aspect of Turkey that could not be modernized). In the 1980s, with the blockage in the political patronage system, a new patronage system based on the patronage networks of religious groups known as sects and congregations was created in Turkey (Kıray, 1995, p. 67).

The process developed on the basis of the patronage and protection of religious communities in Turkish society can also be understood through the *şefaât*¹-type relationship. From this point of view, *şefaât* can be defined as an understanding and an ancient relationship system, which is quite common in both earthly and ethereal fields in Turkish society. This phenomenon is so dominant in the understanding of religion in the society that it can be talked about persons such as prophets, friends of Allah, guardians, fathers, grandfathers, who are given the privilege of “entreating in the presence of Allah” in the account of the hereafter, and the networks of relations formed within this framework (sect, congregation, *dergâh*-dervish lodge-, etc.). Therefore, we can talk about a “society of *şefaât*” in Turkey that is supported by social phenomena such as culture and belief and reflected in public and individual life. In this context, the basis of clientelism

¹According to the Turkish Religious Foundation’s Encyclopedia of Islam (nd), “*Şefaât*, meaning that the prophets and those who are allowed to pray in the presence of Allah entreat for the forgiveness of believers in the Hereafter, is derived from the Arabic word *şef*, which means to make a single thing double with its equivalent or similar; to help someone and try to do his/her job, to ask someone’s mediation for his/her job to be done.”

in Turkish society should also be evaluated through the understanding of şefaât. Such an extent that the clientelistic relations can also be referred to as “earthly şefaât”—especially in the context of the reference that will be detailed below.

One of the most important actors in these relations in Turkey, especially in the last 20 years, is the organization of the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO), with its previous names “the service movement” (*hizmet hareketi*) or “the Congregation” (*cemaat*). This organization, which was very well known in Turkish society even before it was called FETO, but crystallized in the public opinion after July 15, through related lawsuits and the media, is predominantly shaped by a traditional and religious charisma and has achieved to spread to all areas of social and political life in Turkey through “patrons” such as “hodja”, “brother”, “sister”, “mother”, “imam”. Such that this “authority” has become a main “obeyed” power in Turkey, from the determination of national and international politics to daily social relations and their forms and symbols (from marriage decisions to daily greeting routines and social symbolic “new” events/ceremonies).

Although pre-modern patronage systems are widely encountered in Turkish society (agha, bey, etc.), because the cadres who founded the Republic defined modernization as a national mission and excluded the states of existences, which they thought was not suitable for modernity, those parts of the society are alienated and have tended to congregations, and Turkish society has become a society where “an inevitable alienation between these congregations is constantly maintained” (Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006, p. 9) and new patronage and clientelism practices are carried out.

In the Eighth Five-Year Development Plan, Report of Specialization Commission on Improving and Restructuring Public Administration, it is stated that in Turkey, the most disturbing issue for the public conscience in employment is clientelism (DPT, 2000). Research on the issue also demonstrates that clientelism is one of the most serious problems of the public bureaucracy in Turkey. For example, in an early study by the Turkish Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association (TUSIAD) (1983), it is pointed out that there is a lack of merit in appointments in Turkey, and that political parties expand the existing cadres in the bureaucracy in order to provide employment to their advocates and militants, and therefore the bureaucracy grows more than the population growth. In another study by TUSIAD (1995) in Turkey, it was determined that one of the main problems of public administration is political corruption and clientelism. In a study conducted by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) in 2000 and repeated in 2004 (Adaman et al., 2005, p. 47-49), it has been determined that the rate of those who think that the applications of those who want to get a job in the institutions are based on favor and clientelism are over 74% and 57%, respectively.

Findings and Evaluation

The findings of this research, which is based on the narratives of the participants who have personally experienced clientelism, show that employment in the public sector is based on the spoils system in today’s Turkey, the current political power has adopted practices based on political affinity, partizanship and loyalty instead of merit in public employment and that clientelism continues to be a common type of corruption. The findings show that especially in the appointment processes of Group (A) cadres in public duties mentioned above, security investigations, interviews, references and similar practices, which are

²KPSS: The central exam that determines those who will be accepted to the entrance exam to be held by the institutions according to their own legislation for the ones that will be appointed to the positions called Group (A) in the Regulations, and provides the scores

implemented after the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS)² and frequently cause debates in the public, are used as a common clientelism tool that paves the way for the spoils system.

Security investigation as an effective tool for clientelism

When the legislation regarding the security investigation is examined first, it is seen that the investigation carried out at the candidates' place—the registered address of residence and the address of their actual residence—is mostly based on the reporting of the hearings and statements received from people such as the candidate's relatives, neighbors, villagers, and headmen, and this makes it inevitable to make unfair judgments about the candidates. As a result, candidates who do not share the worldview of the current political power can be easily eliminated by being evaluated through practices such as security investigations, interviews and references, regardless of their high scores in the KPSS. Candidates who are not politically supported due to these non-objective practices try desperately to hide their political, ideological and ethnic identities and make them invisible in order not to be victimized:

"I mean, I have friends who crusade for this and if they had a photo of their wives, for example in shorts, on Facebook, people removed them thinking that they can eliminate me because of this photo. So, I have friends who have their own and their spouses' [social media] accounts deactivated."

(...) all the more amazing is that they don't explain why you couldn't pass the security investigation if you n't pass."

One of the important findings of the research is the state of political distrust that develops due to widespread clientelism in public administration. Unfairness, injustices and stigmatization caused by practices based on political clientelism, especially in interviews, lead to a serious decrease in trust in the functioning of the political system and the loss of interpersonal mutual trust. The striking statements of some of the participants, who were eliminated during the interviews because they had "objectionable" relatives supporting the opposition parties, summarized this situation:

"I don't trust anyone; I have gone aside... They stigmatized me even according to the place where I did my internship and according to the Lawyer I worked for. I didn't know anyone, a lawyer directed me to go and do my internship there. I stayed there for only 6 months anyway, they were all supporting the Peoples' Democratic Party and PDP's views. Then, when my friend called A. for reference, he asked directly if I were the girl who worked for that lawyer supporting the PDP."

"My uncle is a judge. I took an exam and he called one of the members of the examining board and the one in the examining board said, "We know which union his father is a member of." I did not know which union my father was a member of until that date and still I don't. (...) I mean, I was 25 years old, I passed the written examination, they cannot attach me to any politician. I had no activity. Why did you eliminate me? You eliminated me because of my father."

Based on the data obtained from the fieldwork, it can be said that the political powers have formed their own "loyal" cadres through interviews and references, as well as the security investigation, which has a key role in the functioning of political clientelism in Turkey. In fact, even mentioning a procedure that proves

to be used to make the placement that will be the basis for appointment to the positions called Group (B) (Official Gazette, 3/5/2002, No: 24744).

this situation is important in terms of showing the current functioning. In terms of both legal legislation and organizational efficiency, the persons to be employed in the public are subjected to a security investigation after they qualify for the current positions, that is, after they pass the relevant exams. However, considering the information obtained from the interviewees in the current situation, it is seen that security investigations are carried out before the interview examination of the candidates in these appointments. Thus, by conducting a security investigation before the interview, it is determined beforehand which candidates will be eliminated and which will not be eliminated during the interview.

The nightmare of job seekers in the public sector: Interviews

Interviews, or in other words, oral exams, are generally complementary to written exams and held for the purpose of determining the most suitable candidate for the position in terms of qualifications by measuring and evaluating various aspects such as the candidate's self-expression and reasoning, ability to understand and articulate a topic and other merits for the position. According to the relevant legislation, interviews are the exams in which the subjective opinions of the interview boards can also take part, and they can change the results of the written exams.

Of course, various legal remedies have been applied regarding the unfair and unlawful aspects of these exams, and many verdicts have been given in this regard. In order for the interviews to be subject to legal control like every other action of the administration, and for the realization of the principle of public interest, which is the ultimate goal of every administrative action, many judicial decisions and precedents have been made regarding the form and procedure of interview exams.³

Another main problem with the interview exams is the regulations regarding the determination of the number of candidates who will be eligible to take the interview exam after the written exam. One participant expressed this situation, which many interviewees who participated in the fieldwork of this research complained about, as *"the first is equated with the three thousandth and the greatest injustice is done from the very beginning"*.

When the data obtained from the fieldwork and the legislation are examined, it can be said that the interview exams are actually used as a tool/method to specify of those who will be appointed (acceptable) and/or won't be appointed (objectionable/other) determined through security investigations. The rules regarding interview exams, which may vary according to different institutions, and the legal texts related to these, which contain phrases such as *"any recording system is not used for the interview"*⁴, are in fact a proof of the stated purpose of the interview expressed by all of the interviewees.

When the experiences of various participants and the legislation are examined, it can be understood that it is impossible from the very beginning for the interview exams to make the assessment specified in the law. According to the data obtained during the fieldwork, the main determinant in these exams was the references of the candidates and the influence of these references. The statement of an interviewee who passed the interview exam through her/his strong references was quite striking:

"After I said I am from Samsun, one asked where to eat good Samsun pita, the other asked where to buy rice, and then another one said "they tricked me once in Samsun and sold Russian rice" and so on..."

³For some precedents, see. Decisions of the 12th Chamber of the Council of State, numbered 2014/8050 E. 2017/6121 K. and 2013/8388 E.

⁴According to the statements of the interviewees, the majority of whom are lawyers, this article was inserted in the law in order to strengthen the hands of the local courts in case of objections and to provide a basis for the negative conclusion of the cases in a short time.

As can be seen, the security investigations and interview exams applied in all of the appointments to the aforementioned positions are not used to measure the skills of the candidates, but as a means of eliminating the “unsuitable” candidates according to the information obtained from the “investigations”.

Interview as a tool of clientelism that does not change even if the political power changes

The statement of an interviewee, who works in a Republican People’s Party (RPP) municipality in Ankara and has interview experience in the internal promotion exam, demonstrates that although the political party in power changes, clientelism and the use of interviews as a tool of clientelism does not change. Another important finding here is that the class phenomenon is still effective in politics:

“There is no difference [talking about different parties] (...) Recently, municipal police were employed for Ç. Municipality. All of them had inside acquaintances and had political connections from the party [she/he means RPP]. Even though the children of the poor got a higher score in the municipal police exam, they were not accepted even though they were from the RPP, but the wealthy, nonpoor councilor or deputy from the RPP makes his own nephew municipal police.”

References as a phenomenon of clientelism

Another most effective tool used in political clientelism in public employment in Turkey is political references. Although reference occupies an important position in job applications as a document showing expertise and experience in certain fields, it works as a very different tool in political clientelism. With this tool, advocates of the government can easily be cleared from security investigations and employed in the public sector, even if they are subjected to any criminal proceedings. It is an important proof of this fact that thousands of civil servants who were dismissed from the public sector on the grounds that they were linked to the terrorist organization known as FETO recently in Turkey, were previously employed in the public sector by being favored in security investigations. As can be clearly seen from the statements of the interviewees, the security investigations and interviews are used as elimination tools by the government to favor advocates and to remove opponents from the bureaucracy and the state in general:

“Even if a person’s security investigation is troublesome, if the reference she/he finds is very strong, it seems like she/he finds a way somehow. (...) It is all about people.”

Another form of reference, which is as important as the references of influential people in the functioning of political clientelism, is the reference mediated by institutions or organizations. As can be seen in the statements of the participants below, these references can function through formal (political party, union, association, foundation, etc.) and informal (tribe, congregation, society, sect, *dergâh*, religious conversation group, etc.) relations:

“[The reference] is usually a person, but sometimes names are also conveyed through institutions. (...) I mean by institution as a public benefit association, the district presidencies of political parties, provincial presidencies, or institutions that have made a splash such as KADEM, IHH (...) But in general, the most influential ones are the political ones (...) Some friends, for example, do something like this, they become members of the youth branches of certain political parties in certain time periods, go their places regularly, [they have] a relationship of familiarity, humaneness, ties of affection.”

“After preparing the student for the district governorship exam, we say this, you passed the exam, the written exam, okay, but the interview is beyond us (...) But it is a very sad thing that all students even know till where the toilet of the Assembly is, for example (...) where I should apply to meet with this person, they know it all so well.” (Teacher at a private teaching institution)

Reference has become so important in clientelistic relations that candidates who can reach certain references—that to reach those, it is also required a reference—are first taken to a pre-interview in the institution they applied to in order to determine their references. Thus, a bureaucracy has also emerged in the functioning of clientelism/favoritism:

“[Reference] generally needs to be in-house. In other words, if you are going to enter the Ministry of Finance, you need a reference from the Ministry of Finance (...) You take the pre-interview, they ask you for your references in this pre-interview. For example, your reference which is the former undersecretary is now an auditor, etc.”

A participant's experience in a “reference” interview (pre-interview) before the judge-prosecutor's interview exam summarizes pretty well that the pre-interview has become a general procedure in political clientelism:

“...there was a line [candidates for reference], then gathering us all in one room, she/he took our information as a whole and let us go.”

The statement of one participant, expressing that they prepared a printed CV form for the candidates in order “not to delay” the works due to the intensity of demand, was quite striking in terms of showing the publicity of the functioning of the Turkish public administration according to political clientelism:

“Whoever you talk to, they make you leave a CV. Almost everyone who can be a reference has prepared their own CV [printed form], a template, they gave me it, they said “Fill it out and give me.””

From the statements of the participants, it is understood that reaching a reference in political clientelism requires direct belonging to certain political networks and political networks operate as “closed groups”, so it is impossible to directly reach people or institutions that will be a reference without political intermediaries:

“When I went to the first interviews (...) I knew that there was a fellow-countryman in the Council of State. I went to him. The secretary asked who would like to meet. I said that I was coming from my hometown and I was going to talk about something. She/he just called him, then turned to me and asked “who referenced you to come here?” In other words, “who sent you?” I said I came myself. They said he wouldn't see me and sent me away.”

Networks of relationships based on clientelism also operate based on power relations in itself and a “hierarchy of references” in particular:

“Well, it's like the reference of the reference of the reference [laughs] (...) There's also something like this: I found favors or references through the district organization, I appoint [other] person, he found an

undersecretary working in the Ministry of Justice, for example, it is inevitable for me to be automatically pushed into the background.”

“Now, reference and favor are not the same things. In other words, you reach someone from the law world through your hometown or another channel, and she/he listens to you like an interview and asks questions whether you are suitable to be a judge or not. This is a reference. But there is also a need for a political party or other things, and that’s a favor.”

As can be understood from the statements of the interviewees, these appointments based on political clientelism have reached such an extent that having expectations of appointments based on qualification and success has begun to be seen as almost equivalent to being “idiot.”⁵

The key to clientelism: Loyalty

During this research, “reference,” “interview,” “security investigation,” “favor,” “having a pull” were among the most common words used by the interviewees in their statements. Also, it was observed that almost all of the participants frequently used words such as “we,” “being one of us,” “advocator,” “they,” “being one of them,” “being their man,” which indicates their tendency to obey, loyalty, and trust the current political power as well as social polarization.

As Sennett (2014, p. 13) states, “no society and no institution of this society can maintain its functionality for a long time without ties of loyalty, authority and fraternity, and therefore emotional ties have political consequences.” Moreover, according to him, the word network/tie, which indicates a relationship formed in this way, also demonstrates a dependency. In this context, the aims and interests to which loyalty is directed and served, especially in organizations such as public administration that should include a Weberian rationality, are vital both for the subject of this research and the execution of almost all kinds of public services in a democratic constitutional state.

In all kinds of contemporary social formations, at least in order to progress, the basic value and purpose is to provide being able to think and act freely. This is not only a moral and ideological ideal but also a rational attitude. In this context, this attitude as a universal, ancient means of gaining social truth/ideal, which is desired to be gained by individuals as from childhood, has been stated as one of the main purposes of education in Turkey.⁶

In addition to being a moral, political and legal norm, free thinking and acting becomes an even more important rule with respect to its consequences, especially in decision-making processes and decision-makers in the public sector. If we evaluate the issue specific to this study, it is an ontological necessity, not an ideological choice, that cadres, who are in a position to make decisions that have the potential to have important consequences in different contexts, such as judge, prosecutor, district governor, inspector, and auditor, should be able to think and act freely, and have such power and be aware of this power. In this context, Bauman’s (2015, p. 128-129) determination about freedom and being able to act freely are quite remarkable:

⁵Dostoyevsky’s novel “Idiot” analyzes the social life and mental states of people in Russia in the 19th century. The protagonist of the work is actually a very smart young man, even though he looks like an idiot. In his novel, the author describes the difficulties of the life of Prince Myshkin, who faltered as an honest person in a corrupt society, in these hypocritical social relations. The novel indicates how an idealist person is labeled as an idiot in a degenerate society, and being honest in such a world is equivalent to being an idiot.

⁶See. Article 2 of the National Education Basic Law.

To have power means to be able to act freely; but not having power or having less power than others means that one's freedom of choice is limited by decisions made by others. When the resources he controls allow A to impose on B compulsory courses of action to achieve the ends set by A; ... we say that A has power over B. ... Serious concessions would be made on B's freedom of choice. B's actions are no longer *autonomous*; they have become *driven*. (Italics by the author)

Determinations regarding the prevalence of this situation and attitude in Turkish society, which point to dependency in a sense, are also seen in the analyses of one of the important Turkish sociologists, Prince Sabahaddin (2007, p. 213), on the Ottoman Empire that degenerated and political collapse quite accelerated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

It is thought that another important reason for the state of being “driven” and “not autonomous,” which Bauman has underlined above, besides “fear,” is the nature of the clientelistic relationships that do not involve justice and this perception of in-justice is likely to be reflected in the client. In this relationship, the loyalty/obligation of the protected to the protector, the positive or negative anxiety and expectation for the future that she/he thinks will arise through this relationship, will of course make the thought and action “driven,” especially in a formation where “public confidence” is not felt.⁷

The nature of making all decisions from a single center, crystallizing in the political/public functioning especially after the new government system in Turkey, reminds Weber's analyses on authority and its resources. According to Weber (1968, p. 231-232), patrimonialism (patrimonial state) as an authority and source of authority based on tradition is that the holder of power turns state apparatuses into his/her own means to expand his/her personal power, and if this domination is a commanding authority that passes from tradition to arbitrariness, it turns into “sultanism” and sultanism is an extreme example of “patrimonial authority.” İnalçık (1994, p. 8-9), in his study, in which he evaluates this analysis exemplifying the Ottoman Empire many times by Weber, mentions the uniqueness of the Sultan in allocating positions (status) in the Ottoman bureaucracy and draws attention to the fact that no official authority, rank, which does not have a *berat/tughra* of the ruler, is legitimate and legal; but he reminds that in case the ruler withdraws his *berat* or dies, all kinds of authorizations and regulations in the society are canceled. It can be interpreted that the political/bureaucratic functioning in Turkey recently has evolved into a “patrimonial sultanism” within the context of the aforementioned definition.⁸ In this sense, in a process mediated by such a functioning of power, and therefore that does not operate on merit principles and where loyalty/assurance is tied to a single center, those who hold various positions (statuses) will constantly feel this anxiety increasing especially in times when the strength of those who hold the power weakens or this perception becomes widespread. Therefore, it can be better understood that constitutional loyalty and assurance is actually the safest basis for everyone.

Clientelism based on fellow-countrymanship

As mentioned before, one of the most common types of clientelism seen in Turkey is clientelism based on being from the same city/hometown. Fellow countryman associations, which are generally established by immigrants from rural-based communities and networks, could become important actors in the local political networks of cities and be effective in public employment, especially during election periods (Köse,

⁷For different studies that point out the clientelism in National Education institutions and police force in Turkey, see (Aksoy, 2016); (Aydoğan, 2009); (Mutlu, 2000, p. 386).

⁸For post-modern manifestations of patrimonial sultanism (*neo patrimonialism/neo patrimonial sultanism*), see (Houcham and Juan, 1998); (Søren, 2018) and for an analysis on Turkey, see (Kalaycıoğlu, 1992).



2008). Because belonging to a certain geography, region and/or city in Turkey often points to a certain ethno-religious and sectarian identity, clientelism can operate on an ethno-religious and sectarian basis. It has been clearly observed in this fieldwork that there is a widespread perception in Turkish politics, especially in the current ruling power period, that those who come from certain cities and regions and who have certain religious beliefs benefit from public resources more and easily. A statement supporting this situation was expressed by Balıkesir Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Yücel Yılmaz from the Justice and Development Party as follows: *“The people of Trabzon represent the politics (in Turkey), the people of the Black Sea. In other words, you must be an Imam Hatip graduate and you must be from Trabzon. To hold an office. It is like this in our period.”* (Memurlar. Net, 2019). Similar views were expressed by those who participated in the focus group and in-depth interviews of this research:

“For those from the Black Sea Region, [reference] is no longer needed. The man is already the manager of every place he goes, the president is from the Black Sea, so he doesn't look for references, he doesn't need them. So the man is going, for example, he will enter the Ministry of Justice, one of the deputy ministers is always from the Black Sea region. Why do they choose the Black Sea, it is a nationalist, obedient nation (...) All of my four five friends have come to beautiful places, they are all from the Black Sea?”

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this research clearly demonstrate that clientelism, which is common in public administration in Turkey, is not only a type of corruption but also a type of discrimination and othering. In particular, political clientelism, which is always used as a tool by the political parties in power to ensure the continuity of political power, destroys the basis of justice and trust, which are the foundation of the state of law, and maintains social polarization even more. Political clientelism in public administration prevents the implementation of the principles of merit and equity and further worsens othering, polarization and discrimination between different identities.

Considering how nepotism as a form of discrimination affects the lives and living standards of the individuals it victimizes and even “steals their lives”, it will be better understood what kind of ethical deterioration this form of relationship indicates.

Considering their impact on the common future of the individual and the society, which are interconnected in a sociological context, the positions obtained through political favoritism will also have very important effects and consequences in terms of public administration, which directly affects the lives of a particular community and the individuals who make up that community. The visibility of these effects in Turkish society continues to increase day by day. The basis of this idea is the argument that those who occupy certain positions through nepotism will not have the necessary merit. This argument can be explained by simple reasoning. In fact, it is a simple logical deduction that if they had the necessary qualifications, the main tools of those who occupy certain positions through nepotism would not be nepotism but merit-based competitions.

As a solution that can yield short-term results, one of the main recommendations of this study is to ensure that merit is the only determinant in public functioning. In addition, clientelism, which is an ethical problem and a type of corruption, “should find its deserved place” in the societal sense, at least as much as theft in negative terms. The required arguments and basis to reach this aim are abundant in the culture and belief world of Turkish society. So, to give an example in the dimension of belief, according to the Directorate

of Religious Affairs' (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, DİB) meaning, the 58th Aya of Nisa Surah in the Qur'an is as follows; "Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice. What good advice does Allah give you? Surely, Allah hears everything and sees everything" (DİB nd). Again, in Anatolia, there are ancient traditions such as writing off each other's debts, not being unfair, and the rightful share, which are also fed by different beliefs. Even funeral ceremonies in Turkish society are in the form of a forgiving ceremony, including publicity in front of the community, asking those who have a debt from the deceased.

Some results and inferences of this research can be summarized as follows;

- The political pressure and domination created through "security investigations" and "interviews" on applicants for the positions analyzed in the research was clearly observed during the research.
- Another finding is "structural clientelism", a type of clientelism that is shaped around an ethno-religious core, visible through region and/or hometown, and which privileges those from certain regions of Turkey and excludes those from other regions in the distribution of certain resources, such as the positions subject to this research.
- It can be said that there is a stigmatization of both those who are brought to certain positions because of nepotism and those who are deprived of these positions because of these relations. As a matter of fact, the widespread conviction in society that clientelism, not merit, is the main way to reach these positions creates an impression that those who occupy these positions are or will be unqualified people and a distrust of institutions. This situation has been observed in recent years, especially in discussions on judges and prosecutors, such as "child judges" (Durakoğlu, 2020)

Considering the findings of the study, some suggestions can be listed as follows;

- It is essential that public and civil pressure groups such as universities, NGOs, etc. address this issue in order to raise public awareness, and also that victims of Turkish society who have not been appointed to these positions organize to make their voices heard.
- Starting with universities, "merit boards" should be established for initial appointments and career advancement in all public institutions, which will act independently and with assurance, and it should be ensured that all such procedures within the institution can only be carried out after the approval of this board.
- Legislation should be reviewed and all legal regulations that lead to such relationships or leave such relationships unsanctioned should be reviewed and reorganized with merit/justice criteria, and individuals should be facilitated in combating such practices.
- Interview exams should either be abolished completely or a "Central Interview Examination" should be organized by ÖSYM or another institution that is transparent, objective, with predetermined criteria and open to legal supervision.
- In democratic societies, organized employees/employee organizations play an important role in the formulation of employment and career policies. The strong presence of trade unions is positively associated with merit-based promotions and career planning. In this context, legal regulations and obligations should be introduced to encourage and expand union-like professional organizations and to ensure that their functioning is in a democratic form.



Ethics Committee Approval	Since the field work of the research was conducted before 2020, there is no ethics committee permission certificate.
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- M.Ö., S.S.; Data Acquisition- M.Ö.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- M.Ö., S.S.; Drafting Manuscript- M.Ö.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- S.S.; Final Approval and Accountability- M.Ö., S.S.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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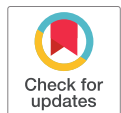


Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Effect of Social Pressure and Trust on Organizational Legitimacy: A Retailing Sector Perspective



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Abstract

Enterprises operate in complex and competitive environments where stakeholders have become more demanding regarding corporate behavior. Organizations must respond to social demands and build trust among stakeholders to be perceived as legitimate. Positive legitimacy evaluations give companies better access to relevant resources, stakeholder support, higher purchasing levels, or stronger commitment. In the retailing sector, competition has strengthened even more than in other sectors due to the complexity of differentiation through tangible matters. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to analyze the effect of social pressure and trust on organizational legitimacy. Next, the impact of legitimacy on consumer purchase intention and engagement will be analyzed. An online survey was distributed among Spanish consumers to achieve this purpose, gathering 200 valid responses. To treat the data, PLS-SEM was applied, and the results confirmed a positive and significant relationship between trust, social pressure, and legitimacy, as well as between legitimacy, engagement, and purchase intention. This situation reflects the importance of appropriate corporate behavior for the success of corporations. The implications of this research can be used by retailing sector managers to improve their social acceptance, ensure long-lasting relationships, and improve sales in the future.

Keywords

social pressure • trust • legitimacy • purchase intention • engagement



Citation: Díaz-Iglesias, S., Cachón-Rodríguez, G. & Miotto, G. (2025). Effect of social pressure and trust on organizational legitimacy: a retailing sector perspective. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 57-72. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1553125>

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 2025. Díaz-Iglesias, S., Cachón-Rodríguez, G. & Miotto, G.

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Effect of Social Pressure and Trust on Organizational Legitimacy: A Retailing Sector Perspective

Companies operate in environments where building trust among stakeholders is critical for receiving social support and positive legitimacy assessments. In addition, they often encounter social pressures and stakeholder requests for specific courses of action (Waldron et al., 2013). Ethical corporate behavior is positively perceived by consumers (Yoganathan et al., 2019), whose perceptions have shifted to a more altruistic orientation. As stated in the Edelman Trust Barometer (Barometer E.T., 2020), many consumers prefer those enterprises they trust and confirm their commitment to those that focus on providing value to society and addressing social needs and demands. Similarly, individuals are globally interconnected, constantly evaluating and searching for information regarding corporate behavior (Castells, 2007). Thus, transparency has become critical to earning trust and customer support (Iglesias et al., 2019).

Customers are more likely to provide positive legitimacy assessments to committed and trustworthy enterprises (Miotto et al., 2020), which shows the need to respond to social demands and develop activities to prove their reliability by behaving in accordance with social norms and values. When managing legitimacy, companies should identify consumers' desires and demands (Miotto et al., 2020). Stakeholders offer positive legitimacy assessments when they trust an organization since they understand that it would respect specific behavioral standards (Yang et al., 2021), which makes the organization reliable in front of society.

Legitimacy has been defined as the appropriateness of an organization due to the congruence of its activities and actions with the established norms and values (Deephhouse et al., 2017). Legitimate organizations will have higher probabilities of survival and success in the medium and long term (Bianchi et al., 2019; Czinkota et al., 2014; Miotto et al., 2020) since consumers will be more willing to be customers (Aksak et al., 2016) and engaged (Ailawadi et al., 2014). This results in enduring customer relationships (Payne et al., 2021). Firms perceived as legitimate have better access to relevant resources and to better develop their activities since they are not constantly questioned by the different stakeholders (Suchman, 1995).

Competition is higher in every industry; however, in the retail sector, the situation can be even more complex since tangible differentiation is more difficult to provide since the majority of brands offer similar products. Economic and pragmatic factors affect consumer decisions within the retail sector; however, socio-cultural assessments are also relevant (Yang et al., 2021). Authors such as Kim et al., (2014) considered that retailers needed to engage in socially accepted activities to achieve legitimacy and obtain a long-term sustained competitive advantage through (Handelman & Arnold, 1999) consistent customer support (Guo et al., 2017).

Retailers should introduce intangible asset management within their main strategies to improve social acceptance and, therefore, increase customer purchase intention and loyalty. Previous studies have focused on understanding the importance of organizational legitimacy in gaining trust, future purchases, and engagement (Kim et al., 2014). Other research papers have focused on the relationship between organizational legitimacy, service quality, and consumers' behavioral intentions in the retail industry (Yang et al., 2021). Nevertheless, a call was made to examine additional variables to understand organizational legitimacy antecedents as well as further benefits (Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2024; Díez-Martín et al., 2020; Payne et al., 2021).

Under this scenario, the main purpose of this research is to examine the antecedent role of social pressure and trust for organizational legitimacy and the impact that high legitimacy levels can have on customer relationship variables in the retail sector. More precisely, the following aspects will be analyzed: 1) The effect that social pressure has on the legitimacy level of an organization; 2) The impact of customer trust on legitimacy; 3) The effect of legitimacy on engagement; and 4) The effect of legitimacy on consumer purchase intention.

A market research company distributed an online survey (Microsoft Form) among Spanish consumers to test the previously mentioned issues. The information was collected from October to November 2021, and 200 valid responses were gathered. The methodology applied was structural equations through SmarPLS.

The main findings of this study will contribute to the customer management field, showing the importance of legitimacy management in obtaining higher purchase levels as well as stronger customer engagement. In addition, important insights will be offered to the retailing managers since social pressure and trust will be analyzed as legitimacy antecedents, providing guidelines to managers on how to improve their legitimacy levels.

This document is organized as follows: first, the theoretical framework covering the concepts and relationships between social pressure, trust, legitimacy, engagement, and purchase intention is presented. Next, the sample and methodology, as well as the main results of the research, are described. Finally, the discussion of the findings and managerial implications is developed, followed by the main limitations and future research agenda.

Theoretical Framework

Social Pressure and Legitimacy

The literature offers perspectives on how legitimacy and social pressure influence consumer attitudes and behaviors. Companies often face social pressures and requests from stakeholders to take certain actions (Waldron *et al.*, 2013). In this vein, social pressure is one of the factors that can influence organizational legitimacy. In fact, in industries such as mining, oil, and gas, different stakeholders, such as environmental activists, governments, consumers, and the media, ask for prudence in terms of the environmental practices developed by organizations (De Melo & Solleder, 2020). In addition, as Julian *et al.*, (2017) suggest, corporations' response to social pressures depends on different factors, such as being publicly traded, the level of certainty surrounding the social pressures they face, or the number of perceived threats in their strategic issue portfolio.

Suchman (1995, p. 574) introduced the definition of legitimacy into the business field, defining it as a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. This definition includes the concept of "social constructed system" which emphasizes the idea that legitimacy depends on the collective observers who provide it and, thus, on how people perceive the organization and the system in which it operates. In other words, legitimacy depends on the collective group of people who observe and judge the organization, called "legitimacy providers" (Barreto & Baden-Fuller, 2006). In the same vein, public endorsement refers to the acceptance of an organization from the wider community, referring to the extent to which the wider society and its members acknowledge and embrace an organization.

According to Haack's multilevel theory, legitimacy is a perception at both the individual and group levels. In this sense, it is understood to provide validity, ownership, and consensus (Haack et al., 2019). Thus, due to the perception of legitimacy, individuals experience a sense of moral obligation to comply with established decisions and regulations, choosing to follow them voluntarily instead of being motivated by fear of reprisal or expectation of incentive. In this sense, the ability to secure voluntary compliance from most individuals, primarily driven by their feelings of duty, enhances efficacy in situations characterized by scarcity, crisis, and conflict (Tyler, 2006).

Likewise, Companies' stakeholders or secondary groups, as Clarkson (1995) referred to, such as community activists, advocacy groups, religious organizations, and other nongovernmental organizations, can put pressure to induce organizations to respond to their requests (Eesley & Lenox, 2006), and as a result, achieve positive legitimacy assessments.

Academic research has tried to understand companies' actions to respond to social pressures exerted on them by different elements of society in their aim of being perceived as legitimate organizations (Smith et al., 2008). An example analyzed is the trend of implementing and divulging uniform codes of ethics in organizations to gain legitimacy (Bodolica & Spraggon, 2015). Another approach that the literature has studied is related to environmental practices, where the impact of social pressure in different industries, such as extractive industries (mining or oil and gas), is determinant, and those companies that implement innovative environmental practices become legitimate to operate in the specific location (Adomako & Nguyen, 2023). In the retailing sector, several authors such as Andersch et al., (2019) and Miotto and Youn (2020) have analyzed the importance of responding to social needs and demands to be perceived as a legitimate organization.

Following the institutional approach, brands respond to society's needs and demands, assuming an ethical responsibility that influences how the company is socially perceived by the engaged communities (Balaji et al., 2019), resulting in higher legitimacy levels (Czinkota et al., 2014; Payne et al., 2021). Considering the performed literature review about the relationship between social pressure and legitimacy, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Social pressure positively and significantly affects the legitimacy of the organization.

Trust and Legitimacy

As evidenced by consumer behavior by the findings presented in the "Spring Update 2020" report of the Edelman Trust Barometer (Barometer E.T., 2020), the report revealed that a substantial 65% of the population expressed their preference for brands in which they had confidence. Moreover, companies that prioritized economic gains solely at the expense of societal well-being risked losing the trust and loyalty of their customers. The report's data indicated a 7% increase in the number of individuals who switched to brands that demonstrated a more substantial commitment to addressing people's needs during 2020.

This situation demonstrates how trustworthy and reliable companies have stronger social support and legitimacy, ensuring their right to operate in a particular environment (Chen, 2010). These enterprises tend to experience higher success levels than those lacking legitimacy (Glozer et al., 2019).

Some studies based on legitimacy are generally focused on social, economic, or political factors and how they influence their transformations over time (Mahadeo et al., 2011). Some cases show that the economic theme related to promoting positive outcomes refers to stakeholders such as retailers or consumers and not to the public interest. While the environmental theme is also associated with retailers, and the social theme, contrary to the expectations, both are significantly related to the public interest (Corciolani et al., 2019).

Organizations gain legitimacy by meeting stakeholders' ethical expectations through their alignment with their values and societal norms (Deephouse et al., 2017), which grants them the opportunity to enhance and prove their credibility and trustworthiness within society (Díez-Martín et al., 2022). Stakeholders must perceive that value generation is mutually received; otherwise, legitimacy assessments might not be positive (Freudenreich et al., 2019).

Since enterprises are constantly scrutinized by society, expecting ethical and appropriate behavior (Brunk, 2010), and the domain of the retail industry, institutional theory has established the notion that consumer choices depend not only on economic factors but also on socio-cultural values (Yang et al., 2021), it is essential to analyze the relationship that perceived trust has on organizational legitimacy. Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented:

Hypothesis 2: Trust positively and significantly affects legitimacy.

Legitimacy and Engagement

Consumers have become more conscious of the concerns related to their immediate environment and are inclined to act for improving their local community. They are now actively involved in creating a better world and aspire to be responsible and sustainable citizens (Fuentes & Sörum, 2019). Consequently, retailer social initiatives directed toward community members are gaining prominence. Retailers, due to their closer and more immediate physical and emotional connection with the community in which they operate, are in a better position to engage in activities that enhance their legitimacy level compared to manufacturers and wholesalers (Kim et al., 2014).

Engaging in socially supported initiatives within the retail sector is a crucial factor for long-term viability, as it simultaneously generates social and economic advantages. Existing research has found that retailers who are perceived to uphold community social norms acquire legitimacy among consumers within that community (Yang et al., 2021). Moreover, when a retailer establishes its legitimacy and justifies its presence as a community member, consumers are more inclined to extend their support (Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Kim et al., 2014). Legitimacy is achieved when organizations share their diverse stakeholders' behaviors, values, and beliefs (Blanco-Gonzalez et al., 2020).

When consumers perceive a retailer as legitimate, they demonstrate a higher willingness to support them through increased loyalty and engagement in activities that contribute to the organization's well-being (Guo et al., 2017). Thus, establishing legitimacy not only enhances customers' intention to revisit the retailer but also creates positive memories among consumers (Yang et al., 2021; Payne et al., 2021). Consequently, customers analyze whether enterprises' behavior meets social demands and values before deciding whether to engage with them or not (Du & Vieira, 2012). Therefore, it becomes critical for retailers to manage their legitimacy to receive customer support in the medium and long term.

Legitimacy affects consumer behavior and attitudes because it contributes to building positive assessments of organizations (Valor et al., 2021). In fact, engagement and loyalty are enhanced (Walsh et al., 2010), which translates into long-lasting customer relationships (Payne et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2010).

Based on these statements, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Legitimacy positively and significantly affects engagement.

Legitimacy and Purchase Intention

Legitimacy, as an intangible resource, offers enduring and sustainable competitive advantages for organizations (Bianchi *et al.*, 2019; Miotto *et al.*, 2018) and exerts a significant impact on consumers' inclination to make purchases (Aksak *et al.*, 2016). By meeting the needs of their stakeholders, organizations gain legitimacy, which, in turn, grants them easier and more sustained access to the essential resources required for their survival (Díez-Martín *et al.*, 2020).

Companies undergo continuous public evaluation where individuals use a subjective moral lens to assess their actions as right or wrong (Brunk, 2010). Some studies have shown that in uncertain situations, emotional reactions to ambiguous circumstances impact individuals' behavioral intentions (Halevy, 2017). Thus, retail operators should be ready to implement long-term strategies to gain a competitive edge and establish consumer confidence (Yang *et al.*, 2021).

Organizational legitimacy is contingent upon the alignment between a retailer's activities and societal norms, wherein the fulfillment of social values implies legitimacy (Woods *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the survival of an organization hinges upon the acquisition of legitimacy and the congruence between strategic performance and institutional norms (Arnold *et al.*, 1996; Kim *et al.*, 2014). Consumers' responses to the legitimacy level of retailers are evident through their intentions to revisit the establishment (Ailawadi *et al.*, 2014; Yang *et al.*, 2021).

In contrast, following instances of misconduct associated with a brand, there is a detrimental effect on purchase intentions, as highlighted by Hsu *et al.*, (2012) and Mena *et al.*, (2019). The selection of a brand is also influenced by customers' alignment with the brand's ethical stances and perspectives (Barometer E.T.; Porter & Kramer, 2007).

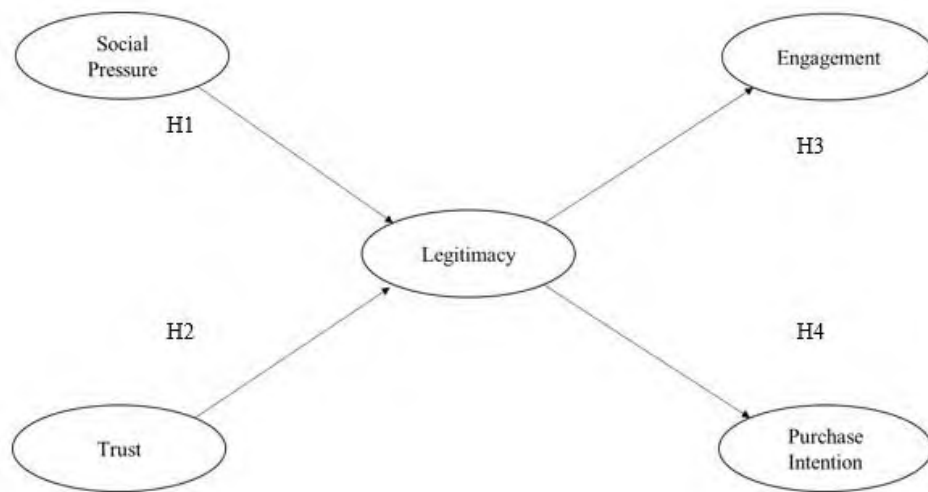
Effective management of legitimacy can indeed have an impact on consumer behavior, leading to increased levels of purchase intention (Payne *et al.*, 2021; Guo *et al.*, 2014). This, in turn, can translate into long-term outcomes as consumers repetitively make purchases and become loyal to the organization (Aksak *et al.*, 2016).

Considering the previously discussed arguments about the relationship between purchase intention and legitimacy, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4: Legitimacy positively and significantly affects the consumer's purchase intention.

In the following figure ([Figure 1](#)), the proposed model is presented to clarify the defined hypotheses that will be tested.

Figure 1
Estimation of the Proposed Model



Sample and Methodology

Sample and data collection

The research setting where this study was developed is the Spanish retailing, specifically in the supermarket sector. As previously stated, competition has been increasing over the last years in almost every sector. However, this situation has been even stronger for the supermarket sector since differentiation based on tangible features is very complex, and the fact that online shopping, at least in Spain, has not replaced brick-and-mortar retail stores (Panzone et al., 2021). Therefore, analyzing the role that building legitimacy and trust can have on purchase intention and engagement for these companies is relevant if they expect to survive and grow in the medium and long term.

An online survey (Microsoft Forms) was distributed by a market research company among Spanish consumers to test the proposed hypotheses defined in the theoretical framework, and 200 valid responses were gathered. The information was collected from October to November 2021.

Variable measurement

As previously mentioned, an online survey was distributed to gather the data for the research. All the questions included to measure each variable were taken from previous scales applied in other research papers using a 7-point Likert scale, with 0 referring to strongly disagree and 7 referring to strongly agree. To measure the concept of social pressure, 5 items were included based on Smith et al. (2008) and Balaji et al. (2019). Regarding trust and legitimacy, we included 3 and 10 questions, respectively, following the scales used by Chen (2010), Woods et al. (2018) and Asgari (2016). Finally, for the measurement of customer engagement and purchase intention, 3 items were used for each variable based on the research developed by Cachón-Rodríguez et al. (2024) and Dodd and Supa (2015). In Table 1, the complete measurement instrument is presented.

Table 1
Measurement Model

Factor	Item	Description
Social pressure	SP1	The important people in my life encourage me to purchase in the supermarket
	SP2	The important people in my life believe we should purchase in this supermarket
	SP3	Purchasing in this supermarket gives me social recognition
	SP4	I should purchase in this supermarket
	SP5	When purchasing in a supermarket, trends are important
Trust	TR1	I can trust this supermarket
	TR2	I believe that this supermarket will fulfill its promises
Legitimacy	LEG1	This supermarket is trustworthy
	LEG2	This supermarket behaves in an ethical manner
	LEG3	This supermarket offers what I need
	LEG4	This supermarket provides value to me
	LEG5	This supermarket performs its activities in the best possible manner
	LEG6	I identify myself with this supermarket
	LEG7	I like how this supermarket works
	LEG8	This supermarket follows the law
	LEG9	This supermarket cares about society's well-being
	LEG10	It is an example of how other supermarkets should work
	LEG11	I feel a connection with this supermarket
	LEG12	It would be a shame that this supermarket disappeared
Engagement	ENG1	I enjoy talking about this supermarket.
	ENG2	I feel involved with the supermarket
	ENG3	I publish comments about the supermarket on the internet
Purchase Intention	PINT1	It is probable that I will keep purchasing from this supermarket
	PINT2	I will recommend this supermarket to my family and friends
	PINT3	Purchasing in this supermarket is my first option

Source: Authors'own elaboration

Data analysis

To test the data, the applied methodology used structural equations through SmarPLS. This method is appropriate for the development of this research since it follows a statistical analysis of the relationships through the prediction of the dependent variables, which enables the calculation of some variables' effects over others (Hallak *et al.*, 2018). In addition, PLS-SEM is suitable for a sample of 200 because previous research has identified a sampling threshold of 100 subjects (Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). As many authors have considered, PMS-SEM is a strong method of analysis (Chin *et al.*, 2003), which has important advantages for developing our research since the proposed model is complex and novel (Hair *et al.*, 2018).

Results

Descriptive analysis

The first step when analyzing the results was to develop a descriptive analysis to understand the evaluation of the considered items and variables. **Table 2** presents the mean and standard deviation of each item and variable. The average values for the analyzed constructs were 3.67 for social pressure, 5.15 for trust, 4.79 for legitimacy, 3.91 in the case of engagement, and 5.59 for purchase intention. These values show a relatively positive assessment of the responses since the maximum value for each question in the survey was 7.

Table 2
Descriptive Analysis

Factor	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Average factor value
Social pressure	SP1	4.42	1.83	3.67
	SP2	3.25	1.92	
	SP3	3.58	1.79	
	SP4	2.86	1.71	
	SP5	4.23	1.81	
Trust	TR1	5.29	1.31	5.15
	TR2	5.00	1.30	
Legitimacy	LEG1	5.16	1.29	4.79
	LEG2	4.60	1.26	
	LEG3	5.43	1.17	
	LEG4	4.24	1.54	
	LEG5	4.72	1.35	
	LEG6	4.40	1.60	
	LEG7	5.12	1.34	
	LEG8	5.00	1.33	
	LEG9	4.38	1.40	
	LEG10	4.56	1.44	
	LEG11	4.34	1.57	
	LEG12	5.52	1.52	
Engagement	ENG1	5.65	1.82	3.91
	ENG2	4.10	1.65	
	ENG3	1.99	1.60	
Purchase Intention	PINT1	6.21	1.03	5.59
	PINT2	5.17	1.53	
	PINT3	5.40	1.50	

Reliability and validity

As it was previously mentioned, for this research, the applied methodology were structural equations through SmartPLS. Before analyzing the structural model, it is mandatory to evaluate the reliability and validity of the model. **Table 3** presents the numbers. All the reflective items show a Cronbach alpha's value

over 0.70 following Hair et al., (2018) as well as Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) recommendations. Regarding the composite reliability, Table 3 shows that all considered items have values higher than 0.60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). When analyzing the average variance extended (AVE), the results show that every value is over 0.50, which is the requirement according to Fornell and Larcker (1981). In addition, the standardized loadings of all the reflective items are significant ($p < 0.01$), which highlights the relevant impact they each have on the measurement of the considered variables for this research.

Table 3

Measurement model reliability and validity

Factor	Item	Loadings	T-Value	CA	CR	AVE
Social pressure	SP1	0.857	28.297	0.899	0.924	0.708
	SP2	0.900	71.236			
	SP3	0.806	25.816			
	SP4	0.822	39.639			
	SP5	0.817	22.358			
Trust	TR1	0.951	111.289	0.899	0.952	0.908
	TR2	0.955	143.398			
Legitimacy	LEG1	0.832	40.429	0.943	0.951	0.619
	LEG2	0.819	28.297			
	LEG3	0.805	27.189			
	LEG4	0.698	16.448			
	LEG5	0.803	23.758			
	LEG6	0.659	16.416			
	LEG7	0.755	21.125			
	LEG8	0.854	41.032			
	LEG9	0.814	28.924			
	LEG10	0.833	31.445			
	LEG11	0.753	25.556			
	LEG12	0.792	24.051			
Engagement	ENG1	0.878	32.006	0.750	0.848	0.654
	ENG2	0.882	54.382			
	ENG3	0.644	9.051			
Purchase Intention	PINT1	0.678	11.762	0.707	0.824	0.613
	PINT2	0.877	42.474			
	PINT3	0.781	16.258			

Note: CA: Cronbach's Alpha; CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extended

Table 4 presents the HTMT ratio, which is the method applied to test the discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2020). The obtained values for every factor are lower than 0.85 (Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2024); therefore, no problems appear in the model.

Table 4*Discriminant validity*

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
F1 Engagement					
F2 Legitimacy	0.69				
F3 Purchase intention	0.44	0.75			
F4 Social Pressure	0.83	0.56	0.34		
F5 Trust	0.44	0.82	0.84	0.36	

Hypotheses testing

The final step is to analyze the results obtained and related to the proposed hypotheses. **Table 5** and **Figure 2** present the numbers. The model shows a strong and significant relationship between all the considered variables, except for the influence of purchase intention on engagement, which has a t-value lower than 2.

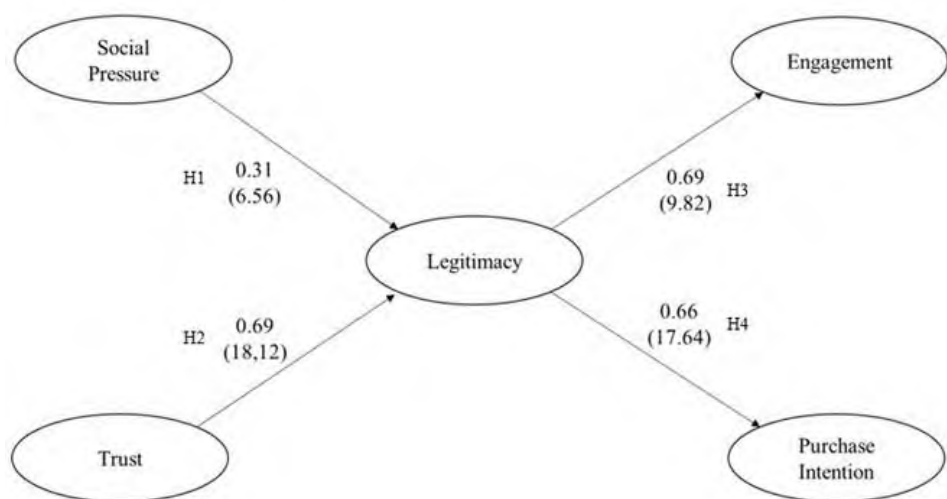
Table 5*Hypotheses testing*

Hypotheses	Beta	T-Value
H1: Social pressure -> Legitimacy	0.307	6.558
H2: Trust -> Legitimacy	0.694	18.120
H3: Legitimacy -> Engagement	0.692	9.819
H4: Legitimacy -> Purchase Intention	0.657	17.642

R² (Legitimacy) = 0.72; Q² (Legitimacy) = 0.44

R² (Purchase Intention) = 0.43; Q² (Purchase Intention) = 0.24

R² (Engagement) = 0.41; Q² (Engagement) = 0.24

Figure 2*Estimation of the Proposed Model*

Discussion, Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

Consumers are more likely to support and start a relationship with an organization that respects commonly accepted behaviors (Miotto *et al.*, 2020). Society, in general, pressures corporations to behave in a responsible way (Yang *et al.*, 2021), and their behaviors affect customer's trust.

According to the above-mentioned theoretical framework, the main objective of this research is to evaluate the impact that social pressure and trust have on the legitimacy perception in the retail industry. Next, through the tested model, we evaluated the impact that legitimacy has on the consumers' purchase intention and engagement.

According to the results, legitimacy positively affects purchase intention, confirming the most recent literature review that links legitimacy perception with the increase in sales (Bianchi *et al.*, 2019; Miotto *et al.*, 2018; Payne *et al.*, 2021; Guo *et al.*, 2014).

On the contrary, legitimacy does not greatly affect engagement and customer loyalty, partially contradicting the latest research, since in the retail industry, building customer loyalty and engagement is still very difficult since the perceived products and services differentiation is most of the time quite low (Yang *et al.*, 2021; Payne *et al.*, 2021).

Trust and legitimacy are linked and play an important role in customer purchase intention and engagement. Firms should be able to improve their perception of trustworthiness, which may increase customers' willingness to engage in a long-lasting relationship (Díez-Martín *et al.*, 2022).

The four proposed hypotheses are confirmed according to the structural model, showing that in the retail industry, social pressure and trust are antecedents of legitimacy, thanks to the respect of social values, improving firms' trustworthiness (Czinkota *et al.*, 2014). As proven in the tested model, legitimacy is a critical resource for retailers' survival and success since it showed an impact on two of the most relevant variables of customer relationship management: purchase intention and engagement. Customers demand ethical behavior, and ethical purchases are an increasing consumer trend (Garanti, 2019; Govind *et al.*, 2017; Schamp *et al.*, 2019).

Considering the difficulty that retailers face when trying to attract new and loyal customers, managers should build new strategies and policies to align the firm's behaviors to the customers' demand in terms of value and trust. This alignment will translate into better performance through a higher level of purchases and customer engagement.

Finally, this research paper has some limitations. First, the sample of 200 individuals, although it is enough to test the data in PLS-SEM, could be increased in future research to be able to better generalize the tested model. In addition, the model was tested only in Spain. Future research lines could replicate the same model in different countries, improving the sample size and facilitating comparison between different geographic areas. Moreover, the different dimensions of legitimacy may be considered different variables to assess customers' perceptions and reactions.



Ethics Committee Approval	There is no Ethics Committee Approval needed for this manuscript.
Peer-Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- S.D.I, G.C.R., G.M.; Data Acquisition- S.D.I, G.C.R.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- G.C.R.; Drafting Manuscript- G.C.R., S.D.I.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- G.M.; Final Approval and Accountability- S.D.I, G.C.R., G.M.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Advertising and Financial Performance in the Tourism Industry: The Moderating Role of The Brand Architecture Strategy



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Abstract

Financial resources are considered one of the important economic resources, which need to be allocated wisely. Despite the increased interest in understanding whether advertising represents an investment or an expense, research on the link between advertising and financial performance is limited. Hence, this study aims to investigate the effect of advertising spending on both operating and market financial performance as well as to analyze the moderating role of brand architecture strategy in the tourism industry. Fixed-effects regression estimations were used to test the proposed effects based on a sample of publicly-listed hospitality firms in the US. The results show that advertising spending boosts both operating and market financial performance. Furthermore, firms applying the house-of-brands strategy were found to benefit more from the positive effects of advertising on return on equity and market value. As such, this study extends the current literature by showing that advertisement represents an investment that contributes to financial performance. Additionally, this research provides the first empirical evidence for the moderating effect of brand strategy on the advertisement and financial performance link. The findings also provide implications for industry practitioners to make budget decisions and for investors to use advertising expenditures and brand strategy as investment criteria in investing decisions.

Keywords

Advertising · operating performance · market performance · brand strategy



- “ Citation: Erkmen, E. (2025). Advertising and financial performance in the tourism industry: The moderating role of the brand architecture strategy. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 73-85. <https://doi.org/10.26650/J ECS2024-1587228>
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Advertising and Financial Performance in the Tourism Industry: The Moderating Role of The Brand Architecture Strategy

There is a growing interest of both researchers and practitioners in understanding the effect of marketing activities on firm financial performance. With respect to different marketing activities, advertising is considered to be an effective tool that has the potential to influence consumer behavior, thereby increasing firm performance (Hyun et al., 2011). The primary assumption for the positive effect of advertising on financial performance is based on the argument that advertisement can be regarded as an investment rather than an expense (Denizci & Li, 2009; Srivastava et al., 1998). In the literature, there are two common approaches to assess the effect of advertising on financial outcomes depending on the measures used to proxy the performance. Specifically, operating financial performance relies on accounting measures, such as operating profit (OP), return on assets (ROA), and return on equity (ROE), which address the short-term financial impacts of advertising (McAlister et al., 2016). On the other hand, market-based financial performance, which adopts a long-term orientation by using market value proxies, focuses on firm value as the outcome of advertising spending. Therefore, some scholars criticize operating performance measures because they fail to capture the long-term effects of advertising. For instance, Shah and Akbar (2008) argue that the market value perspective can outweigh other perspectives, since it has a long-term focus incorporating the carryover effect of advertising on financial performance.

Indeed, the expected impact of advertising is attributed to its role in influencing both consumer and investor behaviors. First, advertising serves as a means to inform customers about products and services, create awareness among them, and shape their attitudes and perceptions (Peterson & Jeong, 2010; Shah & Akbar 2008). As such, advertising has positive behavioral effects on customer responses, which further leads to increased demand and sales for companies (Kim et al., 2018; Park & Jang, 2012). Second, investors use advertising spending as an indicator of financial returns since it represents a sign of future earnings (Joshi & Hanssens, 2010). In fact, the positive effects of advertising can be explained based on the principles of signaling theory (Spence, 1973), which addresses the role of credible signals in the case of information asymmetries between two parties. Since firms have more information than the market, advertising expenditures may serve as credible signals for both consumers and investors to assess product benefits and future financial returns (Joshi & Hanssens, 2010). Moreover, advertising is specifically important for service firms compared to manufacturing firms for its effect on firm performance due to the intangible nature of services (Ho et al., 2005). In particular, the hedonic character of tourism services further intensifies the importance of advertising due to its effects on cognitive decision-making processes (Kivetz & Zheng, 2017).

To date, prior literature has used both operating and market-based performance measures to investigate the effect of advertising, but reported conflicting results (Assaf et al., 2017; Denizci & Li, 2009; Kim et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019). The contradictory findings of previous studies can be explained by the interaction effects of other factors on the link between advertising and financial performance (Luo & de Jong, 2012). Similarly, the contingency theory argues that the relationship between two factors could be dependent on some other factors (Tosi & Slocum, 1984). Hence, this study proposes a company brand architecture strategy as one of the potential moderators based on the argument that different architecture strategies may have different impacts on the efficiency of advertising spending (Rubio & Calderón-Martínez, 2021). As a result, motivated by the importance of advertising for financial performance as well as conflicting results on the

relation between advertising and financial outcomes, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of advertising on both the operating and market financial performance of hospitality firms. Furthermore, the current research aims to analyze whether the effect of advertising on financial performance is contingent on the type of brand architecture strategy. This study also aims to assess whether the effect of advertising differs between firms having multiple brands and firms adopting a single brand.

Therefore, this study contributes to both finance and tourism literature in two different ways. First, the current research answers the call for more studies to investigate the relationship between marketing and finance in the hospitality industry (Assaf et al., 2017). As such, this study provides further empirical evidence for the role of advertising in enhancing both operating and market financial performance. Second, this study provides the first empirical evidence for the moderating effect of brand strategy, thus justifying the contingency perspective on the link between advertising and financial performance. The findings of this study also provide implications, which can guide the advertising decisions of practitioners and the financing choices of investors.

Literature Review

Effect of advertising on financial performance

According to Rust et al. (2004), the effects of advertising can be analyzed from different perspectives. While customer impact focuses on the responses of consumers, such as satisfaction, loyalty; market impact, financial impact, and firm value impact deal with firm financial performance outcomes. Financial performance, defined as “the fulfillment of firm’s economic goals” is commonly conceptualized as short-term performance that uses operating measures and long-term performance that relies on market-based measures (Gentry & Shen, 2010, p. 516). In line with this conceptualization, financial impact relies on accounting performance measures to assess the short-term effects of advertising on operating financial performance. On the other hand, impact on firm value uses value performance measures to evaluate the long-term impact of advertising on market financial performance.

Even though these two perspectives differ based on performance measure orientations, both of them aim to link marketing activities with financial outcomes. According to the literature, the relationship between advertising and financial performance can be approached from the perspective of marketing productivity, which stands for “the quantifiable value added by the marketing function, relative to its costs” (Sheth & Sisodia, 2002, p. 351). Hence, marketing productivity adopts the input-output view where advertising expenditures represent the input resulting in improved financial performance as the output. In particular, the idea assumes that advertising needs to be regarded as an investment rather than a cost. Moreover, especially for the hospitality industry, advertising results in higher economic benefits compared to other assets (Qi et al., 2018)

However, prior literature, which adopts different proxies to tackle the question of how advertising spending influences firm financial performance, reports conflicting findings. For instance, Kim et al. (2019) analyzed the relationship between advertising and restaurant performance using the measures of sales, profitability, and stock value. The authors evidenced the quadratic effect of advertising expenses on all three performance measures and showed that the effect changes depending on the level of advertising spending. Similarly, in a study of restaurant and hotel firms, Assaf et al. (2017) showed that advertising spending has a positive and significant effect on sales and firm value, which is measured as market value added (MVA). Denizci and Li (2009) also provided support for the significant positive effect of advertising on firm value,

which is measured by Tobin's q . However, the effects on stock value and return on assets were found to be insignificant. Likewise, Kim et al. (2018) studied the intermediate effects of advertising, but did not yield a positive immediate or lagged effect of advertising on both sales and profit.

The mixed and contradictory findings in the literature can be attributed to the adoption of different measures and methodological limitations. First, critics have disparaged the use of a single indicator to assess financial performance (Boyd et al., 2005). Since financial performance is not a unidimensional construct (Gentry & Shen, 2010); using two distinct dimensions, namely the operating and market performance, helps to capture both short-term and long-term outcomes. Likewise, prior studies in the hospitality and tourism literature heavily relies on sales and operating performance measures to understand the effect of advertising spending (Qi et al., 2018). Second, it is argued that there might be potential firm-related factors overlooked, which may influence the causal relationship between advertising expenditures and financial performance (Landes & Rosenfield, 1994). Therefore, these criticisms make it important to approach financial performance as a multidimensional construct that needs to be measured by different indicators. Furthermore, the mixed results highlight the noteworthiness of analyzing the effect of moderating factors on the link between advertising and financial performance.

Despite the contradictory findings reported by prior studies, the general notion in the current literature is that advertising spending has a positive influence on firm financial outcomes. In fact, the positive impact of advertising on performance can be explained based on the arguments of signaling theory, which addresses the situations where there is an information asymmetry between two parties (Spence, 1973). Within the framework of marketing, advertising expenditures can be considered as signals to consumers and investors to reduce information asymmetries between the focal firm and the market. The relevance of the signaling theory is based on the assumption that consumers and investors favorably respond to advertising, which further affects the purchases of products and company stocks (Chemmanur & Yan, 2009). On one hand, advertising serves as a tool to inform customers about products and services, which, in turn, triggers demand (Shah & Akbar, 2008). Furthermore, advertising influences the attitudes and perceptions of consumers (Rust et al., 2004), thereby translating into purchase intentions (Hyun et al., 2011). On the other hand, advertising expenditures send signals to the financial market regarding the current and future earnings of the firms. Joshi and Hanssens (2010) provide evidence that advertising expenditures positively affect firm value by creating an investor response. Specifically, investors usually consider advertising spending as an investment that can yield financial returns in the short-run (Rust et al., 2002). In other terms, investors use advertising expenditures as a signal to evaluate their economic returns. Therefore, based on the foundations of the signaling theory, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1. Advertising spending positively affects the operational financial performance of hospitality firms.

H2. Advertising spending positively affects the market financial performance of hospitality firms.

The moderating role of the brand architecture strategy

Brands represent strategic intangible assets for companies that positively contribute to cash flow and stock return (Mizik & Jacobson, 2008). In particular, reputed and reliable brands represent one of the significant firm characteristics positively influencing financial performance due to their risk-reduction effects (Kim et al., 2020). Since reliable brands have the opportunity to have a better position in the minds of consumers relative to competitors (Vogus & Welbourne, 2003), these brands can also be assumed to have strong

brand equity. Specific to the hospitality industry, the intangible characteristics of the services intensify the importance of brands and their impacts on financial performance. However, there are contradictory findings for the effect of brands on the financial performance of hospitality firms. For instance, Fan et al. (2023) could not evidence a significant effect of both brand equity and brand identity on the financial performance of hotel firms. On the other hand, Kim and Kim (2005) found that brand equity positively contributes to financial performance, which is measured as Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR). Hence, these conflicting results imply that there might be other factors to consider while analyzing the impact of brands on firm performance.

Based on a study including firms from different industries, prior research suggests that both brand orientation and inter-firm market orientation result in better financial performance. Tajeddini and Ratten (2020) demonstrated that collaboration with partners and having a mindset that integrates brand into marketing strategy enhance firm performance. This finding is also in line with previous literature, which argues that inter-firm relationships enable firms to combine resources, thereby yielding better outcomes. In a similar vein, Ozdemir et al. (2019) found that restaurant firms following a brand diversification strategy by having multiple brands face lower underpricing in their initial public offerings (IPOs). As such, the brand architecture choices of firms could be considered a factor that influences the financial performance of businesses (Rao et al., 2004). Brand architecture can be defined as “an organizing structure of the brand portfolio that specifies brand roles and the nature of relationships between brands” (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 134). In the literature, “Branded House” (BH) and “House of Brands” (HOB) constitute two primary brand architecture strategies for firms (Petromilli et al., 2002). While BH adopts a unified corporate brand name across all businesses in the portfolio, HOB uses different brands developed for different businesses in the portfolio where the brands do not have an association with the corporate brand (Rao et al., 2004). Hence, the HOB strategy is usually associated with operating a portfolio of diversified brands.

Brand diversification accounts for one of the two common diversification strategies adopted by hospitality firms (Kang & Lee, 2014) since it is especially important for services due to the heterogeneous needs of customers. Brand diversification represents the scope of different brands used by a firm (Bahadir et al., 2008). Even though brand diversification offers various benefits to companies, such as achieving price premiums, larger market share, and competitive advantage (Kekre & Srinivasan, 1990), there is limited research regarding the impact of operating several brands on financial performance, and the results yield contradictory findings. For instance, using a sample of manufacturing firms, Morgan and Rego (2019) report that brand diversification positively contributes to firm value. Conversely, Choi et al. (2011) evidenced the negative effect of brand diversification on the firm value of restaurant businesses. Despite these two different conflicting results, according to the portfolio theory (Markowitz, 1952), which originated from studies in the area of economics, offering a portfolio of different brands can reduce risks and positively affect long-term financial returns. Specifically, a portfolio of brands creates synergy across the portfolio and improves efficiency (Aaker, 2004). Regarding the effect of different brand architecture strategies on financial performance, Rao et al. (2004) concluded that the BH strategy outweighs the HOB strategy in terms of firm value, which is measured by Tobin’s Q. On the contrary, Hsu et al. (2016) showed that HOB strategies result in higher firm value through increased returns and lower risk compared to BH strategies.

As proposed by Aaker (1996), advertising helps to develop brand associations for both customers and investors by influencing their perceptions. Thus, the positive moderating effect of the HOB strategy could be explained based on the spillover effect. As argued by Kang and Lee (2014), especially in the hospitality

industry, brand diversification occurs among similar businesses, resulting in more commonalities. Hence, the advertising expenditures can create synergy across brands in the portfolio. That is, the brand associations of customers and investors may spill over into the perceptions of other brands in the portfolio. In line with the arguments of the spillover effect, Rubio and Calderón-Martínez (2021) demonstrated that the scope of the brand portfolio positively influences the advertising efficiency of hotel firms. That is, larger portfolios enable better segmentation of the market, which, in turn, results in more effective market targeting. Hence, the HOB strategy may allow firms to create synergies across brands, thereby increasing advertisement efficiency, which may lead to higher performance measures. As a result, based on the preceding discussions, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

H3. Brand architecture strategy moderates the positive effect of advertising spending on the operational financial performance of hospitality firms in a way that the effect is stronger for firms that adopt the HOB strategy.

H4. Brand architecture strategy moderates the positive effect of advertising spending on the market financial performance of hospitality firms in a way that the effect is stronger for firms that adopt the HOB strategy.

Methodology

Sample and data

This study uses a panel data set of 68 publicly-traded US hospitality firms, including hotel and restaurant businesses, within the period from 2000 to 2022 with 752 observations. Annual firm financial data were derived from S&P Global's Compustat database. The brand architecture strategy is assessed by reviewing the 10-K of each listed firm included in the sample.

The variables used in the research and the description of each variable are provided in Table 1. Following the methodology of prior studies for firm financial performance (Denizci & Li, 2009; García-Gómez et al., 2022), this research adopted four dependent variables. While profit margin (PM), return on assets (ROA), and return on equity (ROE) are used as the measures of operating financial performance, Tobin's Q is used as the measure of market financial performance. spending, which is measured by annual advertising expenditure, represents the primary independent variable of interest. To analyze the data, the study employed natural logarithms of all performance variables and advertising expenditures to reduce skewness in the distribution. In order to investigate the interaction effect of brand architecture strategy on the link between advertising and financial performance, a dummy variable is created as BRNDSTR, which takes a value of 1 if the firm uses a portfolio of different brands (HOB), and 0 otherwise (BH). Lastly, this research also included a set of control variables in the estimation models. Specifically, firm size, leverage, capital intensity, and liquidity are identified as the firm-level control variables since they are also related to firm performance.

Table 1

Variables and measures

Variable	Measure
OPM	Ratio of net operating income to net sales
ROA	Ratio of net income to total assets
ROE	Ratio of total net income to total equity

Variable	Measure
Tobin's Q	Ratio of the market value of the firm to the replacement cost of its assets
ADV	Annual advertising expenditure
ADV*BRNDSTR	Dummy variable (1 if the firm has a portfolio of different brands and 0 otherwise)
Firm Size	Natural logarithm of total assets
Leverage	Ratio of total liabilities to total assets
Capital Intensity	Ratio of total assets to sales
Liquidity	Ratio of current assets to current liabilities

Model specification

To analyze the data and the proposed hypotheses, regression is used as the statistical method since this research uses panel data of 68 firms to make inferences about causal relationships. For each financial performance variable, this study estimated four separate regression equations. To analyze the main effect of advertising spending on firm financial outcomes, the following regression model (Equation 1) is formulated:

$$FP_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln ADV_{i,t} + \beta_2 FSIZE_{i,t} + \beta_3 LEV_{i,t} + \beta_4 LIQ_{i,t} + \beta_5 CAP\_INT_{i,t} + \omega_i (\text{Firm Fixed Effects}) + \varphi_t (\text{Year Fixed Effects}) + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

where FP denotes the financial performance measures, which are PM, ROA, ROE, and Tobin's Q, i and t indicate the company and year, and $\epsilon_{i,t}$ represents the error term. Firm dummies and year dummies are also included in the model. Since panel data estimation is used in the analyses, the Hausman test is performed to decide whether fixed-effects regression or random-effects regression are appropriate. Based on the p-values smaller than 0.01, this research estimated all models by fixed-effects regression.

To investigate the moderating effect of the brand architecture strategy, the baseline regression model in equation 1 is modified by incorporating an interaction term, which is denoted as $\ln ADV * BRNDSTR$. As such, the following regression model is constructed (Equation 2):

$$FP_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln ADV_{i,t} + \beta_2 BRNDSTR_{i,t} + \beta_3 \ln ADV * BRNDSTR_{i,t} + \beta_4 FSIZE_{i,t} + \beta_5 LEV_{i,t} + \beta_6 LIQ_{i,t} + \beta_7 CAP\_INT_{i,t} + \omega_i (\text{Firm Fixed Effects}) + \varphi_t (\text{Year Fixed Effects}) + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (2)$$

Results

Model estimation results for the main effect of advertising on financial performance

Table 2 provides the regression estimation results for equation 1, which is used to test the main effects of advertising on financial performance measures. The baseline estimation equation is employed for each performance variable, leading to four regression models, which test the effect of advertising expenditure. The coefficient estimate of $\ln ADV$ in Model 1 ($\beta=0.0654$; $p<.01$) is positive and statistically significant, indicating that increased advertising spending results in a higher profit margin. This finding confirms the results of previous research (Kim et al., 2019), which reported a positive quadratic effect of advertising on profitability. In a similar vein, the positive effect of advertising is evidenced in Model 3. The findings of Model 3 reveal that advertising expenditure ($\beta=0.0557$; $p<.01$) is significantly and positively related to return on equity. Despite the positive impact of advertising on PM and ROE measures, this study fails to find a statistically significant effect on ROA. The insignificant coefficient on $\ln ADV$ ($\beta=-0.0557$; $p>.05$) in Model 2 implies that advertising spending does not impact the return on assets. These two findings provide partial

support for the prior research, which analyzed the effects of advertising on hotel sales, risk and return (Chen, 2015). That is, the results of the respective prior study could not display a significant relationship between advertising and profitability measures of ROA as well as ROE. Overall, regarding the influence of advertising on operating financial performance, this study provides support for two accounting-based measures, which are profit margin and return on equity. Precisely, the findings provide proof that advertising expenditures positively contribute to the operating financial performance of hospitality firms.

With respect to the proposed relationship between advertising and market-based financial performance, the estimation coefficient for $\ln ADV$ ($\beta=0.1108$; $p<0.01$) indicate that advertising expenditure has a significant positive effect on market performance, as measured by Tobin's Q. In fact, Tobin's Q is a widely adopted measure of market value performance (Servaes & Tamayo, 2013), which reflects firm value based on the expectations of the stock market, thereby reflecting future growth opportunities. The significant finding for Tobin's Q implies that as the advertising expenditures increase, the market firm performance increases. The result is also in line with those of prior studies that argue for the positive impact of advertising on firm value and market-based financial performance (Assaf et al., 2017; Denizci & Li, 2009; Kim et al., 2019).

Regarding the control variables, the effects of firm size and liquidity are relevant for market-based financial performance. Larger firms with a high level of liquidity are more likely to experience better market value. On the other hand, leverage and capital intensity have implications for operating performance. More capital-intensive and leveraged firms display better operating financial outcomes.

Table 2

Variables and measures

	lnPM (Model 1)	lnROA (Model 2)	lnROE (Model 3)	lnQ (Model 4)
lnADV	0.0654** -33984	-0.0024 (-0.2360)	0.0557** -34129	0.1108** -41426
FSIZE	-0.0055 (-0.2215)	0.0213 -19330	0.0005 (0.328)	0.1844** -57896
LEV	0.0905 (0.0595)	0.0101** -108674	0.0009 -11327	0.0003 (0.5983)
LIQ	-0.0010 (0.6067)	0.0099 (0.8400)	0.0037 -14774	0.1716** -69683
CAP_INT	0.0518* -22235	0.2898* -19788	0.0644 (0.4343)	0.2897 (0.9710)
<i>Firm Fixed Effects</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Year Fixed Effects</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>R-sq</i>	0.3096	0.1455	0.1024	0.5755

t statistics in parentheses; * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

Model estimation results for the moderating effect of the brand strategy

Besides the main effects of advertising spending on financial performance outcomes, this study analyzed the interaction effect of brand architecture strategy on the link between advertising and financial performance. In order to test the moderating role of brand strategy, the baseline estimation model is modified by including an interaction term between advertising expenditure and the type of brand architecture strategy.

The results of the moderation analyses are provided in Table 3. The estimation equation is run for each performance variable, resulting in four regression models. The regression analysis of the moderating role of ROE yields a significant role for the brand architecture strategy. The positive coefficient on the interaction term “lnADV*BRNDSTR” ($\beta=0.0781$; $p<0.01$) shows that adopting a house-of-brands strategy with a portfolio of different brands intensifies the positive effect of advertising spending on return on equity. Likewise, the results of the analysis for model 8, where the interaction term “lnADV*BRNDSTR” ($\beta=0.1108$; $p<0.01$) has a positive significant coefficient, suggests that firms having a portfolio of brands benefit more from advertising expenditures. That is, the positive effect of advertising spending on market performance is more pronounced in the case of the HOB strategy. Conversely, the regression analyses for the moderating role of brand strategy did not yield a significant result for either profit margin or return on assets. In other terms, the type of brand architecture strategy did not make any difference for the influence of advertising spending on profitability or how efficiently a firm uses its assets.

Table 3*Results of the moderator analyses*

	lnPM (Model 5)	lnROA (Model 6)	lnROE (Model 7)	lnQ (Model 8)
lnADV	0.0803** (-35089)	0.0021 (0.2050)	0.0855** (-52701)	0.1727** (-72917)
BRNDSTR	0.0074 (0.9165)	-0.0060 (-0.1616)	0.0054 (-10149)	0.1683 (-11819)
lnADV*BRNDSTR	0.0023 (0.6518)	0.0028 (-0.4333)	0.0781** (-27235)	0.1108** (-31722)
FSIZE	0.0008 (0.4660)	0.0211 -18934	0.0007 (0.5365)	0.1369** -50473
LEV	-0.0624 (-0.0257)	0.0101** (-108466)	-0.0020 (0.9601)	-0.0977 (-0.0781)
LIQ	0.0018 (-10461)	0.0021 (0.2050)	0.0018 (-14845)	0.0073 (0.2423)
CAPINT	0.0529* -24371	0.0289 -19596	0.0555** -36222	0.0429 -1500
Firm Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Quarter Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-sq	0.2827	0.1439	0.1396	0.1059

*t statistics in parentheses; * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$*

Conclusion and discussion

The value of marketing activities and the impact of these activities on financial performance are of great interest to both academicians and practitioners (Denizci & Li, 2009). Specifically, the question of whether advertising represents an expense or an investment still requires further investigation. Moreover, there is an ongoing need to understand the marketing – finance relationship in the hospitality industry (Assaf et al., 2017) and which factors interact with advertising (Luo & de Jeong, 2012). Therefore, using a sample of publicly-listed US firms, including hotel and restaurant businesses, the purpose of this study is to investigate

the effect of advertising spending on both operating and market financial performance. In addition, the current research aims to analyze the interaction effect of the brand architecture strategy on the relationship between advertising and financial performance. The results reveal that advertising positively contributes to both operating and market-based financial performance. Specifically, the more firms spend on advertising, the better they reap the financial rewards. Furthermore, the findings for the moderating role of brand architecture strategy show that brand strategy strengthens the positive impact of advertising on return on equity and market performance. That is, firms following the house-of-brands strategy benefit more from advertising to generate income from equity investments as well as to increase firm market value.

The results of this research also offer valuable implications for academicians and practitioners. From an academic perspective, this study extends the current literature in a way that it provides further empirical support for the role of advertising spending in enhancing both the operating and market financial performance of hospitality firms. Since the hospitality literature on the marketing-finance link is still in its infancy, the results offer further evidence for the positive impact of advertising. Moreover, the findings show that advertising represents an investment rather than an expense and underpins the role of advertising in generating returns for businesses. Last, the direct effect of advertising also endorses the relevance of the signaling theory, which assumes advertising as a signal to influence the behaviors of both consumers and investors. In addition to the contributions regarding the direct effect of advertising, this research presents the first empirical evidence for the moderating role of brand strategy, which interacts with advertising in the effect on financial performance. Hence, the current study also highlighted the importance of adopting a contingency perspective to analyze the relationship between marketing and financial outcomes.

From the perspective of practitioners, hospitality managers need to change their view regarding advertising expenditures. Prior research about the strategic value of advertising in the hospitality industry also argued that advertising expenditures have a higher positive impact on financial performance than other expenditures, and hospitality firms need to approach advertising as an investment. Specifically, a \$1-million increase in advertising spending could result in a 0.4198% increase in firm market value, while a \$1-million increase in other expenses would increase firm market value by 0.0116% (Qi et al., 2018). Hence, when hospitality firms prepare their budgets, they should allocate more financial resources to the marketing department. Marketing departments also need to assess the effectiveness of different advertising tools. Since advertising can be regarded as an investment to improve financial performance, marketing managers should develop their advertising strategies by considering the strengths and weaknesses of each communication tool to achieve efficient use of the financial resources allocated as advertising budget.

Considering the moderating role of brand architecture, adopting a house-of-brands strategy is advisable to develop relationships, especially with investors, since the strategy affects the firm's financial performance. As argued by Wang and Chung (2015), operating portfolio of brands leads to higher financial performance. More precisely, based on a sample of U.S. hotel firms including major groups such as Marriott International, InterContinental Hotels Group, Hilton Worldwide, and etc., the prior research evidenced that hotels with larger portfolio scope achieve higher financial performance in terms of return on assets, profit margin and cash flow per sales. Similarly, this study also shows that firms are more likely to receive benefits of advertising to improve the return on equity invested and market value of the firm when they operate a portfolio of brands. Hence, the brand architecture strategy could be used as a tool for investor decisions. Since advertising could be considered as a signal for the financial market, investors may also use the advertising expenditures of the firms as a decision criterion in their investment decisions. Likewise,

the other criterion that can guide the decisions of investors could be the brand strategy adopted by the businesses. Depending on their investment horizon, investors can choose between companies based on their brand strategies. For long-term oriented investors, the house-of-brands represents a more plausible strategy since it intensifies the positive influence of advertising on market financial performance.

This study also has some limitations. First, the sample includes hospitality firms operating in the US, which represents a developed economy. As such, the results should be interpreted with caution since the results could not be applicable to the firms in other industries and countries. As suggested by Inglehart's theory, the differences between emerging markets and developed markets in terms of socioeconomic development level may influence the effectiveness of advertising across different cultures (Pergelova & Angulo-Ruiz, 2017). Hence, future studies can benefit from testing the proposed effects in different national and cultural contexts. Second, this study focuses on two main types of brand architecture strategies: branded-house and house-of-brands. However, there are other more refined strategies, such as sub-branding, endorsed branding, and hybrid. Hence, it could be valuable to incorporate other branding strategies to assess the role of other forms. Third, to understand the long-term effects of advertising, future studies can adopt other proxies of firm market performance to validate the positive effect of advertising. Last, even though this study provides evidence for the interaction effect of brand strategy on the advertising-finance link, other contingency factors remain unexplored. Hence, further research can be undertaken to explore potential contingency factors.



Ethics Committee Approval	There is no ethics committee approval document since the study uses financial secondary data from S&P Compustat database.
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Those Who Retired and Found a Position in Higher Education



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Abstract

The definition of retirement, which marks the end of working life, has changed over time. In fact, retirement today does not mean the end of working life in a single sense. In both Western countries and in Türkiye, it is observed that working life continues even after retirement for reasons such as increasing life expectancy and retiring at a young age. In this respect, bridge employment, which refers to continuing to work after retirement and which has recently been introduced in Western countries, is an issue that can also be examined in Türkiye. This study seeks to understand what motivates people who continue to work in academia after retiring from state universities along with different sectors. In this context, the study was conducted with 17 participants (7 female and 10 male) through semi-structured interviews, one of the qualitative research techniques. The findings from the study show that most of the participants joined bridging employment primarily for economic reasons. Moreover, the participants engaged in bridge employment in academia for reasons such as still being at a younger age, gaining professional satisfaction, getting out of the house, getting involved in social life, feeling useful, having dependents, and flexible working conditions. Participants stated that working was good for their physical and mental health; although they had problems adapting to technology, they received support from young academics in this regard. At the same time, the participants think that they may benefit students and young academics in terms of experience and knowledge transfer. In this respect, it can be predicted that bridge employment can eliminate the problem of the shortage of qualified staff in foundation universities and relatively newly established state universities and increase intergenerational contact.

Keywords

Retirement • bridge employment • academia • universities • working life



“ Citation: Özben, M. & Kanbir, F. (2025). Those who retired and found a position in higher education. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 86–103. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1584427>

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Those Who Retired and Found a Position in Higher Education

Working after retirement is a common phenomenon in different societies, but it is relatively new for social scientists to address this issue. The main reason for this is the increase in the number of people who start working after retirement. In other words, with the increase in life expectancy, retired people are able to stay in working life because they live longer today than a century or more ago (Beehr & Bennett, 2014:1-2). According to Feldman, traditional retirement has meant the end of a career in full-time jobs. However, frequent entries and exits from the labor force (childcare, elderly care or redundancies, among other reasons) deprive many workers of linear career paths (1994: 285). Today, retirement for everyone takes many different forms (Schellenberg, Turcotte & Ram, 2005: 14) and the classical definition of retirement is changing (Shultz, 2003: 214). According to Doeringer, for many people, retirement also means working after retirement (cited in Feldman, 1994: 286). The study focuses on bridge employment (Beehr & Bennett, 2014: 2; Kim & Feldman, 2000: 1195), which is conceptualized as continuing working life from retirement to full retirement.

There are applied studies on retirement in the world (Atchley, 1974; Palmore, George & Fillenbaum, 1982; Quine, Wells, de Vaus & Kendig, 2007; Ranzijn, Patrickson, Carson & le Sueur, 2004; Richardson & Kilty, 1991; Kim & Feldman, 2000; Midanik, Soghikian, Ransom & Tekawa, 1995; Talaga & Beehr, 1995) and in Türkiye (Sevim & Şahin, 2007; Şahin, 2006; Şahin Baltacı & Selvitopu, 2012). In addition to this literature on retirement, there are also theoretical and applied studies on bridge employment (Ang & Mehta, 2021; Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Beehr & Bennett, 2014; Cahill, Giandrea & Quinn, 2007; Çakır, Çınar & Denizli, 2013; Davis, 2003; Dingemans, 2012; Dingemans & Henkens, 2013; Gobeski & Beehr, 2009; Hill, Snell & Sterns, 2015; Kerr & Armstrong-Stassen, 2011; Kim ve Feldman, 2000; Mazumdar, 2018; Özgen, 2018; Pengcharoen ve Shultz, 2010; Schellenberg et al., 2005; Shultz, 2003; Smaliukiene & Tvaronavičiene, 2014; Tanğ, 2013; Ulrich, 2003; von Bonsdorff, Shultz, Leskinen & Tansky, 2009; Wang, Zhan, Liu & Shultz, 2008; Zhan, Wang, Liu & Shultz, 2009; Zhan, Wang & Yao, 2013). As can be seen, studies on bridge employment have been largely concentrated in the USA and other Western countries (Ang & Mehta, 2021: 14). In Türkiye, there are few theoretical and applied studies examining the effects of working after retirement (Çakır et al., 2013; Özgen, 2018; Öztuna, 2017; Tanğ, 2013).

This study aims to understand the reasons for bridge employment and the explicit and implicit functions of bridge employment based on the individual experiences of academics. While retirement is relatively preferred in all professions and business lines, retirement in academia is mostly not preferred. So much so that even people who retired from different business lines in the state are employed in academia. This study aims to understand the dominant meaning that 17 participants, who retired from different sectors or from well-established and old state universities in Türkiye but continue to work in academia, attribute to retirement and bridge employment and the reasons for their continued working life.

Conceptual Framework

The Life Course

The life course is a way of expressing the turning points in an individual's life and includes the analysis of important life events (Marshall, 1999: 815). The main interest of the life course perspective has been how life events and transitions, such as changes in work, educational conditions, family and gender roles, have

an impact on later life (Akış and Korkmaz Yaylagül, 2020: 282). Since retirement is one of these transitions, it is an appropriate perspective for the conceptual framework of the study.

Participation in working life after retirement has different meanings depending on individuals and occupational branches. Work, productivity, workplace environment and the value placed on work by the society increase and/or decrease the degree of work engagement. In a qualitative study conducted with 25 participants aged 55 and over who continue to work beyond the retirement age based on the life course perspective, it was concluded that although they have been in the labor market for at least 30 years, increasing experience with age does not bring equal value, respect and prestige to everyone. At this point, the value of the job offers advantages and disadvantages for working (Çınay, 2023: 326). Especially the experiences gained during working life and life course affect people's decision to join or not to join working life in the same or a different field.

Retirement

Social scientists have traditionally conceptualized retirement¹ as the cessation of work and work-related activities (Richardson & Kilty, 1991: 154). While unemployment can be seen as an unconventional path, retirement is an unconventional definition, an expected and now almost universal transition, largely due to job loss (Moen, 1996: 131). Retirement is as much a process as it is a transition. This is clearly stated in recent studies on retirement. Retirement is recognized as a process that begins with planning and decision-making some time before the actual end of one's working life and is not completed until years after the point of retirement (Beehr, 1986: 31).

Retirement is embedded in contemporary social policy and practice; it is normatively defined in terms of timing and legitimacy. These normative expectations, in conjunction with the institutionalization of income support (in the form of social security payments and pensions), distinguished retirement from unemployment as a later life that could be planned, anticipated and positively defined (Moen, 1996: 136). Today, retirement is a multidimensional issue with connotations at different levels.

The separation represented by retirement depends on one's emotional resilience, the good experiences accumulated throughout life and the ability to react to the unknown (Hofman, 2012: 20). Reasons that encourage individuals to retire include type A behavior represented by compulsive, aggressive, impatient activity, skill obsolescence, and health and economic well-being (Beehr, 1986: 47). At the same time, the individual's own position, the social networks with which he/she is associated, and the values of the society guide his/her perspectives on retirement. In his analysis of the history of retirement in the United States, Atchley underlines that the history of retirement cannot be understood by economic or demographic processes alone. According to Atchley, intergroup dialectics play an important role in shaping retirement (Atchley, 1982: 274).

Age, as a variable that motivates or forces retirement, greatly shapes the individual and social lives of the older adults. For instance, retirement is of interest to gerontologists because it affects the way older people spend their time, the amount of their income, their social interactions, their physical and mental health, their self-esteem and life satisfaction (Palmore et al., 1982: 733). The gradual separation of the concept of retirement from the concept of old age was characterized in the case of America's retirement history. When

¹The origin of the public pension system is traditionally attributed to the creation of an old-age insurance scheme in Germany in 1889 under Otto von Bismarck. Financed by social contributions and involving employer and worker representatives, the program provided modest earnings-related benefits for industrial workers and their surviving families. (Kohli & Arza, 2011: 252). However, since the historical origins of pensions are not directly the subject of the study, detailed information will not be presented in the study.

retirement was first constructed, the rationale assumed that workers were not fit for work. However, the retirement age has decreased over time, and the rationale for retirement has come to emphasize the control of unemployment and the creation of job opportunities. Today, retirement does not mean a transition to old age, but rather giving up work (Atchley, 1982: 274). When this situation is read in the Türkiye context, it is obvious that retirement cannot be considered to be entirely related to age periods that include old age.

Bridge Employment

There is no generalizable definition of bridge employment, which is conceptualized as continuing working life from retirement to full retirement (Beehr & Bennett, 2014: 2; Kim & Feldman, 2000: 1195), and not all retirees continue working under all circumstances. In fact, the continuation of working life after retirement is determined by many variables such as age, gender, health, and financial situation (Beehr & Bennett, 2014), as well as work and non-work factors such as job commitment, job search self-efficacy, certainty of retirement plans and attitudes toward retirement plans (Pengcharoen & Shultz, 2010: 332), and the lack of desire to retire (Ang & Mehta, 2021: 19).

Those who retire at a younger age can continue their working life due to the low income. In line with this argument, a study of 539 middle-aged and older workers in the United States found that those who are considering full retirement are among the oldest workers and those who are considering career bridge employment are among the youngest (von Bonsdorff et al., 2009: 89). After age, the most important determinant of continuing to work after retirement is health status. Health status positively affects both work engagement and work intention (Kerr and Armstrong-Stassen, 2011: 72). Another reason is that retirement is voluntary. In a mixed-design study, it was found that participants who retired involuntarily were more likely to want bridge employment than older adults who retired voluntarily (Ang & Mehta, 2021: 19). A longitudinal cohort study conducted in the Netherlands with 5-year intervals (2001-2006-2011; age 50-65 in 2001) showed that participation in a bridge job can be a buffer against the negative impact of involuntary retirement on well-being and maintain well-being at pre-retirement levels (Dingemans, 2012: 19). Another study conducted in the Netherlands in the same year periods involving the same author found that involuntary retirement was detrimental to life satisfaction in older adults compared to voluntary retirement, but that participation in a bridge job was effective in mitigating this negative shock (Dingemans & Henkens, 2013: 575). The issue of volunteering varies not only in terms of working after retirement but also in terms of job choice. Indeed, regardless of the type of retirement, retirees seeking bridge employment are more interested in person-job fit (less stressful and part-time jobs) (Ang & Mehta, 2021: 23).

In a qualitative study conducted in the United States with 24 participants aged 62 and over from different educational backgrounds, professions and geographical regions who participated in bridging employment after retiring from a long-term career job, it was concluded that the reasons for choosing bridging employment include the desire to use their time in a meaningful way, to fill their time, to have a say in what they do, to continue their long-term career in some way and/or to meet their financial needs (Ulrich, 2003: 75). In addition, one of the important variables is the positive satisfaction with one's job during the working life. In a related study conducted in Canada with 609 participants between the ages of 50 and 65, including individuals in career occupations, those who were fully retired, and those engaged in bridge employment; it was concluded that recognition and respect have a great influence on people's decisions to stay in the workforce or return to the workforce after retirement. According to Richardson and Kilty, those in low-prestige jobs may have more difficulty maintaining their status and respect when they retire. Loss of role at work may be more detrimental to those in low status jobs than for those in high prestige occupations.

Individuals who are professionals are more likely to have connections, participate in professional groups and maintain part-time professional employment (Richardson and Kilty, 1991: 165-166).

Bridge employment is divided into two different types: career bridge employment and bridge employment in a different field (Feldman, 1994; Shultz, 2003). The degree of prevalence and reasons for these two types of bridge employment are different. For instance, a study conducted in the United States found that retirees with career-related skills were more likely to work in a career-related bridge job (rather than retiring completely or taking a non-career-related bridge job). On the other hand, it was concluded that retirees who experience workload in career jobs are more likely to take a bridge job that is not related to their previous career rather than a career bridge job (Gobeski & Beehr, 2009: 401). According to the study, another reason for this is that older workers often accept lower pay and status in exchange for the flexibility of a bridge job (2009: 402). Similar to this study, a mixed-design study conducted in Canada found that retirees' sense of having choice and control over their work (consideration of leave entitlements, medium- and short-term contracts, comfortable and stable shifts, and manageable workload) is important for their satisfaction with their work life (Mazumdar, 2018: 132, 134).

While men prefer employment in a different field, women prefer career bridge employment more than bridge employment (Wang et al., 2008: 824; von Bonsdorff et al., 2009: 92). At the same time, Wang et al. (2008) found that being younger, having longer education, having better health, positive psychological effects of work (less job stress and higher job satisfaction), and considering retirement less were positively associated with participation in career bridge employment rather than full retirement (Wang et al., 2008: 824). Compared to retirees who chose full retirement, retirees who engaged in both forms of bridge employment reported fewer illnesses and fewer functional limitations, while those who engaged in bridge work only in career fields reported better health (Zhan et al., 2009: 383). At the same time, factors such as having a tenure position or not, marital status, and number of dependents are important in continuing to work after retirement. However, retirees who are younger, have a longer education (more than 1 year), have better health and financial conditions, experience less job stress and consider retirement less are more likely to enter bridge employment in a different field instead of full retirement (Wang et al., 2008: 826). The study also found that retirees who have better financial conditions, experience less job stress and higher job satisfaction in pre-retirement jobs prefer career bridge employment rather than bridge employment in a different field (2008: 826-827).

In bridge employment, the expectation to meet the necessities of life rather than a job-dependent role leads people to work. For example, in a study conducted in Türkiye, it was concluded that although most retirees prefer leisure activities and rest to work, financial needs, inadequacy of prior savings and lack of additional sources of income lead them to work. At the same time, a significant number of retirees may choose to work for new career prospects, development and experience sharing (Çakır et al., 2013: 53). This situation gives a clear idea about the reasons for continuing to work for those who retired from unqualified jobs and those who retired from qualified jobs. As a matter of fact, in the first case, material needs and in the second case, individual satisfaction, intellectual fulfillment and contribution to society predominate. This situation is similar in studies conducted in different countries. While the motivation to work in lower income groups is primarily based on financial reasons (Loi & Schultz, 2007: 286); those who are not under financial pressure are more likely to make decisions in bridge employment according to their career attitudes (Zhan et al., 2013: 370).

Retirement and Bridge Employment in Academia

According to Article 30 of the Higher Education Law No. 2547, “the age limit for faculty members to be dismissed from their duties is the date they turn 67 years old”. “Without prejudice to the provision of the second paragraph of Provisional Article 55, those who have applied before the date they will reach the retirement age and who are in faculty member positions as of the date of the contract, and who are deemed beneficial to remain in their positions in the departments and programs determined by the higher education institutions, may be employed on contract for periods of one year from the date they reach the retirement age, with the proposal of the higher education institution and the approval of the Council of Higher Education, until they reach the age of 75 and until they receive a pension or old-age pension, not exceeding 75 years of age” (Higher Education Law, Article 30). At the same time, “The retirement age for faculty members stipulated in Article 30 is 75 years of age, provided that they work at the State universities established by Laws No. 5467 dated 1/3/2006, No. 5662 dated 17/5/2007, No. 5662 dated 17/5/2007, No. 5765 dated 22/5/2008, as well as Kafkas University² and Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Kültür Varlıklarını Koruma Kanunu³. This practice continues until December 31, 2025” (Law on Higher Education, Provisional Article 55). In the study, participants working in 8 different (state and foundation) universities in Turkey (with the exception of one participant who exceeded the working age limit specified in the law (P5-82)) were selected among those who retired and returned to working life. As can be seen in the study, academics prefer bridge employment even when they retire. This is similar to Ruhm’s (1990) longitudinal study conducted at 2-year intervals over a 10-year period. In that study, it was found that well-educated retirees were more likely to stay in their career fields after retirement. Moreover, it is possible to come across scientific studies showing that this is beneficial for health. For example, an article in *The New York Times*, based on health experts, argues that the age of 65 does not make sense for retirement, especially for those working in knowledge-based jobs (Smith, 2023, April 13).

In accordance with the Civil Servants Law (Sarı, 2022), when academics retire from civil service and start working at state universities again, their pensions are cut off. However, when academics who retired from state universities start working at a foundation university, their pensions are not cut off. The same applies to academics who retire from foundation universities and work at state universities again. In these cases, the participants received double salaries. Similar to this situation, the participants in the study who retired from state universities and worked at foundation universities received double salaries. However, participants who transferred from a different civil servant grade and state university to another state university received a single salary.

Purpose, Importance, Population and Sample of the Study

The aim of this study is to question the dominant meaning attributed to retirement and bridge employment by academics who retired from a different sector and state universities and continue to work as faculty members at another state university or foundation university. At the same time, the study aims to reveal why they participate in bridge employment. In this respect, the article is the first study that deals with academics in Türkiye specifically on bridge employment. The study was conducted with semi-structured interviews, one of the qualitative research techniques. Criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was used in the study. The population of the study consists of academics who have chosen bridge employment in Türkiye, and the sample consists of 17 participants who have chosen bridge employment and are actively working in

²The date of establishment is July 11, 1992.

³The date of establishment is May 18, 2018.

state and foundation universities. The Ethics Committee of Siirt University Rectorate on 14.09.2023 at 10:00 on session number 659 authorized the study. Among the academics in different regions and provinces of Turkey, 3 of them were interviewed face-to-face and 14 of them were contacted through telephone interviewing in September 2024. Participants were asked questions such as what retirement and bridging employment meant to them, for what reasons they re-entered work life, and what problems they experienced in their current jobs. The interviews were recorded on a voice recorder and converted into text. Information about the participants is given in the table below:

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Number of participants	Age	Gender	Marital status	Year of retirement-state or foundation	Bridge Employment Type	Title	Type of University
P1	69	Male	Married	2013-State (Specialist Doctor)	Bridge employment in a different field (retired from State Hospital and worked in academia)	Asst. Prof.	Foundation
P2	70	Female	Married	2021-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	State
P3	72	Male	Married	2019-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	State
P4	63	Male	Married	2013-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof..	Foundation
P5	82	Male	Married	2003-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P6	67	Female	Widow	2021-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P7	74	Male	Married	2004-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P8	58	Male	Married	2007-Military	Bridge employment in a different field	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	Foundation
P9	69	Female	Married	2022-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P10	72	Male	Married	2019-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P11	60	Female	Married	2012-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	State
P12	61	Female	Divorced	2021-State University (Asst. Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Asst. Prof.	State
P13	58	Female	Single	2014-Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Expert)	Bridge employment in a different field	Asst. Prof.	State
P14	68	Male	Married	2001-State University (Assistant Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Asst. Prof.	Foundation
P15	63	Female	Widow	2005-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation

Number of participants	Age	Gender	Marital status	Year of retirement-state or foundation	Bridge Employment Type	Title	Type of University
P16	65	Male	Married	2021-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P17	64	Male	Married	2013-State University (Asst. Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Asst. Prof.	State

As seen in Table 1, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 participants, 7 of whom were female and 10 were male, aged between 58 and 82 years. The average age of the participants was 66.76 years. All participants were married except for two widows, one divorced and one single participant. 14 of the participants had career bridge employment and 3 of them had employment in a different field. Five of the participants are assistant professor, 1 is an associate professor, and 11 are professors. Currently, 6 of them work at state universities and 11 at foundation universities. All of the participants working at foundation universities retired from a state university or a state department. In particular, the participants working at foundation universities stated that they work full-time at the university they are affiliated with regardless of their title and that they come to the university they are affiliated with upon an offer. It was revealed that stress was not a dominant feature of their work tempo, regardless of whether they worked at state or foundation universities. According to them, stress was a binding feature for individuals at the beginning of their career in academia. A distinctive example in this regard is P13. This participant revealed that not being promoted academically was a stress-inducing factor in the late stages. Especially for the participants who are at the last stage of their academic career, their experience and mastery of the subjects of study in the following years eliminate the stress factor. However, another issue that should be mentioned here is the stress caused by a job change. According to P10, this stress is temporary.

While 14 of the participants performed career bridge employment, 3 of them performed bridge employment in a different field. Although P1 found an academic career in the same field with the advantage of being a doctor, P8 completed her PhD while working in the military, and P13 joined bridge employment at the university after retiring from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of the Republic of Türkiye. The finding in the literature (Wang et al., 2008: 824; von Bonsdorff et al., 2009: 92) that women prefer career bridge employment more than bridge employment, while men prefer employment in a different field, is not similar to the participant profile of the study. Among the participants, having an academic background facilitated the maintenance and adoption of working life at the university. This is similar to the findings in the literature (Gobeski and Beehr, 2009: 401) that retirees with career-related skills are more likely to work in a career-related bridge job (rather than retiring completely or taking a non-career-related bridge job). Among those who decided on bridging employment, university life was a positive option. Indeed, the fact that most of the participants have been working in academia for many years (Kim and Feldman, 2000) may be an important factor in accepting bridge employment. The participants retired between 2001 and 2022, and most participants joined bridge employment after a while.

None of the participants stated that they were subjected to discriminatory behavior in their current workplace. They also stated that the university and the academic unit they transferred to have a familiar culture, and therefore, since they attach importance to seniority, they embrace themselves, and they embrace the institution and their colleagues. All of the participants stated that their colleagues and the institution helped them in every area they needed. This shows that the academic community (whether old or new) carries the traces of a deep-rooted past that values knowledge and experience with a social

inclusion approach. P15 provided a different example in this regard. P15 criticizes the lack of a chair tradition in foundation universities and the lack of clear job descriptions.

A divorced female participant (P12) stated that she provided financial support for the education of her daughter who went to university; P17 stated that she provided financial support for her foreign national husband living abroad and for the education of her young son. Another participant, P3, stated that her 2 adult male children were unemployed and that she and her husband supported them financially. Other participants stated that their children have professions, and they do not expect financial support from them, while some stated that they support their children financially even if they are working.

Findings

The Meaning of Retirement

Retirement itself points to a period that creates advantages and disadvantages for working people. This process, which can be considered as the end of one's life and the beginning of another, is perceived differently at different ages. Participants explain retirement as a change of occupation, making time for oneself, a state of inactivity, a period of rest, and engaging in occupations:

"I think retirement is **to change your occupation...** I mean, I think so. (When asked if you could elaborate on this a bit) Let's say doing things that you have been working on but could not do... **Spending more time on your hobbies...**" (P1, male, 69 years old).

"Retirement is **a state of inactivity**. In short, it is **a period of rest**" (P14, male, 68 years old).

"... **It is to give people the opportunity to spare time for themselves** in life. I mean, you are constantly going to work, coming back from work. Retirement means **that you can listen to yourself a little bit** and then, sir, **you can engage in better occupations**" (P10, male, 72 years old).

An important element in sustaining retirement is planning for the future. In a study conducted in a health care organization between 1985 and 1987 with 595 members aged from 60 to 66 who were planning to retire and 595 who were not planning to retire, it was found that retired members were more likely to have lower stress levels and to exercise regularly during the working period compared to non-retired members (Midanik et al., 1995: S61). One participant stated that although he planned for his retirement while working, he could not realize this planning during his retirement. P11, who plans to retire again in a short time and plans to do so, plans to open a business with his wife after retirement based on the experience he has gained in his current job. This participant defines retirement as "going/going home". In addition, unlike other participants, she has a more positive approach to retirement and post-retirement:

"I told you, I **retired** from (meaning a state university in Turkey) **and stayed home for two years. I was depressed**. So, **when I went to** (meaning a foundation university abroad), **it was like I was reborn**. Of course, **I was young then. Now I am 60 years old... I should just go...** (Retirement is meant) I should sit in my house. I should have a dog in my garden again. I mean, I want to work with flowers, plant grass. I want to spend some time like that. **I am tired**" (P11, female, 60 years old).

In retirement, the older adults lack the means to maintain their authority arising from expertise throughout their lives. Because when the expected retirement comes, he/she has to leave working life and

transfer the authority of expertise to younger generations (Tufan, 2002: 189). At the same time, retirement is an irreversible stage; it is the death of the productive asset after a long and difficult working life. It is a time that is expected but at the same time dreaded (Hofman, 2012: 20). People who have worked in one job or the same job for a lifetime may fall into existential emptiness (Frankl, 2019: 121) when they retire; this situation may cause problems in giving meaning to their lives:

“Well, I didn’t like retirement very much. **I felt bad. I mean, useless, old... I started again because I felt like that...**” (P2, female, 70 years old).

“**I thought I would be very happy when I retired, but it was not like that.** I mean, I will rest; then I will travel, see my friends, and so on. But of course, it didn’t work out like that. I mean, it all goes to a certain point... I mean, I was very, very bored. **I found retirement very boring**” (P12, female, 61 years old).

P5 criticizes the negative meanings attributed to retirement. He makes a definition of retirement against the existing assumptions. Here, he states that retirement does not mean lying down and letting oneself go within the continuity of life. P6 states that work is the enabler of the continuation of many activities in life. Therefore, according to P6, retirement means the end of activities. P8 and P9 explain retirement as the withdrawal from working life or the completion of an obligatory job.

P17 explains the end of working life as the “last station”. Some participants equated death with retirement. P5 stated that working in academia is a lifestyle reflected in the whole of daily life. P7 explains this by associating the continuity of brain activities with academics. Working life is decisive for people to prefer bridge employment as a positive point of engagement in the rhythm of daily life.

“**...What about retirement? They say rest. No...** I say this. **Retirement, if you directly say you want to rest, it means you are waiting for death.** The three classes cannot retire. For example, let me tell you. **Soldiers, policemen, professors, especially university professors cannot retire...**” (P5, male, 82 years old).

“**People cannot retire, the brain is constantly working in academics.** Therefore, the brain of academics is constantly solving problems. They deal with science and reach its happiness” (P7, male, 74 years old).

“(When asked if there is an advantage **to retiring**) **I don't think there is an advantage.** (Slightly laughing) Because I mean, the children have grown up, the troubled times are over. Therefore, retirement did not seem more advantageous. I mean, **I liked working**” (P2, female, 70 years old).

Life satisfaction in retirement, quality of life and adaptation to retirement life differ according to factors such as change in income level, affordability, diversity of income sources and household income level (Yıldırım, 2021: 187, 201). In all levels of professions and lines of work, the income obtained in retirement decreases. The decrease in income resulting from retirement lowers the social status of the retiree and creates social problems and adaptation difficulties for the older adults (Emiroğlu, 1995: 41). In a survey conducted on 123 retirees in Şanlıurfa, it was found that retirement was perceived as an economic weakness for the participants (Sevim & Şahin, 2007: 192). Keeping in mind that money provides independence for every generation (Hofman, 2012: 124), its presence or absence is decisive on the individual. Material fulfillment implies an increase in freedom and horizons of choice; its absence implies an increase in dependency. At this

point, expectations from retirement and the requirements of real life explain the difference between what retirement should be and what it is. This situation enables people to transition back to their working life:

“Well, I think retirement should be what it should be rather than what it is... **Retirement is basically a person working and producing for many years at work and then, when he reaches a certain age, he should live a happy life with the values he has produced up to that day, the values he has produced,** what shall we say? He **should live a happy life with his yields and products. This should be retirement...** But **unfortunately, it is not possible to realize this** under the conditions of our country...” (P16, male, 65 years old).

The most prominent answer to the question of whether retirement has an advantage is that it ensures a guaranteed income. Other participants explain this similarly to Tanğ's (2013: 60) association of bridge employment with continuing to work while earning income:

“So, the advantage of being retired now, is there an advantage? **You only have a second salary if you work again economically.** Other than that, an advantage can be a rest, if you are very tired” (P6, female, 67 years old).

“Right now, not only mine but **all academics' e especially e entitlements have fallen far behind economically. There is a general dissatisfaction at the moment,** I can say that” (P15, female, 63 years old).

Reasons for Participation in Bridge Employment

The decision to retire is an individual one, but it is influenced by the attitude of society and older employers toward older workers, the situation in the labor market and the implementation of active labor policy (Smaliukiene & Tvaronavičiene, 2014: 389). The return of retirees to work has positive consequences for the employer and the nation as well as the employee. According to one study, the re-entry of retirees into the workforce has widened the labor pool for employers, making it easier for them to access older and skilled workers. For the nation as a whole, it has enabled people to remain more productive later in life. Thus, there are fewer dependents on social programs; the nation has more goods and services to distribute to the aging population (Cahill et al., 2007: 7). Taken together, all of these can be considered as positive outcomes for employers and the state, as well as for retirees. Participants work in foundation and state universities, stating that it is a necessity for universities to keep them in working life. As a matter of fact, the entry of retirees into working life can be an advantage for these universities despite staff shortages. Participants express necessity based on the need to enter working life. P3 argues that the conditions of the newly established universities in Türkiye are not sufficient for a university identity through the competence of the graduates. At the same time, P9 highlights the difference between state and foundation universities and that the need disappears when the staff shortage is closed. Another participant, P2, talks about the obligation created by not being able to find the necessary teaching member.

Education may be a determinant of career-oriented bridge employment (Zhan et al., 2013: 370). Participants mentioned that it is economically difficult to live in Türkiye and that retiring at a young age is an important determinant of staying in the working life after retirement. So much so that there are participants who would not want to stay in working life if there was no decrease in income:

“Everyone must work now... (When asked why) I mean economic, economic reasons... I mean, **in our country, there is the opportunity to retire at a young age. Therefore, the pension we receive after retirement does not provide you with a living in today’s conditions. Therefore, additional work (?)... (necessary)”** (P8, male, 58 years old).

“...Retirement may be a step more relaxation, a step more comfortable... I mean, right now I can say this clearly... **If they gave me the income I earn here now when I retire, I would retire immediately”** (P17, male, 64 years old).

Similar to the finding that those who are not under financial pressure are more likely to decide on bridge employment based on career attitudes (Zhan et al., 2013: 370), P1 stated that being educated offers the possibility of choice and that even if there is a change in income, this does not affect the decision to work in the first place. Instead, according to the participant, like to work is a motivating force. P1 stated that the experiences gained in retirement are wasted, while by working, the accumulation of experience is transferred to younger generations.

Work-related and non-work-related factors impact the reasons for choosing and not choosing bridge employment (Pengcharoen & Shultz, 2010). The majority of the participants evaluated the reasons for their retirement at different levels within the scope of voluntary retirement; they saw the reason for choosing bridge employment as the necessity of a purpose to live, and as a descriptor at the academic level, not being separated from social life and being productive. According to P16, this situation is manifested by the difficulty of living conditions, especially in big cities. P8 considers working again as a restorative identity and a way of life in the face of age-related limitations in social life:

“You need to have a purpose in your daily life... If you do not have that purpose, you can go to bed again without washing your face. But when there is such a thing, when you work, it is possible to get dressed and go out, socialize at work, **share** something with your circle of friends... Otherwise, an **antisocial life** here is also... What is it called? **It leaves you in a difficult situation”** (P8, male, 58 years old).

Good health positively affects work engagement and work intention (Kerr and Armstrong-Stassen, 2011: 72; Kim and Feldman, 2000; Wang et al., 2008: 824; Zhan et al., 2009: 383). Participants cited participation in working life as a way to be healthy:

“The more I work, the fitter I feel... I see that my mental capacity is not diminishing. On the contrary, I see that it is increasing. The increase in my **mental and intellectual** capacity makes me jubilant. **I am also very healthy physically...**” (P1, male, 69 years old).

Recognition and respect (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008: 47-48) is a determining factor in entering and staying in bridging employment. In this context, the characteristics of the province and the university constitute a source of motivation for the participants to work:

“When I was at, I mean (referring to a long-established and large university in Turkey and the province where it is located), there was nothing like that. Recognition, respect, etc. But here (meaning a small university founded in 2007 in Turkey), there is something very extreme. How can I put

it? **Respect for the people working at the university...** So of course that **makes me happy** here..." (P12, female, 61 years old).

Another aspect is the efficient use of time. In their study, Ang and Mehta concluded that retirees are motivated by social interactions in bridge employment; that retirees see work as a balance between "self and work" and "self and others"; and that bridge employment increases retirees' self-confidence (2021: 20-21). In this respect, bridge employment is seen as a necessity for participants to use their time in a meaningful way, to fill their time, to have a say in what they do (Ulrich, 2003: 75):

"(In working life) time is used effectively. Because there are things that you should not leave from today to tomorrow. But in retired life, when you are at home, you have the chance to leave it for the next day. You have such flexibility. But **in working life**, you have to use **time in a more planned, organized...**(?) way" (P6, female, 67 years old).

Although retired women are less willing to work than men (Çakır et al., 2013: 53), behaving based on gender roles is one of the reasons that motivate participants to work. In some cases, the same participants believed that the change in gender roles was also the enabling force for women to work. However, it should be noted that in both cases, the presence of a (male/female) spouse who picks up the slack enables people to work. P13 states that her reason for pursuing a career is the roles of women and their disadvantages due to these roles. P15 states that gender discrimination has been effective in the academic and administrative decline of women, even if not for her. P5 and P10 stated that the fact that women have more gender-related roles is a justification for their retirement; hardworking men do not desire retirement. However, participants affirm that men work for jobs that require mental labor, such as academics. Therefore, by revealing the difference between men's and women's work on the one hand and, mental-physical labor on the other, it is stated that working at an older age should be in jobs that require mental labor. However, P4 shows that personal characteristics impact gender-based distinctions.

The presence of academics with a long history in the academic world provides an important function for universities to gain and maintain their identity. P13 summarizes the contributions of academics participating in bridge employment to the institution as experience; P15 summarizes knowledge, equipment, experience, and balance in the teacher-student relationship; P16 summarizes accumulation, free and flexible thinking. P14 states that loss of performance is eliminated through the transfer of experience. In this respect, he makes a self-criticism and evaluates the positive and negative effects of bridge employment participants on the institution they are affiliated with:

"A career in academia is built up over years; knowledge, equipment. Let us not just include theoretical knowledge. I mean, **there is the experience of spending years in that academy. There is a balance between the teacher-student relationship** has established over the years... One, after years with such a perspective, **it can be viewed more flexibly and the student-teacher relationship is more balanced...**" (P15, female, 63 years old).

"Just when they reach their most productive age, they are told to go and sit at home. ...I can see this in myself when a person acquires a certain academic background and reaches a certain age. You can think more freely, you can think more flexibly. You can become more flexible. I think that these can provide important support to both scientific life and social life..." (P16, male, 65 years old).

Challenges in the Working Life

It can be said that prejudices such as older individuals not being open to innovations, not following technological developments, not being as agile as young people, and having low work motivation create prejudice against older people in working life (Kalafat, 2023: 63). However, the quality and quantity of the work and expectations from the employee are decisive in reducing such losses or ignoring them in the eyes of the employer. At this point, the presence of young academics has a positive effect on the participants' adaptation to working life in a changing world:

"I still think I can adapt to any technology I want, and because of my administrative work, I have always been surrounded by very **talented assistants**. Unfortunately, those young people **quickly take over and solve** all my technological burdens..." (P4, male, 63 years old).

P11, who identifies bridge employment with productivity in the academic world, questions the contribution of academics, who are professors in academia, to working life. This situation shows us that academics, as conscious recipients of experience participating in working life, do not perceive academia only as a material gain gate:

"**Most academics do nothing after they get their professorship** (she puts her hand under her head and make the sleep sign). In general... So, then there is no production. I mean, children, assistants, if they are hardworking, if they want to do something, they can benefit a lot from those professors. A little bit depends on what the student... (when asked if it doesn't depend on what they want) Yes..." (P11, female, 60 years old).

P14 considers the decrease in performance as a difficulty encountered in working life in academia. However, he also states that experience, which was among the reasons why some participants participated in working life above, compensates for the lack of performance:

"Of course, experience, I think **experience**, accumulation **is essential**... Of course, **performance inevitably decreases** along with it. It decreases compared to the performance in the youth period. **But experience covers it to a great extent**..." (P14, male, 68 years old).

Evaluation and Conclusion

Retirement and bridging employment have different meanings in different business lines and professions. One of the factors that determine this definitional difference is that retirement is not planned and there is no institution or organization that prepares for retirement. When retirement, which is one of the critical transitions of life, occurs as an unplanned end, this situation creates material and moral dissatisfaction in the individual. At this point, bridge employment can assume an important function in overcoming the problems created by retirement and reducing this dissatisfaction. Indeed, in line with the existing literature, participation in bridge employment is effective in alleviating the negative shock of involuntary retirement (Dingemans & Henkens, 2013: 575). Despite this general statement, the reasons for bridge employment vary from society to society and from person to person. According to Beehr and Bennett (2014: 9), the explicit function of bridging employment is financing, while its hidden functions are providing identity, better time utilization, and widening the social environment. Participants in the study had similar evaluations of these

functions. Retirement in academia does not mean the end of working life. With bridge employment, academics gain economic security and remain committed to the living standards they are used to. Although most participants critically stated that the decrease in income motivates them to work again, some participants emphasized that academic working life is a top priority in finding and establishing belonging. This situation contributes to the physical and mental health of the individual participating in bridge employment and keeps them in social life.

In a study conducted at the University of California in 1994; it was concluded that good health, tenure, having a working spouse and dependent children are important factors in accepting bridge employment (Kim & Feldman, 2000). Similarly, the study concluded that reasons such as being healthy, staying in academia for a long time, having a non-working spouse, and having to take care of adult children who are studying or unemployed are decisive in choosing bridge employment.

Similar to the findings obtained, it has been indicated in different studies that only those who are engaged in bridge jobs in their career fields report better health status (Zhan et al., 2009: 383). Since the study only evaluated academics, no data on the health status of those who prefer bridging employment in different sectors could not be reached. Studies to be conducted with people engaged in bridging employment in different sectors will fill this gap.

When considered from a life course perspective, most of the participants stated that having an academic background was decisive for them to continue their working life in addition to the personal characteristics mentioned above. As a matter of fact, as a profession that requires knowledge, experience and effort, academics allow for professional maturation over time. Academics mostly define themselves through their profession.

One of the results of the study is gendered career choice. For some female participants, gender roles increased the likelihood of entering and staying in academia. However, the fact that male academics consider retirement as a right for female academics later in life on the grounds that they are worn out makes it possible for us to question the work and domestic responsibilities directed toward women in society. This situation is seminal for future studies on women's participation in bridge employment.

The world of academic work requires following and adapting to current developments as well as providing experience. Although the fact that most of the participants know enough about technology to be useful compared to younger people can be seen as a disadvantage, it can be said that they make important contributions to the university they are affiliated with in terms of gaining flexibility in the teacher-student relationship and transferring experience and knowledge. As a matter of fact, the participants, most of whom work in foundation universities, stated that their maturity in age and years of experience in long established universities enabled them to embrace and maintain the academic tradition. This situation contributes significantly to the establishment of university identity in foundation and newly established state universities and ensures that these are passed on to generations. However, the fact that retired academics prefer bridge employment may pose obstacles for young academics to find a position in academia. The increase in the salary offered by the state to retired academics may reduce the necessity of bridge employment. In addition, in order to prevent the decline in social status, opportunities should be offered to make their lives meaningful psychologically, physically and socially. In this way, their active participation in economic, social and cultural life can be ensured without the need for bridge employment.



Ethics Committee Approval	The Ethics Committee of Siirt University Rectorate on 14.09.2023 at 10:00 on session number 659 authorized the study.
Peer-Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- M.Ö., F.K.; Data Acquisition- M.Ö., F.K.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- M.Ö., F.K.; Drafting Manuscript- M.Ö., F.K.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- M.Ö., F.K.; Final Approval and Accountability- M.Ö., F.K.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

How do Companies Adapt to Cultural Factors to Gain Legitimacy in International Markets?



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Abstract

The internationalization process entails challenges, and companies need to identify the best manner to reach social support and legitimacy in the host countries. Among the main challenges, cultural differences between the home and foreign country should be highlighted. Since legitimacy is achieved through consistent corporate behavior aligned with social norms and values, enterprises must identify and adapt to these cultural differences to succeed in the expansion process. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to identify the most critical barriers in the internationalization process as well as to provide solutions and guidelines for future enterprises that want to follow an international approach.

Keywords

Legitimacy · Institutional Context · Cultural Values · Internationalization



Citation: Blanco-González, A., Menchen-Atienza, P., Del-Castillo-Feito, C. & Rivero-Gutiérrez, L. (2025). How do companies adapt to cultural factors to gain legitimacy in international markets?. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 104–120. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1549375>

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 2025. Blanco-González, A., Menchen-Atienza, P., Del-Castillo-Feito, C. & Rivero-Gutiérrez, L.

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How do Companies Adapt to Cultural Factors to Gain Legitimacy in International Markets?

The increase in global competition has motivated many enterprises to establish part of their economic activity in diverse markets. This decision involves important challenges for companies since entering a foreign market with a different culture can be complex. Initially, these organizations may face relevant costs associated with the lack of experience in the new location, as well as the constant monitoring and questioning by the local community (Yin et al., 2013). Under this scenario, enterprises must align their behavior with the norms and values of the new location to receive social support. This social support will grant legitimacy to these organizations, which will represent a great advantage for their success in the internationalization process (Plaza-Casado et al., 2024; Rivero-Gutiérrez et al., 2024), since this social acceptance of the company's economic activity is essential (Suchman, 1995). The company's ability to achieve legitimacy will determine its possibilities of survival and high performance in the new market or, on the contrary, its disappearance in a short period of time (Deephhouse, 2016; Kostova & Zaheer, 1999).

Legitimacy is considered a critical resource for organizations' survival and success (Plaza-Casado et al., 2024; Suddaby et al., 2016). Enterprises with high legitimacy levels will receive stakeholders' support, better access to critical resources, and more freedom to develop their activities (Deephhouse, 2016; Glozer et al., 2019; Zamparini & Lurati, 2017). Organizations acquire legitimacy when their behavior and actions are consistent with society's cultural values and norms of rules. Therefore, companies entering new markets need to first understand the cultural context of the new environment and then adapt to develop the correct actions and strategies to gain legitimacy and receive support from the local community. Once legitimacy is achieved, organizations must manage it to maintain it in the medium and long-term (Díez-Martín et al., 2021).

Every company seeks its long-term survival, which reinforces the need to constantly adapt to changing environments (Suddaby et al., 2016). For example, at the end of the last century, the environment, ecology, or being "green" was not as important as it is today. The changing trends present in every cultural context must be monitored and understood for companies to adapt to social values and demands. Organizations that are able to satisfy and create value through the consistency of their behavior with society's values will maintain their legitimacy level and succeed in the market (Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2022). On the other hand, if an enterprise loses part of its legitimacy, it must make a deep effort to recover it if it expects to continue its economic activity (Schembera & Scherer, 2014).

The internationalization process is complex and requires time to ensure the inclusion of the company in the new market (Buckley, 2015; Casillas & Acedo, 2012). Either if the company expects to export products or is exploring the possibility of establishing a subsidiary, the social acceptance of the local community would be critical for the company's arrival in the new market (Buckley, 2015). In today's global context, internationalization provides important opportunities for the development and growth of the business; therefore, organizations must gain legitimacy in the new environment to survive and perform its activity with success (Marschlich & Ingenhoff, 2022).

Existing cultural barriers will determine acceptance in the new market (Shenkar, 2001; Stenholm et al., 2013). Aspects such as language, religion, customs, values or even the ways to understand a business are examples of the possible cultural differences between the home and foreign country (Okoro, 2012; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). The ability of the international company to adapt to these barriers will determine its



legitimacy (Suddaby et al., 2016). In fact, the enterprise must understand the cultural differences in the new location to adapt its behavior and activity since it will be critical to develop its business and achieve a positive performance in the new market (Adamczyk, 2017).

The main purpose of this research is: first, to analyze the importance of legitimacy for international companies; second, to identify the most influential cultural differences for the adaptation process in a new market; and third, to propose strategies to help companies overcome the described barriers for the internationalization process. To pursue this objective, several interviews with CEOs and executive directors of Spanish multinational companies will be conducted. The achieved results will offer guidance for those companies that are about to begin their internationalization process since they will have a better knowledge about the main challenges that they will face along the process.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first one analyses organizational legitimacy, focusing on its concept and definition as well as on its management. In addition, it briefly analyzes the internationalization process and examines the importance of legitimacy in business internationalization. In this sense, cultural barriers are analyzed, offering different strategies to adapt to each of them. The second section consists of the empirical part where an analysis of fifteen interviews with managers of Spanish multinational companies is carried out. In these interviews, several questions regarding the internationalization process, cultural differences, how to adapt to them, as well as about the Spanish and European brands were asked. Finally, the conclusions of the research are presented, developing recommendations regarding the internationalization process.

Organizational Legitimacy as a Competitive Advantage to Overcome Cultural Barriers

When an organization begins developing its business, it needs social support to become successful. Legitimacy is understood as the acceptance sought by an organization for the consistency between its activities and results with the prevailing values and norms in society (Susith & Stewart, 2014). Thus, legitimacy depends on the efforts to adapt within the organization's internal and external environments (Deephhouse & Suchman, 2008). On the one hand, achieving internal legitimacy is crucial for enterprises since employees' performance and engagement will be better (Blanco-González et al., 2020). On the other hand, the perception that society has is essential, not only at an explicit level due to compliance with laws, environmental standards, etc, but also at an implicit level, since the image that the organization projects indirectly on individuals is critical (Haack & Sieweke, 2020).

Legitimacy determines individuals' attitude toward the organization as well as how they understand it (Díez-Martín et al., 2020). Bitektine and Haack (2015) state that when legitimacy is achieved, a feeling of trust is born in the social context. Thus, a cultural congruence appears that facilitates the rational explanation of what the organization does and why (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). However, building legitimacy would be nonsense if it is not possible to maintain it over time (Dacin et al., 2006). Since one of the main purposes for organizations is persistence over time, enterprises try to maintain legitimacy by making changes in the organization to adapt to variations in the environment (Roy et al., 2016). When an organization seeks legitimacy, it must communicate the value that it is adding to society. Sometimes, if legitimacy assessments are positive, they will grant the organization with enough social support to be accepted by the community and be able to continue with its economic activity (Sonpar et al., 2010).

In the end, legitimacy is based on meeting expectations, corresponding to individual value judgments (Rivero-Gutiérrez et al., 2024). The world is currently made up of around two hundred countries, all of them with their own political and geographical characteristics, with their own laws and trade regulations. All this makes the work of multinational organizations increasingly difficult, which will have to rely on the presence of leaders and managers who are aware of all these differences (Yang et al., 2012).

The problem regarding cultural differences when trying to gain legitimacy arises when one partner tries to impose its own culture on a different society with a different cultural context (Okoro, 2012). A clear example is the difference in doing business between the United States and Asian countries (Shenkar, 2001). While the former relies on people's actions and future attitudes to make business decisions, the latter place a great deal of trust in their god, encountering a major culture clash when it comes to making joint business decisions (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008). Traditionally, institutional theory has focused on seeking an explanation for organizational behavior based on a society's norms, rules, and ideology (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). However, in recent years, the so-called neo-institutionalism has focused on understanding how organizations can influence and change the institutions that surround them (Lawrence & Leca, 2009).

Under these circumstances, several questions arise: how are new organizational forms created and legitimized? Who has the power to legitimize a new business form? Hoffman (2001) determined that the pillars of an institution are divided into three groups (Hoffman, 2001). First, the regulative pillar refers to the laws and norms that shape future behavior according to whether punishments or rewards are applied based on nonconformity or conformity in the environment surrounding the institution. Second, the normative pillar encompasses all the unwritten values and norms that shape the institution's behavior. Third, the cultural pillar, which constitutes the company's internal interpretation of the culture that exists externally, through beliefs, ideologies, thoughts, etc. (Adler, 1980). All these constituent elements of the institutions shape the performance of the company, determining the legitimacy level of the strategies adopted in each country (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). As a result, the research makes clear the direct and bidirectional relationship between institutional forces and business activity, which can be conditioned by the surrounding environment.

In the field of internationalization, the theory of institutionalization and neo-institutionalism are even more relevant (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). When a company faces a process of expansion to another country, it is exposed to a situation where part of the learning acquired changes completely, resulting in changes in managers' decisions. The selection process of the foreign country is key, as well as the entry strategies to be followed by the entity (Brouthers & Hennart, 2007). In this context, Yang et al. (2012) state that it is crucial for an internationalizing firm to develop strategies to cope with existing institutions in the host country to gain social acceptance, and a result achieving legitimacy.

In this development of entry strategies, McKague (2011) addresses the concept of dynamic capabilities, a term based on the firm's own resources. The author himself defines them as "*resources to which an organization has access, either by direct ownership or through its network of relationships, and which it can draw on to perform a particular task or meet its objectives*" (McKague, 2011). These dynamic capabilities seek to achieve changes in the environment with long-term perspectives. Therefore, one of the determining capabilities according to McKague (2011) are political actions, whereby the company must establish contacts with the government of the host country to ensure the support of the rulers and secure their acceptance. Another dynamic capability highlighted by the author would be to conduct a reconfiguration of beliefs within the company itself. When an organization undertakes the internationalization process, it should

never impose its beliefs and ways of acting on the host country society. In addition, it also highlights the opportunities that exist when engaging with other private sector institutions. Given its previous experience with the society, the internationalized company can learn not only from the ways of proceeding of the national company, but also from the prevailing culture (Okoro, 2012).

It has been shown in studies of the field that there is a direct relationship between the success in the internationalization process of a company and the legitimacy level that it obtains in the host country, as well as its ability to overcome cultural barriers (Stenholm *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, a dependency relationship is observed between legitimacy, business internationalization, and cultural barriers. Consequently, any entity that decides to undertake the internationalization process should address the joint study of these variables. First, when the company expands to another country with a completely different culture, achieving legitimacy will make the difference between the survival or disappearance of the company. Second, to achieve social acceptance, the company must address the existing cultural barriers, i.e., all those differences between the national and foreign society will condition the correct development of the business activity. Consequently, it is essential to perform an investigation of all the existing barriers to subsequently develop and implement the necessary strategies to achieve a good reception in the host country.

Sample And Methodology

The dependency relationships between different markets highlight the need for a joint study of the business internationalization process and cultural barriers (Roy *et al.*, 2016). The process by which firms recognize and adapt to cultural barriers becomes of prominent interest when trying to achieve legitimacy and, thus, establish a lasting activity in the host country (Feldberga & Grike, 2015). Although it is a topic of growing interest in society, the reality is that empirical studies are not too numerous (Lvina *et al.*, 2019; Mendy & Rahman, 2018; Stahl & Tung, 2015). It is true that there is theory regarding business internationalization, institutional theory, detecting and developing strategies to adapt to cultural barriers, etc, but practical evidence of all the theories is relatively scarce. This study aims to facilitate an approach to reality to verify the application of theory in a practical way, creating new alternatives and paths for the analysis of cultural barriers in the field of business internationalization.

Information gathering

The research follows a qualitative methodology through the development of semi-structured interviews with 15 B2B manufacturing companies with an important international approach and belonging to the Club of Exporters and Investors of Spain, as the main reference in terms of internationalization, both for companies and for public administration.

As **Table 1** shows, the interviewees were selected according to the activity of the firm and their position and international experience, since the primary objective is to understand how these organizations detect and deal with cultural barriers, all with the aim of fostering organizational legitimacy in international markets. The interviews were conducted with the collaboration of CEOs, export managers, purchasing managers or business development managers, and private sector figures with an overly broad knowledge of the strategies, decisions and issues that arise on a day-to-day basis. The information extracted from the interviews can be summarized in the following points:

- Internationalization strategies adopted by their companies.

- Specific aspects of the internationalization process, such as local partners, reputational issues, or cultural differences.
- Skills acquired from experience in international markets and how to adapt to cultural barriers.

The interviews were conducted online between the association and each professional. With prior authorization, they were guaranteed absolute anonymity to obtain the most accurate and concise information possible. These interviews were conducted between March and June 2021. The fieldwork comprises 15 interviews previously prepared with a script that helped guide the conversation without influencing the findings. **Table 1** summarizes the essential information of the entities by providing a brief description of their economic activities, the interviewee's experience in the position, and the position of the persons contacted.

Table 1

Description of the companies

	Activity	Experience	Position
1	Engineering services	40 years	Purchasing Manager
2	Engineering services	20 years	CEO
3	Manufacture of equipment and hand tools for industrial use	28 years	CEO
4	Operations management and consultancy	3 years	COO
5	Engineering services	11 years	Business Development Manager
6	Management of the infrastructure projects	12 years	CEO
7	Engineering services	19 years	COO
8	Operations management and consultancy	40 years	CEO
9	Engineering services	5 years	Business Development Manager
10	Tank and container manufacturers	8 years	Internationalization Manager
11	Paint and coating manufacturing	13 years	Quality and internationalization manager
12	Pharmaceutical	15 years	CEO
13	Beverages and other products for consumption	15 years	Internationalization Manager
14	Engineering services	35 years	Market Intelligence Manager
15	Technology consulting operations and digital transformation	34 years	COO

CEO: Chief Executive Officer; COO: Chief Operating Officer

Source: Own elaboration.

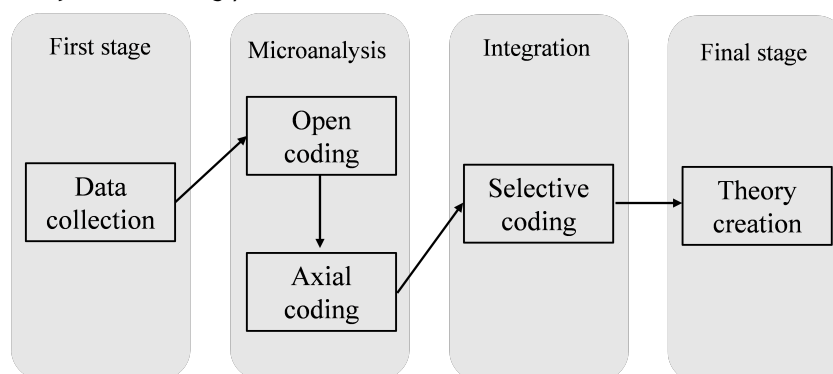
Data Analysis

The Grounded Theory approach, suggested by Glaser, was used due to the large amount of data collected and because it encourages the creativity of researchers in the analysis of results, through manual coding of results (Johnson, 2015). Two different researchers participated in the coding process. The data collected in the interviews with the experts in the first step were transformed into information through an iterative coding process with three steps: open, axial and selective coding (Creswell, 2014) (see **Figure 1**). This sequential approach is aimed at fostering creativity to provide new alternatives to the analysis of the topic. The qualitative data were first subjected to open coding to reduce the information to the essentials. These codes were then organized through axial coding to observe links and data patterns. Finally, selective coding was used to identify the relationships between the elements defined through axial coding. The findings

were discussed and shared among the four researchers who participated in this project (Preikschas et al., 2017) and were only included when there was consensus on their interpretation. This is done to reduce any distortions that may exist in the context of the research and to provide greater credibility to the findings.

Figure 1

Analysis and coding process



Source: Own elaboration.

Specifically, from the data collected in the interviews, the part related to cultural differences has been analyzed, indicating which of these have been identified by the interviewees, what their importance has been in the internationalization process, as well as the strategies used by the companies for their adaptation process. First, a summary of how the companies have approached the internationalization process has been presented, followed by an introduction to the cultural differences they have encountered. Some of these differences will be language, values and customs, or the political context and relations with the Public Administration. Throughout the analysis, the interviewees will provide concrete examples to illustrate the theory. Finally, and as an aspect that has been considered related to the way of adapting to cultural differences, the Spanish and European brands will be addressed, with the aim of studying whether one facilitates more than the other the process of legitimization and helps in the adaptation to cultural barriers.

Results

When a company enters an internationalization process, it faces the challenge of gaining legitimacy in the host country. In this regard, all the interviewees stated that it is essential to adapt the company to the corporate culture in the new country. The 15 interviewees pointed to a change in trend with respect to the past. Whereas at the end of the 20th century, organizations tried to impose their culture and way of working on the new culture, today it is the foreign company that must learn and adapt to the new society. Specifically, CEO #4 expresses that *"to be successful in the foreign market, the international company must become local"*. This statement, in one way or another, can be extracted from every interview.

In line with this argument, all interviewees differentiated procedures for achieving a good degree of local relationships. The basic strategy mentioned is the contact and collaboration with a local partner. CEO #3 stated that the relationship with local partners is a basic strategy in internationalization. It mainly helps the foreigner to understand the market to which he wants to expand, offering vital information about who could be potential customers, who pays more, who pays less, which customer is interested in a quality product, even if it is more expensive, or which customer is looking for a product that fulfills the same functions for a lower price. The business development manager #9 analyzed this strategy in two ways. On the one hand, he is a local partner who helps to understand the market and the culture; and on the other hand, he is also

their semi-finished product distributor, who not only takes care of manufacturing the final product and, thus, avoiding its deterioration during transport, but also knows the company in which he works, taking care of all the logistics.

Another strategy mentioned in eight of the interviews is the acquisition of small companies that serve as a direct entry into the new market, or the establishment of an own subsidiary by hiring local workers. In the first case, the acquisition of a small company in the foreign market that already performs the same activity has many advantages (internationalization manager #13). These include knowledge of the company, which helps to adapt to cultural barriers, knowledge of the customer and knowledge of different distributors. In the second case, the establishment of a subsidiary would be the second step in the internationalization process, always after having the collaboration of a local partner. CEO #2 commented that the existence of its permanent office in the Philippines not only facilitates all negotiations within the country itself but also makes it possible to accelerate the negotiation processes in other nearby countries. In the end, cultural barriers will influence the strategy that the company ultimately chooses to enter the new environment. The 15 interviewees categorically stated that it is vital to adapt to the culture of the host country to gain legitimacy, hence the importance of the local partner.

Although the interviewees referred to language as the main barrier to overcome, only those operating in Asia or Africa considered it to be a major factor. The 12 companies interviewed that offer their services in Latin America do not consider language as a barrier. The companies operating in Europe simply mention that, to overcome the language barrier, they proceed to hire personnel who are fluent in German, French, English, or even Eastern European languages such as Polish or Romanian. Although it is true that the internationalization manager #10 highlights the difficulties they had in expanding to France since they could not find a person with the necessary technical qualifications and at the same time with a very good language level. In the case of the companies operating in North America, they also had no difficulty with the language.

However, the reality is quite different when companies operate in Asia or Africa. Although English is a commonly spoken language and French is quite widespread in Africa, there are countries that prioritize knowledge of their language as a requirement for fruitful negotiations. More specifically, according to three of the interviewees (#13, #4 and #5), Middle Eastern countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Saudi Arabia require the presence of a translator or a foreign company employee who understands Arabic. For example, the COO #4 determined that language is a barrier that must always be considered in Arab countries, in addition to a sensitivity that allows them to be able to grasp the different nuances in the way of behavior of the people they are going to visit.

The above appreciation leads to the next two cultural barriers: customs and values. These are possibly the two most complex barriers to adapt to, since they are not written, but internalized in the society itself. Consequently, the sensitivity referred to by one of the interviewees must be a basic characteristic of the people who make up the company's international team. Specifically, CEO #3 offers a clear example of business in Arab countries. This society values personal relationships, so the object of a meeting should not be directly the negotiation. They would be interpreting that the only objective is the economic activity itself, leaving aside a pleasant and relaxed conversation. Therefore, the international team should not only be informed about the cultural characteristics of the host country but also have the emotional intelligence to analyze the impact that their presence will have on the potential international client.

The business development manager #5 explained that when conducting international business in Africa, it is necessary to consider the colonial history of the countries, arguing that the more traumatic the

independence, the worse the relations with the former colonial power. He gives the example of Angola, a former Portuguese colony with which he maintains fruitful commercial relations, unlike the African country with Portugal. In line with this argument, COO #7 also refers to this colonial legacy as a determining factor in the values of a society. In this case, reference is made to Latin Americans and Africans as people who are going to go ahead with “yes” to any project, given that they are societies that need to develop, and the entry of international companies is ideal for this purpose. Thus, both the interviewee and the COO #15 say that the process of gaining legitimacy is a long one, based on making many trips to create a climate of trust, as well as building a network of contacts to make the company known.

The business development manager #9 offers a strategy to get to know the values of the company that operates in the country to which they are expanding. When they start the internationalization process and get local partners, they offer them training both in their own country and at the parent company in Spain. This procedure brings with it two benefits. On the one hand, a direct and very personal relationship is established with the partner in the host country by showing them the company from the inside. On the other hand, this more personal relationship allows the Spanish company to investigate and learn about the local society to be more prepared for the negotiations with the final client. This same manager makes a small clarification referring to Africa, indicating that, in general, they tend to value the contact, the presence, the possibility of responding to a problem on a Saturday or Sunday, among other things. These are facts that reinforce trust, and at the same time, they appreciate the values of the Spanish company based on this closeness and concern.

Being environmentally responsible and fighting climate change, as well as developing any project that helps those in need, are values that are increasingly present in all societies. In this regard, #1, #8 and #13 exemplify how small actions can greatly enhance the legitimacy level. Company #1 gives the example of an action they carried out in one of their projects when they were commissioned to build a bridge over a river. In this case, the river was polluted and had a huge number of plastics in it, so, as part of the project, they offered to clean up the river, providing what their purchasing manager calls “*regenerative solutions*”. The COO #7 speaks of its irrigation projects and facilities related to the primary sector, contributing to local development, actions that immediately gain the support of society. The same example is offered for the Dominican Republic and Haiti, where they have carried out projects for sanitation and water supply, actions that are viewed with great appreciation by the inhabitants of these countries. Finally, CEO #12 explains the social project they have in Colombia. Their delegation has a procedure through which they take in Venezuelans who have fled their country and provide them with various forms of assistance.

The way of understanding business is another significant cultural difference in international negotiations. Regarding this concept, CEOs #2 and #3 highlight three very representative examples. In the first case, reference is made to the Dutch, who are defined as very direct people, so that beating around the bush in the negotiation process can be seen as a lack of honesty. In the second case, the Japanese, who are usually referred to in the complete opposite way. If they are spoken to in a very clear and direct way, only dealing with the business, they may feel rejection, a feeling that would truncate trust and, consequently, the negotiation. Third and finally, the interviewee offers a twofold example. The local partner they have in Kenya is in a region bordering Somalia, a country with an Arab culture and language. That is, they are ethnically distinct from Kenyans, so they are characterized by the Arab way of doing business, which means they are more prone to continuous and more willing negotiation. Otherwise, if the partner were African, the CEO assures that the business would not be so “easy”.

Complying with these values and leaving a good impression is essential today because of the so-called "word of mouth". In four of the interviews, reference is made to this mode of communication, which consists of the fact that a local client talks to other partners, both within the country and in neighboring countries. In this way, excellent references are given for Spanish companies. CEO #8 exemplifies this "word of mouth". On his first visit to the businessmen with whom he was going to collaborate in Peru, he was pleasantly surprised by the treatment he was receiving from the beginning, which was very close considering that he had not had any previous contact. A few weeks after working with the Peruvian businessmen, they were the ones who told him if he had been surprised by the good treatment they had given him from the first day. The explanation they offered was that their Costa Rican partners had already informed them of the Spanish way of proceeding to achieve more fruitful negotiations. In a similar way, the COO #15 explained the facilities provided by having projects in Morocco and then being able to access other countries in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa, all of which are partners or clients of the Moroccan company.

Within additional cultural differences, the political context and relations with the public administration play an important role in the road to legitimacy. In the 15 interviews, contact with the authorities was mentioned. 100% of the interviewees affirmed that at least moderate relations would favor the legitimization process, but they would not mean the closing or not of the deal with the client, if the client is not the government of the country. CEO #12 emphasizes that not in all cases do they contact the Administration and, if they must do so, they use their local partner as a channel, since they will always receive a better reception than if the foreign company were to do so individually, a statement corroborated by CEO #3. A Completely different situation is the case of #5 and #6, whose business development manager and CEO state the imperative need for good relations with the Administration given that, for example, in Angola, their main client is the Ministry of Agriculture. From another perspective, the COO #15, when asked about his company's relations with the Administration, uses the example of projects they have developed in Peru. He assures that they must always go hand in hand with a local partner because, when it is a foreign company, the Government is quite willing to leave the organization aside when a problem arises.

The political context also plays a role in achieving good relations with the host country, as explained by COO #7. To sell a project to Côte d'Ivoire, a change of government occurred in the middle of the negotiation process. Consequently, until the appointment of the new government, the entire negotiation process could not be restarted. In other words, every trip to this country was paralyzed until the situation was regularized.

One aspect mentioned in some interviews as a determining factor for entering a country and gaining legitimacy in it, is the relationship with Embassies or with local commercial-economic formations, such as importers' or exporters' clubs. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, all the companies interviewed belong to the Spanish Exporters and Investors Club, and some of them also collaborate with the Spanish Institute of Foreign Trade, which shows that this type of organization works to project the international path of companies. In fact, CEO #2 refers to the support provided by the Commercial Office of the Spanish Embassy when they have had to deal with the host country's administration. He assures that, within the public sector, the fact of going hand in hand with the same Embassy can make a big difference, especially in the initial stages of the negotiation. For her part, the business development manager of company #9 explains her collaboration with the Spanish Embassy in the host country in the first steps of the internationalization process. The Commercial Office, after learning about the company's interest, provides support and usually puts the company in contact with local partners. As a final comment on this aspect, COO #4 mentions that,

in certain African countries, his company is part of the Importers' Club, which not only allows it to enter the market of the country under consideration but also opens doors to other international markets.

Another cultural difference, mentioned in only two of the interviews, is religion. CEO #8, when referring to his company's business with Arab countries, comments that negotiations are much more complicated than with Latin America, for example. He assures that the values, the language, as well as the religion, require a prior knowledge of the country that is strictly necessary. The internationalization manager #13 illustrates the importance of religion with a real case that happened to his company. During one of his exports to Algeria, he received a sudden call from the importer notifying him that the cargo had been blocked at the port because of a complaint to the country's Ministry of Religion. The problem was that the labels of his product had an *s*, placed horizontally, which in Arabic read as Allah. The whole unforeseen event led to the redirection of the shipment to another country and the consequent modification of all subsequent labeling for products destined for that African country.

The final topic to be addressed is the one regarding the Spanish and European brands. In the 15 interviews, the question that was asked was whether the Spanish Brand facilitates acceptance and good reception by customers and local society, or if, on the contrary, the European brand really opens more doors. Significantly, 13 of those interviewed said that the Spanish Brand helps in international business, but with several nuances. The first is the sector to which the company is dedicated, since it is not the same for companies dedicated to consulting or pharmaceuticals, which do claim to use the prestige of the Spanish Brand. However, other companies dedicated to engineering services find greater competition with other Brands such as the German or American. Similarly, the degree of development of the country also influences the use of the Spanish or European Brand. Companies #4, #9, and #11 stated that the Spanish Brand is very well received in developing countries, mainly in Africa or Asia. On the contrary, when it comes to developed countries such as those located in North America or Northern Europe, the reception is not very positive.

An additional aspect highlighted in the interviews on this issue is related to the technical and financial factors. Companies #7 and #15 state that they have noticed a clear difference between the good reception of the Spanish Brand when the project is offered at the technical level, while at the financial level the European Brand opens many more doors. On the other hand, only two of the companies said that Spanish Brand has not helped them. Companies #2 and #3 state that the Spanish Brand has not opened any doors for them, but the European Brand has. In addition, CEO #2 highlights the importance of the European brand to compete against Chinese entrepreneurs in international trade.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the warning given by the CEO of company #6 when asked about the Spanish Brand. "Unfortunately, being Spanish, I always say that the image of Spain abroad is infinitely superior to the image of Spain inside, that is, the Spaniards of ourselves". He assures that, apart from all the designations in terms of technical quality, product quality, technology, etc, Spain is a cultural element that, according to his experience, is already well received. He points to Russia or India as countries that can offer great services and their companies can be great rivals, but the gastronomy, the climate, all those attributes that surround Spanish society already pave the way for international business. For this reason, he explains, he is pleased to see this pride in Spain in other parts of the world and, nevertheless, it saddens him that when arriving in Spain this feeling is decimated, among other reasons for political, historical comments, etc. With all this analysis, we can confirm that the Spanish Brand does favor adaptation to cultural differences and, equally, facilitates international business.

Implications

Theoretical implications

In today's environment, many organizations need to enter new markets to grow and expand their business. Nevertheless, the internationalization process also entails important challenges related to the initial lack of support from the local communities (Yin et al., 2013) as well as the poor knowledge of the new location. In fact, the lack of social support in the new market is many times related with the cultural differences between the home and the foreign/local country. International enterprises must identify the most determining cultural barriers to adapt to them and achieve legitimacy in the new environment. Without legitimacy, these organizations will not have local support, and thus, the internationalization process will not succeed (Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2021; Rivero-Gutiérrez et al., 2024).

Under these circumstances, the aim of this research was to empirically demonstrate the importance of gaining legitimacy for achieving a successful acceptance in a new location, as well as to identify the most important challenges to overcome entry barriers within the internationalization process. Through the analysis of the developed interviews, several conclusions were identified. First, the responses of the CEO's proved the relevance that legitimacy has for the success and survival of an international company entering a new market, which was already supported by authors such as Bitektine (2015), Deephouse (2008), and Suchman (2011) whose research summarized the relevance and benefits that legitimacy holds in every scenario. In addition, other papers such as Jiang et al. (2022), Rivero-Gutierrez et al. (2023), Plaza-Casado et al. (2024) or Zhang et al. (2022) reached similar conclusions highlighting the relevance of legitimacy to achieve a successful internationalization process since local support is critical. Second, the interviewees also confirmed that cultural barriers are one of the main challenges in the internationalization process, highlighting the importance of taking them into consideration and adapting to them in the aim of being accepted in the new location.

These implications were also supported by other authors such as Canadian et al. (2021), who demonstrated how cultural values determined the level of acceptance of certain enterprises in new environments.

Based on these arguments, enterprises need to understand that entering an internationalization process without considering the challenges related to cultural barriers would be completely naïve. Since legitimacy is obtained when society (in this case the local communities) perceives the organization as appropriate within their social system based on their cultural values and beliefs, it is essential to identify these cultural aspects and try to adapt to them.

For this purpose, it is essential for the foreign company to have good corporate diplomacy to help it achieve business success (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). As shown in the achieved results, any company embarking on the path of internationalization should analyze in depth the existing cultural differences. Among the benefits of adapting to these differences are the faster start-up of economic activity; the good reputation that goes hand in hand with the achievement of legitimacy; the ability to undertake new projects in the host country; and the knowledge of new cultures that will facilitate entry into other target countries.

Managerial implications

Each country has its own characteristics, and therefore, it is completely different to negotiate with Algerian, Canadian or Japanese businessmen, for example. In this sense, the analysis of the values and customs of the host country, as stated by the interviewees, must be part of the internationalization process.

Companies need to understand that if they expect to offer their product abroad, it is crucial to analyze the target society by observing and examining its behaviors. These behaviors can be understood as unwritten rules that are part of the host country's traditions.

Based on these arguments, through this research, several guidelines could be defined for managers aiming to expand internationally. As shown in the result discussion within the main cultural barriers, the interviewees highlighted that language, the basis of communication, should be the first cultural barrier to overcome; therefore, one of the first initiatives should be to hire translators or native workers. These employees should also have the capability and sensitivity to adapt and understand a new culture. Since the success of the internationalization process is highly linked with the employees' capacity to adapt to the new environment, the interest and knowledge of the local characteristics would be a relevant skill demanded when hiring the parent company's employees.

Another relevant issue when expanding abroad is the host country's values, which in some cases play a significant role even in the negotiation procedures. In fact, in some Arab countries, it is frowned upon for women entrepreneurs to negotiate with male executives. Under this situation, a recommendation for the international company would be to consider whether the internationalization manager should delegate the negotiations to a male colleague from her company. However, in this sense, companies should consider that this controversial situation would not be generally applied when negotiating with other countries such as the ones in Latin America.

The way of understanding business in each country is another essential cultural barrier. In the Netherlands, for example, negotiations are more fruitful when they are direct and to the point, while in Arab countries, the interest of the foreign company in the personal sphere is valued. Japan, with a completely different approach to business, values silence and having time to analyze the project on offer. In this sense, it is important for international companies to have a deep knowledge about the manner in which businesses are conceived in order to be able to adapt to each situation.

As demonstrated through this research, cultural differences are an important challenge when entering a new country; therefore, companies should identify the most suitable entry strategy to succeed. Company managers must evaluate which strategy will be the most convenient, considering different aspects (host country's culture, values, language, complexity etc) and decide either to enter directly into the new market through a subsidiary or to use the acquisition of an existing local company. What has been proven by the empirical analysis is that establishing contact with a local partner is a strategy used by all companies, so it is recommended that those who want to follow the path of internationalization seek a potential partner in the foreign country. Approaching a local partner not only facilitates the commercial entry but also allows the expanding company to get to know the culture of the new country.

Additional barriers to the cultural issue have also been identified in this research. In fact, the environmental impact that the new enterprise can have on the host country is an important factor for the local communities. Therefore, it is important for international companies to consider their environmental impact on the host country in the negotiation process. The corporation's legitimacy in the new country will be higher when the local community perceives not only an economic interest in their country but also the possibility of being socially responsible while doing business in the new location.

Receiving support from the host community is a key element for achieving legitimacy. In this sense, an atmosphere of trust between the two involved parties is important. Relationships with native business-people take hold over time, with travel being necessary both to foster face-to-face negotiations and

ongoing contact to show interest and concern for each other. If a company wants to establish a commercial background in the host country, it is not only important to start up the first project, but also to keep that project alive and try to move forward with others. This is one of the main benefits of adapting to cultural differences and building a trustworthy relationship.

An additional tool to overcome the challenges of internationalization identified in the interviews was the relationship with Embassies or other commercial formations. These alliances always pave the way for international negotiations. When the decision is made to start the internationalization process, this resource can make the difference between a good and easy entry into the country, versus a much more complex process. Contact with the national Embassy should be the first step, since this entity has a marketing department whose job is to put the foreign company in contact with local partners.

Finally, another highlighted aspect is that the concept of the Spanish and European Brand always opens doors. Depending on the sector and the economic activity, one or the other is better seen. In the case of financing, Europe gives a better image since it is understood that the European Union is behind and, in case of a financial problem, it will be easier to solve it. In the case of sectors such as engineering or machinery, the Spanish Brand enjoys a good reputation and recognition.

In conclusion, the internationalization process requires adaptation to the new cultural context, since it is the way to gain legitimacy and local support. The conclusions from this research will serve as guidelines for company managers who are interested in expanding their business to new markets. In fact, through the analysis of the developed interviews, we have presented the most recurrent challenges and cultural barriers and provided several strategies to overcome these issues.

Limitations and future research lines

Regarding the main limitations and future research lines, the following aspects could be considered. We understand that the development of the interviews with experts and relevant managers in international companies provides first-hand information on the internationalization process; however, the sample could be increased in the future. Moreover, this research follows a qualitative methodology; thus, in the future, a combination with quantitative measures could provide a deeper understanding. Future academics interested in expanding the knowledge within legitimacy and internationalizations could focus on how companies can develop good corporate diplomacy to achieve business success; the effect of political-economic uncertainty on organizational legitimacy; the effect of armed conflicts on internationalization operations; how companies must act in delegitimized markets; or how companies can manage their dynamic capabilities to operate in the competitive global world.



Acknowledgement Ethics Committee Approval

The authors thank the Spanish Exporters and Investors Club for their collaboration in this research. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Internal Registry No. 181220230092024) with a favorable opinion signed by Elisabet Huertas Hoyas, Secretary of the Committee. The approval pertains to the doctoral project titled "*Legitimacy of Multinational Companies from Emerging Countries*," specifically the amendment titled "*Measurement of Organizational Legitimacy through Biometric Tools*." The decision was issued in Móstoles, Spain, on 19 December 2023.

Peer Review Author Contributions

Externally peer-reviewed.
Conception/Design of Study- A.B.G., P.M.A.; Data Acquisition- A.B.G., L.R.G.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- A.B.G., G.M.A., L.R.G.; Drafting Manuscript- P.M.A., C.C.F.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- A.B.G., C.C.F., L.R.G.; Final Approval and Accountability- A.B.G., P.M.A., C.C.F., L.R.G.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.



Grant Support The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Legally Self-Employed but De Facto Worker: Motor Couriers' Working Conditions and Work-Life Balance in Zonguldak, Türkiye



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Abstract

This article investigates the working conditions and work-life balance of couriers in Zonguldak, Türkiye. The study aims to determine whether there is any differentiation in working conditions and work-life balance between self-employed platform couriers and employed platform or non-platform couriers. The "Survey on Socio-demographic Data and Opinions on the Working Conditions of Motor Couriers" which consists of close-ended questions prepared by researchers and the "Work-Life Balance Scale" developed by Fisher, Bulger, and Smith, was used as a data collection tool. The purposive sampling method was employed in the selection of a sampling group, and the snowball sampling method was used for data collection. In the field study, 195 couriers were surveyed out of a total of 250-275 couriers. According to the data, self-employed platform couriers work longer than salaried platform and non-platform couriers, and their work-life imbalance is higher than others. Although they make more money than all other couriers, their life satisfaction is not much higher than that of salaried and weekly-waged couriers. In the SPSS analysis, it was found that self-employed platform couriers are not in a more advantageous position than other fixed-wage employed couriers in terms of income, work hours, seniority, flexibility, and work-life balance.

Keywords

Food delivery workers • couriers gig economy • gig workers • platform workers • flexibility • work-life balance



Citation: Demir, İ. & Özkan, A. O. (2025). Legally Self-Employed but de facto worker: Motor couriers' working conditions and Work-Life balance in Zonguldak, Türkiye. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 121-139. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1597125>

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2025. Demir, İ. & Özkan, A. O.

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Digital labor platforms do not produce any concrete goods. They bring together product and service providers with consumers, customers, or requesters in a digital application. This interaction has engendered a new form of work and organization. The advent of a gig economy inflames the debate on platform-based employees' legal status (De Stefano et al., 2022, p. 24; Duggan et al., 2022, p. 3). Most platform workers, especially food delivery workers (hereafter couriers), are classified as self-employed by platforms to avoid operating expenses, even though they are dependent on platforms for income, tasks, customers, working time and work organization. This leads them to be legally classified as self-employed even though they are de facto employees. Research on platform workers reveals that these workers are exposed to precarious and dangerous working conditions (Kassem, 2023; Rani and Gobel, 2023; Schor, 2020; Taylor et al., 2017). Couriers, one of the most common workers in a gig economy, regularly work under these conditions (Fairwork, 2023a; Ivanova et al., 2018).

In recent years, the economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, high costs and courier deaths have led to numerous couriers' protests in Türkiye (Hamsici, 2022; GazeteDuvar, 2023; Kıldak, 2023). However, the job has been glorified with the rhetoric of entrepreneurship, flexibility, high earnings and self-employment (Uysal, 2022). A monopoly in food and grocery delivery in Türkiye, *Getir* has soon expanded to the world's largest metropolises. Another big Turkish company, *Yemeksepeti* was bought by the German Deliveroo Hero. There are many delivery platforms in Türkiye, like *Vigo*, *Fiyuu*, *Banabikurye*, *TrendyolGo*, *Pakettaksi*, *Tıklagelsin* and *İstegelsin*, other than *Getir* and *Yemeksepeti*. They do not pay a regular and fixed salary and prefer a pay-per-package system. Most couriers can earn the minimum wage or less by working 12 hours a day after all operating costs and do not benefit from social and economic protections (ILO, 2022; Ceylan, 2022).

The gig economy is transforming not only the way we work but also our work-life balance. As Kelliher et al. (2018) stated, "work-life balance refers to the relationship between work and non-work aspects of individuals' lives." Just as gender roles and class affect the work-life balance, new production technologies and the ways of working also have effects on it negatively or positively (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). The balance, however, varies according to person, gender, class, marital status, educational level, job, profession and other social categories. Therefore, it may be necessary to develop a more encompassing and dynamic understanding of work and life. When we consider the flexible working arrangements, it is evident that the work-life balance is blurring. Work is spilling over into life, and the boundaries are becoming unclear (Guest, 2002). With the spread of flexible work organizations, the distinction between work hours and non-work hours is fast disappearing. Compared to traditional ways of working, the gig economy has altered the work-life balance.

In this frame, the article aims to show the working conditions and work-life balance of food delivery workers in Türkiye. However, it focuses on platform-based self-employed couriers because they make up the majority of employees. The article also examines, as a secondary objective, whether there is a difference in terms of working conditions and work-life balance between platform-based self-employed couriers and salaried platform or non-platform couriers. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the article explores whether flexible labor regimes are considered an advantage by self-employed platform couriers in terms

of income, working hours, work-life balance, and autonomy compared to salaried platform or non-platform couriers.

Research on the working conditions of couriers generally focuses on working hours, working days (Ceylan, 2022; Heiland, 2022b), flexibility experiences (Piasna & Drahekoupil, 2021; Sun et al., 2023), income levels and precarity (Huang, 2022; 2023; Taylor et al., 2017). They also address how algorithmic management creates these conditions (Heiland, 2022a, 2022b). In this study, the working conditions were analyzed by using these parameters in the literature.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it fills the gap in the quantitative data on food delivery workers in Türkiye. Second, it provides knowledge on platform labor in Türkiye, a country in the Global South. Third, it shows that flexible working practices do not create autonomy for couriers and, in this sense, undermine work-life balance rather than providing it.

The article begins with an explanation of platform capitalism's political economy, the platform economy's flexible working conditions and the concept of work-life balance. It continues with the research method. Third, the results reveal the couriers' working conditions and work-life balance. In the last section, discussion and conclusion, it is compared the research's results with the literature of platform work and present how to create fairer working conditions.

Theoretical Framework

The Political Economy of Platforms and the Transformation of Work

Digital platforms, which have emerged with technological developments in the last 2 decades, bring together the supply and demand for goods and services. However, they also function as means of surplus-value extraction (Woodcock & Graham, 2018; Poutanen et al., 2019; Duggan et al., 2022). For this reason, digital capitalism (Schiller, 1999) needs freedom of action and an unregulated labor force market, as well as a digital infrastructure. It provides this freedom through neoliberal economic policies and flexible work. Although the platformization of capitalism has many dimensions, the most prominent features are the outsourcing and flexibilization of labor and algorithmic surveillance technologies. Therefore, the platform economy cannot be considered independent of class conflicts, labor exploitation, capital intensification, inequalities and profit maximization.

Working in the platform economy refers to wage labor. Platforms as a means of production are owned by companies and workers work for platforms by renting their labor, although they are not classified as employees. The value produced is put into relations of distribution, and a large part of this value is appropriated by the platform owners. Therefore, digital technologies and capital are not a thing, but a definite social production relation that confronts production actors.

Marx put forth all these components in Capital I. According to Marx (1990), capitalists appropriate surplus value by increasing work hours, decreasing wages, intensifying labor, using new technology, new management strategies, and a piece-wage system. The basic aim of technological transformation and labor management for capitalists is to capture surplus value and undoubtedly increase economic and political domination. The platform economy does this with digital production technologies, flexibilization, and algorithmic management. Also, according to Marx (1993), the basic elements of the labor process are the purposeful activity of labor, the object of labor, and the means of labor. In the era of the platform economy, although there are formal changes, the basic logic has not changed. Digital technologies as the means of

labor and data as the object of labor are new elements of digital capitalism. However, the relations of exploitative production remain the same way. While digital technological transformation has not done more fair and equitable to the world, it has punished workers and the poor by increasing income inequalities (O'Neil, 2017). Moreover, digital labor platforms have contributed greatly to the expansion of the precarity that Standing (2014) spoke about long ago. The irregular, fixed-term, part-time, project-based, and periodic work without job and income security defines this class. Digital work platforms and their labor regime have increased precarization, especially through the classification of self-employed or independent contractors. Precarization not only impacts job and income security but also, as Sennett (2003) shows in "The Corrosion of Character," hinders the formation of meaningful and stable relationships and disrupts work-life balance.

Work-life Balance

Work-life balance is defined as the ability to be satisfied with one's work and non-work life (Sturges & Guest, 2004). Behind the increased academic interest in work-life balance after 2000 is the transformation of the work form due to digital technologies, the spread of flexible working, the blurring of distinction between work and private life, precarization, the marketization of public life as a result of privatization, a decline in life satisfaction, an increase in women's employment, and a more intense experience of work-life imbalance among women in employment (Booth & Frank, 2005; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Drobnič, 2011; Houston, 2005, p. 1–3; Kelliher et al., 2018).

Work-life balance is generally understood as the way work affects our non-work life, especially family life, but the concept could also mean the effect non-work life, especially family life or problems related to private life, could have on our work life (Benito-Osorio et al., 2014; Lazăr et al., 2010). The work-life balance should be seen as a two-pole concept. Many approaches have been developed on work-life balance. These approaches include views on the possibility of work-life balance disruption and its causes and consequences. This research, on the other hand, mainly adopts a conflict approach.

There are various impacts of platform work on platform workers' work-life balance. For instance, couriers in particular are often unable to spend time with family and friends as they have to work during peak hours (evenings and weekends) (Heiland, 2021, p. 9). Moreover, the per-package wage system forces couriers to work more and therefore they do not spend time on extra-work activities (Ceylan, 2022). In addition, couriers do not make productive use of their non-work time as they work six hours a week and take care of engine maintenance on their days off. The reflection of psychological problems caused by working in precarious and uncertain conditions on relationships outside of work is another dimension of this phenomenon.

Freelancers working online suffer from the social isolation of working from home. The opportunities for social interaction provided by the workplace are absent in work-from-home, and freelancers lack the opportunity to spend time with colleagues after work. Due to the disadvantages of reputation ratings, many freelancers underbid for assignments, are forced to undertake long-term tasks, and lose their privacy at home due to algorithmic surveillance (sending screenshots or turning on cameras). Irregular and untimely payments are other factors that disrupt freelancers' work-life balance. However, online freelancers, especially women ones, have the opportunity to earn income without interrupting their caregiving responsibilities and can spare time for their domestic needs. Especially for workers who prefer platform work for additional income, these jobs increase household income and contribute to private life. (İlyas, 2022; Moore et al., 2018)

Method

In the study, a quantitative research method was employed. The study population consisted of couriers working via digital platforms (such as *Getir*, *Vigo*, *PaketTaksi*, *Fiyuu*, *Tıklagelsin*, *Trendyol Go* and *Yemeksepeti*), salaried couriers, and daily/weekly wage couriers for restaurants in the Zonguldak city center and its districts, named *Ereğli*, *Çaycuma* and *Kilimli*. The "Survey on Socio-demographic Data and Opinions on the Working Conditions of Motor Couriers" which consists of close-ended questions prepared by researchers and the "Work-Life Balance Scale" developed by Fisher, Bulger, and Smith (2009) were used as data collection tools. The study was approved by the Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University Ethics Committee (Approval No: 23.3.2023/288960).

The scale included a total of 17 items and has four sub-dimensions: "Negative Impact of Life on Work", "Negative Impact of Work on Life", "Positive Impact of Life on Work" and "Positive Impact of Work on Life". The scale was a 5-point Likert scale with five different responses ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". There were no reverse scored items in the scale. The scale score was obtained by summing the value equivalents of the responses given to the scale items, and an increase in the score obtained from the scale sub-dimensions draws attention to an increase in the impact of the relevant dimension.

According to the results of a confirmatory factor analysis on the validity and reliability of the scale, the model goodness of fit criteria of the scale are found as Chi-square/sd = 1.572, RMSEA = .053, NNFI = .97, CFI = .98 for the four sub-dimensional model and it was found to be a reasonable model goodness. The reliability for all four sub-dimensions; Negative Impact of Life on Work (Cronbach's alpha = 0.847), Negative Impact of Work on Life (Cronbach's alpha = 0.869), Positive Impact of Life on Work (Cronbach's alpha = 0.837) and Positive Impact of Work on Life (Cronbach's alpha = 0.812), were found to be good.

In this study, the SPSS AMOS and SPSS 25 programs were used for data analysis. For the four sub-dimensional models that were tested within the scope of the study, it was found that the model fit criteria of the scale had a reasonable model goodness of fit (Chi-square/sd = 1.611, RMSEA = .056, NNFI = .94, CFI = .97). The reliability analyses showed that a reliable measurement was provided in the sub-dimensions of the Negative Impact of Life on Work (Cronbach alpha = 0.905), Negative Impact of Work on Life (Cronbach alpha = 0.942), Positive Impact of Life on Work (Cronbach alpha = 0.929) and Positive Impact of Work on Life (Cronbach alpha = 0.865).

In the data analysis step of the study, descriptive analyses were employed by the researchers and cross tabulations were preferred. In the sample selection, purposive sampling, one of the non-probability sampling types, was preferred. Since we clearly identified the characteristics of the group subject to our research and reached almost all members of this group, it was clear that this sampling technique provided reliable results. In addition, a snowball sampling technique, which is a sub-dimension of purposive sampling, was used in the study. To collect data, we first met the head of the Zonguldak Motor Couriers Association. The head shared the questionnaire form on the WhatsApp group of the association and then directed the researchers to the waiting area and workplace of the couriers.

Purposive sampling is quite functional for sample groups with homogeneous characteristics. Therefore, there was no quota setting or stratification. No random selection was made in the survey application. This type of sampling is preferred in field research and explanatory studies (Neuman, 2012, p. 274). Individuals who reflected the population in general terms were included in the sample. The knowledge and experience of the researchers guided the sample selection (Balci, 2004, p. 90). This sampling method, which is extremely

valuable for special cases, is based on the selection of sample cases for a specific phenomenon (Neuman, 2012, p. 274). The sampling technique and the researchers' command of the field provided an opportunity to reach almost all of the population, and this increased the reliability of the results obtained. Purposive sampling was the most appropriate in terms of time and cost because it ensured the accuracy of the results (Neuman, 2012, p. 274).

The population of couriers in Zonguldak was not clearly known. To estimate the size of the population, interviews were held with the Zonguldak Tax Offices and the number of self-employed couriers who had established a sole proprietorship was found. With the NACE Code 50.20.09, the tax office found that there were 28 delivery workers registered to the *Karaelmas* Tax Office, 68 registered to the *Uzun Mehmet* Tax Office and 72 registered to *Ereğli* Tax Office. Of course, the couriers surveyed are not only those registered with these tax offices. As in other provinces of Türkiye and countries around the world, couriers are working informally in Zonguldak as well.

Based on the information obtained from official institutions, interviews with couriers and field observations of the researchers, it was estimated that there were around 250-275 couriers in Zonguldak. After considering the total population size, an ideal sample size was reached (Sekaran & Bougie, 2003).

The data collection process occurred between April and August 2023. A combination of face-to-face and online survey techniques was preferred as part of the data collection process. Before the fieldwork, the researchers visited the couriers' workplace and waiting areas, provided information about the research and joined the messaging application (WhatsApp) groups. For couriers who could not be interviewed face-to-face, the survey form was transferred to Google Forms. The researchers followed this approach as recommended in the literature to achieve a satisfactory sample size (Hewson, 2008).

Results

Table 1
Sociodemographic Data (n=195)

Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	1	0.5%
Male	194	99.5%
Age		
Age 18-25	131	67.2%
Age 26-33	44	22.6%
Age 34-41	14	7.2%
Age 42-49	5	2.6%
Age 50+	1	0.5%
Marital status		
Married	34	17.4%
Single	161	82.6%
Having children or not		
Yes	30	15.4%
No	165	84.6%
Education		

Gender	Number	Percentage
Literate	1	0.5%
Primary and Secondary School	27	13.8%
High School	129	66.2%
Bachelor's Degree	37	0,19
Master's Degree or Higher	1	0.5%
Duration of work (in years)		
1-5 Years	173	88.7%
6-10 Years	17	8.7%
11-15 Years	3	1.5%
16-20 Years	1	0.5%
21 Years and up	1	0.5%
Working time in the same company (years)		
1-5 Years	194	99.5%
6-10 Years	1	0.5%
Reason to work		
Main job	189	96.9%
Additional work	3	1.5%
Student (works for pocket money)	3	1.5%
Occupational status		
Self-employed couriers	102	52.3%
Salaried couriers	72	36.9%
Daily/weekly wage couriers	21	10.8%

Source: Authors' compilation based on the survey

Almost all the respondents were male (99.5%), and the majority were between the ages of 18-25 (67.2%). Nearly 83 percent (82.6%) of the respondents were single and 84.6% had no dependent children. When we looked at how many years they had been working as food delivery workers, we saw that the majority (88.7%) had been working between 1 and 5 years. Only 10.7% of the respondents have been working as a courier for more than 5 years. There were almost no couriers who worked in the same business for more than 1-5 years and the majority (52.3%) were self-employed.

Table 2

Earnings and working hours

Monthly earning	Avr.	Min-Max ± Ss
Self-employed couriers	15.759(562\$)	10.000(357\$)-29.000(1035\$)± 4.418,21
Salaried couriers	12.015(429\$)	9.000(321\$)-18.000(642\$)± 1.424,49
Daily/weekly wage couriers	11.471(409\$)	10.000(357\$)-14.000(500\$)± 911,12
Daily working hours		
Self-employed couriers	10.43	5-14 ± 1.53
Salaried couriers	9.90	7-14 ± 1.50
Daily/weekly wage couriers	10.09	5-13 ± 1.78

Monthly earning	Avr.	Min-Max ± Ss
Working day number (weekly)		
Self-employed couriers	6.12	5-7 ± 0.41
Salaried couriers	6.04	5-9 ± 0.48
Daily/weekly wage couriers	6.23	6-7 ± 0.43

Source: Authors' compilation based on the survey

While the minimum wage was 8.506 TL (about 425 dollars) in the first six months of 2023, during the data collection phase of the study, it became 11.402 TL (about 407 dollars) in the last six months of the given year. Although the government increased the minimum wage due to inflation, the minimum wage eroded rapidly because of the increase in the dollar exchange rate. The data provided in this article reflects the second 6 months of 2023.

In [Table 2.](#), in average monthly earnings, the lowest earners were the daily/weekly wage couriers, while the highest earners were self-employed couriers. In the average daily working hours, self-employed couriers got the most work, while traditional salaried couriers got the least. In the average number of days worked per week, casual couriers had the highest number of workdays, while salaried couriers had the lowest. This shows that both self-employed platform couriers and casual restaurant couriers work more than fixed-wage workers.

Table 3

Findings on Flexible Working Experiences of Self-Employed Couriers (n=102)

Ability to determine working days	Number	Percentage
Yes	34	33.3%
No	68	66.7%
Ability to determine working hours		
Yes	29	28.4%
No	73	71.6%
Ability to determine monthly earnings		
Yes	46	45.1%
No	56	54.9%

Source: Authors' compilation based on the survey

The findings in [Table 3.](#) showed that 66.7% of self-employed couriers could not determine their work days, 71.6% could not determine their work hours and 54.9% could not determine their monthly income. First, companies require couriers to work according to certain shifts. In addition, couriers generally must work during peak hours to increase the number of orders they deliver. This also forces them to work mostly in the evenings and on weekends. Especially in the summer, couriers work until 2:00–3:00 a.m. Finally, regardless of their hard work, their earnings are always stuck at a threshold due to various expenses. For all these reasons, couriers cannot think that they can determine their working days, hours, regions, income, and conditions.

Table 4*Findings on being a courier is seen dangerous*

Self-employed couriers (n=102)	Number	Percentage
Almost Never	1	0,01
Very Low	7	6.9%
Medium	16	15.7%
High	16	25.5%
Very High	52	0,51
Salaried couriers (n=72)		
Very Low	7	9.7%
Medium	9	12.5%
High	14	19.4%
Very High	42	58.3%

Source: Authors' compilation based on the survey

Both self-employed and salaried couriers stated that they perceived the profession as dangerous regardless of their status. According to them, drivers do not respect couriers and often ignore them. Working in bad weather conditions also increases accidents. Even though they have safety equipment, they see the possibility of being involved in an accident with injury and death as high. In spontaneous conversations during the surveys, it was found that many couriers had fractures, dislocations, and crushes in various parts of their bodies. As a matter of fact, various messages about work accidents are frequently encountered in the WhatsApp groups and Instagram accounts followed by the researchers. Couriers have established a solidarity network for such situations. The Zonguldak Motorcyclists Association also has a lawyer who provides counseling services in cases of accidents and disputes.

Table 5*Findings on feeling the order pressure*

Self-employed couriers (n=102)	Number	Percentage
Self-employed couriers (n=102)	Number	Percentage
Almost Never	14	13.7%
Very Low	23	22.5%
Medium	30	29.4%
High	26	25.5%
Very High	9	8.8%
Salaried couriers (n=72)		
Almost Never	12	16.7%
Very Low	21	29.2%
Medium	21	29.2%
High	13	18.1%
Very High	3	6.9%

Source: Authors' compilation based on the survey

When the self-employed and salaried couriers' feelings of delivery pressure were analyzed, the total rate of feeling pressured about delivery at moderate, high, and very high levels was 63.7% for self-employed

couriers, while this rate was 54.2% for salaried couriers. There are several reasons why self-employed couriers feel more pressure than salaried couriers. First, self-employed couriers must deliver more packages because they work on a per-package wage policy, and they therefore feel the need to move faster. Second, as they are mostly platform couriers, they are often exposed to algorithmic surveillance technologies, and every second is recorded. In particular, the fast delivery promises of platforms increase customer expectations and put couriers under pressure.

Table 6

Findings on Job, Earnings, and life satisfaction

	Job Satisfaction		Earning satisfaction		Life Satisfaction	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Self-employed couriers (n=102)						
Never	13	12.7%	16	15.7%	40	39.2%
Less	25	24.5%	23	22.5%	23	22.5%
Normal	53	0,52	54	52.9%	36	35.3%
Very	11	10.8%	9	8.8%	3	2.9%
Salaried couriers (n=72)						
Never	11	15.3%	29	40.3%	25	34.7%
Less	20	27.8%	15	20.8%	15	20.8%
Normal	36	0,5	27	37.5%	30	41.7%
Very	5	6.9%	1	1.4%	2	2.8%
Daily/weekly waged couriers (n=21)						
Never	2	9.5%	4	0,19	9	42.9%
Less	6	28.6%	6	28.6%	4	0,19
Normal	13	61.9%	11	52.4%	8	38.1%

Source: Authors' compilation based on the survey

When the job satisfaction rates of couriers were analyzed, it was seen that the rates were close to each other. Regarding income satisfaction, self-employed couriers had a higher satisfaction rate, whereas salaried couriers reported a high level of dissatisfaction. In terms of life satisfaction, the rates were similar.

Table 7

Findings on the Work-Life Balance Scale (n=195)

Scale Sub-Dimensions	Avr. - Ss	Min. - Max.
Negative Impact of Life on Work	11.23 ± 5	6-27
Negative Impact of Work on Life	18.33 ± 6.19	5-25
Positive Impact of Life on Work	7.11 ± 3.21	3-15
Positive Impact of Work on Life	7.92 ± 3.08	3-12

Source: Authors' compilation based on the survey

Table 8

Findings on the scores of respondents' Work-Life Balance Scale

	Mean scores from the scale		
	Self-employed couriers (n=102)	Salaried couriers (n=72)	Hourly/weekly courier(n=21)
Scale Sub-Dimensions			
Negative Impact of Life on Work	11.74	10.12	12.52
Negative Impact of Work on Life	18.75	17.91	17.71
Positive Impact of Life on Work	7.58	6.36	7.38
Positive Impact of Work on Life	7.75	8.02	8.42

Source: Authors' compilation based on the survey

When **Table 8.**, which demonstrated the average scores of the couriers from the Work-Life Balance Scale, was examined, it was observed that the average score of the daily wage couriers was high in the "Negative Impact of Life on Work" sub-dimension. This score revealed that life had a more negative effect on the work of daily/weekly wage couriers compared to self-employed and salaried couriers. When the "Negative Impact of Work on Life" sub-dimension was analyzed, it was seen that the average scores of self-employed couriers were higher. This is noteworthy because it revealed that for self-employed couriers, work affected their lives negatively more than other couriers. When the mean scores of the "Positive Impact of Life on Work" sub-dimension were analyzed, it became clear that salaried couriers felt a less positive impact when compared to other couriers. In the "Positive Impact of Work on Life" sub-dimension, the mean scores of self-employed couriers were lower than those of other couriers.

Discussion and Conclusion

In Zonguldak, as in other countries, delivery platforms and restaurants established different forms of labor relations and systems with couriers for work time and wages. The working relationships are categorized as follows:

1. Employed couriers working with *restaurant motorcycles* for fixed-wage (*Dominos, McDonalds* et al.).
2. Self-employed couriers working (mostly informal) with *restaurant motorcycles* for a daily/weekly wage.
3. Self-employed couriers (mostly young and informal) working for restaurants and on *their own motorcycles* for a daily/weekly wage.
4. Platform couriers (self-employed) (*Vigo and Paket Taksi*) working with *their own motorcycles*, on an hourly rate+per package basis.
5. Platform couriers (self-employed) working with *platform motorcycles* on an hourly rate+per package basis (*Getir*).
6. Platform couriers (employed) working with *personal or platform motorcycles* for fixed-wage (*Tıklagelsin and Fiyuu*)

Wages, Working Hours and Days

In the research, an interesting picture emerged concerning working hours and income. The minimum wage is calculated for 45 hours of work (9 hours per day, 5 days a week) per week as 11.400 TL (407\$). When we looked at the working hours of couriers participating in this study, it showed an average of 10-12 hours per day, 6 days a week, which is 60 hours of work a week.

If a courier who earns minimum wage worked 45 hours a week, his hourly wage would be 63 TL (2.26 dollars), but since the same courier really works an average of 60 hours a week, his hourly wage is 47.50 TL (1.69 dollars). Based on 60 hours of work per week, the monthly wage for a courier on the payroll would be approximately 15.120 TL (540 dollars). A self-employed courier has to cover the costs of fuel, food, engine maintenance, insurance and other expenses, which is on average at least 28.000 TL-30.000 TL (1000-1100 dollars), but the majority of platform-based self-employed couriers do not reach this income. Even if they do, the loss of income due to illness, vacation, or accident and the lack of paid annual leave make this income meaningless. Moreover, many couriers (whether salaried or self-employed) work close to 80 hours per week. As a result, according to the data of this study, both platform couriers and other couriers actually worked for an income below the minimum wage when working hours and expenses were considered.

Ceylan's study (2022, p. 124-126) on couriers in İstanbul and Kaya et al. (2022) in İzmir clearly show how the income of self-employed couriers has become meaningless due to fuel, food, insurance, taxes, and engine maintenance costs, so new strategies should be developed. Ceylan reveals that to save money, couriers work long hours, work on multiple platforms at the same time, do not have insurance and rent their motorcycles to other couriers. Couriers need for delivering 35-40 packages to make a profit sometimes working 12-13 hours per day to reach this figure (Ceylan, 2022, p. 127-129). The same was true for the couriers in Zonguldak. Platforms that negotiate with couriers on an hourly+per package basis increase their profits by increasing the number of tasks assigned to the courier.

The courier who wants to earn more than the minimum wage must work more than 10 hours. Moreover, since the algorithm distributes the packages evenly among couriers, it is not possible for one courier to carry too many packages, or there is competition among couriers to carry these packages. Therefore, couriers cannot rise above a certain income level.

The findings of this study agreed with the findings of the research conducted by ILO (2022) and Kaya et al. (2022). According to ILO's research, couriers in Türkiye will earn an average of 5.117 TL in 2022. This figure is around the minimum wage of the period (5.500 TL). In 2022, self-employed couriers earned an average of 6.273 TL, while salaried couriers earned 4.106 TL, which was lower than the minimum wage. Kaya et al.'s research (2022) also showed that delivery workers earn an average of 5000-6000 TL when all expenses are considered. In addition, when the unpaid labor of couriers (Cini, 2023) (such as waiting for orders, carrying packages, communication with customers, engine maintenance) is considered, the labor exploitation that they are exposed to becomes even more visible.

As mentioned above, some platforms work with self-employed couriers on the principle of hourly wage + per package in Zonguldak. As the number of packages delivered and the work time increased, the couriers earned more. However, when operating costs are considered, the total monthly earnings remain around the minimum wage. Looking at the data, self-employed couriers earned an average of 15.800 TL (585 USD) per month when all expenses were deducted; however, there were some who earned more. Some platforms (*Fiyuu*) opted for a fixed wage model and paid couriers minimum wage (for working 60 hours or more), but when working hours were added (more than 60 hours per week), the couriers actually earned less than the minimum wage.

According to *Türk-İş* (2023), Türkiye's largest labor union confederation, the cost of living for a family of four is 39.733 TL (1419 dollars). The cost of living for a single worker is 15.813 TL (564 dollars). Furthermore, according to the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Türkiye (*Disk*, 2023) on the brink of famine is

12.612 TL (450 dollars), while the poverty line is 43.623 TL (1.557 dollars). These earnings kept single couriers at or below the poverty line and married couriers at or below the brink of famine.

According to the data, the average working time of couriers in Zonguldak was over 10 hours. The experiences of platform couriers in other parts of the world are similar to those described in this study. Reports by Fairwork (2023d, 2023b, 2023e) show that in many countries, from the USA to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Uganda to Brazil, couriers work below the minimum wage hourly. In these countries, platform couriers work close to 80 hours per week (Fairwork, 2023c). A study (Urzi Brancati et al., 2020, p. 37) covering 16 European Union countries showed that the longer the work hours, the lower the hourly earnings among platform workers. Ivanova et al.'s (2018, p. 20-22) research on Foodora and Deliveroo couriers in Berlin prove that platform couriers cannot earn minimum wage because of working hours and operating costs.

Flexibility and Autonomy

One of the most remarkable findings of the study concerned whether self-employed platform couriers felt autonomous in terms of work days, hours, location, and income. As the data showed, 66.7% of self-employed platform couriers did not feel autonomous in terms of working days, 71.6% in terms of working hours, and 54.9% in terms of income. The most important reason for this is the algorithmic management strategies developed for directing and monitoring the production process. Platforms often present themselves as infrastructures that enable flexible working. Delivery platforms (Fiyuu, 2023; PaketTaksi, 2023) describe their couriers as self-employed micro-entrepreneurs in Türkiye.

Despite propagating a narrative of flexibility, platforms control the entire production and distribution process. Through algorithmic management, platforms limit the space in which couriers work, determine delivery routes and times, confiscate tips, set package rates, and suspend a courier's account in case of a customer complaint. From the findings of the study, it was clear that the discourses of flexibility and self-employment, which were used to make platform-based work attractive, did not have a concrete counterpart in the world of work.

About 70 percent of self-employed couriers believed that they could determine neither their work days nor their working hours. Therefore, the promise of working where they want, when they want, for as long as they want, with whom they want, and being their own boss was confronted with the harsh reality of company directives, shifts application, algorithmic surveillance strategies, and the obligation to work during peak hours (Bertolini et al., 2023; Ivanova et al., 2018, p. 21-22). As Heiland also shows (2019), algorithmic management leads 63% of German couriers to feel at the mercy of platforms.

Although platforms work on an hourly+per-package wage model, they do offer couriers certain schedules or shifts and ask them to choose one. Henly et al. (2006) conceptualized this as manager-controlled flexible scheduling. Therefore, the flexibility is a kind of guided flexibility.

Data on the couriers' working hours showed that flexibility extended the hours. For couriers, working per package or hourly required working more than 10 hours to reach the minimum wage, while for businesses it meant access to a workforce that could work for long periods of time without employment.

The illusion of flexibility and the illusory freedom it created (Umer, 2021) were not unique to the delivery workers in Zonguldak. Delivery workers in other countries lack work autonomy, even if they appear to be self-employed (Griesbach et al., 2019, p. 2; Sun et al., 2023). Lehdonvirta's (2018) study clearly shows how structural constraints prevent flexibility that would work in favor of the workers. Furthermore, Piasna and Drakohoupil's (2021) research on Deliveroo couriers in Belgium shows that workers who are economically

dependent on the platform and more vulnerable in the labor market prefer to be classified as employees rather than as self-employed and prefer regular hours instead of flexible work. Mbare (2023), in his research on food delivery workers in Finland, states that Finnish couriers also experience the tensions of flexibility and autonomy due to algorithmic management practices, harsh conditions, a lack of social interaction with coworkers, and their mental well-being negatively affected.

Work-life Balance

Just as working more than 8 hours a day disrupts couriers' work-life balance, uncertainty about income and working hours also makes work-life balance uncertain. Warren (2021) questions the applicability of the mainstream work-life balance agenda for the platform economy as it reflects the traditional employment model and argues that the impact of precarious and uncertain working conditions on work-life balance should be reconsidered. According to Warren (2021, p. 526-527), the mainstream agenda focuses on time constraints and individualizes problems/solutions, reducing "work" to paid employment, "life" to family life, and "balance" to a conflict-addition dichotomy. However, this problem, which has become public, cannot be solved by individualistic explanations and time squeezing cannot be the fundamental problem of work-life balance.

Digital platform labor creates a work relationship that calls into question the already problematic mainstream work-life balance approach. Insecurity, precarization, unpaid labor, digital surveillance, financial difficulties, and uncertainty allow for a class-based approach to work-life balance that focuses on time squeezing (Warren, 2021, p. 528). Lakshmi and Arunachalam's study (2022) on couriers in the city of Madurai (India) shows that work-life imbalance is caused not only by time constraints but also by the factors mentioned above. Kim et al.'s (2023) study on gig workers' work-life balance and life satisfaction reveals that the work environment and income level are determinants. Finally, Glavin et al.'s study (2024) on location-based platform workers in Canada reveals that platform workers suffer more from work-life conflict compared to employees and the traditional self-employed. According to this study, the protection of workers' rights, defining the boundaries of work, clarifying work and leisure time, ensuring employment status, and achieving an income that covers the cost of living are the main indicators of work-life balance. In this sense, Fairwork's (2023f) criteria of fair wages, fair working conditions, fair and transparent contracts, fair and participatory management, and fair representation are functional in ensuring the work-life balance of couriers.

When we look at the research findings, work-life had a negative impact on non-work life. Findings on life satisfaction proved the problem in work-life balance. Approximately 65% of both salaried and self-employed couriers stated that they were dissatisfied with their lives. Although the couriers were satisfied to having a job and income, they had a negative attitude toward life satisfaction. Because the unemployment rate among 15-24 year olds is 18% (Turkstat, 2023) and the NEET rate among 15-29 year olds is 29% for men in Türkiye (OECD, 2023), it is easy to understand why the job and income satisfaction are at this level. However, there was a contradiction between the couriers' satisfaction with their jobs and incomes, even though their wages did not cover the cost of living and their life satisfaction was low. In the dialogs during the survey, the couriers stated that they felt lucky to have a job and income in the current economic conditions, but that they were uncomfortable with the rising costs of living and long working hours.

According to the data, there was a significant difference between self-employed couriers (61.7% in total) and employed couriers (38.9% in total) in terms of income satisfaction. However, platform couriers did not have an advantageous position in terms of work-life satisfaction. This is because flexibility is embodied not

as a factor that reduces work-life conflict and increases incomes, but as uncertainty, precariousness, and financial risk. Even though couriers earn more, they can not enjoy this gain as an extra advantage due to work time, operating costs, cost of living, lack of time for private life, and difficulties of the profession. The "Negative Impact of Work on Life" sub-scale score of all couriers (salaried, self-employed, and casual) was very high. According to this data, platform couriers did not get rid of the boredom of working 9-5 nor did they benefit from the advantage of "living their private lives the way they want" which should be provided by the flexible working model.

There is not much discussion or research done on how long delivery workers can do this job under the current work conditions. Previous studies usually focus on the couriers' wages, work hours and whether they have security or not. However, many delivery workers have suffered from fractures and bruises, especially in their wrists, ankles, shoulders, and other parts of their bodies due to accidents. Couriers suffer from neck, back and lumbar problems because they sit on the motorcycle even when they are resting. Normally, when you travel on a motorcycle, your eyes tear up. During the surveys, some couriers reported dry eyes. Many couriers continue to work unaware of the cardiological and respiratory diseases they will face after 10 years of this type of work. Considering all these factors, there are many issues affecting life satisfaction and work-life balance. Therefore, it would not be wise to limit the work-life balance issue to work time factors only.

As mentioned above, the gig economy has increased securitization, precarization, uncertainty, informalization, and risks. Couriers have lots of problems regarding wages, work hours, work conditions, work accidents, health, and weather conditions in Türkiye (Hamsici, 2022; KuryeHaber, 2022, 2023; Motorcycle Couriers Association, 2022). In recent years, many protests have been organized by delivery workers due to their working conditions and low wages (Hamsici, 2022; Kıdak, 2023). In addition, there have been court rulings and discussions as to whether couriers were employees with fixed wages or self-employed business owners. (Cefaliello & Countouris, 2020; Diken, 2021, 2022; Jimenez et al., 2021)

As a result, this study initially contributes to the research area regarding platform-based couriers with quantitative data and aims to close a big gap concerning the indicated research field in Türkiye. There are almost no studies based on quantitative data on the working conditions, work-life balance, and income of delivery workers in Türkiye. A small number of qualitative studies (Kaya et al., 2022; Ceylan, 2022; ILO, 2022; Kavurmacı, 2023; Kanyılmaz Polat & Cezer Aydin, 2023) and research by courier associations (KuryeHaber, 2023; Motorcycle Couriers Association, 2022) provide parallel findings to this research. Also, the study detects that platform work does not occur autonomously as argued, and flexible work creates precarious conditions for gig workers by combining with algorithmic management. In this sense, the study contributes to the international literature by providing information about the situation of the platform economy and delivery workers in Türkiye. Platform-based couriers must work in precarious, low-paid, informal and insecurity conditions in Türkiye, as well. Moreover, it shows that platforms promise autonomy for workers notwithstanding they do not facilitate delivery workers' non-work life, in other words, their work-life negatively affects their private life. Although the study was conducted in a small city and with a small number of couriers, the results it achieved can serve as some insights for researchers.

Achieving decent working conditions and work-life balance for couriers depends on the regulation of work hours, work days and wage policy. Furthermore, regulations must eliminate insecurity, precarity, informalization, and uncertainty to ensure fair work and work-life balance.

In the absence of a new legal framework that mitigates the risks of gig work and guarantees the rights and interests of employees, platforms use workers in any way they want and appropriate huge surplus-



value. Therefore, neither flexible nor traditional forms of working solve workers' problems. There is no other solution than a fair framework for the relations between production and distribution.



Ethics Committee Approval	The study was approved by the Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University Ethics Committee (Approval No: 23.3.2023/288960).
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- İ.D., A.O.Ö.; Data Acquisition- İ.D., A.O.Ö.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- İ.D., A.O.Ö.; Drafting Manuscript- İ.D., A.O.Ö.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- İ.D., A.O.Ö.; Final Approval and Accountability- İ.D., A.O.Ö.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Social Inclusion and Diversity in the Axis of Social Sustainability: A Study on Roma Women Benefiting from the Gallipoli SODAM Project



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Abstract

Social sustainability, which focuses on human and societal well-being, encompasses values such as rights and freedoms, equal opportunities, social inclusion, quality of life, diversity, democracy, and governance. Based on these values, this study examines social inclusion and its related concepts of diversity and intercultural communication. Disadvantaged groups in society, such as people with disabilities, refugees, and minorities, fall within the scope of social sustainability. In this study, one of these groups, the Roma, has been chosen as the focus of analysis. The aim of this study is to examine the initiatives undertaken for the Roma community by both public and private institutions, as well as societal responses, within the framework of competence, equal opportunities, discrimination, inclusion, the preservation of cultural diversity, and intercultural communication. Using the in-depth interview technique, a qualitative research method, data were collected from Roma women benefiting from the Social Support and Solidarity Centers (SODAM) project implemented by the Ministry of Family and Social Services. The interviews, conducted through semi-structured questions, were analyzed using the MAXQDA20 content analysis software. The findings reveal that, although the Roma have equal rights in accessing public services such as education, security, and healthcare, they continue to live at the lowest income levels, receive insufficient support, and face discrimination within society. However, in terms of cultural transmission and communication, it was observed that they generally do not experience significant problems and, in some cases, even receive support.

Keywords

Sustainability • Social Sustainability • Social Inclusion • Intercultural Communication • Diversity • Roma/Romani

Author Note

The umbrella-term ‘Roma’ is commonly used in EU policy terminology (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu>). Therefore, the term Roma is preferred in the article.



Citation: Ergin Çağatay, H. H. & Yıldırım, G. (2025). Social inclusion and diversity in the axis of social sustainability: a study on Roma women benefiting from the Gallipoli SODAM Project. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 140-161. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2025-1629012>

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 2025. Ergin Çağatay, H. H. & Yıldırım, G.

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Social Inclusion and Diversity in the Axis of Social Sustainability: A Study on Roma Women Benefiting from the Gallipoli SODAM Project

The importance and necessity of sustainability have grown rapidly over the years, making the implementation of its complementary components now irreversible. The extent of the world's environmental and social problems is increasing, resources are depleting quickly, and social needs are rising with the growing population. Despite recognizing these challenges in the 1970s and attempting to find solutions through various forums, summits, laws, decisions, statistics, and reports show that progress has been slower than targeted.

The concept of sustainability has brought environmental and economic challenges to the forefront, while studies on social sustainability have remained somewhat overlooked. Social sustainability revolves around two main elements individuals and society. Key concepts within this domain, such as equity in access to basic needs diversity, democratic values, inclusiveness, and social participation, pose broad and complex challenges.

When examining sustainability, which has been one of the most frequently studied topics in recent years, the literature generally emphasizes the economic, environmental, and institutional dimensions (Cantele & Zardini, 2018). In contrast, the social aspect has received comparatively less attention, highlighting a gap in the field that warrants further exploration. Social sustainability is a multidimensional and comprehensive concept and its basis is the question 'what are the social goals of sustainable development?' (Dempsey et al, 2011). Vallance, et all (2011, 342) argue that social sustainability is "a concept in chaos". According to Woodcraft et al. (2011) social sustainability is the way in which a society is created according to the desires and needs of people. Murphy (2012) evaluates social sustainability within the framework of equality, participation, sustainability awareness and social harmony.

The most common topics in the literature on social sustainability include improving working conditions for employees, new business models, ways to increase productivity at work, good governance (Kumbali et al., 2022; Mathiyazhagan et al., 2023; Mogale et al., 2023), and gender equality (Schoonjans, 2024; Yarram et al., 2021; Torchia et al., 2011). This study takes a different approach by focusing on the inclusion and diversity elements of social sustainability, with the Roma community as the sample group. The Roma has been the subject of various studies in Türkiye and around the world. Mirga-Kruszelnicka (2022), who critically analyses Roma political activism in Colombia and Argentina and compares it with that in Spain, argues that the Roma issue is not solely a European problem but a global one. Balidemaj (2021) highlighted the high level of Roma exclusion in Kosovo and proposed strategies to help integrate the Roma community and reduce overall social exclusion. In their study comparing the attitudes of Italian and French youth toward Romanian Roma, Cousin et al. (2021) found that while Italian participants held more negative views than their French counterparts, both groups exhibited a biased perspective.

In Türkiye, several studies have focused on the integration of Roma into Turkish society, covering aspects such as employment, health, housing, education, culture, and exclusion. According to Gök and Dirimeşe (2023), between 2003 and 2022, 11 doctoral and 38 master's theses were written on the Roma. The majority of these studies focused on Roma identity and culture (Alpar, 2003; Eren, 2008; Dişli, 2017; Polat, 2021), exclusion and discrimination (Kolukırık, 2004; Sarıkaya, 2019; Yıldırım, 2019), and art and representation (Sal, 2009; Mert, 2016; Agvan, 2021). Other studies in the literature include Fazla (2020) who examined the

marginalization of Roma women in the labor force and found that women are affected by this situation in psychological, social, and economic dimensions. Güler and Parlayan (2020) revealed that the Roma community could not urbanize due to ethnic identity-based marginalization, making them prone to crime. Gümüş (2020) addressed the problems of Roma social exclusion and emphasized the importance of social inclusion policies implemented by the state. Yanıkdağ (2021) examined the sub-identities of Roma living in Türkiye highlighting differences and drawing attention to identity debates. Ateş and Ünal (2022) explored the problems of Roma mothers regarding their children's schooling and proposed solutions. Karadeniz (2022) analyzed the interrelationship between Roma identity problems, social exclusion, poverty, and social perceptions and proposed different solutions. Dirimeşe and Gök (2023) evaluated the problems and solutions of social exclusion faced by Roma in the economy. Alpar (2023) reviewed recent action plans in Türkiye for preventing the social exclusion of Roma citizens and made various recommendations. Although these challenges are subtopics of social sustainability, no sustainability framework has been developed, and no evaluation has been conducted from this perspective. Addressing the Roma challenge from a sustainability and social sustainability perspective aims to fill gaps and shortcomings in the existing literature. Although social sustainability is less covered among the components of sustainability, it includes a wide range of issues. For this reason, this study is necessary in order to examine the issue with different research samples, to reveal the problems and solutions, and to provide a new perspective. With this study, we aim to draw attention to the need to strengthen policies within the scope of social sustainability, which has increased in importance in every field today. The focus of this study is on Roma citizens, a group often considered disadvantaged in society. For this research, Roma women living in Çanakkale Gelibolu, who are participants in Social Solidarity Center (SODAM) courses organized by the Ministry of Family and Social Services, were selected as the sample due to their accessibility.

The Ministry of Family and Social Services established SODAMs to address challenges in education, employment, housing, health, and social services through the Strategy Document for Roma Citizens (2023–2030) and the Phase I Action Plan (2023–2025). This study, which focuses on social sustainability, addresses the following question: “How do SODAMs help Roma women and their families?” “To what extent can Roma participate in society and access basic social needs?” and “What efforts are made, both individually and by public authorities, to help Roma preserve their culture and pass it on to future generations?” These questions were investigated through content analysis of in-depth interviews with Roma participants.

Before the interview phase, the main concepts of sustainability, inclusion and diversity were outlined. The living conditions of disadvantaged groups are one of the areas of study of social sustainability. Roma people who are considered among disadvantaged groups constituted the sample of this study. After the interviews, the data were analyzed and interpreted with the MAXQDA20 analysis program. The findings show that although positive results of inclusion and support efforts for Roma have been observed, discrimination against this ethnic group continues and solutions have been proposed.

Concept of Sustainability and Social Sustainability

The term “sustainability” first appeared in a text called “Silvicultural Economic,” written in 1712 by the German forester Hans Carl von Carlowitz who described how forests should be managed over the long term. The environmental movements that began in the late 1960s, coupled with the work of environmentalists to link environmental issues to development, placed sustainability on the international agenda. With increased sensitivity to the challenge after the 1970s, “sustainability” became the focus of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Commission on Sustainable Development, which convened in 1987 under the chairman-

ship of former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Brundtland. This resulted in a landmark report entitled “Our Common Future” (Scoones, 2007). Which defined sustainability as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). This definition is widely accepted as the definition of sustainability.

Sustainability and sustainable development ensure the continuity of societies in environmental, economic, and social terms. The UN has tried to draw the attention of the world’s countries to these challenges through various milestones: the Environment and Sustainable Development Summit in 1972, the Brundtland Report in 1987, the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the Copenhagen Social Development Summit in 1995, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, the Millennium Summit in 2000, the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the Brazil Sustainable Development Conference in 2012, and the Transforming Our World report in 2015 (Gedik, 2020). In addition, the Paris Agreement (An international treaty under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) aimed at limiting global warming) was signed in 2016, the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures recommendations were released in 2017, Global Report Initiative, Sustainability Accounting Standards Board announced plans to collaborate in 2020, the International Sustainability Standards Board was established in 2021 to set global sustainability standards, and COP29 (29th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC) was held in 2024. As the world’s challenges rapidly increase, countries and organizations must focus not only on ensuring profitability and financial sustainability but also on solving global challenges through increased social investment. These organizations identify their focus areas to determine the scope of their sustainability efforts, provide accurate reporting, and make and implement future decisions.

Sustainability has three major dimensions: environmental, economic, and social. Environmental sustainability involves using renewable energy sources and promoting social actors that support environmental self-renewal. Economic sustainability entails producers, distributors, and consumers adopting wise practices to create and maintain stable economic organizations. Social sustainability involves the preservation, cultural integration, access to basic services, and renewal and maintenance of social institutions that form society, such as families, political institutions, and various communities (Carmo & Pinto, 2011; Morelli, 2011).

Social sustainability, being human- and community-oriented is more difficult to address and process than environmental or economic dimensions. It has more cultural and intangible characteristics, making assessment and measurement challenging (Varsei, et al., 2014). Social sustainability includes equal access to basic services for all communities in a country, improved living conditions, social participation, integration of different cultures, and cultural transmission. The implementation, planning, and evaluation of these issues vary according to the needs and interests of each community (McKenzie, 2004; Bramley & Power, 2009). Social sustainability is characterized by a strong sense of social cohesion and equality in access to basic services, such as health, education, transportation, housing, and recreation (McKenzie, 2004; Morelli, 2011). This process of development and growth emphasizes social equality and supports social integration to improve the quality of life for all segments of society while preparing the necessary environment for culturally and socially diverse social groups to live together in harmony (Gedik, 2020).

Social sustainability improves the living conditions of different communities within a country. Key elements include equal access to basic services (transport, health, education, housing, security, recreation); intergenerational equity (preventing future generations from being disadvantaged by the activities of the current generation); the creation of a system of cultural relations that values and protects the positive aspects of different cultures, promoting cultural integration; and widespread political participation of

citizens not only in electoral activities but also in other areas of political activity, especially at the local level (McKenzie, 2004; Bramley & Power, 2009). In social sustainability, criteria such as equality, diversity, social cohesion, improvement of quality of life, democracy, and governance are increasingly recognized international values (McKenzie, 2004). Roma citizens, who have a distinct cultural structure, it is crucial to preserve their cultural values and pass them on to future generations, thus integrating into society and experiencing social inclusion in line with the basic values of social sustainability.

Inclusion and Diversity in the Context of Social Sustainability

In addition, to important concepts such as democracy, governance, social participation, equality, inclusion, diversity, and a sustainable future within the framework of social sustainability stand out as crucial factors. Diversity refers to individuals with different demographic characteristics who work and live together providing a competitive advantage by enriching organizations and societies with varied perspectives, experiences, and talents. Inclusion means that different voices and perspectives are accepted, supported and actively participate in social life without discrimination. Organizations that embrace the principles of inclusion and diversity can better communicate with society by promoting equality and fairness, fostering innovation from diverse perspectives and knowledge, and being prepared to adapt to changing global markets.

Today, a company's future is determined not only by its investments and financial size but also by the perspective, support, or loyalty of all its stakeholders (including employees, customers, suppliers, consumers, local communities, governments and shareholders). This indicates that the sustainability of companies, beyond their financial profits, is closely linked to the value they create for all these stakeholders (<https://www.skdturkiye.org/sosyal-icerme-ve-kapsayicilik>). Research shows that companies leading in diversity and inclusion metrics increase their market share by 45% and have a 70% higher success rate in new markets than those that do not (<https://www.globalcompactturkiye.org/cesitlilik-kapsayicilik/>). The first two principles of the UN Global Compact, which are based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 4, 5, 8, and 10 guide companies in their efforts to promote diversity and inclusion.

Social inclusion refers to the active participation of diverse groups within a society, ensuring that no individual is discriminated against based on their beliefs, ethnic origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, political views, socioeconomic status, or disability. It aims to provide equal access to services such as education, healthcare, security, employment, and housing for all, particularly for those considered disadvantaged, migrants, people with disabilities, refugees, youth, women, and children, due to their unique identity characteristics. Social inclusion is essential for fostering an environment where individuals from these groups can fully use their potential, realize and develop their talents, and smoothly integrate into social and cultural life (Öcal, 2018; Çetin, 2017; Altınsoy, 2019). It also aims to include individuals at risk of poverty and social exclusion in economic, social, and cultural life, enhancing their well-being and ensuring equal opportunities to participate in the labor market. Initially, the concept of social inclusion focused on individuals who had difficulty adapting to social norms; however, it has since broadened to encompass all disadvantaged groups, particularly in European countries, where it emphasizes the social analysis of these populations (Rawal, 2008; Gümüş, 2020).

Inclusion embodies democratic, egalitarian, libertarian, and participatory values and understandings that balance the rights and responsibilities of individuals in society. Societies valuing these principles seek to achieve inclusion through practices that eliminate differences based on age, gender, ethnicity, ability,

class, religion, and geography, providing equal opportunity. Despite the general acceptance that societies worldwide should be inclusive and participatory, obstacles and exclusionary tendencies exist in practice (Uştuk & Can Traunmüller, 2022).

In Europe, efforts are being made to promote the social inclusion of Roma minorities and prevent their marginalization. The discourse of cultural relativism explains the special culture of the Roma and encourages special treatment (Roth, 2011). In Türkiye, which has ethnicities and religious beliefs, Roma is a minority group with distinct cultural characteristics (Yanıkdağ, 2021). Roma are from socially disadvantaged backgrounds; they are disproportionately poorer, unemployed, lack adequate housing, lack access to healthcare and education and often involved in criminal activities (Roth, 2011). Planning and implementing social policies aimed at social inclusion to improve the socioeconomic and cultural situation of Roma is crucial for preventing their frequent social exclusion, poverty, unemployment, lack of social security, and discrimination, thus ensuring their social communication and integration (Gümüş, 2020). This approach will also positively transfer Roma's ethnic and cultural structures to future generations and preserve cultural diversity. Highlighting different cultural values, protecting these elements, and passing them on to future generations is essential for ensuring diversity on the sustainability axis. Keeping cultures alive requires multimedia work and the common spirit created by public and private institutions, NGOs, and individuals. Communication and intercultural communication act as catalysts for cultural preservation, diversity and continuity.

Intercultural communication occurs between cultures or individuals living in the same culture but belonging to different subcultures. This approach enables individuals from different cultures to understand and communicate with each other through tolerance, understanding, and dialogue (Özdemir, 2011). Cultural communication occurs when individuals and groups with culturally different characteristics interact in a common environment (Ölçekçi, 2020). Evaluating intercultural communication requires analyzing the dialogue or conflict between two or more cultures, the cultures of the parties, and the communities' communication style (Timcheva & Özer, 2021). The main goal of intercultural communication research is to contribute to the intercultural competence by eliminating prejudices between different nations or subcultures within the same culture, different ethnic identities, and dominant culture (Uştuk & Can Traunmüller, 2022; Bitirim Okmeydan, 2019; Özdemir, 2011). Culture encompasses all abstract and concrete life practices passed on from generation to generation. Culture and its elements have a dynamic and changing structure that shapes all societies. In the context of diversity, it is crucial for Roma to preserve and transmit their cultural values and contribute to social cohesion through intercultural communication.

Social Policies for Roma in the Process of Social Inclusion

The Roma constitutes the largest ethnic minority in Europe with an estimated population between 10 and 12 million (EPRS, 2024). The designation "Roma" commonly used in European Union (EU) policy terminology includes various groups such as Sinti, Kales, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Balkan Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, and Abdal, as well as traveling populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti) (EPRS, 2024:2). In general, the words Roma and Gypsy are used to describe the same community. However, there are differences in their historical and sociocultural dimensions. Although the word Gypsy has historically been the most widely used, those who belong to this community prefer to identify themselves as Roma, as it is considered a derogatory and discriminatory term (Ünalı, 2012).

The First World Roma Congress in London in 1971 decided to use the word Roma, derived from the root 'Rom' meaning 'man, human being', to refer to this community (Yanıkdağ, 2021; Çelik, 2018). The Roma

is believed to have originated in northwestern India, forced to leave their homeland in the 9th and 10th centuries due to famine, drought, and war (Kolukırmık, 2008, Fırat, 2022). Their historical roots in Türkiye date back to Byzantium where they were considered sorcerers and diviners, worshiped astrology, and faced prejudice and discrimination (Marsh, 2008; Yanıkdağ, 2021; Çetin, 2017; Kurşun and Cengiz, 2013).

A study by the Institute of Population Studies at Hacettepe University (H.U.) in 2024 found that the population of Roma and similar communities in Türkiye, is estimated to be between 1.200.000 and 2.300.000 with the majority living settled lives in different regions (<https://www.romaar.com>, 2024). Accurately determining this number is due to a lack of ethnic characteristics in existing censuses (Ünaldı, 2017). While some Roma speak different languages such as Romani, Lomca, Dom, Teber, and Kurdish, the primary language of Roma in Türkiye is generally Turkish (Karan, 2017). The Roma primarily resides in the Thrace and Marmara regions, with dense populations in cities such as Izmir, Bursa, Eskişehir, Muğla, Ankara, and Bursa (<https://www.romaar.com>, 2024). The study by the Institute of Population Studies at Hacettepe University (H.U.) in 2024 found that 65% of Roma households are poor or very poor, and 70% believe they have been discriminated against in education, health, employment, housing, and social services (<https://www.romaar.com>, 2024).

The EU has been addressing the Roma issue since the mid-1990s, launching a major initiative in 2011 to formulate Roma inclusion strategies (2011–2020) and establishing a new strategy in 2021 that will last until 2030. This aims to fight against socioeconomic exclusion and discrimination by promoting equal access to education, employment, health, and housing (EPRS, 2024).

In Türkiye, Roma citizens began forming civil society organizations after the 2000s due to increased awareness of human rights and the development of social dialogue (Çetin, 2017). Roma associations were established in Edirne, Samsun, and İzmir in 2003 (Gümüş, 2020). The Edirne Roma Culture Research, Development Assistance and Solidarity Association (EDROM) was founded in 2004 to organize seminars and workshops to protect the social rights of Roma and improve their welfare. EDROM implemented the “Improving Roma Rights in Türkiye” project together with the European Roma Rights Center and the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly (Gümüş, 2020; Uzpeder, 2008). Subsequently, over 40 Roma associations were established in 16 provinces, including Tekirdağ, Kırklareli, Balıkesir, Mersin, Adana, Ankara, Bartın, Çanakkale, Zonguldak, Manisa, Aydın, Diyarbakır, and Istanbul. In 2006, the Federation of Roma Associations (ROMDEF) was established to unite Roma associations and ensure stronger, more effective policies (Uzpeder, 2008). In 2016, the “Strategy Document and Action Plan for Roma Citizens 2016–2021” was implemented to systematize Roma citizen work and projects. Various activities continued in 2023, with a new follow-up strategy report (2023–2030). The “Supporting Social Inclusion in Areas where Roma People Live Densely (SIROMA)” project was launched to support the improvement of Roma citizens’ living conditions. Activities to increase employment, support education and promote health literacy were conducted in 12 provinces with large Roma populations (https://www.aile.gov.tr/media/127013/yeni-roman-strateji-belgesi-20221222_v19.pdf s.5 2023). In 2022, the “Resolution on the Implementation of Projects of Family Support Centers (ADEM) and Social Solidarity Center (SODAM) was approved aiming to protect disadvantaged groups and integrate items into society (Ministry of Family and Social Services, ADEM/SODAM Projects Cooperation Protocol, 2023). These initiatives strive to ensure that Roma citizens benefit from opportunities within the framework of equality of opportunity contribute to the country’s values and cultural diversity and preserve their cultural characteristics for future generations.

Methodology

This study is framed within these broad aspects of social sustainability, focusing specifically on the components of inclusion and diversity. This study aims to determine the extent to which improvements made to Roma citizens, a disadvantaged group in society, align with these social sustainability goals. Specifically, this study examines the efforts made by the Ministry of Family and Social Services to integrate and communicate with Roma women participating in SODAM between 2016-2024. By conducting interviews with Roman women, the research aims to uncover the contributions and changes that have resulted from these initiatives, thereby assessing their effectiveness in promoting social sustainability for the Roma community.

This study, while providing valuable insights into the impact of SODAM activities on Roma women in Çanakkale, has several limitations. First, the research is geographically limited to Gallipoli, which may not fully represent the experiences of Roma communities in other regions of Türkiye or different countries. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on Roma women involved in SODAM projects, potentially overlooking the experiences of other Roma groups and men within the community. During the interview period, 27 women who participated in SODAM's activities were asked for their permission to participate, but only 16 women agreed to participate. These women have been attending SODAM trainings for an average of 5-6 years. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, using qualitative research methods. The sample size was determined based on the saturation principle, where data collection ceased after 16 participants as no new information emerged. Face-to-face interviews with these women, selected through purposive sampling, were conducted between June 1 and 15, 2024, and lasted an average of 40–45 minutes. Official approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Istanbul Aydın University on April 24, 2024, before conducting the interviews.

For the reliability and the validity of the study, both researchers participated in all interviews simultaneously. The interviews were conducted in a meeting room at SODAM Office where only the researchers and the interviewer participated. Face-to-face interviews were recorded by both researchers using two different recording devices. All coding and theme formation stages were carried out by both researchers, and the analysis was completed based on the shared decisions reached. Furthermore, the findings were supported by direct quotes from the raw data and the evidence reached was presented as much as possible.

This study is based on descriptive analysis, utilizing the “Business World Diversity and Inclusion Guide” prepared by the “Global Compact Türkiye Diversity and Inclusion Working Group” to design semi-structured questions aimed at achieving the study’s purpose. Initially, demographic questions, such as age, gender, occupation, and income level, were asked, followed by 11 topic-specific questions. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questions, a pilot study was conducted with 5 participants. Based on the responses from the pilot study, the open-ended questions were finalized.

The study’s primary research challenge was explored through six main questions:

- Q1: What has changed the living environment of Roma citizens due to SODAM activities?
- Q2: How do Roma participants position themselves in society?
- Q3: Do Roma participants perceive themselves as accepted and equal in society?
- Q4: Do Roma participants feel discriminated against?
- Q5: What is being done at the individual and public levels to preserve and continue Roma culture?
- Q6: What is the extent of communication between Roma and other cultures?

The data obtained from the in-depth interviews were analyzed and evaluated using MAXQDA20, a qualitative data analysis program. A framework was created based on the research questions and responses to facilitate the descriptive analysis. Categories and themes for content analysis were determined using this framework. As recommended in many qualitative studies, data collection and note-taking were conducted concurrently, followed by data analysis and interpretation. The data were coded using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. This method involves examining a dataset—comprising individual or focus group interviews or various texts—to identify recurring patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). An inductive approach was adopted, and the interviews were reviewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with the data, as required by thematic analysis. In the initial phase of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, which involves becoming acquainted with the data, preliminary codes were generated. These codes then served as the foundation for identifying sub-themes and main themes. Concept maps and figures were generated using MAXQDA20.

Findings

Demographic Findings

As shown in Table 1, all participants were Roma women aged 18-66. Most are married with an average of two children and live in their own homes. Among the participants, two were retired, and four worked in cleaning positions. Their husbands are either retired from lower-level jobs or work in similar positions. Most participants earn the minimum wage with three receiving social welfare. Their educational level is generally at the primary school level, with those with high school education continuing in open high schools. It is also observed that most of their children are educated at the primary school level.

Table 1
Demographic Status of Participants

	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Who's Working	Occupation of Who Works	Income TL	House	Number of Children	Number of Households	Education of Children
K1	Female	55	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Construction worker	10000	Own house	4	2	Primary School
K2	Female	60	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Retired	13000	Own house	2	2	University
K3	Female	48	Widow	Primary School	Self	Cleaning staff	5000	Own house	2	1	University, Primary School
K4	Female	48	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Self-employment	10000	Tenant	0	2	0
K5	Female	57	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Retired	13000	Own house	2	2	University, Primary School
K6	Female	66	Divorced	Primary School	Self	Retired	16000	Own house	4	1	Primary School+High School
K7	Female	59	Married	Not Attending School	Spouse	Retired	10000	Own house	2	2	Primary School+High School
K8	Female	51	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Peddler+Retired	17000	Own house	3	4	Primary School+High School

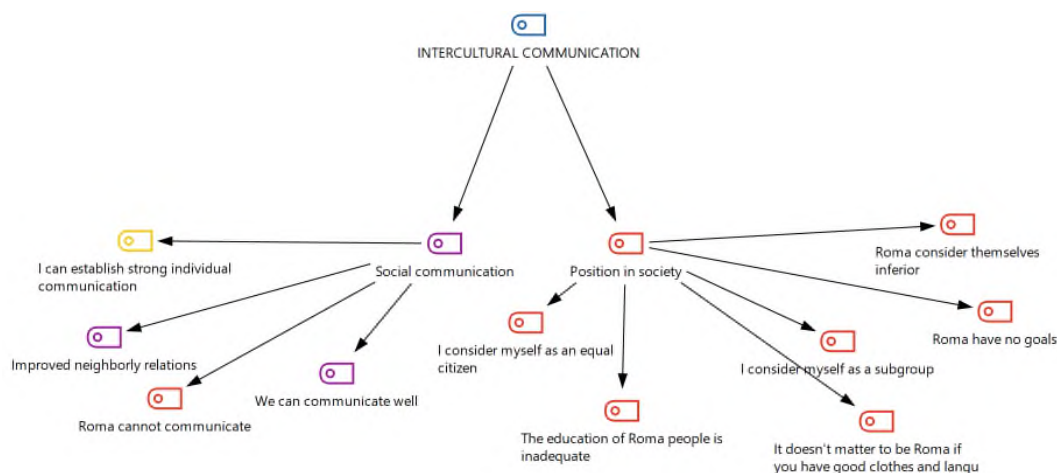
	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Who's Working	Occupation of Who Works	Income TL	House	Number of Children	Number of Households	Education of Children
K9	Female	59	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Retired	10000	Own house	2	2	High School+High School
K10	Female	51	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Cleaning staff+ Retired	20000	Tenant	1	5	Primary School
K11	Female	63	Married	Primary School	Spouse+Self	Driver+ Retired	30000	Own house	2	2	Primary School
K12	Female	18	Single	High School-Still	Parents	Cleaning staff	35000	Tenant	0	4	0
K13	Female	27	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Musician	11000	Tenant	1	3	Primary School
K14	Female	61	Married	Primary School	Spouse+Self	Retired	20000	Own house	1	2	Primary School
K15	Female	36	Married	High School	Spouse	Parking Staff	17000	Own house	2	4	Primary School
K16	Female	18	Single	High School-Still	Mother	Cleaning Staff	17000	Tenant	0	2	0

Cultural and Social Dynamics

Understanding and appreciating cultural differences is crucial for intercultural communication. The positioning of different communities with a culture and their perceptions by others are also important. Interviews and intercultural communication emerged as the main categories, with social (Figure 1), social communication (4 sub-themes), and position in society (6 sub-themes) identified as the main themes.

Figure 1

Hierarchical Subcode Model: Intercultural Communication



Roma citizens are integral to Türkiye's cultural diversity, enriching this mosaic through their traditions and way of life. However, many participants criticized their identity and communication methods. While they can develop close and warm relationships individually, Figure 2), they often face communication diffi-

culties due to lack of education, poor language skills, and a sense of social inferiority. Despite positioning themselves as equals in society, they feel discriminated against. For example, the opinions of P1, P2 and P5 support this finding.

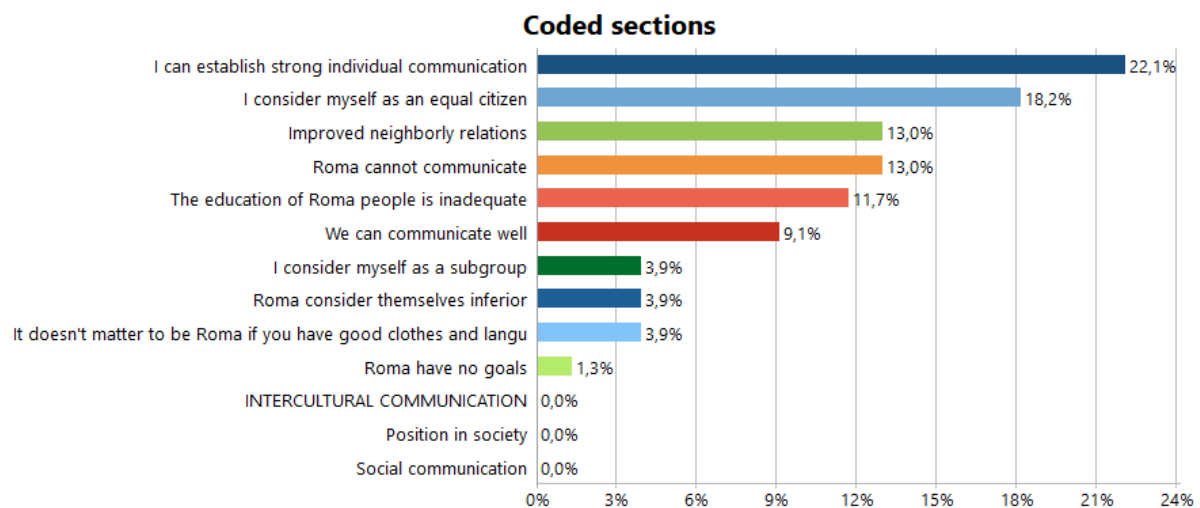
P1: *“Some Roma perceive themselves as inferior, which hinders their ability to enter social settings and express themselves, leading to feelings of isolation and difficulty in communication.”*

P5: *“Many Roma struggle in society; they often feel excluded, humiliated, discriminated against based on wealth. However, I don't feel that way.”*

P2: *“When we go somewhere, how would anyone know we are Roma? If you dress well speak well, and communicate effectively, there's no issue. Behavior is key if one knows how to behave, there is no difficulty in communicating.”*

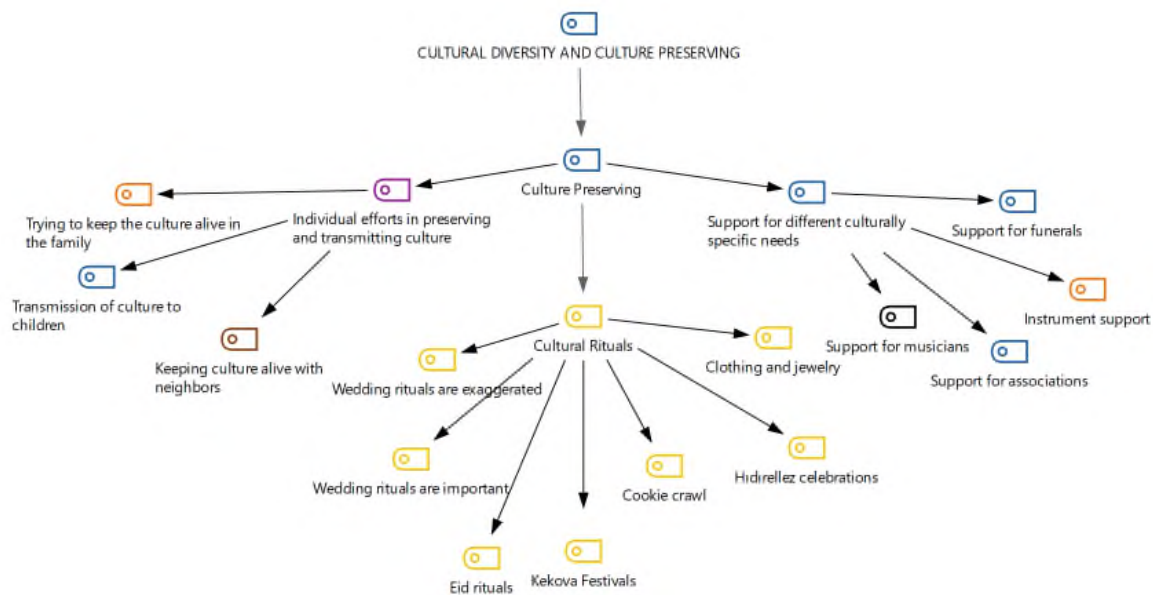
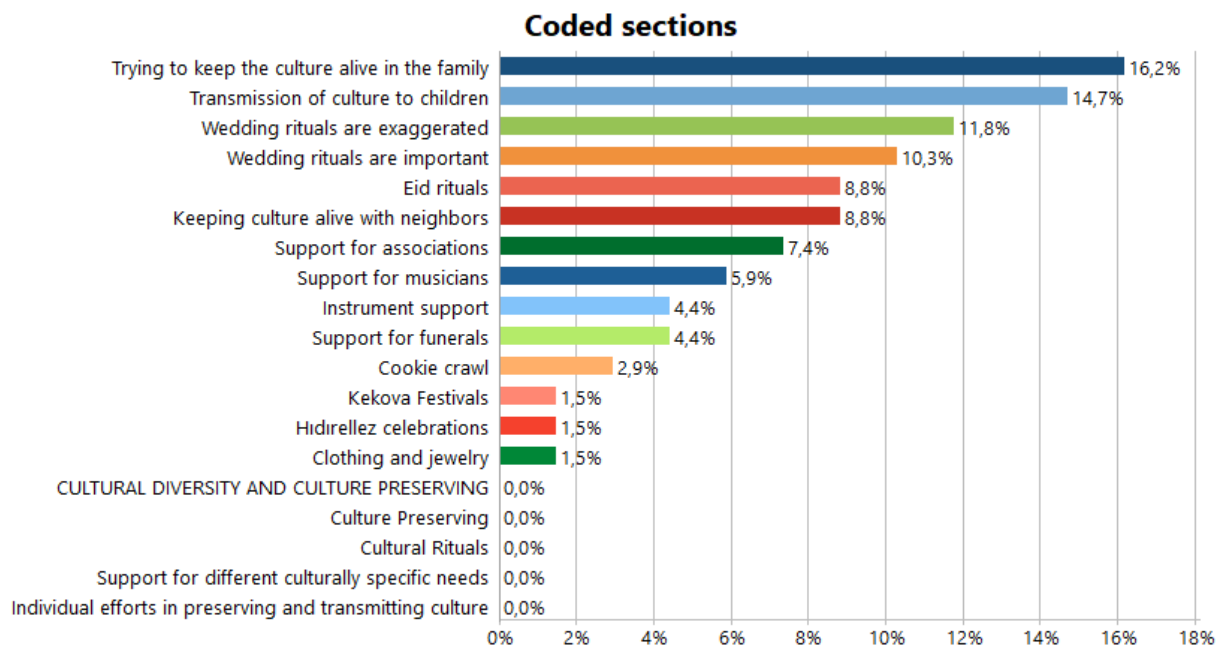
Figure 2

Roma views on establishing intercultural communication



Cultural Preservation and Transmission

Cultural diversity is essential for preserving various ways of life, traditions, and values, thus bringing richness and flexibility to societies. Different cultures support and reinforce each other to achieve development goals and generate new ideas. In this study, cultural diversity and the preservation and transmission of culture emerged as a main category (Figure 3), with cultural rituals (7 sub-themes), individual efforts to preserve and transmit culture (3 sub-themes), and support for culturally specific needs (4 sub-themes) identified as key themes.

Figure 3*Hierarchical Subcode Model: Cultural Diversity and Protection of Culture***Figure 4***Roma views on cultural diversity and the preservation and transmission of culture*

The preservation and transmission of culture to new generations are vital for maintaining cultural heritage. The interview results (Figure 4) indicate that Roma maintains many traditions, such as preparing for and celebrating holidays and wedding ceremonies, as well as specific events like Hidirellez, Kekova Fest, and the cookie crawl. These traditions are maintained within the family, shared with neighbors and passed on to children.

P2: “For example, during holidays, we make lokma with our neighbors and distribute it throughout the neighborhood. When we want to make stuffed grape leaves, we wrap them together. We also make our baklava; these are things we always do with our neighbors. I set up my table and I serve them. I’ve tried to pass this culture on to my children. Similarly, P1, P2, P9, P10, P11, P13, and P14, mentioned that they prepared for the feast with their neighbors and passed these cultural values on to their children.

However, the elaborate nature of Roma wedding ceremonies, especially in terms of clothing and jewelry, was criticized by some participants.

P4: “I think the practices at weddings are unnecessary and costly. I’m against them. The constant introduction of new customs strains the budget.”

P1: “I do not attach much importance to weddings. I find them noisy and exaggerated, and I would rather not have them.”

Supporting culturally specific values is crucial for social sustainability. Public institutions such as the Governor’s Office, Municipality and District Governor’s Office support music and musicians, which are significant in Roma culture.

P4: “Official authorities particularly support musicians in preserving this culture.”

P14: “The authorities grant necessary permissions, and the district governor supports musical activities. For example, my uncles received support from the district governor for drums, clarinet, and darbuka.”

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is a crucial aspect of social sustainability (Figure 5), focusing on integrating disadvantaged groups into society, ensuring that their voices are heard, and providing equal opportunities. This category (Figure 5) was analyzed under themes such as quality of life (6 sub-themes), equality (4 sub-themes), efforts of public institutions (3 sub-themes), and reduction of discrimination (2 sub-themes).

Figure 5

Hierarchical Subcode Model: Social Inclusion

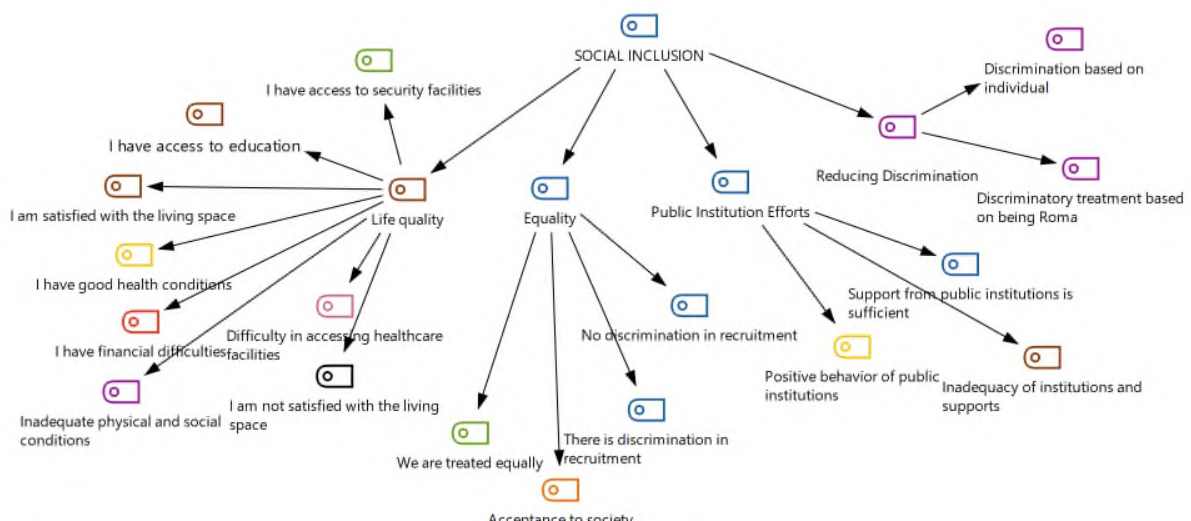
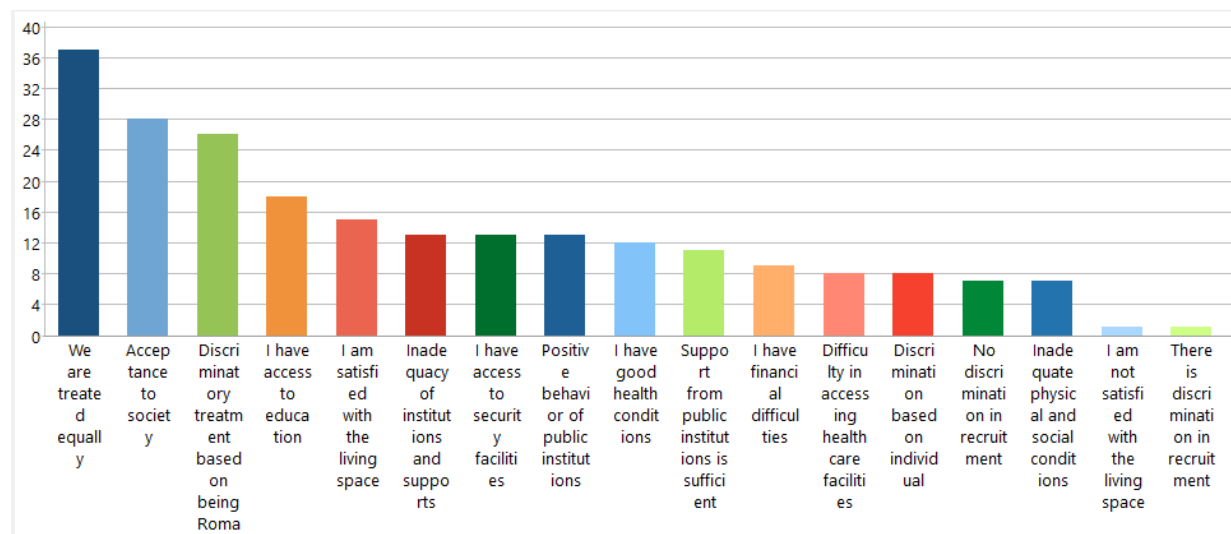


Figure 6*Roma women' views on Social Inclusion*

Social inclusion is the process of ensuring that all individuals in society participate equally in economic, social, cultural and political life. Social inclusion aims to ensure that disadvantaged groups such as the disabled, the elderly, women, ethnic minorities, immigrants and low-income individuals are fully and effectively included in society. In this context, Roma women have generally stated that they are treated equally in public institutions. However, they state that there is general discrimination in society in general due to their Roma identity. Many respondents indicated that Roma still faces discrimination, particularly in housing and education. This theme is further exemplified by the following participant quote:

P3: "When you go to the hospital, or anywhere else, people immediately pout as if to say, 'Oh, these are the Roma.' There is a sense of being looked down upon, and we are subjected to such treatments in society."

P11: "I think there is a lot of discrimination. For example, I used to work as a cleaner, and people would be afraid when we mentioned that we were Roma."

P14: "Some of our children's teachers discriminate against them in schools. They are racist."

However, some participants believed that discrimination was more related to individual behavior than to being Roma.

P10: "I do not think there is any discrimination at all. I believe the negativity stems from individuals themselves."

Government institutions such as the District Governor's Office, Municipality and SODAM, provide significant support to improve the quality of life, although this support is often insufficient for low-income families. Despite this, many participants expressed satisfaction with their housing and the general support from public institutions.

P3: "Yes, we receive support, but it is insufficient. We get assistance from the family support program and while it helps to an extent, unfortunately, it is not enough given Türkiye's current conditions."

Some participants generally perceived their experiences within public institutions positively. They reported being treated equally, having no issues with access to education and security, and experiencing

no discrimination in hiring. They also appreciated that officials attended ceremonies such as association meetings, funerals, and weddings, expressing satisfaction with the activities conducted for them.

P10: *"Thanks to the government, I worked in the public sector and was very happy. I was not marginalized; my insurance was paid, I retired, and there was no discrimination. I was very satisfied."*

P4: *"The state supports everyone in times of need. From what I observe, people around me receive help from Mukhtar's office, the District Governor's Office and the municipality."*

P11: *"They treat my daughter very well at her workplace. She has become like family to them; they take care of all her problems. My son works in a hospital. and earns a good salary as a government employee, and I don't think he will face any discrimination."*

P11: *"Our mayors attend our weddings and funerals. They send us rice; and aid, and they provide a car when we are sick. In that sense, I am very satisfied; our family is also very satisfied, and we receive help for almost everything."*

However, participants expressed significant concern about health services. Despite expressing satisfaction with equal opportunities in education, employment, and security, respondents highlighted significant issues regarding access to healthcare. They emphasized that these problems are widespread and not specific to the Roma community.

P4: *"Regarding local facilities, our hospital is inadequate, so we often have to visit other hospitals."*

P16: *"In terms of healthcare, for example, there aren't enough doctors here, so we must go to Çanakkale."*

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion in sustainability aims to eliminate inequalities and enhance integration among different segments of society by establishing balanced social, economic and environmental relationships. In this context, SODAM activities initiated by the Ministry of Family and Social Services are designed to serve this purpose. Proper planning, implementation, and management of social cohesion components are necessary to create a healthy social structure.

Participants were also asked questions about SODAM's work, its contribution to their lives, and the changes it has brought. Based on the responses it was found that SODAM contributed to the participants at four different levels (**Figure 7**). Four main themes emerged within the framework of social cohesion: social (2 sub-themes), psychological (8 sub-themes), communication (2 sub-themes and economic contribution, 3 sub-themes).

Figure 7

Hierarchical Subcode Model: The Contribution of SODAM Activities to the Social Cohesion of the Roma Women

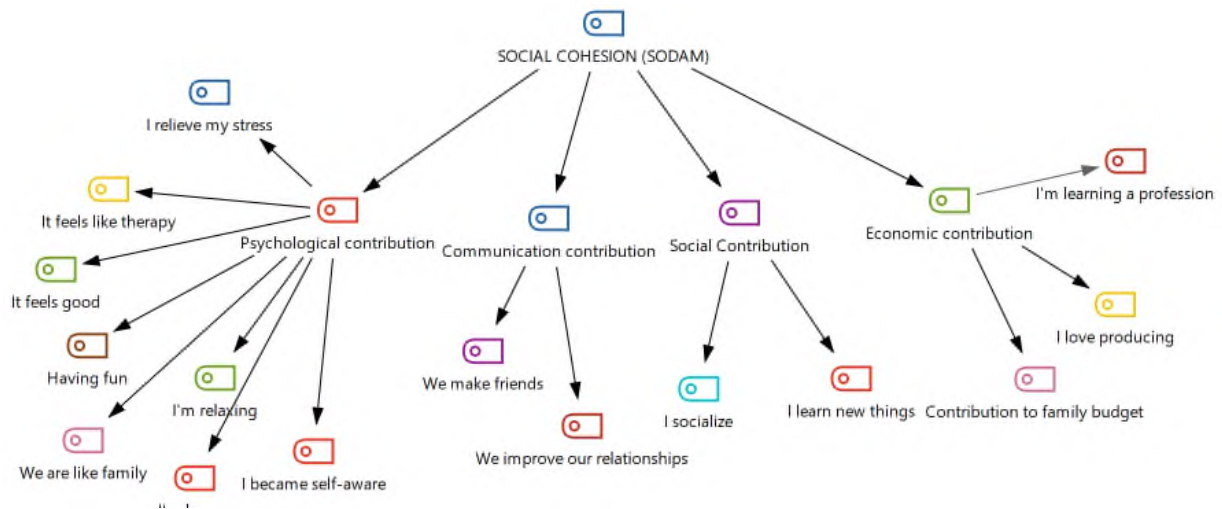
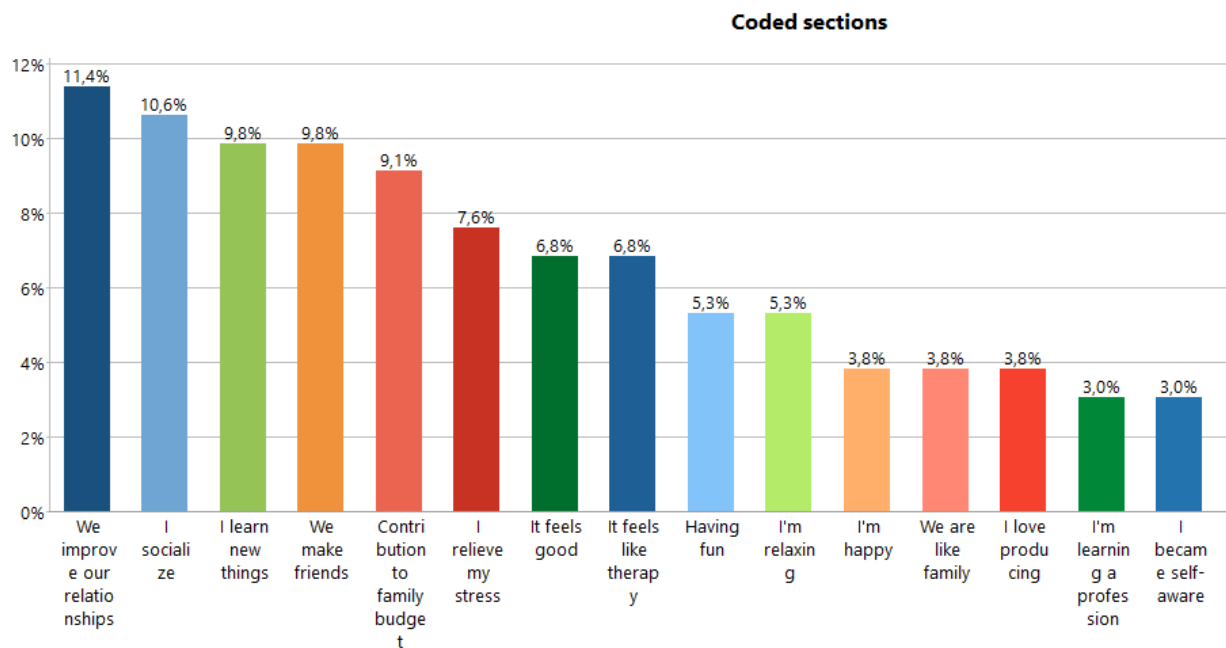


Figure 8

Roma Women' views on SODAM's Contribution to Social Cohesion for Roma



From this perspective, it has been observed that the participants in this project have added value to their lives through SODAM's initiatives. Eight participants have been in SODAM activities for 8-10 years, while the other eight have participated for 1-5 years. The participants emphasized (Figure 8) that they learned new things, socialized, and improved their friendships during these years.

P3: "These courses have greatly enhanced my learning. First of all, you should socialize. Your circle of friends grows, and your dialogue with people changes. At least you learn how to interact with others appropriately."

P12: *"It contributed a lot to me. We learned new things, expanded our circle of friends and socialized. It made me feel good."*

The project has been beneficial for all participants, especially in terms of the psychological realization of their talents, stress relief, happiness, fun, and relaxation, almost like a form of therapy. Additionally, participants stated that they achieved economic gains and contributed to their family budgets through the skills they acquired during these courses.

P9: *"I found myself here. I socialized, and we created a great environment with friends. We had fun and laughed. This place has been very good for me; I say I won't attend each year, but I can't resist coming back."*

P8: *"Economically, it is significant that we set our clothes. I've also sold what I made, I'm still selling it, and my sales are increasing because I'm becoming more recognized."*

The responses of the Roma participants selected for this study, which explored the dimensions of social inclusion, diversity and intercultural communication within social sustainability (Figure 7), indicate that they are generally satisfied with the projects implemented for them.

Discussion and Conclusion

Sustainability, founded on three interconnected pillars environmental, social, and economic is an arena with numerous problems awaiting resolution in each pillar. This study focuses on social sustainability, which includes shared goals and values. Social sustainability offers various business and social models to enhance the living, working, educational, health, and cultural conditions of people across all societal segments. It seeks to protect social institutions and provide opportunities for different social groups to live harmoniously. This approach promotes social welfare and preserves social justice for future generations.

Social sustainability, with its focus on people, encompasses a multifaceted and comprehensive set of objectives. It aims to improve living and working conditions and ensure equal access to basic rights such as education, health, security, employment, social participation, inclusion, diversity, governance, gender equality, and the preservation and transmission of cultures. Studies (Woodcraft, 2015; Eizenberg, & Jabareen, 2017; Ajmal et al, 2017; Cuesta et al, 2024) generally suggest that the social dimension of sustainability receives less attention than its environmental and economic counterparts. Although we acknowledge that socially oriented practices are essential for sustainability, efforts in this area will be weakened due to numerous gaps in both theory and practice. This study, framed by the components of inclusion and diversity, specifically examines the situation of Roma women. In order for societies to live together in peace and tranquility, it is important that they find common ground and share similar rights and freedoms. The study is based on the idea that various institutions should organize ongoing projects and collaborations for the acceptance and integration of communities that have been living together for hundreds of years under the same roof. The study aims to examine how Roma position themselves and how the support they receive from state institutions has changed their lives. These objectives are framed by the components of inclusion and diversity as components of social sustainability.

There are important studies (Stewart 1997; Fonseca 2002; Hancock 2010; Kurşun and Cengiz, 2013; Çetin, 2017; Yanıkdağ, 2021; Fırat, 2022; Dişli, 2016 etc.) in the literature on the living conditions, origins, migration problems, education, employment, etc. of Roma. However, the lack of publications on social sustainability and its components constitutes the basis of this study. Roma are considered one of the most disadvantaged groups in Türkiye and globally. Due to the difficulty of accessing the Roma population, estimated to be between 1-2 million in Türkiye and dispersed across various cities, this study focused on those living in

Gallipoli, Çanakkale. The research involved interviews with Roma women who voluntarily participated in SODAM projects initiated by the Ministry of Family and Social Services.

The analysis of the impact of SODAM activities on Roma women in Çanakkale Gelibolu revealed that these centers significantly contribute to their integration into social life and access to basic social needs. SODAMs encourage Roma women to take a more active role in their communities by providing social support, education, and psychosocial services. Increased self-confidence, socialization, and the development of skills and competencies among women are important steps toward social integration and inclusion.

In the context of the main problematics of the research, this study shows that Roma in Türkiye are discriminated against and excluded by the society at large, despite the fact that they position themselves as equals in society.. The findings indicate that existing policies addressing social exclusion, unemployment, health, education, and housing are inadequate and inappropriate, reinforcing the disadvantaged position of Roma. Most Roma work in low-level jobs, such as cleaning, market work, music, and paper collection, which do not require special skills or education, preventing them from raising their income levels. Additionally, children are often required to contribute to the family budget, hindering their education. The struggle to preserve cultural identity while integrating into society leads to social exclusion in various areas, including education, health, employment, and housing. This situation, which has become a vicious circle, prevents the Roma from improving their negative social identities and perceptions. These conclusions align with the findings conducted by H.U (<https://www.romaar.com>, 2024), the European Parliament Research Unit (EPRS, 2024), and the works of Genç et al. (2015, Gökçe (2018), Alpar (2023), Roth (2011) and Balidemaj (2021).

Diversity in sustainability brings together people of different ages, genders, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and economic, educational, and professional experiences, facilitating macro level problem-solving and solutions. Cultural knowledge and local traditions can be crucial to the sustainable management of social and natural resources. The Roma participating in this research strive to keep their traditions alive and pass them on to their families, children, and communities. In addition, to their efforts, they receive support from public institutions, such as the district governor and municipality, for weddings, festivals, funerals, and traditional professions like music and musicianship. While there is a consensus that Roma do not have issues communicating within their community many struggles to communicate outside it due to a lack of education and social skills.

Linking social sustainability with values such as social inclusion, equity, and justice is crucial for building a sustainable society. This study confirms the benefits of diversity and inclusion in promoting social innovation and prosperity. Various studies have demonstrated that inclusive and diverse structures provide a competitive advantage for organizations and societies and strengthen social cohesion. “It is at the intersection of changing and maintaining society that social sustainability can be realized” (Åhman, 2013). This intersection can only be realized when equal and fair rights are granted to different structures and groups within society. In other words, initiatives focused on trust, justice, and equity form the foundation of social sustainability, which is one of the three main pillars of sustainability. We argue that if individuals can first experience secure and just environments in their private spheres, they will be more actively engaged in societal, environmental, political, and economic development.

In conclusion, this study on social sustainability highlights the importance of protecting the cultural and social rights of Roma, ensuring their integration into society, and strengthening policies for disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, the role of intercultural communication and dialogue in supporting Roma social cohesion and preserving cultural diversity is crucial. In this context, social policies and strategies must

be redesigned and implemented according to sustainability principles. Such actions will enhance society's overall well-being by enabling the Roma and other disadvantaged groups to participate more effectively in social life, making an important step toward a sustainable future. Ensuring the continuity and diversification of the efforts initiated by the EU in 2011 and Türkiye 2016 to address the challenges faced by the Roma and improve their lives is essential. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the geographic scope to include a broader range of locations and by including a more diverse sample of Roma individuals, both men, and women, as well as those not involved in SODAM projects. Investigating the long-term effects of such programs on Roma integration and well-being could provide deeper insights into their sustainability and effectiveness. Furthermore, comparative studies across different regions and countries could enhance understanding of the varying impacts of social support initiatives on Roma communities.



Ethics Committee Approval	The obtained the necessary official permissions from İstanbul Aydın University Ethics Committee (24.04.2024-04).
Informed Consent	Consent was obtained from the participants.
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- G.Y., H.H.E.Ç.; Data Acquisition- G.Y., H.H.E.Ç.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- G.Y., H.H.E.Ç.; Drafting Manuscript- G.Y., H.H.E.Ç.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- G.Y., H.H.E.Ç.; Final Approval and Accountability- G.Y., H.H.E.Ç.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Teaching Profession in the Written and Oral Proposals Submitted to the TBMM: Problems, Demands and Issues on the Agenda



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Abstract

This study examines the discussions on the teaching profession and the search for solutions through written and oral proposals submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) between 2002 and 2024. In this research, which was carried out using the document analysis model within the qualitative methodology, a total of 3671 proposals were identified from the official archive of the TBMM and these proposals were analyzed by content analysis. These proposals were analyzed through content analysis. The results of the research show that the problems of the teaching profession in the proposals submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye are concentrated in the economic, social and professional dimensions. The proposals focus on issues such as teacher appointments, personal rights, professional development opportunities and teacher shortages in rural areas. However, low response rates and delays in the process prolong the time it takes to find solutions to teachers' problems. It was observed that opposition parties are more likely to raise teachers' issues, while the ruling party makes limited contributions to these issues. The research shows that a comprehensive restructuring of education policy is needed to address the chronic problems of the teaching profession. In addition, improving teachers' personal rights, increasing professional development opportunities and ensuring equal educational opportunities in disadvantaged regions are crucial for the sustainability of the profession.

Keywords

Education Policies • Education Sociology • TBMM Proposals • Teaching Profession



Citation: Atmaca, T. & Kesim, E. (2025). Teaching profession in the written and oral proposals submitted to the TBMM: Problems, demands and issues on the agenda. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 162-188. <https://doi.org/10.26650/J ECS2025-1620973>

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 2025. Atmaca, T. & Kesim, E.

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Teaching Profession in the Written and Oral Proposals Submitted to the TBMM: Problems, Demands and Issues on the Agenda

The teaching profession in Türkiye stands out not only as a cornerstone of the education system but also as a fundamental element in the processes of social transformation, progress, and cultural transmission. Beyond being a mere profession, it is one of the most critical dynamics of societal development (Akyüz, 2011; 2012). Due to its impact on society, teaching has historically been accorded a special status and recognized as a respected profession (Pişkin & Parlar, 2021). Since the proclamation of the Republic, the teaching profession in Türkiye has undergone a continuous process of change driven by educational reforms and social transformations (Deringöl, 2007). In the early Republican era, teachers were positioned as key actors in cultivating “ideal individuals” who would fulfill the goals of modernization and development within society (Ergün, 2000). Legal regulations such as the Law on the Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) adopted in 1924 and initiatives like the Village Institutes further reinforced the pioneering role of teachers within the community (Akyüz, 2011).

Over time, the changes in education policies in Türkiye have also reflected on the roles and responsibilities of teachers. Since the 1980s, under the influence of globalization and neoliberal policies, processes of marketization in education have begun, reshaping the education system around concepts like competition and efficiency (Keleş & Aslan, 2022; Kılıç & Tunç, 2022). During this period of transformation, issues such as teacher performance evaluations, workloads, and job descriptions have become increasingly complex, while uncertainties regarding job security and working conditions have grown (Özdem, 2007). Today, some of the key challenges faced by the teaching profession include economic difficulties, low levels of job satisfaction, and a decline in the profession’s status and respectability (Atmaca, 2020; Yurdakul et al., 2016).

In recent years, teaching in Türkiye has been the subject of significant debate from economic, social, and professional perspectives (Yaraş & Turan, 2021). Issues such as teachers’ job security, salaries, professional rights, professional development opportunities, and recruitment processes are frequently brought to the forefront of education policy discussions (Göker & Gündüz, 2017). At the heart of these debates lies the aim of both preserving and improving the professional status of teachers and enhancing the overall quality of education.

One of the most notable recent reforms in this context is the “Teaching Profession Law” published in 2024. This law aims to elevate the status of the teaching profession while introducing a new framework for career progression, including titles such as “expert teacher” and “master teacher,” which require specific exams and training processes to obtain (ÖMK, 2024). However, this regulation has sparked debates about the creation of hierarchical statuses among teachers and the institutionalization of an exam-focused approach to professional development (Yazıcı & Çolak, 2024). Furthermore, research indicates that career ladders determined through examinations fail to provide effective solutions to the chronic problems faced by teachers and the teaching profession (Akin & Çolak, 2024).

Teacher salaries and economic rights are another central focus of recent discussions. It is often argued that teachers’ salaries in Türkiye are insufficient compared to other professions and that their purchasing power remains low (Cantürk, 2021; Çinkır & Kurum, 2017). Economic challenges negatively affect teachers’ motivation and job satisfaction, which in turn pose a risk to the quality of education (Demirbaş, 2022). Another contentious issue is the challenges faced in the teacher recruitment processes. Despite a significant

teacher shortage in certain regions of Türkiye, the growing number of unappointed teachers stands out as a critical problem (Kuş-Gürbey et al., 2021; Manav, 2022). Teacher candidates graduating from education faculties or other faculties that provide a pool for teacher recruitment must pass various exams for public appointments. However, the lack of sufficient positions delays or complicates these candidates' recruitment processes. This situation has created a serious problem among unappointed teachers and has heightened criticism about the mismatch between the number of graduates from education faculties and available public positions (Kiraz & Kurul, 2018).

Another prominent issue in recent years is how to support teachers' professional development (Bümen et al., 2012; Külekçi-Akyavuz & Küçükkapdan, 2024; Sancar & Atal, 2021). The increasing prevalence of educational technologies and innovations in teaching methods require teachers to engage in continuous learning (Kurtoğlu & Seferoğlu, 2013). In this context, enhancing access to in-service training programs and improving teachers' digital competencies have become key priorities in education policy (Avcı & Güven, 2021; Sarıtepeci et al., 2016). However, there is criticism that current in-service training programs fail to fully address teachers' needs and that qualitative improvements in these programs are necessary (Ayvaci et al., 2014; Kaya & Akçadağ, 2022).

In Türkiye, teacher training policies, professional rights, and professional development have become prominent topics on the political agenda (Baş & Nural, 2023). Given the significant role of education in shaping the social structure and future of the country, the role of teachers within the education system holds a central place in the education policies of both the ruling and opposition parties (Küçük & Akpınar, 2022; Toprakçı & Akçay-Güngör, 2014; Yıldız & Yıldız, 2016). Discussions about teachers' economic conditions (Çimen & Karadağ, 2020), professional status (Ünsal, 2018), working conditions, and recruitment processes are frequently addressed in the political arena, with various solutions proposed from differing ideological perspectives (Çoban, 2018; Tok, 2012). The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party), which has been in power since 2002, has introduced structural reforms in recent years aimed at supporting teachers' professional development and improving the quality of education (Sunar et al., 2024). On the other hand, the opposition parties consistently emphasize the need to improve teachers' salaries and working conditions. They also advocate for strengthening job security, addressing challenges in recruitment processes, and ending the practice of employing teachers on a contractual basis.

These political debates reflect differing approaches to issues such as teachers' economic rights, professional development, and employment conditions (Aslan, 2017; Berber, 2014). The ideological differences between the ruling and opposition parties create a platform for broader societal discussion about the role of teachers in the education system and their position in society. These debates in the political arena are also echoed in official documents such as written parliamentary proposals, assembly discussions, and election manifestos presented to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), thereby serving as a pressure mechanism for shaping education policies.

In recent years, education reforms in Türkiye have significantly impacted teachers' working conditions, professional roles, and responsibilities, requiring them to adapt to various transformations in the education system. During this process, numerous issues have surfaced, ranging from recruitment processes and working conditions to professional rights and career development. The Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi-TBMM) plays a critical role in addressing these challenges and demands through written and oral parliamentary proposals submitted by members of parliament (MPs). These proposals serve as a formal platform for discussing teachers' issues and concerns, highlighting the shared

interest of both educators and political actors in addressing these challenges. Enhancing teachers' professional status, improving their economic conditions, and strengthening public perception of the teaching profession remain central to the policies proposed by political parties, with the ultimate goal of ensuring the sustainability of the education system.

While research on the teaching profession in Türkiye often focuses on teachers' economic, social, and professional challenges, there is a lack of comprehensive studies analyzing how parliamentary proposals categorize these issues, how they evolve over time, and which specific topics related to teachers are prioritized by political parties, particularly the opposition. Examining the approaches of political parties toward teacher-related issues provides valuable insight into the decision-making processes that influence the professional and societal status of teachers. This study seeks to contribute to this gap by analyzing how teachers' problems are addressed from a political perspective. Written and oral parliamentary proposals submitted to the TBMM provide crucial data on the current problems, demands, and reform agendas concerning the teaching profession. These proposals reflect several expectations regarding teachers' professional rights, working conditions, and career development needs. They not only shape the direction of education policies but also allow for a holistic assessment of the teaching profession's status. This study contributes to the existing literature by systematically analyzing the role of parliamentary proposals in shaping educational policies. It provides insight into the political discourse surrounding the teaching profession and highlights how policymakers prioritize teachers' issues.

The Function of Parliamentary Proposals in the TBMM

In the TBMM, MPs can submit written or oral parliamentary proposals to fulfill their role in overseeing the executive branch, obtaining information on specific topics and drawing public attention to particular issues (Bülbül, 2007). These proposals, which require a formal response, function as a constitutional and legal oversight mechanism (Koca, 2020). Written proposals, often preferred for detailed inquiries, are answered in writing by the relevant ministry or institution within a specified period and are published in the TBMM records. Oral proposals, which are typically aimed at obtaining brief responses or addressing urgent matters, facilitate direct dialog between MPs and government representatives during general assembly sessions. The TBMM's internal regulations outline specific procedures for handling parliamentary proposals. According to Article 99 of the TBMM's Rules of Procedure, the relevant ministry or institution must answer written proposals within 15 days of receiving them. Responses are prepared and submitted in writing, with the entire process recorded in TBMM's system, making them accessible to MPs and the public. The status of parliamentary proposals is categorized as follows:

1. **Answered:** Proposals that are responded to within the designated timeframe by the relevant ministry or institution.
2. **Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered:** Proposals that are not answered within the specified timeframe are officially documented in the TBMM records as unanswered.
3. **Declared Useless Due to the End of the Legislative Term:** Proposals lose validity if the legislative term ends before they are answered.
4. **Answered After the Deadline:** Proposals were answered after the designated 15-day period, indicating delays in the government's responsiveness.
5. **15-Day Response Period Ongoing:** Proposals are still within the 15-day response period.

The rate of timely responses to parliamentary proposals serves as an indicator of governmental accountability. Proposals that are delayed or left unanswered point to potential shortcomings in the democratic oversight mechanism.

Research Objectives

Despite extensive debates on teachers' professional conditions in Türkiye, there is limited research on how these issues are represented in parliamentary proposals and how they shape education policies. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing written and oral proposals submitted to the TBMM between 2002 and 2024 to understand how teachers' concerns are addressed in political discourse. The study addresses the following research proposals:

1. How are the numbers of written and oral parliamentary proposals related to teachers distributed across legislative terms from 2002 to 2024?
2. How are these proposals distributed across political parties in each legislative term from 2002 to 2024?
3. How do the outcomes (e.g., answered, unanswered) of written and oral proposals related to teachers vary by legislative term and political party from 2002 to 2024?
4. What specific themes and issues related to teachers do political parties prioritize in their parliamentary proposals during this period?
5. How are the themes and issues in parliamentary proposals distributed across legislative terms from 2002 to 2024?
6. Which MPs stand out in terms of the frequency and focus of their proposals about the teaching profession during this time?

Method

Research Model

This study was conducted using the document analysis model, a qualitative research method. Document analysis is a research model aimed at obtaining information by examining existing written or visual materials (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In line with the research objective, written and oral parliamentary proposals submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, TBMM) between 2002 and 2024 regarding the teaching profession were analyzed. These parliamentary proposals underwent a comprehensive analytical process to evaluate the issues, demands, and topics related to the teaching profession through a historical and thematic approach.

Sample

The sample of this study consists of written and oral parliamentary proposals submitted to the TBMM regarding the teaching profession between 2002 and 2024. To select the sample, the purposive sampling method was employed, as it allows for the selection of data that best addresses the research problem (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, parliamentary proposals obtained from TBMM records were selected based on specific criteria, ensuring that they were directly related to issues, demands, and topics concerning teachers.

Data Collection Process and Analysis

The data for this study were obtained from the online archives of the TBMM (<https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/denetim/yazili-soru-nergeleri>). A data search was conducted using keywords related to the teaching profession (e.g., “teacher”) to identify relevant parliamentary proposals. As a result:

- A total of 3,671 parliamentary proposals submitted between 2002 and 2024 (covering the 22nd legislative term to the 28th legislative term, up to December 2024) were identified using these keywords.
- Parliamentary proposals included in the scope of the study were selected based on their relevance to the economic, professional, and social challenges faced by teachers, their demands, and issues raised on the TBMM agenda.
- If a parliamentary question addressed multiple topics, the first-mentioned topic was prioritized for analysis.

The researchers classified the selected parliamentary proposals by legislative terms, political parties, and prominent themes. The analysis of the data categorizing and coding the parliamentary proposals submitted by MPs into specific categories, followed by calculating the frequency of these categories. This process falls under content analysis and descriptive analysis, which are the key methods in qualitative data analysis. Content analysis is a method used to systematically examine data, create meaningful themes and categories, and code these themes to identify patterns and frequencies (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The primary goal of content analysis is to uncover the implicit or explicit meanings within the data and to identify the relationships and trends among them. Coding, as part of the content analysis process, serves as a tool for organizing and classifying the data.

In this study:

- The parliamentary proposals submitted to the TBMM were coded into 32 distinct categories.
- Descriptive analysis was employed to calculate the frequencies of these categories and to systematically present the results.

An example of how a category was created is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Example of coding

Sample Parliamentary Question	Included Categories
Regarding the Shortage of Subject Teachers in the Ilıca District of Erzurum (22 nd Legislative Term)	Shortage of Teachers in Specific Locations and Subject Areas
Regarding Teacher Appointments to Anatolian, Science, and Social Sciences High Schools (24 th Legislative Term)	Teacher Appointments, Teacher Shortages, and Surplus Staffing
Regarding Efforts to Improve the Economic Conditions of Teachers (26 th Legislative Term)	Working Conditions and Professional Rights
Regarding Allegations Against the principal and Certain Teachers of a Primary School in Mersin (22 nd Legislative Term)	Special Cases, Various Practices, and Allegations
Regarding Teachers Under Investigation for Social Media Posts (24 th Legislative Term)	Legal Issues (Investigations, Suspensions, Dismissals, etc.)

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the legislative terms between 2002 and 2024. Parliamentary proposals outside these terms were excluded from the scope of the research. Only written and oral parliamentary proposals submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) were analyzed. The study is further limited to parliamentary proposals identified through searches in the TBMM archives using the keyword “teacher”, and it does not claim to represent all issues or demands related to the teaching profession. Additionally, party changes by members of parliament during certain legislative terms were disregarded. As the 28th legislative term has not concluded, proposals from this term were limited to those submitted up to December 2024.

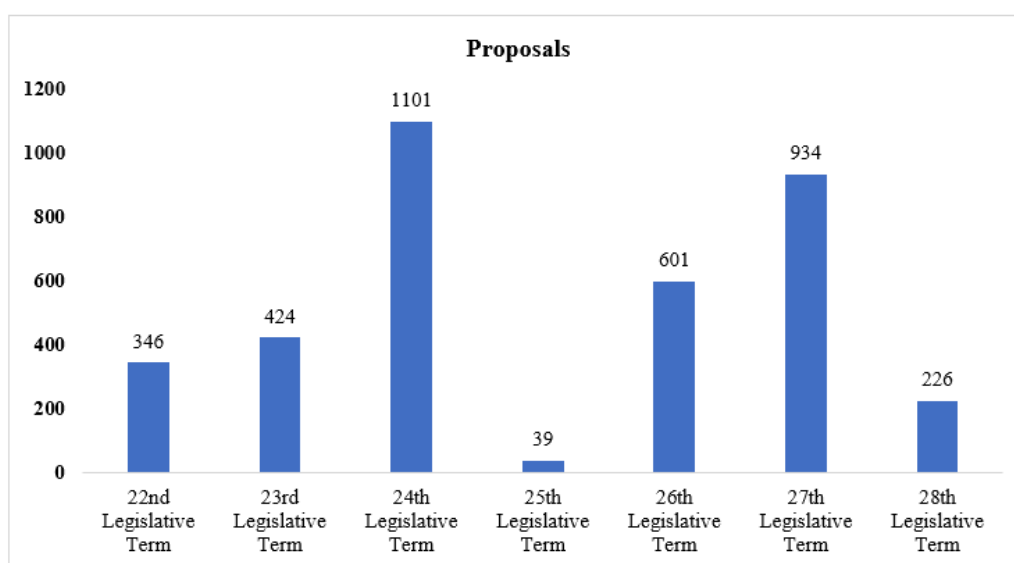
Findings

Findings on the Quantitative Distribution of Parliamentary Proposals Related to Teachers Submitted to the TBMM Between 2002 and 2024 by Legislative Terms

The findings on the quantitative distribution of parliamentary proposals related to teachers submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) between 2002 and 2024 by legislative terms are presented in **Graph 1**.

Graph 1

Distribution of Written and Oral Parliamentary Proposals Related to Teachers Submitted to the TBMM by Legislative Terms (2002–2024)



As shown in **Graph 1**, the distribution of the written and oral parliamentary proposals submitted to the TBMM between 2002 and 2024 can be observed. It is evident that various topics, issues, or details related to teachers' concerns and professional rights were most frequently raised during the 24th legislative term. Considering that the 25th legislative term was a transitional period due to early elections and that the 28th legislative term is still ongoing (following the 2023 elections), it can be stated that teacher-related topics were brought to the agenda least often during the 22nd legislative term.

Findings on the Quantitative Distribution of Teacher-Related Parliamentary Proposals Submitted to the GNAT (TBMM) Between 2002 and 2024 by Political Parties

Table 2 presents the frequency with which teacher-related topics were raised in the GNAT by political parties with parliamentary representation during the period from the 22nd legislative term to the 28th legislative term.

Table 2

Frequency of Teacher-Related Topics Raised by Political Parties in the GNAT (22nd–28th Legislative Terms)

LEGISLATIVE TERMS	AK PARTY	CHP	MHP	DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM*	DEVA**	GELECEK***	SP****	İYİ PARTY*****	TİP*****	BBP*****	DSP	TOTAL
22 nd Term	21	325	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	346
23 rd Term	0	196	184	35	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	424
24 th Term	0	458	525	118	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1101
25 th Term	2	25	4	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39
26 th Term	13	389	80	119	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	601
27 th Term	13	514	33	263	0	0	7	104	0	0	0	934
28 th Term	1	80	2	86	2	8	6	40	1	0	0	226
Total	50	1987	828	629	2	8	13	144	1	1	8	3671

*DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM: This political group first gained representation in the parliament during the 23rd legislative term, with 20 members of parliament. Over different legislative terms, it participated in elections under various party names, reflecting changes in its organizational identity.

** The DEVA Party was founded in 2020 and did not participate in elections prior to this date. It contested elections for the first time in 2023, running on the candidate lists of the CHP (Republican People's Party) and the İYİ Party.

*** The GELECEK Party was founded in 2019. In the 2023 elections, it entered the parliament with 10 members of parliament through the CHP candidate lists.

**** SP (Saadet Party) could send members of parliament to the legislature for the first time in the 2018 elections. In the 2023 elections, it secured representation in the parliament with 10 MPs running on the CHP (Republican People's Party) candidate lists, bringing its total representation to 19 MPs.

***** The İYİ Party was founded in 2017. Following the 2018 elections, it began to be represented in the parliament with 43 members of parliament.

***** The Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP) began to be represented in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) during the 28th legislative term, with 4 members of parliament.

***** The Great Unity Party (BBP) was represented in the 23rd legislative term by one member of parliament, its Chairman Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu. In the 2018 elections, the party participated with 18 candidates on the AK Party lists, and only its Chairman, Mustafa Destici, was elected as a member of parliament.

According to the distribution presented in Table 2, during the 22nd legislative term, only members of parliament from the AK Party (Justice and Development Party) and the CHP (Republican People's Party) submitted written and oral parliamentary proposals to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM). Of the 346 proposals submitted during this term, 325 (93.93%) were submitted by the CHP, while 21 (6.07%) were submitted by the AK Party.

In the 23rd legislative term, 424 proposals were identified. Of these, 196 (46.23%) were submitted by the CHP, 184 (43.40%) by the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), 35 (8.25%) by the DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM, 1 (0.24%)

by the BBP (Great Unity Party), and 8 (1.88%) by the DSP (Democratic Left Party). During the 24th legislative term, a total of 1,101 proposals were identified. Among these, 458 (41.60%) were submitted by the CHP, 525 (47.68%) by the MHP, and 118 (10.72%) by the DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM.

In the 25th legislative term (a transitional period due to early elections), 39 proposals were identified. Of these, 25 (64.10%) were submitted by the CHP, 2 (5.13%) by the AK Party, 4 (10.26%) by the MHP, and 8 (20.51%) by the DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM. In the 26th legislative term, 601 proposals were submitted. Of these, 389 (64.73%) were submitted by the CHP, 13 (2.16%) by the AK Party, 80 (13.31%) by the MHP, and 119 (19.80%) by the DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM.

During the 27th legislative term, 934 proposals were identified. Of these, 514 (55.03%) were submitted by the CHP, 13 (1.39%) by the AK Parti, 33 (3.54%) by the MHP, 263 (28.16%) by the DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM, 104 (11.13%) by the İYİ Parti, and 7 (0.75%) by the SP (Felicity Party). Finally, in the 28th legislative term (up to December 2024), 226 proposals were identified. Among these, 80 (35.40%) were submitted by the CHP, 1 (0.44%) by the AK Parti, 2 (0.88%) by the MHP, 86 (38.05%) by the DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM, 2 (0.88%) by the DEVA Party, 8 (3.55%) by the GELECEK Party, 6 (2.66%) by the SP, 40 (17.70%) by the İYİ Parti, and 1 (0.44%) by the TİP (Workers' Party of Türkiye).

The AK Party submitted the highest number of parliamentary proposals during the 22nd legislative term, while the CHP submitted the most proposals in the 27th legislative term. Similarly, the MHP was most active during the 24th legislative term, while the DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM and İYİ Parti submitted the highest number of proposals during the 27th legislative term.

Table 3 and Table 4 present the distribution of written and oral parliamentary proposals submitted to the TBMM between the 22nd and 28th legislative terms in terms of their outcomes (e.g., response types) by political parties.

Table 3

The Status of Responses to Proposals Concerning Teachers Submitted by Political Parties Represented in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT-TBMM) Between the 22nd and 28th Legislative Terms

Legislative Terms	Status of the Question	PARTIES										
		AK PARTY	CHP	MHP	DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM	DEVA	GELECEK	SP	İYİ PARTY	TİP	BBP	DSP
22 nd Term	Answered	18	285	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered	3	36	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Declared useless Due to the End of the Legislative Term	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	TOTAL	21	325	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Answered	-	107	80	22							5

Legislative Terms	Status of the Question	PARTIES										
		AK PARTY	CHP	MHP	DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM	DEVA	GELECEK	SP	İYİ PARTİ	TİP	BBP	DSP
23 rd Term	Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered	-	9	17	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
	Declared useless Due to the End of the Legislative Term	-	2	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Answered After the Deadline	-	78	74	10	-	-	-	-	-	1	2
	TOTAL	-	196	184	35	-	-	-	-	-	1	8
24 th Term	Answered	-	55	88	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered	-	220	222	72	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Answered After the Deadline	-	183	215	43	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	TOTAL	-	458	525	118	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
25 th Term	Declared useless Due to the End of the Legislative Term	2	25	4	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	TOTAL	2	25	4	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
26 th Term	Answered	-	9	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered	1	68	6	23	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered	-	52	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Answered After the Deadline	12	260	69	94	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	TOTAL	13	389	80	119	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 4

The Status of Responses to Proposals Concerning Teachers Submitted by Political Parties Represented in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT-TBMM) Between the 22nd and 28th Legislative Terms

Legislative Terms	Status of the Question	PARTIES										
		AK PARTY	CHP	MHP	DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM	DEVA	GELECEK	SP	İYİ PARTİ	TİP	BBP	DSP
27 th Term	Answered	3	111	5	77	-	-	2	21	-	-	-
	Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered	-	46	-	25	-	-		12	-	-	-
	Declared useless Due to the End of the Legislative Term	-	10	-	12	-	-		1	-	-	-
	Answered After the Deadline	10	347	28	149	-	-	5	70	-	-	-
TOTAL		13	514	33	263	-	-	7	104	-	-	-
28 th Term	Answered	-	20	-	18			1	14			
	Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered	-	5	1	10	-	1	1	-	-	-	
	Declared useless Due to the End of the Legislative Term	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Answered After the Deadline	1	52	1	56	2	6	3	26	1	-	-
	15-Day Response Period Ongoing	-	3	-	2		1	1	-	-	-	-
TOTAL		1	80	2	86	2	8	6	40	1	-	-

According to [Table 3](#) and [Table 4](#), during the 22nd Legislative Term (total number of proposals: 346), 18 (85.71%) of the 21 proposals submitted by the AK Party to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT) concerning teachers were categorized as “Answered”, while 3 (14.79%) were listed under the category of “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”. During this same period, of the 325 proposals submitted by the CHP, 285 (87.69%) were categorized as “Answered”, 36 (11.07%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, and 4 (1.24%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”.

In the 23rd Legislative Term (total number of proposals: 424), of the 196 proposals submitted by the CHP regarding teachers, 107 (54.59%) were categorized as “Answered”, 9 (12.31%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, 2 (1.02%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, and 78 (39.80%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. During this period, of the 184 proposals submitted by the MHP, 80 (43.48%) were categorized as “Answered”, 17 (9.24%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”,

13 (7.06%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, and 74 (40.22%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Similarly, of the 35 proposals submitted by DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM during this term, 22 (62.86%) were categorized as “Answered”, 3 (8.57%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, and 10 (28.57%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Of the 8 proposals submitted by DSP, 5 (62.50%) were categorized as “Answered” 1 (12.50%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, and 2 (25.00%) as “Answered After the Deadline”.

During the 24th Legislative Term (total number of proposals: 1,101), of the 458 proposals submitted by the CHP concerning teachers, 55 (12.00%) were categorized as “Answered”, 220 (48.04%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, and 183 (39.95%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”. During the same term, of the 525 proposals submitted by the MHP, 88 (16.76%) were categorized as “Answered”, 222 (42.29%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, and 215 (40.95%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”. Similarly, of the 118 proposals submitted by DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM, 3 (2.54%) were categorized as “Answered”, 72 (61.02%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, and 43 (36.44%) as “Answered After the Deadline”.

In the 25th Legislative Term (total number of proposals: 39), all proposals submitted by the AK Party (2), CHP (25), MHP (4), and DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM (8) were categorized as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, as the short duration of this legislative period prevented their evaluation.

During the 26th Legislative Term (total number of proposals: 601), of the 13 proposals submitted by the AK Party concerning teachers, 1 (7.69%) was categorized as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, while 12 (92.31%) were categorized as “Answered After the Deadline”. Of the 389 proposals submitted by the CHP, 9 (2.31%) were categorized as “Answered”, 68 (17.48%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, 52 (13.37%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, and 260 (66.84%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. During this term, of the 69 proposals submitted by the MHP, 1 (1.25%) was categorized as “Answered”, 6 (7.50%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, 4 (5.00%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, and 58 (86.25%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Similarly, of the 94 proposals submitted by DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM, 23 (19.33%) were categorized as “Answered”, 2 (1.68%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, and 69 (78.99%) as “Answered After the Deadline”.

In the 27th Legislative Term (total number of proposals: 934), of the 13 proposals submitted by the AK Party concerning teachers, 3 (23.08%) were categorized as “Answered” and 10 (76.93%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Of the 514 proposals submitted by the CHP, 111 (21.60%) were categorized as “Answered”, 46 (8.95%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, 10 (1.95%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, and 347 (67.50%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Similarly, of the 33 proposals submitted by the MHP, 5 (15.15%) were categorized as “Answered” and 28 (84.85%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Of the 263 proposals submitted by DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM, 77 (29.28%) were categorized as “Answered”, 25 (9.51%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, 12 (4.56%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, and 149 (56.65%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. During this term, of the 7 proposals submitted by SP, 2 (28.57%) were categorized as “Answered”, and 5 (71.43%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Of the 104 proposals submitted by the İYİ Party, 21 (20.19%) were categorized as “Answered”, 12 (11.54%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, 1 (0.96%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, and 70 (67.31%) as “Answered After the Deadline”.

In the 28th Legislative Term (total number of proposals as of December 2024: 226), the single proposal submitted by the AK Party concerning teachers was categorized as “Answered After the Deadline”. Of the 80

proposals submitted by the CHP, 20 (25.00%) were categorized as “Answered”, 5 (6.25%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, 52 (65.00%) as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, and 3 (3.75%) as “15-Day Response Period Ongoing”. During this term, of the 2 proposals submitted by the MHP, 1 (50.00%) was categorized as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, and 1 (50.00%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Similarly, of the 86 proposals submitted by DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM, 18 (20.93%) were categorized as “Answered”, 10 (11.63%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, 56 (65.11%) as “Answered After the Deadline”, and 2 (2.33%) as “15-Day Response Period Ongoing”.

During the same period, of the 6 proposals submitted by SP, 1 (16.67%) was categorized as “Answered”, 1 (16.67%) as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered” and 3 (50.00%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Of the 40 proposals submitted by the İYİ Party, 14 (35.00%) were categorized as “Answered” and 26 (65.00%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Of the 2 proposals submitted by the DEVA Party, 1 (50.00%) was categorized as “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, and 1 (50.00%) as “Answered After the Deadline”. Similarly, of the 8 proposals submitted by the Future Party, 1 (12.50%) was categorized as “Answered”, 6 (75.00%) as “Answered After the Deadline”, and 1 (12.50%) as “15-Day Response Period Ongoing”. Lastly, during this term, the single proposal submitted by the TİP was categorized as “Answered After the Deadline”.

During the 22nd Legislative Term, a significant portion of the proposals submitted by the AK Party and CHP (85.71% and 87.69%, respectively) were categorized as “Answered”. This demonstrates the executive’s effectiveness during this period in providing timely responses. However, during the 23rd and 24th Legislative Terms, the response rates to proposals from the opposition parties showed a significant decline. For instance, in the 23rd Legislative Term, only 54.59% of the CHP’s proposals were categorized as “Answered”, and this rate dropped to 12% in the 24th Legislative Term, indicating a regression in accountability by the executive. In the 25th Legislative Term, all proposals were categorized as “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, which reflects the short duration of the term and the inability to process proposals.

In the 26th and 27th Legislative Terms, the majority of proposals submitted by opposition parties (66% or higher) were categorized as “Answered After the Deadline”, which highlights delays in addressing opposition demands. Although the 28th Legislative Term shows slight improvements in the proportion of proposals categorized as “Answered”, the high rates of “Answered After the Deadline” persist. The lower number of proposals submitted by the ruling party contributes to relatively higher response rates, as seen during the 22nd Legislative Term, when 85.71% of the AK Party’s proposals were answered. Conversely, the large volume of proposals submitted by opposition parties, such as the CHP, resulted in lower response rates. Additionally, during the 23rd and 24th Legislative Terms, a significant portion of opposition proposals fell under the categories of “Answered After the Deadline” or “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, which indicates slower processing of opposition demands by the executive.

In **Table 5**, it is possible to observe the general distribution of the outcomes of the proposals concerning teachers submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT) according to political parties.

Table 5*General Distribution of the Outcomes of Proposals Concerning Teachers Submitted to the GNAT (TBMM) by Political Parties*

PARTIES	Answered	Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered	Answered After the Deadline	Declared useless Due to the End of the Legislative Term	15-Day Response Period Ongoing	TOTAL
AK PARTY	21	4	23	2	0	50
BBP	0	0	1	0	0	1
DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM	120	133	352	22	2	629
CHP	587	384	920	93	3	1987
DEVA	0	0	2	0	0	2
DSP	5	1	2	0	0	8
GELECEK	0	1	5	0	1	8
İYİ PARTY	35	12	96	1	0	144
MHP	174	246	387	21	0	828
SP	3	1	8	0	1	13
TİP	0	0	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	945	782	1797	139	7	3671

A total of 3,671 proposals submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT) revealed the approaches of political parties toward addressing issues related to the teaching profession. These proposals have been categorized as “Answered”, “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered”, “Answered After the Deadline”, “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, and “15-Day Response Period Ongoing”.

The majority of proposals fall into the categories of “Answered After the Deadline” (1,797 proposals, 48.94%) and “Announced in Official Papers as Not Answered” (782 proposals, 21.31%), which indicates that most parliamentary proposals are not addressed within a timely manner. Furthermore, 139 proposals (3.78%) were “Declared Null and Void Due to the End of the Legislative Term”, and only 7 proposals (0.19%) remained in the category of “15-Day Response Period Ongoing”.

The AK Party submitted only 50 proposals, making it a party with the fewest proposals compared to the opposition parties. Of these, 42% (21 proposals) were answered on time, 46% (23 proposals) were answered after the deadline, 8% (4 proposals) were announced in official papers as not answered, and 4% (2 proposals) were declared null and void due to the end of the legislative term. These data indicate that the AK Party's effectiveness in submitting proposals is limited. However, the fact that the majority of its proposals were answered may stem from its direct access to government mechanisms as the ruling party.

The CHP, with 1,987 proposals, accounted for 54.13% of all proposals submitted, making it the party most actively raising issues related to the teaching profession. Of these, 29.54% (587 proposals) were answered on time, 46.29% (920 proposals) were answered after the deadline, and 19.32% (384 proposals) were not answered. Additionally, 93 proposals (4.68%) were declared useless due to the end of the legislative term. The high number of proposals submitted by the CHP reflects its prioritization of issues affecting teachers.

However, the fact that 65% of its proposals were not addressed on time highlights the limited effectiveness of parliamentary proposals as a mechanism for resolving such issues.

The MHP, with 828 proposals, emerged as the second most active party on issues related to the teaching profession. Of its proposals, 21.01% (174 proposals) were answered on time, 46.74% (387 proposals) were answered after the deadline, and 29.71% (246 proposals) were not answered at all. Only 2.54% (21 proposals) were declared useless due to the end of the legislative term. The MHP's effectiveness in submitting proposals is relatively low compared to other major parties, with more than 70% of its proposals either answered late or left unanswered.

The DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM submitted 629 proposals, ranking third among the parties. Of these, only 19.08% (120 proposals) were answered on time, 55.95% (352 proposals) were answered after the deadline, and 21.14% (133 proposals) were announced in official papers as not answered. Additionally, 22 proposals (3.50%) were declared useless due to the end of the legislative term. The fact that approximately 76% of the proposals submitted by DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM were either answered late or not answered at all indicates that the issues raised by this bloc through parliamentary proposals were not adequately addressed by the government.

The İYİ Party submitted 144 proposals, of which 24.31% (35 proposals) were answered on time. However, 66.67% (96 proposals) were answered after the deadline, and 8.33% (12 proposals) were not answered at all. Only 1 proposal (0.69%) was declared useless due to the end of the legislative term. The İYİ Party's effectiveness in submitting proposals is limited, and most its proposals were answered late, indicating that its recommendations on educational policies were not addressed in a timely manner.

The contributions of other parties were relatively limited. The Saadet Party (SP) submitted 13 proposals, the majority of which were answered after the deadline. The DEVA Party and the GELECEK Party each submitted 8 proposals, most of which were also answered after the deadline. The DSP submitted only 8 proposals, showing a similar trend. Meanwhile, BBP and TİP submitted only one proposal each, both of which were answered after the deadline. These parties made limited contributions to addressing issues related to the teaching profession.

The distribution presented in [Table 5](#) indicates that the majority of proposals submitted to the GNAT regarding the teaching profession were not addressed on time, and a portion of them were declared null and void due to the end of the legislative term. Opposition parties such as the CHP, MHP, and DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM frequently raised issues related to the teaching profession. However, a significant portion of their proposals were either answered late or left unanswered. While the AK Party submitted fewer proposals overall, the fact that most of its proposals were answered is noteworthy, likely reflecting its position as the ruling party.

Findings on the Distribution of Proposals Related to Teachers Submitted to the GNAT (TBMM) (2002–2024) by Party and Category

The distribution of proposals related to teachers, categorized by political parties, is presented in [Table 6](#).

Table 6*General Distribution of Categories of Proposals Related to Teachers Submitted to the GNAT by Political Parties*

CATEGORIES	AK PARTY	CHP	MHP	DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM	İYİ PARTY	SAADET	DEVA	GELECEK	DSP	BBP	TİP	TOTAL
Teacher Shortages in Specific Locations and Branches	5	348	63	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	440
Teacher Appointments, Staffing Needs, and Surpluses	7	253	139	70	27	1	0	3	2	1	0	503
Working Conditions and Employment Rights	4	135	107	20	14	0	0	0	2	0	0	282
Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations	5	262	52	160	13	0	1	0	2	0	0	495
Regional and Local Educational Problems	0	8	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Teacher Candidates, Pedagogical Formation, Anatolian Teacher High Schools, KPSS, etc.	1	60	33	10	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	110
Teachers' Guesthouses	1	75	14	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	99
Contract Teachers	1	71	34	17	9	0	0	0	2	0	0	134
Professional Development, Career Progression, and Performance Systems	1	31	26	10	6	0	0	1	0	0	0	75
Legal Situations (Investigations, Dismissals, Expulsions, etc.)	2	106	11	113	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	233
Logistical Support and Material Assistance	0	11	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Legal Regulations (Regulations, Directives, etc.)	1	40	21	5	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	72
Retired Teachers	0	7	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Relocation, Branch Changes, and Transfers (e.g., Spousal Transfers)	2	82	69	18	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	177
Teachers' Housing and Other Miscellaneous Issues	7	52	36	15	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	118
Educational Affairs and the Quality of Education and Teachers	0	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Substitute and Temporary Teaching Positions	3	70	39	39	8	2	1	0	0	0	0	162
Teachers Working Abroad	0	2	7	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Teachers with Disabilities	2	48	15	18	6	0	0	1	0	0	0	90
Teachers in Private Schools	1	38	7	30	15	4	0	1	0	0	1	97
Violence Against Teachers	0	18	20	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43
Teachers Who Committed Suicide, Passed Away, Resigned, Were Abducted, or Injured	0	10	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Statistics on the Number of Teachers in Various Areas	4	158	50	34	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	256

CATEGORIES	AK PARTY	CHP	MHP	DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM	İYİ PARTİ	SAADET	DEVA	GELECEK	DSP	BBP	TİP	TOTAL
Interview System Used for Appointments, Exams, KPSS, Application Requirements, etc.	1	15	3	5	3	3	0	2	0	0	0	32
Circumstances Regarding Teachers' Additional Duties, Assignments to Different Roles, and Responsibilities	0	16	12	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	33
Foreign National Teachers	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Teachers Working in Non-School Institutions	0	3	2	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Covid-19, Vaccination, Distance Education, and Teachers	0	18	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
Various Awards, Incentives, and Campaigns for Teachers	1	4	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Teachers Becoming Administrators or Inspectors	0	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
The Status and Problems of Teachers in Specific Branches	0	12	22	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36
Other	1	25	26	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	63
TOTAL	50	1987	828	629	144	13	2	8	8	1	1	3671

According to the distribution in [Table 6](#), the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) submitted 50 proposals, accounting for only 1.36% of the total 3,671 proposals. The party submitted the most proposals in the categories of “Teachers’ Housing and Other Miscellaneous Issues” (7 proposals, 5.93% of its total) and “Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses” (7 proposals, 1.39% of its total). However, it is noteworthy that the AK Party did not submit any proposals in important categories such as “Regional and Local Educational Problems” “Covid-19 and Distance Education” and “Logistical Support and Material Assistance”. This indicates that the party prefers to address these issues through government policies rather than parliamentary proposals. Furthermore, the AK Party’s contributions in other categories were limited to “Statistics on the Number of Teachers in Various Areas” (4 proposals, 1.56% of its total) and “Legal Situations (Investigations, Dismissals, Expulsions, etc.)” (2 proposals, 0.86% of its total).

The Republican People’s Party (CHP) emerged as the most active party, submitting 1,987 proposals, which accounted for 54.13% of the total. The CHP submitted the most proposals in the categories of “Teacher Shortages in Specific Locations and Branches” (348 proposals, 79.09% of the total) and “Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses” (253 proposals, 50.30% of the total). Additionally, the CHP made significant contributions to critical areas such as “Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations” (262 proposals, 52.93% of the total) and “Working Conditions and Employment Rights” (135 proposals, 47.87% of the total). However, the CHP’s contributions were relatively lower in categories such as “Covid-19 and Distance Education” (18 proposals, 75% of the total), “Teachers Working Abroad” (2 proposals, 18.18% of the total), and “Legal Regulations (Directives etc.)” (40 proposals, 55.56% of the total). By actively contributing across

a wide range of categories, the CHP systematically brought teaching profession issues to the parliamentary agenda, with a particular focus on critical topics such as unemployed teachers and regional shortages.

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) ranked as the second most active party with 828 proposals, accounting for 22.56% of the total. The MHP submitted the most proposals in the categories of “Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses” (139 proposals, 27.63% of its total) and “Working Conditions and Employment Rights” (107 proposals, 37.94% of its total). The party also contributed to areas such as “Teacher Shortages in Specific Locations and Branches” (63 proposals, 14.31% of its total) and “Legal Situations (Investigations, Dismissals, Expulsions, etc.)” (11 proposals, 4.72% of its total). Categories with fewer proposals from the MHP included “Covid-19 and Distance Education” (2 proposals, 8.33% of its total), “Violence Against Teachers” (20 proposals, 46.51% of its total), and “Legal Regulations (Directives, etc.)” (21 proposals, 29.17% of its total). The MHP primarily focused on fundamental issues such as unemployed teachers, employment rights, and social conditions, providing substantial contributions in these areas.

The DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM ranked third with 629 proposals, representing 17.14% of the total. The DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM submitted the most proposals in the categories of “Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations” (160 proposals, 32.32% of its total) and “Legal Situations (Investigations, Dismissals, Expulsions etc.)” (113 proposals, 48.50% of its total). The DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM also actively contributed to areas such as “Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses” (70 proposals, 13.91% of its total) and “Substitute and Temporary Teaching Positions” (39 proposals, 24.07% of its total). However, categories with no or minimal contributions from the DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM included “Educational Affairs and the Quality of Education” (0 proposal), “Logistical Support and Material Assistance” (0 proposal), and “Awards and Incentives for Teachers” (1 proposal, 0.16% of the DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM’s total). The DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM primarily focused on regional issues, legal processes, and teachers’ individual circumstances, making significant contributions in these areas.

The İYİ Party submitted 144 proposals, accounting for 3.92% of the total. The party submitted the most proposals in the categories of “Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses” (27 proposals, 5.37% of its total) and “Working Conditions and Employment Rights” (14 proposals, 4.96% of its total). The party’s contributions were limited in areas such as “Substitute and Temporary Teaching Positions” (8 proposals, 4.94% of its total) and “Teacher Shortages in Specific Locations and Branches” (0 proposals). Categories with no contributions from the İYİ Party included “Educational Affairs and the Quality of Education”, “Teachers Working Abroad”, and “Covid-19 and Distance Education”. The İYİ Party primarily focused on issues such as job security, appointment processes, and teachers’ social issues.

Other parties made limited contributions. The Saadet Party (SP) submitted 13 proposals, primarily focusing on the “Appointments and Needs” category. The DEVA Party provided only 2 proposals, making it the party with the least contributions. The GELECEK Party submitted 8 proposals, focusing on areas such as “Surpluses in Staffing”. The DSP, with 8 proposals, made limited contributions, particularly in categories such as “Housing Issues”. The BBP and TİP each submitted only one proposal, both of which focused on minor areas.

With a 54.13% share, the CHP was the most active party in addressing issues related to the teaching profession. The MHP and DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM followed with shares of 22.56% and 17.14%, respectively. The contributions of the İYİ Party were limited to 3.92%, while the AK Party’s proposals accounted for only 1.36% of the total. Other parties made mostly symbolic contributions. This demonstrates that opposition parties

with a significant number of members of parliament have been more active in bringing teachers' issues to the parliamentary agenda.

Findings on the Quantitative Distribution of Proposals Related to Teachers Submitted to the GNAT (TBMM) Between 2002 and 2024 by Legislative Terms

The distribution of proposals related to teachers by legislative terms and categories is presented in Table 7.

Table 7

General Distribution of Categories of Proposals Related to Teachers Submitted to the GNAT (TBMM) by Legislative Terms

CATEGORIES	22 nd Term	23 rd Term	24 th Term	25 th Term	26 th Term	27 th Term	28 th Term	TOTAL
Teacher Shortages in Specific Locations, and Branches	188	57	109	0	26	51	9	440
Teacher Appointments, Staffing Needs, and Surpluses	25	67	180	20	59	113	39	503
Working Conditions and Employment Rights	18	54	93	1	27	77	12	282
Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations	45	63	113	2	104	138	30	495
Regional and Local Educational Problems	0	0	9	0	0	0	1	10
Teacher Candidates, Pedagogical Formation, Anatolian Teacher High Schools, KPSS etc.	8	15	38	2	20	22	5	110
Teachers' Guesthouses	13	16	28	0	8	24	10	99
Contract Teachers	11	45	7	1	37	32	2	135
Professional Development, Career Progression, and Performance Systems	3	5	23	0	23	18	3	75
Legal Situations (Investigations, Dismissals, Expulsions etc.)	5	15	42	0	75	85	11	233
Logistical Support and Material Assistance	2	0	2	0	1	7	0	12
Legal Regulations (Regulations, Directives etc.)	9	24	15	0	13	8	3	72
Retired Teachers	2	3	6	0	0	1	0	12
Relocation, Branch Changes, and Transfers (e.g., Spousal Transfers)	6	22	104	5	19	14	7	177
Teachers' Housing and Other Miscellaneous Issues	2	13	47	4	16	23	13	118
Educational Affairs and the Quality of Education and Teachers	1	0	5	0	1	0	0	7
Substitute and Temporary Teaching Positions	1	3	57	1	18	62	20	162
Teachers Working Abroad	0	0	7	0	1	3	0	11
Teachers with Disabilities	0	0	18	0	23	40	9	90
Teachers in Private Schools	0	2	11	0	2	59	22	96
Violence Against Teachers	0	0	24	0	11	6	2	43
Teachers Who Committed Suicide, Passed Away, Resigned, Were Abducted, or Injured	0	0	8	0	3	4	1	16
Statistics on the Number of Teachers in Various Areas	0	4	77	1	80	81	13	256

CATEGORIES	22 nd Term	23 rd Term	24 th Term	25 th Term	26 th Term	27 th Term	28 th Term	TOTAL
Interview System Used for Appointments, Exams, KPSS, Application Requirements, etc.	1	1	3	0	4	15	8	32
Circumstances Regarding Teachers' Additional Duties, Assignments to Different Roles, and Responsibilities	1	1	19	0	6	6	0	33
Foreign National Teachers	0	1	0	0	3	1	0	5
Teachers Working in Non-School Institutions	0	0	0	2	2	6	0	10
Covid-19, Vaccination, Distance Education, and Teachers	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	24
Various Awards, Incentives, and Campaigns for Teachers	3	2	1	0	1	2	0	9
Teachers Becoming Administrators or Inspectors	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	5
The Status and Problems of Teachers in Specific Branches	0	0	25	0	8	3	0	36
Other	2	7	29	0	10	9	6	63
TOTAL	346	424	1101	39	601	934	226	3671

According to the distribution in [Table 7](#), 346 proposals were submitted during the 22nd Legislative Term, accounting for approximately 9.42% of all proposals submitted across legislative terms. The majority of these proposals focused on the category of Teacher Shortages in Specific Locations and Branches (188 proposals, 54.34%). This indicates that imbalances in teacher distribution and branch-specific shortages were prominent issues during this term. Additionally, 25 proposals (7.23%) were submitted in the category of Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses, and 18 proposals (5.2%) focused on Working Conditions and Employment Rights, highlighting other significant topics of the period. Overall, during the 22nd Legislative Term, regional and branch-based problems related to the teaching profession were more frequently brought to the agenda compared to other issues.

During the 23rd Legislative Term, 424 proposals were submitted, representing 11.55% of the total. During this period, the distribution of proposals was more balanced. The category of Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations stood out with 63 proposals (14.86%), while Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses saw 67 proposals (15.8%), indicating an increased focus on this issue. Additionally, economic matters such as Working Conditions and Employment Rights were significant on the agenda, with 54 proposals (12.74%) submitted. The 23rd Legislative Term reflects a more comprehensive range of issues related to the teaching profession.

The 24th Legislative Term saw the highest number of proposals, with a total of 1,101 proposals, accounting for 29.99% of all proposals. The most prominent category during this term was Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses, with 180 proposals (16.34%). Other notable categories included Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations (113 proposals, 10.26%) and Working Conditions and Employment Rights (93 proposals, 8.45%). This period displayed widespread interest in nearly all categories related to the teaching profession, with discussions focusing heavily on topics such as unemployed teachers and working conditions.

In contrast, the 25th Legislative Term had the lowest number of proposals, with only 39 proposals, representing 1.06% of the total. During this period, proposals were extremely limited and primarily concentrated on the category of Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses (20 proposals, 51.28%). The number of

proposals in other categories was minimal, reflecting a significant decline in legislative activity related to the teaching profession.

During the 26th Legislative Term, 601 proposals were submitted, accounting for 16.37% of the total. A significant portion of these proposals focused on the category of Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations (104 proposals, 17.3%). Other notable categories included Working Conditions and Employment Rights (27 proposals, 4.49%) and Teachers with Disabilities (23 proposals, 3.83%). This term demonstrated a broader scope of issues being addressed regarding the teaching profession.

The 27th Legislative Term saw 934 proposals, representing 25.45% of the total. The most prominent category was Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations, with 138 proposals (14.77%), followed by Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses, which accounted for 113 proposals (12.1%). The diversity and high number of proposals during this term indicate an intense focus on various issues related to the teaching profession.

During the 28th Legislative Term, 226 proposals were submitted, accounting for 6.15% of the total. The most active categories were Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses (39 proposals, 17.26%) and Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations (30 proposals, 13.27%). However, the number of proposals in other categories was relatively low, indicates that issues related to the teaching profession were brought to the agenda less frequently compared to previous terms.

When examining the table as a whole, it is evident that the largest number of proposals concerning the teaching profession was submitted during the 24th Legislative Term (1,101 proposals, 29.99%), while the fewest were submitted during the 25th Legislative Term (39 proposals, 1.06%). The most frequently discussed categories were Teacher Shortages in Specific Locations and Branches, Teacher Appointments, Needs, and Surpluses, and Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations. Topics such as unemployed teachers, regional teacher shortages, and employment rights were consistently discussed across legislative terms. However, the low number of proposals in certain terms highlights that issues related to the teaching profession did not receive sufficient attention on the parliamentary agenda during those periods.

Findings on the Distribution of Proposals Related to Teachers Submitted to the GNAT (TBMM) (2002–2024) by Members of Parliament

Table 8 presents the distribution of proposals related to teachers submitted by members of parliament from the 22nd to the 28th Legislative Terms, highlighting those who were the most active in addressing these issues.

Table 8

Members of Parliament Who Submitted the Most Proposals Related to Teachers in the GNAT (TBMM) Between the 22nd and 28th Legislative Terms

Legislative Terms	Members of Parliament	Occupation	Deputy Period	Party	Number of Proposals	The Most Frequently Raised Category
22 nd Term	Bursa Deputy Kemal DEMİREL	Administrative of Private Education Institute	2002-2011	CHP	158	Teacher Shortages in Specific Locations and Branches
23 rd Term	Kütahya Deputy Alim IŞIK	Agricultural Engineer and Academician	2007-2015	MHP	34	Teacher Shortages in Specific Locations and Branches

Legislative Terms	Members of Parliament	Occupation	Deputy Period	Party	Number of Proposals	The Most Frequently Raised Category
24 th Term	Balıkesir Deputy, Ahmet Duran BULUT	Teacher	2007-2015	MHP	127	Teacher Appointments, Staffing Needs, and Surpluses
25 th Term	İstanbul Deputy Mahmut TANAL	Lawyer	Since 2011	CHP	4	Teacher Appointments, Staffing Needs, and Surpluses
26 th Term	Niğde Deputy Ömer Fethi GÜRER	Industry Engineer	Since 2015	CHP	97	Statistics on the Number of Teachers in Various Areas
27 th Term	Kocaeli Deputy Ömer Faruk GERGERLİOĞLU	Doctor	Since 2018	DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM	100	Legal Situations (Investigations, Dismissals, Expulsions etc.)
28 th Term	Kocaeli Deputy Ömer Faruk GERGERLİOĞLU	Doctor	Since 2018	DTP-BDP-HDP-DEM	32	Special Circumstances, Various Practices, and Allegations

In **Table 8**, the professions, political affiliations, and levels of contribution of members of parliament who submitted proposals related to teachers to the GNAT (TBMM) from the 22nd to the 28th Legislative Terms are displayed. During the 22nd Legislative Term, Kemal Demirel, a CHP member and an administrator of educational institutions, submitted 158 proposals, highlighting the prioritization of issues related to the teaching profession and the CHP's active stance in this area during that period. In the 23rd Legislative Term, Alim Işık, an academic from the MHP, submitted 34 proposals addressing various issues and demands of teachers. Although this number reflects a notable decrease compared to the previous term, it demonstrates that educational issues were approached with a local and academic perspective within the party.

In the 24th Legislative Term, Ahmet Duran Bulut, a MHP member with a teaching background, submitted 127 proposals, indicating that education policies were actively brought to the parliamentary agenda by a representative with direct experience in the profession. In contrast, the 25th Legislative Term stands out as a particularly passive period, with only 4 proposals submitted. However, this can be attributed to the fact that the term lasted only a few months and was followed by an early election. This short transitional period created a pause in addressing issues related to teachers. During the 26th Legislative Term, Ömer Fethi Gürer from the CHP submitted 97 proposals. Despite his engineering background, this demonstrates that educational policies were given significant importance at the party level.

In the 27th and 28th Legislative Terms, Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, a member of the HDP-DEM, submitted 100 proposals in the 27th term and 32 proposals in the 28th term. This reflects the continuation of addressing issues related to the teaching profession across various contexts. Overall, the approach to addressing teacher-related issues varied depending on the priorities of the period, the influence of the political atmosphere, and the professional backgrounds of the members of parliament.

Discussion, Conclusion, And Recommendations

The teaching profession in Türkiye has long been a focal point of public and political attention due to its role as the cornerstone of education and its critical importance in societal development. However, this attention has not resulted in sufficient and effective solutions to the economic, social, and professional challenges faced by teachers. The findings of this study highlight that written and verbal parliamentary

proposals submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (GNAT-TBMM) serve as an important channel for expressing demands and issues related to the teaching profession. Nonetheless, the low response rate to these proposals and the frequent delays in the process reveal the weaknesses in the democratic accountability mechanisms.

Various studies in the literature emphasize that the professional challenges faced by teachers in Türkiye fall under several key themes. According to a study by Esen et al. (2017), the major issues faced by teachers include the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) policies, a decline in professional prestige, inadequate physical conditions and infrastructure, student-related problems, employment rights, and economic challenges. Teachers in Türkiye face significant economic, social, and professional challenges. Key problems include low salaries, the erosion of the profession's status, and uncertainties in appointment processes. In a study by Ünsal (2018), the low status of the teaching profession was attributed to factors such as teacher training institutions, working conditions, economic factors, media portrayals, societal perceptions, teacher qualifications, hierarchical relationships with superiors, and education policies.

Additionally, a study by Kiraz and Kurul (2018) found that teachers who are not appointed often have to work in low-paid and insecure jobs, negatively affecting their professional identity. Furthermore, limited opportunities for professional development and inadequate in-service training programs undermine job satisfaction among teachers. According to Altun and Sarpkaya (2021), the OECD's TALIS 2018 report noted that the rate of professional collaboration among teachers in Türkiye is low and below the OECD average. Teachers primarily participate in standard in-service training programs, but the effectiveness of these programs is often questioned. These challenges directly impact the quality of education and pose a long-term threat to societal development.

This study analyzed 3,671 proposals submitted to the GNAT between 2002 and 2024, which addressed various issues related to the teaching profession. The most frequently raised topics included teacher appointments, economic conditions, and regional teacher shortages. In particular, the issue of "unemployed teachers" has been a recurring concern highlighted by political parties. Teacher shortages or high turnover rates in certain regions of Türkiye contribute to educational inequities. Teacher shortages in rural or disadvantaged areas negatively affect the quality of education (Kızıldaş, 2021; Özdemir & Kazancı-Tınmaz, 2024). However, the focus of parliamentary proposals on repetitive issues indicates that chronic problems within the teaching profession remain unresolved.

The findings reveal that a significant portion of the proposals were either unanswered or answered after the deadline. For example, a large share of proposals submitted by opposition parties fell into the categories of "answered after the deadline" or "announced in official papers as not answered." This indicates a limited responsiveness by the ruling party to the issues raised by the opposition. While the proposals submitted by the AK Party had relatively higher response rates, this reflects the government's prioritization of its own agenda rather than broader educational issues. Notably, the AK Party was responsible for just 1.36% of proposals related to the teaching profession. This indicates that the ruling party tends to avoid addressing these issues through parliamentary mechanisms.

For political parties, the teaching profession serves as a platform for debate and policy development (Küçük & Akpınar, 2022). However, there are significant differences in how the ruling and opposition parties approach these issues. Between 2022 and 2024, opposition parties frequently brought up problems related to teachers' economic rights, appointment processes, and working conditions in their proposals to the GNAT (TBMM). This demonstrates a more participatory approach toward resolving issues related to the teaching

profession. Conversely, the low number of proposals submitted by the ruling party, coupled with their relatively higher response rates, indicates that the government prefers to address these issues through internal mechanisms rather than parliamentary proposals.

While parliamentary proposals provide a platform for addressing problems related to the teaching profession, the findings show that this mechanism remains limited in producing effective solutions. The issues raised in the proposals tend to concentrate on specific periods and are influenced by the political atmosphere of the time. Consistent with findings in the literature, teachers often complain about the frequent changes in education policies and the lack of adequate financial resources (Demirkol et al., 2023). Karataş (2024) found that the necessary steps to elevate the teaching profession to a professional status have not been taken, with new legislative drafts being prepared instead of revising existing laws. However, a lack of sufficient political will to address these issues and the structural limitations of the parliamentary proposal system hinder its capacity to offer effective solutions.

Although the teaching profession is central to education policies, the findings indicate that the proposals submitted to the GNAT (TBMM) highlight the chronic nature of teachers' problems and the ongoing inadequacies in finding concrete solutions to these issues. The low response rates and slow processing of proposals underscore the need for this mechanism to be used more effectively to ensure democratic accountability.

Parliamentary proposals reveal that different political parties develop varying perspectives on teachers' problems and address these issues in line with their political agendas. Overall, how teacher-related issues are addressed depends on the priorities of the period, the influence of the political atmosphere, and the professional backgrounds of the members of parliament. The educational levels and professional experiences of MPs play a decisive role in shaping education policies. For example, during the 27th Legislative Term, the majority of MPs in parliament were lawyers (127 MPs) and businesspeople (106 MPs), while only 33 MPs had an educational background (Çoban & Ergenekon, 2021). In this context, it can be argued that MPs' perceptions and approaches to education policies are shaped by their professional backgrounds and personal experiences. Therefore, contributions from MPs with diverse professional and academic backgrounds are essential for creating more inclusive and effective education policies.

While evaluating parliamentary proposals, considering the proportional representation of political parties in the GNAT is crucial for an accurate interpretation of the findings. Larger parties with greater parliamentary representation are inherently more likely to submit proposals, whereas smaller parties may rely on alternative political strategies due to their limited legislative power. A proportional analysis of proposal submissions relative to party representation in parliament reveals that opposition parties, despite having fewer seats, have been more active in raising issues related to the teaching profession. This indicates that parliamentary representation influences the extent to which parties engage in educational policy discussions through proposals.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Political parties approach teachers' problems differently: while opposition parties frequently raise issues such as teachers' economic rights, appointment processes, and working conditions, the ruling party's proposals are limited and focus primarily on its own political priorities. To address the challenges faced by the teaching profession, education policies must be comprehensively restructured. Long-term strategies should be developed with contributions from experts across various disciplines and insights gained from interna-

tional experiences. Teacher training programs should be restructured to emphasize practical applications and align with contemporary needs, while appointment processes should be based on the principles of merit and transparency. Improving teachers' economic and social rights is crucial for enhancing their professional motivation and prestige. Teacher shortages in rural and disadvantaged areas should be addressed, with additional incentives provided to teachers serving in these regions to promote educational equity. Future research could explore the varying approaches of political parties to education policies and their impact on teachers. Comparative analyses could also examine discussions related to the teaching profession in the parliaments of other countries to identify best practices and areas for improvement.



Ethics Committee Approval

This study does not involve the collection of data from human participants, nor does it employ an experimental research design. The analysis is based exclusively on publicly accessible official documents. As such, the research does not fall within the scope of studies requiring prior approval from an ethics committee, in accordance with relevant national and institutional guidelines.

Peer-Review

Externally peer-reviewed.

Author Contributions

Conception/Design of Study- T.A., E.A.; Data Acquisition- T.A., E.A.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- T.A., E.A.; Drafting Manuscript- T.A., E.A.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- T.A., E.A.; Final Approval and Accountability- T.A., E.A.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support

The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Behavioral Intention to Use Cryptocurrencies Among Bank Employees in the West Bank



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Abstract

Cryptocurrencies have been increasingly accepted worldwide; however, their applications in financial systems are still limited. Global research on cryptocurrencies adoption is extensive; studies specifically on the West Bank are relatively scarce. This distinction is crucial as it underscores the unique contribution of this study to the application of the UTAUT2 model in order to understand cryptocurrency adoption among bank employees in the West Bank. The purpose of this paper is to identify bank employees' behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency in the West Bank. To that end, the researchers employed seven variables to collect and analyze the data. These variables were Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Hedonic Motivation, Price/Value, and Habit. The researchers added two more variables to the model: the Perceived Risk and Legitimacy. The analysis was based on an online questionnaire administered to 380 bank employees. After data collection, the researchers used the Structural Equation Modeling for analysis. The main findings showed that 95.8% of the participants were familiar with cryptocurrency. Of these, 30.3% expressed an interest in investing in cryptocurrencies. However, only 8.4% had actually invested in it. The majority of those investors (84.3%) were males aged 26-45 years old. Furthermore, factors like Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Hedonic Motivation, Price/Value, and Legitimacy showed a positive and significant effect on behavior intention to adopt cryptocurrency. In contrast, the Facilitating Conditions, Habit, and Perceived Risk did not significantly influence users' intention to adopt cryptocurrency. The study also revealed a number of practical implications, including strategies to boost cryptocurrency adoption, enhancing legitimacy through clear regulations, developing cost-effective mining programs, and emphasizing practical benefits for high-income males interested in investing in cryptocurrencies. Based on these findings, the researchers recommend promoting social influence and ease of use through training to boost hedonic motivation and highlighting financial benefits like cost savings and lower fees while addressing price volatility.

Keywords cryptocurrency · UTAUT2 model · behavioral intention · the West Bank · financial systems.

Jel Codes G21, N25, O16, O33



“ Citation: Sholi, S., Antonovica, A., Curiel, J. d. & Aydogan, M. (2025). Behavioral intention to use cryptocurrencies among bank employees in the West Bank. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 189-220. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1562786>

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Background

The amazing advancement of technology has fundamentally changed every aspect of human existence, including how we handle financial transactions (Glebova and Desbordes, 2020). Following developments in stock exchanges and mobile banking, the world is currently seeing a fascinating change in which digital currencies (new electronic payment systems) are replacing conventional money. Digital currency is a creative method of money exchange that uses technology (Kavanagh and Dylan-Ennis, 2020). A significant advancement in this area is the integration of technology and finance, also known as financial technology (FinTech). The growth of FinTech, as described by Arner et al. (2015) and Khan (2024), is an ongoing process in which finance and technology have evolved together, leading to both evolutionary and disruptive innovations such as peer-to-peer lending, mobile payments and crowdfunding. FinTech or financial technology refers to the integration of technology into financial services to enhance their delivery and efficiency. This broad field includes a number of applications ranging from mobile banking and online payment systems to blockchain technology. FinTech represents a transformative wave in the financial services industry and is reshaping how consumers and businesses interact with money. This transformation is driven by advancements in technology, regulatory changes, and evolving consumer preferences.

Due to FinTech advancements, there has been a greater need for digital currencies to enable quick, easy and low-cost financial transactions (Jackson, 2024). New digital currencies, known as cryptocurrencies, were developed using cryptographic methods to replace conventional money (Li, 2024). With the 2008 debut of Bitcoin, the rise of cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology sparked a revolutionary shift in financial technology, thus establishing them as widely recognized innovations within the financial sector (Kayani and Hasan, 2024). Bitcoin was introduced in 2008 when the anonymous creator of blockchain technology "Satoshi Nakamoto" published a paper titled "Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System", secured by cryptography, designed to enable people to connect and exchange digital tokens securely (Nakamoto, 2008). As awareness of the benefits of cryptocurrency is growing, it is gaining popularity as a payment method and can become a major global medium of exchange (Yu et al., 2024). Cryptocurrency also functions without the interference of rules or oversight from governments. Because cryptocurrencies are decentralized, people have more influence over their financial transactions (Nakamoto, 2008).

Recently, there has been a surge in the global adoption of cryptocurrencies (Wu et al., 2022). However, the adoption rate of cryptocurrencies has been limited due to concerns over their potential use in money laundering, terrorism financing, and tax evasion (Lim, 2022; Sneek, 2024). Despite these challenges, cryptocurrency continues to be regarded as a technological advancement for financial institutions (Chen et al., 2021). Researchers have become more interested in cryptocurrency due to its attractiveness. A number of studies have investigated the adoption of cryptocurrency: Tamphakdiphanit and Laokulrach, 2020; Ayedh et al., 2021; Chengyue et al., 2021; Alaklabi and Kang, 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Ramachandran and Stella, 2022; Bommer et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023; Atellu, 2024. Nonetheless, there is a lack of academic research on cryptocurrencies in relation to the West Bank.

The West Bank Financial System

The components of the financial system in the West Bank are the Palestine Monetary Authority (PMA), the financial institutions, and the Palestine Exchange. The PMA, established in 1994, following the creation of the Palestinian National Authority, acts as the central bank (PMA, 2022). Financial institutions are categorized into depository financial institutions (commercial and Islamic banks) and non-depository financial institutions (insurance, leasing, brokerage, mortgage, specialized financing companies, electronic payment, and money exchange companies). Depository financial institutions are supervised by the PMA, whereas non-depository institutions are overseen by both the PMA and the Palestinian Capital Market Authority (PCMA) (PMA, 2022). The PCMA manages the Palestine Exchange (Association of Banks in Palestine, 2022). This study investigates the reasons that motivate bank employees in the West Bank to accept and use cryptocurrencies. Although many people are familiar with cryptocurrencies, not that many are actually using them. Therefore, there is a need for a better understanding and more research on them in this area. This viewpoint is crucial because the recognition of cryptocurrency as a legitimate form of cash or a means of payment will determine how far it may expand. With new information and awareness of the factors influencing current, prospective, and non-cryptocurrency users, this research can have support in expressing the criteria essential for effective cryptocurrency acceptance among bank workers. Furthermore, by conducting this study, more information will be available describing the relationship between the application of digital currency and the extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) model.

Financial markets may be adversely affected by world events such as wars, pandemics, economic downturns, natural disasters, and political instability; thus, investors become more risk averse as an outcome of increasing the uncertainty and vulnerability within these markets (Kamal et al., 2023). As a result, many investors turn to alternative investment options for safety, leading cryptocurrencies to be one such option during political uncertainties (Colon et al., 2021; Kevser, 2022).

Banks in the West Bank face global and local challenges. These challenges, shaped by ongoing political conflicts and economic instability, limit access to global financial networks, restrict the movement of goods and people and hinder digital infrastructure development (Hinn and Harker, 2024), thus impacting FinTech growth. Additionally, limited access to traditional banking and geopolitical restrictions, let alone regulatory and infrastructure barriers, such as inadequate digital systems and restrictive financial policies, must be addressed for effective FinTech strategies (Hurani, 2024). The West Bank's socio-economic conditions have led to growing interest in alternative solutions like cryptocurrencies. These currencies enable individuals to manage their finances without physical banks, allowing the banking sector to reach underserved populations and provide financial services. As Hamilton (2024) notes, cryptocurrencies can offer better access to banking and financial inclusion for individuals in underdeveloped countries that lack traditional banking services.

Significance of the Study

It has been shown that the overall attitude of bank employees toward cryptocurrency is somehow encouraging and hence may influence the positive decision of banks on the adoption and use of cryptocurrency (Mahwera, 2022). We expect that the findings of this study will provide valuable insights for policymakers and financial institutions to strengthen the ongoing cryptocurrency adoption initiatives. It may also inform the development of new strategies or training programs to enhance employees' understanding of cryptocurrencies and their benefits and accordingly contribute to the broader acceptance of cryptocurrency in the

West Bank's financial sector. This could lead to improvement of access to digital financial services and enhancement of economic opportunities for both employees and the general population. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no such study has been conducted in the West Bank.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives were developed for this study:

- To assess knowledge of and attitudes toward cryptocurrency use among bank employees in the West Bank.
- To examine the UTAUT2 model elements affecting bank employees' behavior regarding the use of cryptocurrencies and to provide justification based on the model.
- To assess the extent of bank employees' technological adoption and intentions regarding cryptocurrency use.
- To evaluate the alignment of the UTAUT2 model with the data on bank employees' behavioral intentions to use cryptocurrencies and to develop a framework for practical implications.

The paper has the following sections. The introduction was devoted to discuss the research background, the financial system in the West Bank, significance of the study and study objectives. The second section was devoted to the evolution of cryptocurrencies and the research theoretical framework. The third section introduced the hypotheses related to the variables according to the relevant theories. The fourth section covers the methodology: study design, study setting and timeframe, study population, sample size and technique, demographic data and the additional equations used in the analysis. The fifth section was devoted to demographic data analysis and the modeling analysis framework. The sixth section discussed the results of the hypotheses and their theoretical and practical implications. The last three sections covered the conclusion, the study limitations and future research agenda, an overview and the contributions of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Cryptocurrency

Financial services companies continuously seek innovative ways to enhance their offerings and deliver faster, more efficient services that boost transparency, reduce costs, and improve customer satisfaction (Zheng et al., 2017). Historically, banks and trade associations have always relied on physical media like coins and paper money for value transmission, thus limiting their reach due to physical transportation challenges. The advent of communication and information technology, such as the electrical telegraph, has revolutionized this by enabling rapid information transfer over long distances (Alt et al., 2018). Recent technological advancements have allowed financial service providers, particularly banks, to develop unique corporate networks and systems that facilitate internal communication and operations. Electronic interfaces such as internet banking and ATMs have become integral to customer interactions and have been widely adopted by other financial institutions and exchanges. As a result, the financial services sector has evolved into a digital enterprise where digital interactions have become crucial for connecting global market participants, financial institutions, and customers (Gomber et al., 2017). Cryptocurrency is a significant development in the world of money and finance. Cryptocurrency is an electronic medium of exchange that verifies financial

transfers and controls the creation of new units of money by using encryption. These native digital assets have multiple uses in public blockchain systems with open access, acting as a means of exchange, a store of value, and occasionally even showing characteristics of securities (Hassan et al., 2020; Steinmetz et al., 2021; Jackson, 2024). A blockchain can be described as a distributed digital transaction ledger that is kept in identical copies across several computers under the control of multiple entities (Tabatabaei et al., 2023).

Extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2)

In the last few decades, different theories were proposed to explain or predict how technology would be used and accepted. Venkatesh et al. (2003) established the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) to identify the reason behind this technology adoption. The UTAUT hypothesis was proposed by carefully integrating and synthesizing the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1977), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), Motivational Model (MM) (Davis et al., 1989), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), combined TAM and TPB (C-TAM-TPB), (Taylor and Todd, 1995), Model of PC Utilization (MPCU) (Thompson et al., 1991), Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) (Warner, 1974), and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986). According to Venkatesh et al. (2003), the UTAUT primarily uses four variables in predicting behavioral intentions to adopt technology: Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence and Facilitating Conditions. The model was additionally moderated by four primary variables: gender, age, experience and willingness of use. Venkatesh et al. (2012) contended that the UTAUT model included only technical and operational methods because it emphasized usefulness and ease of use as key determinants of consumers' intentions to use information technology. Then, the UTAUT2 model was proposed. This expanded the UTAUT model by including some variables that considered users' psychology or subjective perception, thus introducing new constructs: Price/Value (PV), Habit (HB), and Hedonic Motivation (HM). This has shifted the model's focus from the organizational to the consumer perspectives. Compared to UTAUT, the extensions introduced in UTAUT2 significantly increased the percentage of variance that is explained by technology use from 40% to 52% and behavioral intention from 56% to 74% (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Many studies have been conducted and have proved that the model is useful for analysis in the context of newly developed technologies. UTAUT2 is frequently employed to evaluate technology adoption in diverse fields, such as financial services (Chang et al., 2020), internet banking and commerce (Lai and Zainal, 2015) and consumer usage intentions (Li et al., 2023).

Based on this, this study has adopted the UTAUT2 model to explore the factors influencing cryptocurrency acceptance among bank employees in the West Bank. The research is grounded in UTAUT2, which builds on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and examines how various factors directly affect technology use intentions.

Study Variables And Hypotheses

Performance Expectancy (PE)

PE as defined by Venkatesh et al. (2003) refers to users' belief that adopting a technology would significantly enhance their productivity and overall performance. PE is created using the five combinations of the perceived usefulness from TAM, extrinsic motivation from MM, relative advantage from IDT, outcome expectations from Social Cognition Theory SCT and job-fit from MPCU. As a combination of these five factors, PE remains the most significant predictor of intention across all evaluation stages (Venkatesh et al., 2003). This factor is widely acknowledged as a critical determinant influencing individuals' intention to adopt and use new technologies (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Several published empirical studies have highlighted the

importance of PE (Khan et al., 2017; Makanyeza and Mutambayashata, 2018). According to Nadeem et al. (2021), the adoption of cryptocurrencies and other similar technologies has a positive effect on consumers' intentions. According to Arias-Oliva et al. (2019), PE was identified as a key factor influencing the adoption and usage of digital money in Spain. Therefore, PE is seen as one of the key factors affecting the adoption of cryptocurrencies.

Furthermore, the related literature consistently identifies performance expectancy as a crucial factor that significantly influences users' behavioral intention and acceptance of technology (Chandler et al., 1987; Venkatesh et al., 2012; Alalwan et al., 2019; Nikolopoulou et al., 2021). Customers are more likely to use and adopt new technology when they perceive it as providing meaningful advantages and improvements in their everyday activities (Ghalandari, 2012). In addition, cryptocurrencies have been used to provide individuals with secure and confidential methods of managing their savings and funds.

The following hypothesis was proposed and tested:

H1: Performance Expectancy has a positive influence on the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency.

Effort Expectancy (EE)

EE as defined in UTAUT2 refers to the level of ease associated with consumers' use of new technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003). This plays a significant role in shaping their intention toward adopting such innovative mediums (Merhi et al., 2019). Three different design combinations were used to create EE: ease of use from IDT, perceived ease of use from TAM, TAM2 and complexity from MPCU. Many practical field studies have stressed the significance of EE or related issues such as the perceived ease of use in positively influencing users' intention to adopt a technology (Alalwan et al., 2017; Rodrigues et al., 2016). The extent to which a technology's usability influences its widespread adoption and acceptance remains a topic of debate (Lu, 2021). Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that the adoption of technologies, like cryptocurrencies, is positively correlated with the level of effort that users commit to learning them (Kishore and Sequeira, 2016; Farah et al., 2018; Moon and Hwang, 2018). Ramayah (2006) found that Effort Expectancy positively and significantly influenced users' intention. Based on this, it is anticipated that users in the West Bank will have a higher likelihood of adopting a cryptocurrency if it is perceived as useful and requires less effort to perform tasks. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed and tested:

H2: Effort Expectancy has a positive influence on the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency.

Social Influence (SI)

As humans are always subjective to the environments in which they interact socially and culturally, it is reasonable to say that social influence shapes an individual's behaviors (Jayendra and Srikanth, 2018). SI refers to the degree to which an individual perceives the opinions and beliefs of others regarding the usage of a particular technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003). SI was created using three variables from pre-existing models: subjective norms from TAM2, social factors from MPCU and images from IDT. Factors such as family, friends, mentors and peers within one's social life play an important role in shaping this influence (Rana et al., 2017). It is assumed that people frequently check with their social network before implementing new technology and their decisions may be impacted by what other people find significant (Salem, 2019). Several empirical studies have demonstrated that Social Influence has a significant positive impact on the adoption of a new technology (Moon and Hwang, 2018; Greeff, 2021). Raeisi and Behboudi (2016) and Adapa et al. (2018)

both underscored the crucial role of SI in shaping the intentions of technology adoption. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3: Social Influence has a positive influence on the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency.

Facilitating Conditions (FC)

FC can be defined as the user's confidence in the existence of institutional support and infrastructure to aid in the use of a specific technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003). There are three main structures of FC: facilitating conditions from MPCU, behavioral control from TPB, and compatibility from IDT. When individuals have access to the necessary resources and support, they are more likely to adopt technology (Alalwan et al., 2017). Technology is only beneficial if users believe that there is a strong support system in place to help them learn how to use it. Therefore, the effectiveness of a technological use is dependent on the presence of FC in a particular setting (Canziani and MacSween, 2021). Martins et al. (2014) argued that facilitating conditions have a substantial impact on digital banking users. Therefore, these conditions enhance the availability of essential devices and knowledge required to execute quicker transactions using blockchain technology. Previous research indicated that FC influenced the adoption and use of technology (Khan et al., 2017; Chow et al., 2019). Given these findings, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H4: Facilitating Conditions have a positive influence on the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency.

Hedonic Motivation (HM)

HM refers to the positive emotions, such as joy, pleasure and happiness, that individuals experience when using a particular technology (Venkatesh et al., 2012). These emotional responses and pleasures that result from using and adopting the technologies play a significant role in influencing individuals to accept and adopt technology (Shaw and Sergueeva, 2019). According to Al-Amri et al. (2019) and Puspanegara et al. (2024), HM has been found to significantly influence consumers' intention to invest in cryptocurrencies. The pleasure and happiness that arise from using technology have a significant influence on behavioral intention (Childers et al., 2001). Brown and Venkatesh (2005) hypothesized that HM would have a significant impact on the intention to use technology. Additionally, users who find that using blockchain technology is enjoyable, fun, and cheerful are more likely to be motivated to use it more productively. This increased engagement requires less effort and enhances the perceived value of the technology (Moon and Kim, 2001; Cheng et al., 2006). Kim and Yoo (2020) found that HM significantly influenced user acceptance of technology. Based on the findings of past research, this study hypothesizes a positive relationship between hedonic motivation and the intention to invest in cryptocurrency. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H5: Hedonic Motivation has a positive influence on the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency.

Price/Value (PV)

The concept of PV refers to the mental evaluation of the balance between the financial cost and the advantages of using a technology. This evaluation can result in a positive or negative PV, depending on whether the perceived benefits outweigh the monetary expenses associated with using the technology (Venkatesh et al., 2012). The willingness of users to adopt a technology tends to increase when the Price/Value exceeds the financial cost (Beh et al., 2021). Empirical evidence reveals that perceived value is a key factor in influencing customers' intentions to adopt internet banking services. Similarly, the financial benefits provided by Internet banking play a significant role in driving its adoption (Ho and Ko, 2008). Previous research has revealed that the perception of price greatly influences the intention of buyers (Eneizan et al.,

2016). Escobar-Rodríguez and Carvajal-Trujillo (2014) showed that PV had a favorable influence on the desire to utilize after substituting price savings for it. Additionally, when users believe that the benefits or value of cryptocurrency exceed its costs, this perceived value will positively influence their intention to use the technology (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H6: Price/value has a positive influence on the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency.

Habit (HB)

HB can be defined as the extent to which individuals perform behaviors automatically because of previous learning (Venkatesh et al., 2012). It can be distinguished in two ways: first, as a behavior that has been previously established (Kim and Malhotra, 2005), and second, as a Behavior that an individual perceives as an automatic behavior (Lamayem et al., 2007). A recent research showed that the regular practice of habits is a significant predictor of future technology usage trends (Kim and Malhotra, 2005). HB reduces the likelihood of customer discontent by creating an emotional bond with a product through frequent use. It has also been found to positively influence individuals' intentions to use and adopt technology (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Limayem et al. (2007) explored how HB affected the continuity of information systems usage, and they showed how it moderated the relationship between intentions and information systems use. It was predicted on the idea that customers do not yet understand online Bitcoin payments well enough to regard them as routine. Sham et al. (2023), looking at consumers' acceptance of cryptocurrencies, found that they were sufficiently aware of Bitcoin as a simple online payment option that increased productivity. Roos (2015) revealed that habit was a crucial factor driving behavioral intentions to adopt Bitcoin as a payment method. On mobile banking, Win et al. (2021) found that HB was the primary element influencing consumers' behavioral intentions. These findings show that users who frequently trade and invest in cryptocurrency are likely to have a significant impact on their intention to keep using it in the future. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H7: Habit has a positive influence on the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency.

Perceived Risk (PR)

The term Perceived Risk refers to the degree of insecurity and unforeseen concerns that users may have while investing in goods and services (Lim, 2003). Recent studies have investigated the relationship between perceived risk and the intention to adopt financial technology. Liébana et al. (2014) conducted a study on the adoption of new technology for payment. In their study, they highlighted the significance of the PR, noting that concerns about potential financial loss could greatly affect the adoption of payment services. According to Chen (2008), Lu et al. (2011) and Kim et al. (2010), PR could crucially impact users' trust in mobile payment systems and thereby diminish their intention to use such new payment technologies. Khan et al. (2017), in their research on online banking usage intentions, found that perceived security played a key role in shaping behavioral intentions. In the context of cryptocurrency, Mendoza-Tello et al. (2018) found that PR did not significantly affect the intention to adopt cryptocurrencies for online payments. In their study on cryptocurrency investments, Massarczyk et al. (2019) showed that investors who expected to avoid the total loss of their cryptocurrency investments were more willing to use cryptocurrencies. In contrast, investors who took on more risk in their investments typically intended to use cryptocurrencies more in order to maximize their gains. Cryptocurrencies face adoption challenges due to their value volatility, lack of operational assurance, and pricing instability. Additional issues include irreversible transactions, irretrievable keys, and wallet theft (Kubát, 2015; Ciaian et al., 2016). Given the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H8: Perceived Risk has a negative influence on the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency.

Legitimacy (LG)

LG is the generalized perception or assumption that an entity's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed framework of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman, 1995). It involves aligning a firm's activities and outcomes with societal values, norms and expectations. For an organization to be deemed legitimate, it must engage in appropriate activities and gain acceptance from stakeholders for resource exchanges. These aspects are known as conforming and strategic legitimacy (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990). According to Almahendra et al. (2024), LG in cryptocurrency adoption refers to the perception that an entity's actions are appropriate within societal norms and values encompassing alignment with societal beliefs (normative legitimacy), adherence to legal and regulatory standards (regulative legitimacy), and consistency with existing beliefs (cognitive legitimacy). All of these are essential for establishing cryptocurrencies as valid and trustworthy and for fostering public engagement and confidence.

There is no well-defined authority overseeing cryptocurrency systems, thus leaving a gap in the responsibility for transaction integrity. Cryptocurrencies need strict regulations to prevent money laundering and terrorism due to their anonymity and accessibility issues (Cunha et al., 2021). Bitcoin, in particular, is often used by hackers on the dark web for illicit activities such as drugs, counterfeit documents, and weapons. This study examines the extent of the legitimacy of cryptocurrency in the West Bank. Based on the previous discussion, the following hypothesis was tested:

H9: Legitimacy has a positive influence on the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency.

Methodology

This section is devoted to the research methodology used in this study. The methodology provides a detailed description of the study design, study setting, population, sampling, and data collection tools. The section ends with the use of SPSS 22 and equations for the analysis of the collected data.

Study Design

This study employed the UTAUT2 model (see [Figure 1](#)) and used a cross-sectional design, focusing on bank employees in the West Bank. A self-administered online questionnaire was used to facilitate easy access to the sample, saving time and effort. The researchers believe that a cross-sectional approach is the most suitable for achieving the study's objectives.

Figure 1
UTAUT2 Model



Source: adapted from Venkatesh et al. (2012).

Study Setting and Timeframe

An anonymous self-administered online questionnaire was administered to bank employees in the West Bank. The West Bank has three regions: the Northern West Bank, representing 20.5% of total bank employees; the Middle West Bank, representing 66% of total bank employees; and the Southern West Bank, representing 13.5% of total bank employees. This study was conducted from April 26 to May 29, 2023.

The researchers developed a questionnaire based on the literature review and the constructs of the UTAUT2 model.

Sections of the questionnaire:

- Demographic data of the participants: gender, age, place of work, job title, academic qualification, years of bank experience and monthly income.
- Knowledge, desire to invest and participants' investments in cryptocurrency.
- Instrument of the study: proposed by Venkatesh et al. (2012) and adapted for the cryptocurrency context with 24 questions measuring the 7 UTAUT2 constructs; six questions based on scholarly articles to measure the two additional factors in the model, which is included in Table 1. Sociodemographic data were also collected for comparisons (Tables 2 and 3). A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to minimize cognitive biases, reduce confusion for participants, and ensure high-quality data. A pilot test sample of 20 people was conducted to ensure its clarity and ease of administration and to estimate the time required to complete the questionnaire by the participants.

Table 1
Study variables

No	Variables	Items	Reference
1	Performance expectancy	4	

No	Variables	Items	Reference
2	Effort Expectancy	4	Venkatesh, et al., 2003
3	Social Influence	3	
4	Facilitating Conditions	4	
5	Hedonic Motivation	3	
6	Price/Value	3	Venkatesh, et al., 2012
7	Habit	3	
8	Perceived Risk	3	Lim, 2003
9	Legitimacy	3	Suchman, 1995

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2

Questionnaire questions on knowledge and experience about cryptocurrency among participants.

No	Questions	Answers
1	Have you heard about cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin or ethereum?	Yes/no
2	Do you have the desire to invest in cryptocurrencies?	Yes/no
3	Have you invested in cryptocurrencies before?	Yes/no
4	If yes, how much have you invested?	a. less than 1000 \$ b. 1001-5000 \$ c. 5001-10000 \$ d. above 10000 \$

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3

Questionnaire questions based on the UTAUT2 model

Constructs	Items	Questions
Performance Expectancy	PE1	I find cryptocurrencies useful in my daily life.
	PE2	Using cryptocurrencies increases my chances of achieving my important tasks.
	PE3	Using cryptocurrencies increases my productivity.
	PE4	Using cryptocurrencies helps me accomplish things more quickly.
Effort Expectancy	EE1	Learning how to use cryptocurrencies is easy for me.
	EE2	My interaction with cryptocurrencies is clear and understandable.
	EE3	I find cryptocurrencies easy to use.
	EE4	It is easy for me to become skillful at using cryptocurrencies.
Social Influence	SI1	People who are important to me encourage me to use cryptocurrencies.

Constructs	Items	Questions
	SI2	People who influence my behavior encourage me to use cryptocurrencies
	SI3	People who I do value their opinions encourage me to use cryptocurrencies.
Facilitating Conditions	FC1	I have the resources (software and hardware) necessary to use cryptocurrencies.
	FC2	I have the knowledge necessary to use cryptocurrencies.
	FC3	Cryptocurrencies are compatible with the other technologies I use.
	FC4	I can get help from others when I have difficulties using cryptocurrencies
Hedonic Motivation	HM1	Using cryptocurrencies is fun.
	HM2	Using cryptocurrencies is enjoyable.
	HM3	Using cryptocurrencies is entertaining.
Price/Value	PV1	Cryptocurrencies services are reasonably priced.
	PV2	Cryptocurrencies services offer good value for money.
	PV3	At the current price, using cryptocurrencies provides good value.
Habit	HB1	The use of cryptocurrencies has become a habit.
	HB2	I am addicted to using cryptocurrencies.
	HB3	I must use cryptocurrencies.
Perceived Risk	PR1	Using cryptocurrencies is risky.
	PR2	There is too much uncertainty associated with the use of cryptocurrencies.
	PR3	Compared with other currencies/ investments, cryptocurrencies are riskier.
Legitimacy	LG1	Using cryptocurrencies is legal.
	LG2	Using cryptocurrencies does not violate the social and law standards or rules.
	LG3	Cryptocurrency has no scams or misconduct aspects.
Behavioral Intention	BI1	I intend to use cryptocurrencies in the future.
	BI2	I will always try to use cryptocurrencies in my daily life.
	BI3	I plan to use cryptocurrencies in the future.
	BI4	I predict I will use cryptocurrencies in the future

Constructs	Items	Questions
Source: own elaboration.		

Study Population

The research sample comprised all bank employees in the West Bank. This study sought to determine how these bank employees' intentions to use cryptocurrency are influenced by their perceptions and attitudes toward it. These participants were chosen for their relevant knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors regarding cryptocurrency. However, the researchers excluded the participants in the pilot test (20) and the participants who provided random or illogical answers (14). These participants failed to read the questionnaire well before its completion.

Sample Size, Sampling Technique and Demographic Data

This study explores the intentions of banking sector employees in the West Bank to use cryptocurrency. This sector includes 13 major banks. Of these, seven were Palestinian and six were foreign with 378 branches. The banking sector encompasses commercial banks, Islamic banks, and investment banks. Notably, commercial banks handle over 90% of the banking operations in the West Bank. These include granting loans, capital, and deposits (PMA, 2022).

The sample size was calculated using a 95% confidence level and a 0.05 estimated sample error on either side of the proportion. The total number of bank employees in the West Bank was 5,775 (Monetary Authority and the Association of Banks in Palestine publications 2022). The number of bank employees is distributed as follows:

- 1) 1,185 employees were in the Northern West Bank, representing 20.5% of the total bank employees.
- 2) 3,809 employees in Middle of the West Bank, representing 66% of the total bank employees.
- 3) 781 employees were in the Southern West Bank, representing 13.5% of the total bank employees.

The Richard Geiger equation was selected for the sample size calculation due to its precision in finite populations, especially with expected non-responses. The equation adjusts for the population size, optimizing the sample size and reducing costs. Using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error ($Z = 1.96$, $d = 0.05$), the equation balances precision and reliability. With a conservative estimate ($p = 0.50$) and a 15% increase for non-responses, it ensures a representative sample. The Geiger equation is widely used in social science and behavioral studies for its adaptability and accuracy. According to Israel (1992), such formulas are crucial for accurate survey estimates while managing resources.

$$n = \frac{\left(\frac{z}{d}\right)^2 \times (0.50)^2}{1 + \frac{1}{N} \left[\left(\frac{z}{d}\right)^2 \times (0.50)^2 - 1\right]}$$

$d = 0.05$ $z = 1.96$ $N = \text{population}$ $n = \text{sample size}$

Based on the above equation, the minimum calculated sample was 361 employees used to assess the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrency. To compensate for the non-responding employees, we added an extra 54 employees ($\approx 15\%$) to the calculated sample. A total of 415 soft copies of the questionnaire were distributed (the minimum number required and the extra 15%). A total of 394 participants completed and answered the questionnaire (response rate was 94.9%) 14 copies of the questionnaire were excluded because of random and illogical answers. The number of valid copies of the questionnaire for analysis was 380.



The study participants were selected using a convenient sampling technique. However, great care was taken to select bank employees in the West Bank from all districts that are equal to their proportion in the total eligible study population through an online questionnaire. This approach allowed the researchers to reach a broad sample of participants across various banks.

Additional Equations for the Analysis

Most of the statistical analysis was done using SPSS 22. However, some additional equations were used for the analysis:

- Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = $\frac{\sum \lambda^2}{N}$
($\sum$ Standardized factor loading²)/N, where N is the number of indicators of the construct.
- Composite Reliability (CR) = $\frac{(\sum \lambda)^2}{(\sum \lambda)^2 + \sum (1 - \lambda^2)}$
($\sum$ Standardized factor loading)² / {($\sum$ Standardized factor loading)² + $\sum$ (1- Standardized factor loading²)}
- HTMT Ratio($Y_1 Y_2$) = $\frac{\text{mean}(R_{Y_1 Y_2})}{\sqrt{\text{mean}(R_{Y_1 Y_1}) \cdot \text{mean}(R_{Y_2 Y_2})}}$
- The Fornell-Larcker criterion states that for a construct to have adequate discriminant validity, the square root of its AVE must be greater than its correlations with other constructs.

Data Analysis

Table 4 provides a summary of the hypotheses tested in the study. It gives an overview of the key concepts. A more detailed discussion of the hypotheses and their development is provided in Section 3: Study Variables and Hypotheses.

Table 4

Summary of the study hypothesis

Hypothesis	Variable	Influence on Behavioral Intention to Use Cryptocurrency
H1	Performance Expectancy	Positive
H2	Effort Expectancy	Positive
H3	Social Influence	Positive
H4	Facilitating Conditions	Positive
H5	Hedonic Motivation	Positive
H6	Price/Value	Positive
H7	Habit	Positive
H8	Perceived Risk	Negative
H9	Legitimacy	Positive

Source: own elaboration.

Demographic Data Analysis

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire responses and the demographic data included in Tables 5 and 6, the study found that 95.8% of the participants were familiar with cryptocurrency. Of these, 30.3% expressed an interest in investing in it. However, only 8.4% had actually invested. Of the investors, 84.3% were males with an average age of 35. Very few investors were over 45 years old. Additionally, 78.1% of those who had invested resided in the Middle West Bank. In terms of job title, 71.8% of investors were employees.

Regarding education, 75% of the investors held a bachelor's degree. Among those with more than 20 years of experience, only a small percentage had invested in cryptocurrencies. Approximately 84.3% of investors had less than 20 years of experience. Income levels showed that 68% of investors were in the high-income bracket. Overall, the data shows that young males with a high income were the most likely to invest in cryptocurrency given its high-risk nature.

Table 6 shows that 71.8% of the study participants were males. In terms of age, 78.7% of the participants were under 45 and 21.3% were over 46. The Middle West Bank accounted for the largest share of participants: 66.3% of bank employees. The job title distribution showed that 84.7% of the participants were ordinary employees. On education, 77.6% of the participants had a bachelor's degree. The experience level was fairly consistent across the board, with employees having 11-15 years of experience and making up 30.3% of the participants, which was slightly more than the other groups. Those with less than 5 years of experience had the smallest representation. As for income, most employees earned more than \$ 1,000, comprising 65.8% of the participants, followed by 31.1% with a moderate income of \$300-\$1,000. A small percentage had a monthly income under \$300.

Table 5

Knowledge and experience about cryptocurrency among participants.

Questions	Answer	Frequency (%)
Knowledge about cryptocurrency	Yes	364 (95.8%)
	No	16 (4.2%)
Desire to invest in cryptocurrency	Yes	115 (30.3%)
	No	265 (69.7%)
Investment in cryptocurrency before	Yes	32 (8.4%)
	No	348 (91.6%)

Source: own elaboration.

Table 6

Demographic characteristics

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	273	71.8%
	Female	107	28.2%
Age	Less than 25 years	22	5.8%
	26-35 years	123	32.4%
	36-45 years	154	40.5%
	46-55 years	57	0,15
	Above 56 years	24	6.3%
Place of work	Northern West Bank	78	20.5%
	Middle West Bank	252	66.3%
	Southern West Bank	50	13.2%
Job title	Manager	18	4.7%
	Head of the Department	40	10.5%
	Employee	322	84.7%
academic qualification	High school	19	0,05

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage
	Diploma	50	13.2%
	Bachelor's degree	295	77.6%
	Master's degree	16	4.2%
Years of bank experience	Less than 5 years	33	8.7%
	6-10 years	96	25.3%
	11-15 years	115	30.3%
	16-20	63	16.6%
	more than 20 years	73	19.2%
Monthly income	Limited (less than \$ 300)	12	3.2%
	Medium (\$300-1000)	118	31.1%
	High (More than \$ 1,000)	250	65.8%

Source: own elaboration.

Modeling Analysis: Framework

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using SPSS 22 to evaluate the measurement model including convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency of the constructs. To assess convergent validity, the researchers measured factor loadings for item reliability, composite reliability (CR) for each construct, and average variance extracted (AVE) (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). In [Table 7](#), the standardized factor loading values varied from 0.792 to 0.949, thus exceeding the minimum required value of 0.50 (Gefen et al., 2000). All of the composite reliability ratings exceeded the 0.70 criterion, indicating the internal consistency of the latent components (Heinzl et al., 2011). The percentage of the latent variable's variance, explained in relation to the random measurement error, is determined by the average variance extracted (AVE) values, ranging between 0.655 for Effort Expectancy and 0.891 for Perceived Risk. All of the variables were above the minimum threshold of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Most predictors in this study, as included in [Table 7](#), were highly reliable. The convergent validity results indicate that the latent constructs were well represented by the observed variables, as they were correlated with each other within the model.

Table 7

Results for the measurement model.

Variable	X	STD	CR	AVE
Performance Expectancy	PE1	0.848	0.908	0.712
	PE2	0.847		
	PE3	0.838		
	PE4	0.844		
Effort Expectancy	EE1	0.821	0.884	0.655
	EE2	0.802		
	EE3	0.823		
	EE4	0.792		
Social Influence	SI1	0.919	0.938	0.833
	SI2	0.914		

Variable	X	STD	CR	AVE
	SI3	0.906		
Facilitating Conditions	FC1	0.801	0.885	0.657
	FC2	0.802		
	FC3	0.827		
	FC4	0.812		
Hedonic Motivation	HM1	0.905	0.931	0.818
	HM2	0.899		
	HM3	0.911		
Price/Value	PV1	0.885	0.916	0.784
	PV2	0.882		
	PV3	0.890		
Habit	HB1	0.913	0.941	0.840
	HB2	0.916		
	HB3	0.922		
Perceived Risk	PR1	0.936	0.961	0.891
	PR2	0.948		
	PR3	0.949		
Legitimacy	LG1	0.922	0.947	0.856
	LG2	0.934		
	LG3	0.920		
Behavioral Intention	BI1	0.808	0.895	0.679
	BI2	0.829		
	BI3	0.822		

Source: own elaboration.

For the evaluation of discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait and Fornell-Larcker criterion (Henseler et al., 2015) were used as an estimator of the correlation between the two latent variables. Table 8 validates the discriminant validity of the latent variables utilized; the coefficients in all cases presented levels below 0.90, as required by the Heterotrait-Monotrait indicator. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which involves holding a comparison between the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE), for each construct, with the construct's correlations with the other constructs. For a construct to have adequate discriminant validity, the square root of its AVE must be greater than its correlations with the other constructs. All of the constructs included in Table 9 meet this criterion. This outcome confirms that each construct is sufficiently unique and that the measurement items are adequately set apart from other ideas.

Table 8
“Heterotrait-monotrait ratios”

	PE	EE	SI	FC	HM	PV	HB	PR	LG	BI
PE										
EE	0.655									
SI	0.363	0.384								
FC	0.592	0.731	0.420							

	PE	EE	SI	FC	HM	PV	HB	PR	LG	BI
HM	0.390	0.342	0.266	0.398						
PV	0.311	0.344	0.290	0.397	0.460					
HB	0.258	0.258	0.105	0.274	0.253	0.401				
PR	-0.119	-0.15	0.013	-0.158	-0.213	-0.266	-0.191			
LG	0.236	0.266	0.089	0.280	0.293	0.285	0.221	-0.282		
BI	0.529	0.561	0.474	0.541	0.477	0.463	0.213	-0.174	0.341	

Source: own elaboration.

Table 9

Fornell-Larcker criterion

	PE	EE	SI	FC	HM	PV	HB	PR	LG	BI
PE	0.844									
EE	0.633	0.809								
SI	0.351	0.371	0.912							
FC	0.572	0.698	0.404	0.810						
HM	0.379	0.332	0.259	0.391	0.904					
PV	0.302	0.333	0.281	0.383	0.447	0.885				
HB	0.247	0.247	0.100	0.267	0.243	0.385	0.917			
PR	-0.115	-0.145	0.013	-0.186	-0.207	-0.258	-0.183	0.944		
LG	0.256	0.256	0.086	0.270	0.284	0.276	0.211	-0.272	0.925	
BI	0.589	0.541	0.457	0.525	0.434	0.448	0.204	-0.168	0.328	0.824

Source: own elaboration.

For evaluating the internal consistency of the constructs, the researchers calculated a Cronbach's alpha, which equals 0.937. **Table 10** shows the excellent internal consistency. That is to say, the scale items were highly correlated and they reliably measured the same construct. This high reliability enhances the validity and robustness of the study findings. In addition, the researchers employed the multiple linear regression analysis at 95% confidence intervals. The analysis revealed a good model fit, which is included in **Table 11** ($P < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.506$ and $R^2 = 0.518$). This shows that the model explains 51.8% of the variance in the dependent variable and reflects moderate to strong explanatory power, capturing a significant portion of the variability and indicating the model's effectiveness in predicting the outcome.

Table 10

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.937	34

Source: own elaboration

Table 11*Model summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	0.720	0.518	0.506	3.21327	0.518	44.212	9	370	0.000	1.376

Source: own elaboration.

The researchers also performed factor extraction to identify the key factors driving the patterns, relationships, and variance in the data. The results included in [Table 12](#) indicate a high level of adequacy and appropriateness for the dataset. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.831 confirms that the data was suitable for factor analysis, while the Chi-square statistic (929.58 with 36 df) suggested that the correlations among variables were meaningful and justified the use of factor analysis. These results support the validity of the factor extraction process and the interpretation of the underlying dimensions in the data. The extraction sums of the squared loadings, included in [Table 13](#), showed that the first two factors explained 53% of the total variance.

Table 12*KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.831
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	929.584
	df	36
	Sig.	.000

Source: own elaboration.**Table 13***Total variance explained*

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of the variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of the variance	Cumulative %	Total
PE	3.501	38.897	38.897	3.501	38.897	38.897	3.032
EE	1.275	14.162	53.059	1.275	14.162	53.059	2.428
SI	0.875	9.719	62.778				
FC	0.783	8.703	71.482				
HM	0.718	7.979	79.461				
PV	0.643	7.141	86.602				
HB	0.507	5.634	92.236				
PR	0.418	4.650	96.885				
LG	0.280	3.115	100.000				

Source: own elaboration

The researchers conducted a collinearity analysis. This analysis indicates that multicollinearity is not an issue. [Table 14](#) shows how the tolerance values varied from 0.421 to 0.867, and they all exceeded the minimum needed value of 0.1. All variance inflation factors (VIF) were between 1.154 and 2.378. All were found to be

well below the threshold of 10, demonstrating that the predictor variables were sufficiently independent and did not show severe multicollinearity.

Table 14
Coefficients

		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	Constant	−0.229	0.942		−.243	.808		
	PE	0.280	0.047	0.294	5974	0.000	0.536	1865
	EE	0.125	0.052	0.132	2381	0.018	0.421	2378
	SI	0.258	0.052	0.205	4993	0.000	0.774	1292
	FC	0.047	0.053	0.049	0.889	0.375	0.437	2289
	HM	0.123	0.051	0.104	2413	0.016	0.702	1425
	PV	0.218	0.055	0.176	3948	0.000	0.654	1528
	HB	−0.084	0.060	−0.056	−1403	0.162	0.815	1227
	PR	−0.027	0.050	−0.021	−0.530	0.597	0.867	1154
	LG	0.162	0.055	0.116	2934	0.004	0.826	1211

a. Dependent Variable: BI

Source: own elaboration.

In summary, the comprehensive assessment of the measurement model's reliability and validity underscores the robustness of the latent constructs. It provides clear evidence of their distinctiveness demonstrating solid discriminant validity while also emphasizing on how well they correlate with the observable variables showing their great convergent validity. These results provide a strong foundation for the study conclusions and analysis.

For evaluation of the chain relation in the cause connecting constructs, using the structural model (Hair et al., 2010), the researchers calculated the relationship between the dependent and independent variables using the multiple linear regression analysis at 95% confidence intervals. This demonstrates the average beta coefficient (b), statistics T, and p-value.

The SEM results included in Table 15 the guidelines of H1, H2, H3, H5, H6, and H9 were significant. These guidelines are Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Hedonic Motivation, Price/Value and Legitimacy. They were significantly correlated with user intention to use cryptocurrency among bank employees in the West Bank. Performance Expectancy ($\beta = 0.294$, $p < 0.001$) was considered a good predictor, followed by Social Influence ($\beta = 0.205$, $p < 0.001$), Price/Value ($\beta = 0.176$, $p < 0.001$), Legitimacy ($\beta = 0.116$, $p = 0.004$), Hedonic Motivation ($\beta = 0.104$, $p = 0.016$) and Effort Expectancy ($\beta = 0.132$, $p = 0.018$). Pertaining to H4, H7, H8, the Facilitating Conditions ($\beta = 0.049$, $p = 0.375$), Habit ($\beta = -0.056$, $p = 0.162$), and Perceived Risk ($\beta = -0.021$, $p = 0.597$) showed that they did not significantly influence bank employees' intention and decision to use cryptocurrency in the West Bank.

Table 15*Results and hypothesis testing*

	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
Performance Expectancy → Behavioral Intention	0.294	5974	<0.001	Accepted
Effort Expectancy → Behavioral Intention	0.132	2381	0.018	Accepted
Social Influence → Behavioral Intention	0.205	4993	<0.001	Accepted
Facilitating Conditions → Behavioral Intention	0.049	0.889	0.375	Rejected
Hedonic Motivation → Behavioral Intention	0.104	2413	0.016	Accepted
Price/Value → Behavioral Intention	0.176	3948	<0.001	Accepted
Habit → Behavioral Intention	-0.056	-1403	0.162	Rejected
Perceived Risk → Behavioral Intention	-0.021	-0.530	0.597	Rejected
Legitimacy → Behavioral Intention	0.116	2934	0.004	Accepted

a. Dependent Variable: BI**Source:** own elaboration.

Results And Discussion

The framework of the model, according to UTAUT2, provides an empirical foundation for many constructs that influence users' intentions and cryptocurrency usage. The behavioral intention of users is influenced by many factors, including Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Hedonic Motivation, Price/Value and Legitimacy. Concerning R^2 , 51.8% of the predictability of user intention was assigned by this model.

Results of data analysis showed that Performance Expectancy (H1) had a significant and positive impact on the intention and decision to use cryptocurrency among bank employees in the West Bank. This result is consistent with the related literature, which found that the performance expectations played a significant role in the adoption of new technologies. For instance, Venkatesh et al. (2003) and Davis, (1989) found that people were more willing to accept new technologies when they thought that their job performance would improve and offer noticeable benefits. This finding is consistent with those of Khazaei (2020) and Alalwan et al. (2019). It stressed the role of Performance Expectancy in encouraging the adoption of new technologies. In the context of the West Bank, its impact on cryptocurrency adoption was heightened by the local economic and technological context influencing bank employees' perceived benefits. Future research should examine these contextual factors and the interaction of variables, like ease of use and social influence, with performance expectancy to provide a better understanding of cryptocurrency adoption drivers and inform regional strategies.

The study indicates that Effort Expectancy (H2) had a significant and positive influence on the intention to use cryptocurrency among bank employees in the West Bank. This study emphasizes that it is crucial to consider how a cryptocurrency's perceived adoption effort and ease of use can impact its adoption in a specific context. This finding concurs with findings in other related research. Effort anticipation played a significant role in the adoption of new technologies. Venkatesh et al. (2003) found that users' acceptance of new technologies, especially financial technologies, was significantly influenced by effort expectation or perceived ease of use. The results are also consistent with findings in several studies in which it was found that Effort Expectancy was significant. These studies include Alalwan et al. (2017); Raman and Don (2013). However, the findings do not concur with other studies that indicated less significance in Effort Expectancy.

Investigations conducted by Gunawan and Novendra (2017) and Gillies et al. (2020) have proposed that Social Influence and Performance Expectancy might have a greater impact on cryptocurrency adoption than Effort Expectancy. These studies indicate that, while ease of use is a key factor, other elements may be more influential depending on the particular circumstances. The positive influence of Effort Expectancy in the West Bank reflects regional factors such as technological familiarity and user support quality, thus highlighting the importance of context in technology adoption factors. This shows that ease of use can be a crucial determinant in environments where users are still becoming accustomed to new technologies. Future research should examine how Effort Expectancy interacts with factors like Performance Expectancy and Social Influence to gain a better and more comprehensive understanding of cryptocurrency adoption and refine strategies for different regions.

Social influence (H3) had a significant and positive influence on the intention to use cryptocurrency among bank employees in the West Bank. This finding shows the influence of social factors on technology adoption, including peer endorsements and organizational norms. The results are consistent with previous research, which identified social influence as a key factor in determining the acceptance of new technologies. Venkatesh et al. (2003) showed how social influence shaped people's beliefs and behaviors, which had a significant effect on technology adoption. Davis et al. (1989) also pointed out that social factors could raise the perceived value of new technology, which in turn affects how widely the technology is adopted. The findings are consistent with those by Wang et al. (2009); Khazaei (2020); Alomari and Abdullah (2023), who found that Social Influence was significant on the intention to use technology. However, this conclusion does not concur with some studies that showed that social influence was less significant with regard to the intent to use a cryptocurrency. Ebizie et al. (2022) and Chotiyaputa (2023) confirm that factors like Performance Expectancy and Facilitating Conditions may play a more dominant role than Social Influence in driving cryptocurrency adoption. The significant role of Social Influence in the West Bank reflects regional dynamics such as strong community ties and the importance of peer recommendations. This highlights the need to consider local social contexts when evaluating cryptocurrency adoption. Future research should explore how Social Influence interacts with factors such as Perceived Risk, Performance Expectancy, and Effort Expectancy to gain deeper insights and develop more effective region-specific strategies.

This study also revealed that the Facilitating Conditions (H4) did not significantly impact the intention to use cryptocurrency among bank employees in the West Bank; therefore, the finding was consistent with other research findings. That is, the Facilitating Conditions were less significant. Sheel and Nath (2020) and Almajali et al. (2022) argued that while Facilitating Conditions were relevant, they were not significant in influencing the intent to use cryptocurrency and may not be the primary drivers of adoption when compared to other factors. However, this study results failed to prove the hypothesis and some literature which advocated their importance. Venkatesh et al. (2003) stressed that access to resources and infrastructure is crucial for effective technology adoption. The study result is not consistent with the results arrived at by Arias-Oliva et al. (2019) and Arias-Oliva et al. (2021), who found that Facilitating Conditions had a significant and positive impact on the intention to use cryptocurrencies and highlighted that supportive infrastructure and resources could drive technology adoption. The limited impact of Facilitating Conditions in the West Bank may reflect regional characteristics, such as the greater importance of perceived risk and social influence. This underscores the need to consider multiple factors in technology adoption evaluations.

Regarding H5, the study found that Hedonic Motivation significantly and positively influenced the intention to use cryptocurrencies among bank employees in the West Bank. Specifically, the enjoyment

and excitement of cryptocurrency trading were key drivers for adoption, highlighting that intrinsic pleasure and the novel experience of using cryptocurrencies enhanced users' intention to engage with the use of cryptocurrency. These findings are consistent with Herrero et al. (2017) and Mbeya and Mofokeng (2023) findings. They also found that the intrinsic enjoyment, excitement, and pleasure associated with cryptocurrency significantly boosted users' intentions to adopt these technologies. However, some researchers indicated that Hedonic Motivation did not always be a significant predictor of cryptocurrency adoption among users. Wijaya and Balqiah (2022) wrote that Hedonic Motivation had a direct but non-significant effect on the intention to conduct cryptocurrency transactions. This indicates that it did not strongly influence cryptocurrency use. Chotiyaputa (2023) found that Hedonic Motivation had an insignificant effect on users' intent and behavior, suggesting that it was less important for cryptocurrency adoption. Users' familiarity with basic features may reduce the significance of hedonic aspects. These findings emphasize the need to explore various motivational factors in cryptocurrency adoption and call for further research on how different motivations affect usage.

On H6, the study proved that Price/Value significantly and positively influenced the intention to use cryptocurrencies among bank employees in the West Bank. This is consistent with the results of Jegerson et al. (2023); Puspanegara et al. (2024), who found that the effect of Price/Value on the intention to use cryptocurrency was statistically significant. This means that changes in the perceived financial value of cryptocurrency, such as its potential for high returns or low transaction costs and reasonable price, meaningfully influence the likelihood that bank employees would choose to use cryptocurrency. This finding however does not concur with findings in other research, which showed that Price/Value had less influence on users' intentions to use cryptocurrencies. Wijaya and Balqiah (2022) and Mbeya and Mofokeng (2023) found that the impact of Price/Value on cryptocurrency adoption was less pronounced than expected, suggesting that price volatility and personal financial considerations might reduce its significance. Additionally, they noted that Hedonic Motivation and Habit may have a greater influence on adoption intentions. This discrepancy highlights the need for further investigation into the varying impacts of Price/Value and other factors on cryptocurrency adoption.

Habit (H7) had an insignificant impact on the intention to use cryptocurrency among bank employees in the West Bank. In contrast, previous research, such as the study on mobile learning by Moorthy et al. (2019), showed that Habit was a key factor in influencing users' adoption of new technology. Mbeya and Mofokeng (2023) also revealed that Habit significantly and positively influenced Behavioral Intention to use Bitcoin for online payments. This indicates that established routines and habits are not the major drivers of cryptocurrency adoption. Further research is needed to identify other factors influencing cryptocurrency use.

According to the researchers' framework and data analysis, the results indicate that Perceived Risk (H8) did not significantly affect the intention to use cryptocurrency among bank employees in the West Bank. This is consistent with Jegerson et al. (2023) study which found that concerns about security and financial loss did not notably impact the adoption intentions. These findings indicate that Perceived Risk was not a major factor in this demographic area, underscoring the need for further research to look into other influencing factors. These findings contradict Walton and Johnston (2018) and Wijaya and Balqiah (2022) findings. In their study, they found that the Perceived Risk significantly influenced the intention to use cryptocurrency. This demonstrates that addressing these risks is essential for improving cryptocurrency adoption.

The study highlights a significant positive influence of Legitimacy (H9) on the intention to use cryptocurrencies among bank employees in the West Bank. This finding supports broader technology adoption theories that highlight the role of legitimacy in shaping attitudes toward new technologies. It aligns with the Almahendra et al. (2024) findings. In their study, they found that Legitimacy significantly affected public engagement in the Indonesian crypto market where over 17 million traders and a market value exceeding 720 million USD attested its impact. In the West Bank, where financial and technological systems face distinct socio-political challenges, legitimacy is especially crucial. Bank employees, who are well-versed in financial matters, are particularly sensitive to the credibility of cryptocurrencies. If cryptocurrencies receive government legislation, their willingness to adopt them could signal broader adoption trends in similar contexts. The study also highlights the need for further research into how legitimacy is constructed across different contexts. Understanding the specific mechanisms, such as government policies and public perception, that contribute to cryptocurrency legitimacy is essential for enhancing adoption.

From a theoretical perspective, this research underscores the importance of incorporating technology-specific variables into the UTAUT2 model to better assess Behavioral intentions. The study validates the influence of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Hedonic Motivation, Price/Value, and Legitimacy on cryptocurrency adoption and thus demonstrates the model's relevance in understanding technology acceptance, especially among bank employees in the West Bank.

The study has offered several practical implications to operate the cryptocurrencies more successfully. First, policymakers should prioritize creating a regulatory framework for cryptocurrencies to increase their legitimacy. When cryptocurrencies are officially recognized and supported by government policies, bank employees are more likely to adopt them, leading to broader adoption across the financial sector. In emerging markets, like the West Bank, developing cost-effective mining programs and improving infrastructure can reduce cryptocurrency prices, boosting user intent and adoption.

Second, financial institutions should emphasize the practical benefits of cryptocurrencies, such as faster transactions, lower costs, and improved job performance, to make them more appealing to bank employees. Training programs that highlight these advantages can further encourage adoption by demonstrating how cryptocurrencies can enhance efficiency and reduce costs in daily operations. Emphasizing these benefits would particularly appeal to high-income males aged 26 to 45, who are most interested in investment, as indicated in Tables 5 and 6.

Third, the Effort Expectancy is critical. Financial institutions should focus on creating user-friendly platforms and provide support to make cryptocurrency adoption less intimidating for employees. Clear instructions and accessible training will help ease the transition.

Fourth, bank employees in the West Bank are influenced by peers and social networks. Policymakers and financial institutions should foster peer-to-peer endorsement and create communities of practice to promote cryptocurrency adoption. Social programs and initiatives can increase confidence and willingness to try new technologies.

Fifth, to enhance hedonic motivation, cryptocurrency platforms should offer engaging features such as gamification and interactive interfaces. Financial institutions should highlight the fun and rewarding aspects and showcase success stories and user testimonials. Workshops should be devoted to both the technical and enjoyable elements of cryptocurrencies to attract users.

Sixth, financial institutions should also highlight the economic values of cryptocurrencies, such as lower fees and potential for high returns, to attract new users. Offering clear comparisons between cryptocurrencies and traditional financial systems would help users make informed decisions.

Conclusion

The statistical analysis validates that the extended UTAUT2 model, in addition to incorporating the variables such as Perceived Risk and Legitimacy, effectively measures the behavioral intention to use cryptocurrencies among bank employees in the West Bank. This study revealed that PE, EE, SI, HM, PV and LG significantly impacted the intention to adopt cryptocurrencies. However, FC, HB, and PR did not significantly affect adoption in this context. These results highlight the importance of developing targeted strategies to improve cryptocurrency legitimacy, showcase its performance benefits, leverage social influence, and address both hedonic and financial considerations to drive adoption. This research enriches our understanding of cryptocurrency acceptance in regional contexts and underscores the significance of contextual factors in technology adoption.

In summary, these findings show that the unique economic, technological, and social contexts of the West Bank play an essential role in shaping user intentions toward cryptocurrency adoption. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on technology adoption by validating the UTAUT2 model in the context of cryptocurrency use among bank employees in the West Bank. It builds upon the work of Venkatesh et al. (2003) and Davis (1989), who highlighted the importance of Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy and Social Influence in technology acceptance. Our findings confirm that users in the West Bank are more likely to adopt cryptocurrencies if they perceive them as beneficial to job performance and easy to use. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize the significant role of Social Influence in shaping the intention to use technology, which is consistent with Alomari and Abdullah (2023) and Kim et al. (2022) findings. This study found that Hedonic Motivation significantly impacted the intention to adopt cryptocurrencies among users in the West Bank, with the pleasure and happiness from using technology strongly influencing Behavioral intention. This is similar to the findings in previous studies by Puspanegara et al. (2024); Mbeya and Mofokeng (2024). Furthermore, the study found that Price/Value positively influenced bank employees in the West Bank to adopt cryptocurrencies when perceived benefits outweighed the costs driving the intention to use cryptocurrency. This finding is consistent with Restuputri et al. (2023) finding. The study recommends the creation of a supportive environment for cryptocurrency adoption. Policymakers and financial institutions should enhance Legitimacy through regulation and support. Promoting benefits, like lower transaction costs and efficiency along with user-friendly platforms, Social Influence, and economic and hedonic benefits, will be crucial for encouraging adoption, especially in regions like the West Bank. However, the study revealed that the Facilitating Conditions and Perceived Risk were insignificant factors for cryptocurrency adoption among bank employees in the West Bank. This finding does not concur with the Puspanegara et al. (2024) finding. They found them to be significant factors in cryptocurrency adoption. Additionally, the study indicates that habitual behavior may not be a major driver for cryptocurrency adoption among bank employees in the West Bank. This is not consistent with Restuputri et al. (2023) finding. In their study, Habit was found to be a significant factor in adoption. These discrepancies underline the need for more context-specific research to better understand the complex factors influencing cryptocurrency adoption in different regions.

Limitations And Future Research Agenda

All results were based on self-administered data, thus making it liable to self-desirability bias. However, it is unlikely that participants would spend time giving unreliable and biased answers given their level of professionalism and anonymity of the questionnaire.

Another limitation that we should consider is related to focusing specifically on bank employees. This means that our findings may not fully represent other segments of the population. While the researchers discussed and justified this decision, it would be beneficial for future studies to explore cryptocurrency acceptance among different groups, thus offering a more comprehensive understanding of its societal impact. Additionally, it is worth noting that this research was limited to the West Bank. Assuming the questionnaire had a broader geographical scope or was being conducted in another country, the results might have varied. This demonstrates that further investigation across different regions could provide valuable insights into cryptocurrency acceptance on a global scale. Concerning the variables of the studied model, other variables could be added in order to have a better understanding of the behavioral use of cryptocurrencies.

Study Contributions

This study is expected to make several significant contributions to the field of cryptocurrency adoption, particularly within the context of bank employees in the West Bank.

First, this study has extended the UTAUT2 model by incorporating additional variables such as Perceived Risk and Legitimacy, thus enhancing its ability to predict behavioral intentions toward cryptocurrency use.

Second, this study has provided a detailed analysis of how Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Hedonic Motivation, Price/Value, and Legitimacy significantly impacted the intention to adopt cryptocurrencies, thus offering new insights into the factors driving adoption in this specific regional context.

Third, this study has offered practical implications for increasing cryptocurrency adoption by emphasizing the need to enhance legitimacy, demonstrate clear value, leverage social influence, and address both hedonic and financial considerations. These findings are particularly relevant to the development of targeted strategies that can improve the integration of cryptocurrencies in emerging markets.

Lastly, this study has identified gaps for future research, including the need to explore cryptocurrency acceptance across diverse demographic groups and geographic regions and the need to consider additional variables to further understand Behavioral intentions. This comprehensive approach contributes to a deeper understanding of cryptocurrency adoption and provides a foundation for future research and practical applications.



Ethics Committee Approval	For this study there hasn't been applied any human experiment where is needed ethical approval from the committee.
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- S.S., A.A., J.E.C., M.A.; Data Acquisition- S.S.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- S.S.; Drafting Manuscript- S.S., A.A., J.E.C., M.A.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- S.S., A.A., J.E.C., M.A.; Final Approval and Accountability- S.S., A.A., J.E.C., M.A.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.



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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

Business Intelligence as a Strategic Asset: Enhancing Decision Quality, Effectiveness and Performance in NGOs



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Abstract

The exponential growth of unstructured data has prompted organizations to adopt Business Intelligence (BI) tools. While BI adoption in profit-seeking sectors is well-studied, its use in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) remains underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how BI technologies enhance decision-making quality, organizational effectiveness and performance in NGOs operating in Türkiye. Grounded in the Resource-Based View framework, the study posits that data quality is critical for BI to improve decision-making quality, ultimately leading to improved organizational outcomes. Survey data collected from 178 NGOs reveal findings consistent with the existing research in the for-profit sector. The results demonstrate that NGOs can leverage BI tools to optimize resource allocation and program implementation, align decision-making processes with their missions and goals, better serve their stakeholders, improve program outcomes, and enhance overall organizational effectiveness and performance. This study makes a significant contribution to the literature by highlighting the key role of BI technologies in the non-profit sector. Ultimately, this study underscores the transformative potential of BI technologies in improving decision-making and organizational outcomes in NGOs, offering a valuable foundation for future research and practical applications in the sector.

Keywords

Business Intelligence • Decision-Making Quality • Organizational Performance • Organizational Effectiveness • Non-Governmental Organizations



“ Citation: Helal, M. A. & Taşkın, M. D. (2025). Business intelligence as a strategic asset: Enhancing decision quality, effectiveness and performance in NGOs. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 221-238. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1552780>

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Business Intelligence as a Strategic Asset: Enhancing Decision Quality, Effectiveness and Performance in NGOs

The growth of unstructured data has necessitated the development of automated decision-making tools to enhance organizational and human decision-making (Power & Sharda, 2007). To enhance decision-making (Kulkarni, Robles-Flores & Popovič, 2017), organizations have made substantial investments Business Intelligence (BI) that extracts insights from this data profusion and enhances decision-making speed in organizations. Designed for data-driven decision-making, in this paper, Designed for data-driven decision-making, this paper argues that BI tools have strong potential to enhance NGO performance and effectiveness in fulfilling their altruistic missions by improving decision-making quality. Considering their impact, NGOs are presumed to benefit from reliable data to a greater extent as such data inputs steer BI tools and permit NGOs to better align their choices with their mission, goals, and resources. This study extends the literature by proposing that data quality facilitates BI-supported decision-making, leading to improved decision-making quality, ultimately enhancing NGO performance and effectiveness.

BI empowers organizations to leverage data for insights, informed decisions, adaptation, and competitive advantage in today's data-driven world. It converts vast unstructured data into useful information (Sharma et al., 2021) and primarily enhances decision-making capabilities, subsequently leading to improvements in organizational performance (Felder, 2012) and effectiveness (Turban et al., 2008; Kelidbari & Rayat, 2017). BI tools such as Quick Books Tableau, Microsoft Power BI, Plotly, and Gephi systematically analyze and transform data to provide insights into the organization's historical and current status (Sorensen, 2020). These tools consolidate data, create dashboards and reports, and generate actionable insights, enabling informed inferences and future projections. Ultimately, BI tools offer a faster, more agile, and resourceful response to organizations' necessities (Saucedo-Martínez, et al., 2018). This enhanced responsiveness is particularly critical for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in achieving their missions.

NGOs navigating the complexities of data-driven operations, data quality is paramount. High-quality data are characterized by accuracy, timeliness, completeness, consistency, relevance, and fitness for use (Miller, 1996; Wang & Strong, 1996; Strong, Lee, & Wang, 1997). These fundamental principles of data quality provide the essential bedrock for effective mission fulfillment for NGOs. Conversely, poor data quality can hinder the generation of valuable insights (Chae et al., 2014; Warth, Kaiser & Kügler, 2011) that are crucial for NGOs' program design, resource allocation, and beneficiary targeting. This, in turn, can lead to inefficiencies such as less effective decision-making, increased operational costs, reduced program effectiveness, and ultimately, a diminished ability to achieve their social impact goals (adapted from Redman, 1998).

Decision-making involves selecting one course of action from a range of possibilities through a process of logical thinking. (Owda et al., 2019a). In the context of NGOs, decision-making involves crucial choices, such as allocating resources to specific programs (e.g., education vs. healthcare) in a particular region, prioritizing beneficiaries based on need, or selecting the most impactful campaign strategy. BI tools facilitate this process by refining, analyzing, and presenting data. BI tools process it to reflect past, present, and future trends, thereby enabling decision-makers to make more informed and up-to-date decisions (Gauzelin & Bentz, 2017). Furthermore, the effectiveness and efficiency of the decision-making processes are related to decision quality (Clark Jr., Jones & Armstrong, 2007), defined as the correctness and accuracy of decisions (Raghunathan, 1999). Existing research shows a positive correlation between data quality and decision-

making quality (Keller & Staelin, 1987; O'Reilly, 1982). For NGOs, this translates to a greater ability to make informed decisions that have a greater impact on the lives they aim to improve by identifying areas with the highest potential return and ensuring scarce funds are directed toward the most impactful programs.

More research is needed to understand how business intelligence tools are used to improve decision-making and their effects on organizational performance and effectiveness (Llave, 2019). It is equally imperative to consider their potential transformative impact on NGOs in particular. Existing research by Owda et al. (2019a; 2019b) and Lange (2021) addresses challenges in NGO decision-making and data management practices. However, these studies neither involve a data/information management approach nor do they incorporate BI into their research questions. Accordingly, this research intends to explore NGOs that operate in Türkiye, which have been increasingly relying on BI tools due to significant data growth.

The resource-based view (RBV) is adopted as the theoretical backdrop, with a specific emphasis on technology (i.e. BI tools) as a key resource. RBV highlights the critical importance of resources, skills, and capabilities in determining competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Within this framework, RBV is presumed to be apt in explaining the relationships among resources, decision-making, and organizational outcomes. This framework can provide a comprehensive understanding of how data quality affects managerial decision-making supported by BI, subsequently influencing the organizational performance and effectiveness of NGOs. Therefore, RBV offers an appropriate backdrop for this research as it provides a robust foundation for analyzing how BI tools contribute to competitive advantage and organizational success in the non-profit sector.

This endeavor aims to uncover how BI technologies enhance decision-making quality and subsequently affect overall performance and effectiveness in NGOs operating in Türkiye, making a unique contribution to the relevant research stream. The structure of this paper is as follows: After providing a literature review to define key concepts and establish the theoretical foundation, the methodology and findings are presented. This is followed by the discussion section, and the paper concludes with final remarks and outlines directions for future research.

Literature Review

Business Intelligence and Decision-Making in NGOs

Decision-making is a rational process that involves choosing one path of action among several others (Owda et al., 2019a). The rapid accumulation of unstructured data, combined with the increasing volume and rapidly changing context of information, requires the creation of methods to enhance organizational and human decision-making through automated decision-making tools (Power & Sharda, 2007; Olszak, 2016). As such, Business Intelligence (BI) involves technological methods and tools that effectively integrate and translate data into information/knowledge that supports informed decision-making (Popovič et al., 2012; Sharda, 2014; Jess & Member, 2019).

Business intelligence (BI) is considered as “data-oriented decision support systems” (Power & Sharda, 2007) that involves the collection, evaluation, preservation, and interpretation of data to facilitate informed decision-making, resource management, performance measurement, and operational optimization for managers at strategic, tactical, and operational levels (Watson & Wixom, 2010; Mohammad, 2012; Farzaneh et al., 2018; Abusweilem & Abualoush, 2019). Cheng et al. (2020) indicated that BI is a bidimensional concept with data integration and analytical capability. Data integration aims to combine and provide a unified view of data residing within different sources (Ferraris et al., 2019; Wamba et al., 2015), while analytical capability

concerns the effective deployment of methods to transform business data into valuable decision-making knowledge (Dubey et al., 2019; Wamba et al., 2017).

Consequently, organizations' need for data examination, data clarification, and processing has propelled BI tools to a critical role within organizations (Tunowski, 2015; Soltani & Siadati, 2019). These tools reduce ambiguity in decision-making by offering a holistic view and enabling quicker, more precise, and consistent decision-making (Torres Sidorova & Jones, 2018; Scholtz, Calitz, & Haupt, 2018). They provide efficient reporting and information analysis to understand both internal and external settings (Teoh et al., 2014; Solberg Sjølen, 2015) and extract valuable insights from their operational data by uncovering previously hidden patterns (Pranjić, 2018), providing vital information for high quality and accurate decision-making (Teoh et al., 2014; Gauzelin & Bentz, 2017). Some frequently employed systems include solutions for ad hoc querying, spreadsheet analytics, and visualizing (Sabanovic, 2008; Popovič, Puklavec & Oliveira, 2019), along with data management techniques for assembling, archiving, and structuring data into data warehouses or data marts, along with running complex queries, reporting, presenting, and utilizing methodological approaches for forecasting (Sousa & Dias, 2020). Organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), commonly employ business intelligence software, which integrates reporting, analysis, and data mining features with visual tools to offer meaningful and concise information to decision-makers (Adiguzel, 2019).

NGOs are defined by the United Nations as "any non-profit, volunteer members' initiative established on a regional, nationally, or worldwide level that is task-oriented and led by individuals with a mutual curiosity" (Teegan et al., 2004). NGOs are not affiliated with either governments or businesses, and their mission is to promote and serve the public good rather than profit or the interests of a specific group (Owda et al., 2019a). Decades of global economic downturns, political instability, increasing national debts, poverty, disease, natural disasters, and environmental degradation have amplified the need for NGO interventions as governments struggle to formulate sustainable solutions to these issues. Especially in the vulnerable and underprivileged parts of the world, NGOs quickly flourished in order to address the political, social, economic, and environmental requirements. NGOs are indispensable in the constantly evolving world as they promote social justice and community well-being through adaptability, grassroots focus, and commitment to positive change.

NGOs face challenges distinct from those of for-profit businesses, often struggling with insufficient operational funding that impedes mission accomplishment. In addition, decision-making on actions, the extent and nature of activity, resource distribution, inter-organizational collaboration, and ensuring the safety of the affected as well as the relief staff is crucial (Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2020). For instance, in cases of crisis response, decisions are frequently made within time constraints (Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2020), and actions during humanitarian crises can have far-reaching consequences (Hayles, 2010). Given these circumstances, decision-makers need to consider the possible effects of their decisions on those affected by crises, relief groups, and employees. These possible outcomes are difficult to predict and evaluate, leading to ambiguity in the decision-making process. The unpredictable nature of the environments in which humanitarian intervention occurs, combined with the critical importance of emergency aid, can magnify the potential consequences of these decisions (Cosgrave 1996; Yu & Lai, 2011).

In the relevant stream of research, BI is theorized to facilitate decision-making by reducing information asymmetry as well as reducing confusion and vagueness (Shollo, 2013); however, more research is needed (Llave, 2019). More research is required to better comprehend how organizations can leverage BI to more

effectively transform data into valuable information and improve their decision-making processes at the operational, administrative, and strategic levels (Llave et al., 2018). Considering decision-making in NGO settings in particular, there are studies that explore information gaps, how, by whom, and when decisions are made (Heyse, 2013; Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2020). Owda et al. (2019a; 2019b; Al Shobaki, El Talla, & Al Najjar, 2023) explored the managerial challenges of decision-making in NGOs in the Gaza Strip while Lange (2021) collected data from Kolkata's slumps to update previously collected data. However, these studies do not delve into how BI improves the quality of the decision-making process in NGOs.

Data Quality and Decision-Making Quality

For NGOs, incomplete beneficiary data can lead to the misallocation of resources, hindering program effectiveness and potentially leaving vulnerable populations without critical support. Thus, the effectiveness of the decision-making process depends on data quality and reliable information (Adiguzel, 2019; Yeoh & Popovič, 2016). Data is considered to be of high quality if it is fit for use in operations, compliance, planning and decision making (Wang & Strong, 1996; Tayi & Ballou, 1998; Juran & Godfrey, 1999; Watts, Shankaranarayanan & Even., 2009; Southekal, 2023:39). Consistency and comprehensiveness are also important aspects of data quality (Giovinazzo, 2009). Research indicates that one of the most critical success factors for BI implementations has access to clear and pertinent data (Işık et al., 2013).

The accuracy of decisions is defined as decision-making quality (Raghunathan, 1999). Initial literature provides evidence that data quality positively influences decision-making quality (Keller & Staelin, 1987; O'Reilly, 1982). Moreover, the quality of the decisions depends on both the quality of the data input and the process that transforms into actionable insights (Jannsen et al., 2017). BI tools are typically employed to enhance decision-making quality by refining, structuring, and analyzing data, thereby enabling faster and more accurate resolutions for a wide range of problems—from highly structured to highly unstructured ones (Visinescu, Jones & Sidorova, 2017). By structuring and analyzing data from diverse sources, BI tools enhance their usability, empowering decision-makers to make more informed choices based on high-quality insights. This, in turn, is deemed to enable NGOs to implement data-driven strategies that have a greater positive impact on the communities they serve.

Effects on Effectiveness and Organizational Performance

Effective decision-making is essential for organizational performance and effective operation. Effectiveness is “the degree to which an organization achieves its objectives” (Daft, 2007). Organizational performance relates to the ability to efficiently implement strategies to reach organizational objectives (Obeidat, 2016). For NGOs, effectiveness refers to achieving their social mission, such as delivering impactful programs, improving beneficiary well-being, or promoting social change. Performance metrics for NGOs might include program reach, service utilization rates, or cost-efficiency in achieving desired outcomes. The ability to assess performance using current and consolidated data is one of the major advantages of BI systems for decision-makers (Adiguzel, 2019).

The growing importance of BI is due to its expanding role in improving business performance, primarily through enhanced decision support (Guarda et al., 2013; Gauzelin & Bentz, 2017; Vukovic, 2020). By analyzing and processing existing data, BI tools provide timely and relevant information, helping organizations make correct, prompt, and informed decisions. This improves productivity (Haghighat et al., 2012; Arefin et al., 2015; Alasiri & Salameh, 2020) and, in the case of for-profit organizations, profitability (Olaru, 2014). With respect to NGOs, BI tools enhance their ability to deliver services, expand program reach, and ultimately serve more

beneficiaries. BI technologies improve decision-making speed by offering deeper insights into stakeholder behavior, improving the timeliness of reporting, and providing more effective control over performance (Alasiri & Salameh, 2020). Organizational effectiveness is significantly influenced by the usefulness of BI systems, as they empower managers with data-driven insights that support better decision-making (Turban et al., 2008; Kelidbari & Rayat, 2017).

Several frameworks exist for measuring NGO performance. Carman (2007) identified fundraising, inspections, cost, effectiveness, efficacy, and beneficiary satisfaction as common metrics. Benjamin and Misra (2006) categorize performance measures into inputs, outputs, results, and impacts. Inputs, monitor resources invested in a program, such as time, personnel, and finances. Outputs track program results achieved through resource utilization, focusing on delivered services and beneficiaries compared to set targets.

Given the positive global, societal, and individual impact of NGOs, more research is needed to explore how BI tools impact decision-making processes and, consequently, overall organizational effectiveness and performance within NGOs. BI tools improve decision-making processes by offering a clearer understanding of data and generating actionable insights that ultimately contribute to better outcomes in achieving the mission of NGOs. Accordingly, this study aims to highlight the role of BI tools in enhancing NGO performance and effectiveness by facilitating data-driven decision-making processes based on reliable and well-managed data inputs.

The Resource-based View

Organizations need an array of resources to create, select, and apply their strategies (Schulze, 1992). Essentially, the resource-based view (RBV) focuses on identifying and leveraging unique resources and capabilities within an organization to achieve sustained competitive advantage. For an organization, this depends on a bundle of resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). Resources become particularly valuable when they facilitate the implementation of strategies designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of resource transfers between business units or across borders (Kruesi & Bazelmans, 2023:551).

Information technology (IT) comprises computer technologies such as hardware and software for processing and storing information, as well as communications technologies for transmitting information (Brown et al, 2012:1). IT is vital for organizations by facilitating communication, improving decision making and enhancing data organization (Beniger, 2009). Research suggests that managerial IT skills (Mata, Fuerst & Barney, 1995), collaborative partnerships between IT and business unit management (Ross, Beath & Goodhue., 1996), inter-organizational systems and the skills and expertise of the organization's workforce (Chatfield & Bjørn-Andersen, 1997) are potential drivers of competitive advantage. Furthermore, leveraging advanced technology can enhance an organization's resources, leading to growth in output, service provision, and overall operational efficiency (Inmyxai & Takahashi, 2010).

This study employs Resource-Based View as the theoretical background that identifies technology, particularly BI tools, as a valuable organizational asset. By refining and presenting this data in an accessible format, BI tools support enhanced decision-making, thereby enhancing organizational performance and effectiveness. Dubey et al. (2019) further highlighted that BI projects can be viewed as a way to gain a competitive advantage that improves organizational performance. As such, BI tools can provide a

competitive edge for NGOs by transforming existing data into actionable insights, improving both decision-making and overall organizational outcomes.

Building on this understanding, this research aims to explore how data quality improves decision-making quality, which consequently influences organizational performance and effectiveness in NGOs. It is important to note that the quality of the data itself is determined by the processes through which it is collected, managed, and maintained, while BI tools enhance the usability and accessibility of this data for decision-makers. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: *There is a positive and significant relationship between data quality and BI-supported decision-making quality in NGOs.*

Hypothesis 2: *BI-supported decision-making positively and significantly influences decision quality in NGOs.*

Hypothesis 3: *Decision quality positively and significantly influences NGO effectiveness.*

Hypothesis 4: *Decision quality positively and significantly influences NGO performance.*

Research Design And Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

This study focuses on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) operating in Gaziantep, Hatay, and Istanbul, Türkiye. These provinces were chosen due to the significant number of NGOs established following the Syrian crisis. The target population includes NGOs registered in Türkiye that have demonstrably implemented diverse programs and projects for both Syrian and Turkish beneficiaries for at least five years. This selection criterion ensures a focus on established organizations with a proven track record of service delivery. Convenience sampling was conducted as the first author is a manager in a humanitarian aid NGO. A total of 550 NGOs were contacted, and 178 surveys were received with no-missing data, which yields to a 32,3% response rate.

The respondents included various NGO staff members who are responsible for making decisions supported by BI tools. The study identified Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Power BI, Tableau, and QuickBooks as the primary tools used. These tools are used within the NGOs for a variety of purposes, including data entry, basic analysis, program monitoring, financial management, budgeting, advanced data visualization and reporting as well as stakeholder reporting. We acknowledge that the usage of these tools can vary across the geographical locations of the NGOs and across the different roles of the respondents. Participants' demographic information is exhibited in [Table 1](#):

Table 1

Respondent Characteristics

	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
26-35 Years	89	0,5
36-45 Years	72	0,404
46-60 Years	17	0,096
Gender		

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	150	84,3
Female	28	15,7
Education Level		
High school graduate	1	0,006
University degree	100	0,562
Master's degree	72	0,404
PhD degree	5	0,028
Type of NGO		
UN Agency	5	0,028
INGO	22	0,124
NGO	151	0,848
Size of the NGO		
0-50 employees	41	0,23
50-100 employees	31	0,174
100-200 employees	14	0,079
200-300 employees	25	0,14
300-500 employees	40	0,225
Above 500	27	0,152
Experience in the NGO sector		
1-3 years	14	0,079
3-5 years	32	0,18
6-10 years	112	0,629
Above 10 years	20	0,112
Experience in the current NGO		
1-3 years	98	0,551
3-5 years	38	0,213
6-10 years	38	0,213
Above 10 years	4	0,022
Current Position in the NGO		
Officer	43	0,242
Coordinator	39	0,219
Department Manager	69	0,388
General Manager	7	0,039
Consultant	11	0,062
CEO	9	0,051

Measures

A survey was designed to collect data in order to assess the proposed relationships. The questionnaire was approved by the Marmara University Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The questionnaire consists of 50 questions concerning demographic data, data quality, decision-making empowered by BI,

decision-making quality, organizational effectiveness, and organizational performance. The questionnaire was designed using the following measures: Data quality was measured by Wieder et al.'s (2012) 5-item scale, BI-supported decision making was measured using the 10-item scale developed by Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga et al. (2009), decision quality was measured using the 6-item scale developed by Wieder & Ossimitz (2015), and organizational effectiveness was measured using 9-items developed by Aboramadan & Borgonov (2016) and Mwai (2018), while organizational performance was measured using the 12-item scale developed by Aboramadan & Borgonov (2016).

Since the original measures were in English, the questions were translated into Turkish and Arabic and then back-translated to ensure that the concepts were clear and accurately conveyed. Except for questions about demographics, each measure was assessed using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). For each construct, exploratory factor analyses with varimax rotation were conducted, and the average scores for each dimension were calculated.

The data, as shown in Table 2, are appropriate for dimension reduction using factor analysis. This is supported by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and the statistically significant results of Bartlett's Sphericity Test ($p < ,001$) across all measures. Furthermore, the reliability estimates for all scales exceeded the recommended threshold of 0,700 (Nunnally, 1978). Further details are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary Information on the Factor Analyses

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Number of Factors	Total Variance Explained	KMO Measure of the Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity
Data Quality	0,773	5	1	0,52847	0,783	0.000
Decision making	0,77	10	3	550,46	0.803	0.000
Decision Quality	0,788	6	1	490,61	0.806	0.000
Organizational Effectiveness	0,736	9	2	469,75	0.784	0.000
Organizational Performance	0,811	12	3	564,8	0.813	0.00

Accordingly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values and the results of the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for all scales are statistically significant. All of the Cronbach's Alpha values for the scales are above the threshold of 0,700 suggested by Nunnally (1978).

Findings

Table 3 offers a general summary of the relevant relationships by presenting the descriptive statistics and bivariate Pearson correlations between the variables.

Table 3*Pearson Correlation Results*

Pearson Correlation	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Data Quality (1)	2,4236	0,69518	1				
Decision Making (2)	2,6028	0,59474	,396**	1			
Decision Quality (3)	2,677	0,75792	,195**	,562**	1		
Organizational Effectiveness (4)	2,5512	0,51933	,337**	,537**	,442**	1	
Organizational Performance (5)	2,4808	0,61708	,441**	,464**	,417**	,525**	1
*p<0,05; **p<0,01							

Two hierarchical regression analyses were run to test the hypotheses. Specifically, as the first set of independents, control variables such as age, gender, education level, experience in the NGO sector as well as the position and the experience in the current NGO of the participants, followed by NGO age, type and size were included. After the control variables, data quality, decision making, and decision quality were added as dependent variables for organizational effectiveness for the first model and organizational performance for the second model. The outcomes of these analyses are presented in Tables 4 and 5, respectively.

In the first model, data quality, decision making, and decision quality were evaluated as predictors of organizational effectiveness. As shown in Table 4, the control variables explain only 3,8 percent of the variance in organizational effectiveness, which is not statistically significant ($F(9;168) = 0,734$). The inclusion of data quality increased the explained variance in a statistically and substantively significant manner ($\Delta R^2 = 0,101$; $\Delta F(1;167) = 19,628$; $p < 0,01$). Decision making was also found to be a statistically and substantively significant predictor ($\Delta R^2 = 0,185$; $\Delta F(1;166) = 45,279$; $p < 0,01$). Finally, the addition of decision quality further enhanced the explained variance in a statistically significant manner ($\Delta R^2 = 0,028$; $\Delta F(1;165) = 7,203$; $p < 0,01$).

Table 4*Regression Results for Organizational Effectiveness*

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient
Control Variables												
Age	-0,13	0,073	-0,139*	-0,093	0,066	-0,099	-0,097	0,062	-0,104	-0,111	0,061	-0,118*
Gender	0,113	0,127	0,067	0,087	0,114	0,051	0,16	0,108	0,094	0,176	0,105	0,104*
Education Level	-0,077	0,084	-0,07	-0,052	0,075	-0,048	-0,06	0,071	-0,054	-0,057	0,069	-0,052
NGO sector Experience	-0,118	0,072	-0,143	-0,077	0,065	-0,094	-0,04	0,061	-0,048	-0,016	0,06	-0,019
Current NGO Experience	-0,041	0,058	-0,058	-0,012	0,052	-0,017	-0,025	0,049	-0,036	-0,031	0,048	-0,044
Position	0,053	0,041	0,115	0,043	0,037	0,093	0,035	0,034	0,075	0,043	0,034	0,094

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient
NGO Age	0,01	0,005	0,259**	0,01	0,005	0,268**	0,008	0,004	0,211*	0,008	0,004	0,198*
NGO Type	0,105	0,175	0,077	0,052	0,157	0,038	0,002	0,148	0,002	0,015	0,144	0,011
NGO Size	0,008	0,026	0,023	0,005	0,023	0,015	0,003	0,022	0,01	0,008	0,021	0,024
Independent Variables												
Data Quality				0,385	0,06	0,434***	0,265	0,061	0,298***	0,271	0,06	0,305***
Decision Making							0,352	0,071	0,340***	0,217	0,082	0,210***
Decision Quality										0,19	0,061	0,233***
Model Summary												
Adjusted R Square	0,049			0,232			0,326			0,36		
R Square	0,097			0,275			0,368			0,403		
Δ in R Square	0,097			0,178			0,093			0,035		
F for Δ in R Square	2,006**			41,059***			24,402***			9,770***		
F for ANOVA	2,006**			6,342***			8,792***			9,299***		
*p < 0,10												
**p < 0,05												
***p < 0,01												

Note: Provided in the Table are the results of four sequential regression runs. Model 1 regresses Organizational Effectiveness against the control variables only, and the following models include data quality, decision making and decision quality one after the other hierarchically.

In the second model, data quality, decision making, and decision quality were evaluated as predictors of organizational performance. As shown in Table 5, the control variables explain 9,7 percent of the variance in organizational performance, which is statistically significant ($F(9;168) = 2,006$; $p < 0,05$). Including data quality resulted in a significant increase in the explained variance of organizational effectiveness, improving the model's predictive power ($\Delta R^2 = 0,178$; $\Delta F(1;167) = 41,059$; $p < 0,01$). Decision making was found to be a statistically and substantively significant predictor ($\Delta R^2 = 0,093$; $\Delta F(1;166) = 24,402$; $p < 0,01$). Finally, the addition of decision quality further enhanced the explained variance in a statistically significant manner ($\Delta R^2 = 0,035$; $\Delta F(1;165) = 9,770$; $p < 0,01$).

Table 5*Regression results for Organizational Performance*

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Std. Coefficient
Control Variables												
Age	-0,051	0,064	-0,065	-0,028	0,061	-0,035	-0,033	0,054	-0,042	-0,043	0,053	-0,055
Gender	-0,015	0,11	-0,01	-0,031	0,105	-0,022	0,055	0,094	0,039	0,067	0,092	0,047
Education Level	0,027	0,073	0,029	0,042	0,069	0,046	0,034	0,061	0,037	0,036	0,06	0,039
NGO sector Experience	-0,136	0,062	-0,196**	-0,111	0,06	-0,159	-0,066	0,053	-0,095	-0,048	0,053	-0,069
Current NGO Experience	0,009	0,05	0,016	0,028	0,048	0,047	0,012	0,043	0,02	0,008	0,042	0,013
Position	0,024	0,035	0,062	0,018	0,034	0,046	0,008	0,03	0,02	0,014	0,03	0,037
NGO Age	0	0,004	0,014	0,001	0,004	0,021	-0,002	0,004	-0,059	-0,002	0,004	-0,071
NGO Type	-0,008	0,152	-0,007	-0,042	0,144	-0,036	-0,101	0,129	-0,088	-0,091	0,126	-0,079
NGO Size	0,011	0,022	0,039	0,009	0,021	0,033	0,007	0,019	0,025	0,011	0,018	0,039
Independent Variables												
Data Quality				0,244	0,055	0,327***	0,101	0,053	0,136*	0,106	0,052	0,142**
Decision Making							0,418	0,062	0,479***	0,316	0,072	0,362***
Decision Quality										0,143	0,053	0,209***
Model Summary												
Adjusted R Square	-0,014			0,087			0,279			0,305		
R Square	0,038			0,139			0,324			0,352		
Δ in R Square	0,038			0,101			0,185			0,028		
F for Δ in R Square	0,734			19,628***			45,279***			7,203***		
F for ANOVA	0,734			2,697**			7,218***			7,464***		
*p < 0,10												
**p < 0,05												
*** p < 0,01												

Note: Provided in the Table are the results of four sequential regression runs. Model 1 regresses Organizational Performance against the control variables only, and the following models include data quality, decision making and decision quality one after the other hierarchically.

Discussion And Conclusion

This study builds on the existing literature that positions BI technologies as essential tools for enhancing decision-making (Power & Sharda, 2007; Olszak, 2016) and ultimately improving organizational effectiveness (Turban et al., 2008; Kelidbari & Rayat, 2017) and performance (Guarda et al., 2013; Gauzelin & Bentz, 2017;

Vukovic, 2020). While much of the previous research has focused on the profit-oriented sector, this study addresses the gap in the literature by examining the role of BI technologies in NGOs, specifically those operating in Türkiye.

The empirical results reveal statistically significant positive relationships between data quality, decision-making quality, and organizational performance and effectiveness. The findings corroborate the research on for-profit businesses by Llave (2019) and Visinescu, Jones & Sidorova (2017) by indicating that BI systems not only reduce confusion and vagueness in decision-making but also improve the overall quality of managerial decisions. This, in turn, allows NGOs to make data-driven decisions that are aligned with their mission, ultimately improving organizational performance and effectiveness.

In particular, the findings of this study indicate that high data quality is a critical input for BI systems and is positively correlated with decision-making quality in NGOs. Earlier research has already established a positive correlation between data quality and decision-making quality (Keller & Staelin, 1987; O'Reilly, 1982). Popovič, Puklavec, & Oliveira (2019) highlighted BI applications as essential data-driven decision-support tools, facilitating the collection, storage, and presentation of data in a format conducive to effective decision-making. BI enables NGOs to utilize both internal and external data sources, which are cleansed and structured for more accurate analysis. This finding is consistent with that of Southehal (2023), who argues that quality data empowers BI tools to significantly improve decision-making by refining and structuring raw data into a usable format. As such, BI systems enhance decision-making capabilities by delivering high-quality, timely, and relevant information, which leads to more accurate and impactful decisions.

Furthermore, this study supports the assertion that high-quality decision-making, enabled by BI tools, positively influences organizational performance and effectiveness (Daneshvar & Palvia, 2016; Obeidat, 2016). The ability to make faster, more informed decisions is essential for NGOs to meet their objectives, particularly in resource-constrained environments where decisions must often be made under pressure (Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2020). By providing real-time insights into operational data, BI tools enable NGOs to optimize program reach, service delivery, and resource utilization, all of which contribute to improved program outcomes and increased stakeholder satisfaction (Carman, 2007; Benjamin & Misra, 2006).

From the perspective of the Resource-Based View (RBV), this study also confirms that BI tools can be considered a valuable organizational asset that contributes to competitive advantage. In the context of NGOs, BI technologies serve as a strategic resource that enhances decision-making quality, which then leads to improved organizational effectiveness and performance. This ultimately increases the organization's capacity to achieve its mission and goals. By providing decision-makers with high-quality insights, BI tools allow NGOs to better align their resources, strategies, and operations with their mission objectives. This alignment is critical for achieving both financial and non-financial performance goals, such as expanding program reach, improving service delivery, and enhancing stakeholder satisfaction.

Overall, this study demonstrates that BI technologies significantly enhance decision-making quality, leading to improved organizational effectiveness and performance in NGOs. The results underscore the importance of data quality in driving decision-making excellence and emphasize the role of BI in providing NGOs with the tools they need to achieve their mission goals more effectively. While there is still much to learn about the long-term impact of BI adoption in the nonprofit sector, this research lays the groundwork for future studies that can further explore how BI tools can be utilized to optimize NGO performance.

By focusing on the intersection of BI, decision-making, organizational effectiveness and performance, this study makes a unique contribution to the relevant research stream. The results provide a solid foun-

dation for future research and practical applications, particularly in expanding the use of BI technologies in non-profit organizations. As NGOs continue to face increasing challenges, BI tools offer a promising solution for improving decision-making, resource allocation, and overall organizational effectiveness and performance.

While this study provides important insights into the role of BI technologies in enhancing decision-making and organizational performance in NGOs, several limitations remain. First, the study is geographically limited to NGOs operating in Türkiye, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should explore BI adoption in a wider range of geographic contexts to better understand how different environments influence the effectiveness of BI tools.

Potential research could also incorporate qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding through interviews and case studies. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide further insight into how BI systems influence decision-making quality and organizational outcomes over time. Finally, exploring the role of organizational culture and leadership in facilitating the successful adoption of BI tools in non-profit settings could be another promising research avenue.



Ethics Committee Approval	This study was approved by the Social and Humanities Ethics Committee of Marmara University (Decision No. 119, dated 15.02.2024). Participant confidentiality was maintained, and informed consent was obtained where required.
Peer-Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- M.A.A.H., M.D.T.; Data Acquisition- Ö.K.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- M.T.A., Ö.K.; Drafting Manuscript- Ö.K.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- M.T.A.; Final Approval and Accountability- M.T.A., Ö.K.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

The Transformation of Intimate Relationships Among University Youth: The Case of Sakarya University



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Abstract

This study aims to explore the dynamics of premarital intimate relationships among undergraduate students at Sakarya University, which represents a postmodern melting pot at the intersection of agricultural-traditional and industrial-modern societal characteristics. This positioning makes the university a microcosm of Turkish society, with its diverse student body offering an ideal sample to demonstrate secularizing trends and cultural aspects such as individualization, the culture industry, and extensive narcissism, all of which emerge under global influences. The survey was conducted with 740 participants using stratified random sampling under a quantitative research methodology, as this approach enhances representativeness and ensures more precise comparisons across subgroups, thereby improving the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Accordingly, a confidence interval of 90% and an error margin of 0.3 were ensured in the survey. The selected data include variables such as the students' levels of religiosity, the types of education (faculties), ideological predispositions, urbanization, and the duration and frequency of their current relationships, as these factors are anticipated to best reflect secularization trends. Thus, several findings reveal some remarkable consequences. For instance, the lower the level of religiosity among young people, the more they tend to be flexible and relaxed in their premarital intimate approaches. Students brought up in urban cities have more intimate experiences in the premarital stage than their counterparts from rural areas. Those who give priority to material demands in terms of ideological predispositions are more prone to engage in premarital sexual activities than those who give preference to spiritual and moral requirements. As a result, this research can be considered a contribution to the debates on modernity in the Turkish context of intimate relationships and family studies.

Keywords

Secularization • Individualization • Urbanization • Intimacy • University Students



“ Citation: Kaya, Ö. & Tayfun Amman, M. (2025). The transformation of intimate relationships Among University youth: The case of Sakarya University. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 239–257. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1561854>

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The Transformation of Intimate Relationships Among University Youth: The Case of Sakarya University

In modern societies, societal values, norms and moral codes have rapidly changed due to the globalization of technological advances and digital novelties. Socio-cultural conventions, which once were a consistent frame of reference to navigate individuals' behaviors, have become indistinct, while individuals have gained more autonomy in their decision-making processes. This shift toward greater individual independence causes some disadvantages as well as opportunities. As the traditional autopilot has been switched off because of individualization, individuals are bound to take responsibility for their actions on their own (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In the context of intimate relationships, this autonomy can often lead to entangled relationships in this more complex or atomized environment, especially among young people.

One of the most prominent manifestations of this comprehensive cultural turn can be viewed in the changing premarital experience among young people. According to a survey conducted in 24 developed countries in 1998, for instance, 76% of the young population tended to exhibit a positive approach toward premarital intercourse (Widmer et al., 1998). Similarly, this sign of emancipation from the restrictions of traditional values and norms has also started to be evident in the socio-cultural context of Türkiye. For instance, according to the findings of a comprehensive study conducted in 2005 across 17 provinces in Türkiye, involving face-to-face interviews with 2,908 young individuals aged 13 and above, the average age at which individuals experienced their first non-marital sexual encounter was found to be 19.4 for women and 18.8 for men (Armutçu, 2007), which means that the same rapid cultural transformations under global influences have simultaneously come to coexist with the decline of cultural conventions and religious traditions.

As a late modern country, Türkiye has undergone far-reaching transformations in the socio-cultural realm since the establishment of the republic, in line with Western values and norms. In other words, the historical adventure of Turkish modernity has been marked by the cultural tension between secularists, who regard the embrace of Western values as a prerequisite for the Enlightenment (see Kaya, 2006), and conservatives, who perceive the adoption of these values as a form of alienation (see Göle, 2019). The massive movement of the population from rural regions to urban centers since the 1950s has not only continued to contribute to the dissolution of traditional solidarity but also, as Mardin (2017) asserted, has made the competition between central and peripheral social sections more visible. The cultural shift in Türkiye, alongside its economic transformation, accelerated with the adoption of neoliberal economic policies implemented in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, driven by the forces of globalization. Soon, this process was accompanied by the widespread influence of the mass media and its cultural consequences, including the rise of popular and consumer culture. During this period, the underlying lifestyle differences between the central and peripheral social sections became evident once again, this time manifesting through a new cultural atmosphere represented in the contrast between pop and arabesque music (Kozanoğlu, 1999; Gürbilek, 2001). Therefore, it is no wonder that young people often find themselves stuck between two contradictory ways of life in Türkiye, which can be regarded as an extension of the aforementioned historical-cultural duality of Turkish modernity. Moreover, this tension manifests itself in young people's romantic relationships, including premarital intimate approaches. Therefore, this paper specifically concentrates on

the premarital intimate attitudes of undergraduate students at Sakarya University. The social analysis here, whose main aim is to clarify the correlations between religiosity, ideological predispositions, the current situations of romantic relationships, and ongoing premarital attitudes, is based on data gathered from a sample of 740 undergraduate students at Sakarya University.

Secularization is often considered a process in which the dominant religion, along with its values, institutions, and practices, gradually loses its established status and influence over the political, educational, and cultural spheres of social life (Wilson, 2016; Bruce, 2002). That is, the weakening of religious authority enables individuals to make increasingly autonomous decisions regarding nature, society, and humanity, thereby enhancing the fluidity of social relations in general and romantic relationships in particular. Indeed, some important findings of our research also indicate a substantial shift in romantic relationships. For instance, as individuals' religiosity diminishes, there are tremendous positive attitudes toward premarital intercourse. Similarly, those who tend to materialism have more premarital experience than those who tend to idealism.

Another phenomenon influencing the establishment of intimate relationships is urbanization. Investigating the construction of urban spaces from a Marxist perspective, some scholars argue that urban environments are socially constructed to align with the primary needs of capitalist production. For example, urban planning plays a crucial role in creating and reinforcing class inequalities. Thus, the reconstruction of physical space cannot be considered independent of capital accumulation and political power, as reshaping urban space through various initiatives—such as housing and gentrification—serves merely as a palliative measure to prolong the capitalist system's lifespan (Castells, 1977; Harvey, 2016). Therefore, industrial capitalism reflects the economic stratification of class society, while urban spaces simultaneously encompass the corpus of postmodern values and norms¹, facilitating the flourishing of more secular relationships. In this regard, our research findings indicate that premarital sexual intercourse is significantly more common among students with urban backgrounds than among their rural counterparts.

Consequently, these results, as the prominent indicators of secularization, highlight that students tend to become open to liquid and frail relationships because marriage and family are no longer obligatory life stages but customizable projects, open to interpretation, negotiation and change among partners. Hence, relationships are increasingly based on emotional satisfaction rather than duty, making them more fragile and flexible (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). For this reason, it is important to understand the dynamics of romantic relationships among young people, which can tell us what will happen to the family structure in the near future, as well as provide some clues regarding more extensive socio-cultural transformations in Turkish society.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Implications of Secularization

The receding authority of the organized religion in modern societies has resulted in the emergence of a range of cultural facts, infiltrating into everyday interactions. A concise overview of these facts can be depicted as follows:

The Age of “Me”: The Power of Individualization

Although the foundations of individualization can be found in classical social theories such as Durkheim's division of labor, Weber's rationalization, and Tönnies's distinction between community and civil society,

¹The postmodern condition can simultaneously encompass phenomena that appear irreconcilable in rational, religious, and cultural terms. For a detailed discussion on this topic, see (Kellner & Best, 2011).



the concept attracted much more interest in the late 1970s due to the imminent globalization of the liberal model of modernity based on neo-liberal policies. Some contemporary scholars, such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), attempted to redefine it in this era as follows:

- The weakening of traditional social bonds, including family ties, class affiliations, and community connections, has resulted in individuals navigating life with greater independence. This case has caused several personal freedoms and responsibilities for individuals' life choices over time.
- Individualization entails individuals making life plans on their own and engaging in reflexive evaluation of their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in order to ensure self-control over them. In doing so, they lack the guidance of established conventions, norms, and institutions. Thus, individuals find themselves in a more dynamic and fluid environment.
- Individualization requires encountering some risks and uncertain conditions because individuals always have to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. As familiar forms of interactions, which describe traditional social structure, diminish, it can lead to potential instability and insecurity in the course of one's life, especially when it comes to issues such as employment and relationships.
- Individualization is not solely a result of personal choice; it is also institutionalized through social policies and practices. For instance, welfare and educational systems and free market circumstances are rearranged in order for individuals to internalize the process.

Kelly (2022) argues that becoming an individual today is equivalent to a form of conformism, as the discourse of authenticity itself has recently turned into a commodity. It is conformist because, on the one hand, everyone is expected to be distinct, yet, on the other hand, this distinction must align with the demands of the free market. For example, the authentic lifestyle of the Hippies, which emerged in the 1960s, was a countercultural movement that rebelled against the values and norms of modern industrial society. Although Hippies no longer exist as a distinct social group today, various aspects of their lifestyle—such as alternative fashion and music styles, their approach to nature, polyamorous relationships, individualized beliefs like mysticism and meditation, vegetarian diets, and drug use—have been commodified and seamlessly integrated into the market through neoliberal economic policies over the past four decades. Even so, in modern secular societies, the simultaneous commitment to both individual and collective demands often leads to internal tension and confusion. As a result, individuals frequently succumb to widespread social anxiety as they navigate between cooperation and competition.

The Culture Industry: Love for Sale?

The concept, first introduced by Adorno and Horkheimer (2007), critical theorists from the Frankfurt School, in their seminal work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1947], refers to the mass production of cultural goods and services within capitalist societies. Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the culture industry deliberately maintains the status quo by transforming art into standardized commodities, not only for profit but also to promote passive consumption among audiences, thereby diminishing their capacity for critical thought and ensuring social control. The concept 'culture industry' synthesizes Marxist and Weberian analyses. From a Marxist perspective, it highlights how the cultural sphere is dominated by competitive and increasingly monopolistic corporations driven by profit motives, thereby commodifying culture and alienating people in the process. From a Weberian viewpoint, it underscores organizational rationalization,

where cultural production and consumption are increasingly planned, suppressing alternatives. Since the latter decades of the 20th century, this understanding has evolved, especially in advertising and marketing, which aim to captivate audiences as a new opiate of the modern masses. Rationalization impacts not only production but also standardizes cultural products, creating a sense of “pseudo-individuality” in consumption (Garnham, 2007, pp. 942-945). Consequently, the culture industry fulfills a deceptive social function by manipulating the masses through the precise orchestration of all mass media instruments, such as novels, movies, music, and astrology. Thus, it fosters an inauthentic culture, which becomes an end in itself. For instance, the authentic works of Beethoven, Mozart, and Wagner have been presented to audiences in fragmented forms as a prerequisite for successful advertising and marketing.

Over the past forty years, modern human experiences, influenced by Weberian instrumental reason and global neoliberal policies, have profoundly affected the self-perceptions and societal values of new generations. This process, undoubtedly, also influences the ways in which young people form and sustain romantic relationships. The cultural climate generated by this version of modernity under the guidance of instrumental reason creates a conducive environment for dysfunctional relationships. As the power of institutional religion in daily life diminishes, a new ideology of love, well-suited to being marketed by the culture industry as a new secular religion, has been on the rise.

Neoliberal capitalism, through the culture industry, has discovered ways to market the enticing content reflecting the lifestyles of marginal counter-culture groups (e.g., hippies) —such as drug use and polyamory — as attractive consumer goods promising liberation to all members of society, especially the youth. This perceived freedom has weakened the social function of shame, leading to unfiltered discussions on intimate matters. As social values and norms are discarded as “obsolete” and “burdensome” in the name of diversifying love consumption, the sole means of preserving equilibrium is to accelerate relationships. Love can be encountered anywhere at any time; however, precisely because of this advertisement and exhibition of intimacy, love can no longer manifest itself anywhere. Few things are as disenchanted as the words “my love” and “I love you” due to the homogenizing policy of the culture industry.

Through cultural commodities such as films, music, and advertisements that impose this love ideology, the emotions, norms, language, and symbols of the youth are restructured. From the perspective of these arrangements, which incite the desire for consumption and draw a significant portion of the youth toward shallower qualities and superficial interactions, men are not seen as wealthy enough for women, women are not seen as sexy enough for men, holidays are not seen as luxurious enough, and parents are not seen as sufficiently tolerant and supportive.

Cultural Narcissism: Why Are Relationships More Fragile Than Ever?

The term, also referred to as ‘the culture of narcissism’ (Lasch, 1991), denotes the public expression of nearly all repressed desires by individuals, either without feeling constrained by the social control of the superego or perceiving weak restrictions from prevailing socio-cultural values and norms. In this context, in our society, concurrent with global trends, instances of cheating, deception, and lying have escalated in domains such as business, relationships, politics, and all forms of media. Furthermore, several scholars have asserted that these trends contribute to the emergence of a “post-truth age” (Keyes, 2004; McIntyre, 2018). The products of the culture industry convey messages of approval and appreciation that make individuals feel valuable. Messages such as “You are special!”, “You deserve the best in life!”, “All the power you need is within you!”, “Nothing is impossible!”, “you can do anything and get whatever you want!” etc. are conveyed through mass media, especially self-help publications (Niedzviecki, 2006). To feel successful and

confident, individuals need not do anything other than purchase these products. In fact, all these flattering suggestions, which resonate with childhood traumas, reinforce hedonistic and impulsive attitudes that serve the development of an inflated view of the self. Moreover, Twenge and Campbell (2013) compare narcissism to a highly contagious socio-cultural epidemic distinct from clinically diagnosed pathological cases. They emphasize that the fundamental characteristic of cultural narcissism is the internalized belief among young individuals—whose parents never denied their desires and who were raised as “heirs and princesses”—that they deserve the best of everything without any responsibility or effort on their part.

According to Lasch (1991), the tense conditions of a secular, modern society compel individuals to adopt narcissism as a defense mechanism. These conditions initially target the stable family structure and influence the child’s personality. Members of a society so concerned about their future naturally invest less time and energy in the next generation. This historical sense of discontinuity, which spells disaster for that society, adversely affects parents’ reliable and composed demeanor, thereby undermining the child’s positive self-perception of being loved and wanted. A child internalizing the perception that the world is insecure and dangerous has no choice but to adopt a narcissistic defensive stance. However, adopting a self-centered view of the world prioritizes cut-throat competition, undermining the principles of social solidarity. When young people falter between their current selves and their ideal selves and cannot meet the expectations of an inflated view of the self characterized by hedonistic, impulsive, and narcissistic attitudes and behaviors, they fall into the trap of various addictions such as alcohol, drugs, gaming, and sex.

Consequently, young individuals striving for success in intimate relationships often fail to establish genuine and sincere emotional bonds, frequently leading their communication to become limited or exclusive. In other words, “every sexual relationship under the sway of narcissism becomes less fulfilling the longer the partners are together” (Sennett, 1977, p. 9). Hence, it could be argued that narcissism also constitutes an underlying cause of frequent partner changes. Consequently, the secularization theory posits that as societies progress, religion loses its influence over various aspects of life, including governance, education, and individual behavior. This theory is supported by the observation that highly developed societies tend to exhibit lower levels of religiosity and higher degrees of secularization (Norris & Inglehart, 2004).

The process of secularization in Turkey, initiated with the founding of the Republic in the early 20th century, has seen significant developments over the decades. Initially driven by Atatürk’s reforms, such as the abolition of religious courts and the introduction of a secular legal code, the influence of religion in public life was systematically reduced. This was part of a broader modernization effort aimed at aligning Turkey with Western standards. However, the secularization of Turkish society became more pronounced and visible in the public sphere starting from the 1980s and 1990s. Meanwhile, the introduction of mass media became increasingly prominent in the last quarter of the 20th century, playing a crucial role in the establishment of secular values and norms in Turkish society. Individuals were exposed to the cultural contents of Western modernity, particularly through television, catalyzing the process of secularization. The pop music culture of the 1990s (exemplified by songs of Sezen Aksu and Tarkan) gradually highlighted the secular ideology of love as a personal realm, presenting it as a secular religion.² The film and television industry, which gained momentum in the late 1990s, contributed to the normalization of secular lifestyles by portraying changing gender roles and issues such as divorce, virginity, masturbation, nudity, infidelity, rape, immoral proposals, forbidden love, and the trivialization of sexual relations. Notable productions such as *Berlin in Berlin* (1994), *Mum Kokulu Kadınlar* (1996), *Mustafa Hakkında Her Şey* (2004), *Duvara Karşı* (2004),

²For a comprehensive discussion on the secularization of love or whether love has become a new religion, see Illouz (2024: 62-89).



Binbir Gece (2006), *Barda* (2007), *Aşk-ı Memnu* (2008), and *Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?* (2010) are some of the prominent examples. In the television world, the increasing success of romantic love themes, which garnered higher ratings, quickly paved the way for the normalization of pornography in everyday life (Kahraman, 2010).

In addition, another leading contributor of modernity to secularization is urbanization, which provides members with an opportunity to become anonymous or invisible in the urban crowds. This is especially the case regarding intimate relationships. The large-scale migration from rural regions to urban areas in Turkey, which intensified from the 1950s onwards, has caused a transformation in everyday social interactions. Urban environments provide more diverse social connections and increased opportunities for education and employment, leading to more liberal attitudes toward issues like premarital intimate approaches.

Main Question of the Research

How have university students' attitudes toward premarital relationships evolved in the context of secularizing trends in contemporary Turkey?

Objectives

The primary objectives of this study can be outlined as follows:

- To investigate how varying levels of religiosity among students influence their attitudes toward premarital intercourse, with an emphasis on the secularization trends in Turkish society.
- To investigate how urbanization affects students' attitudes toward premarital intercourse, distinguishing between those from urban and rural backgrounds.
- To analyze the correlation between ideological perspectives and attitudes toward premarital intercourse, focusing on the continuum from conservative to liberal ideologies.
- To identify and compare differences in sexual attitudes and experiences among students across various faculties within the university.
- To draw attention to the correlation between the number of romantic relationships students have and their engagement in sexual activity, which contributes to the emergence of more fluid and fragile relationship dynamics.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design, using a survey method to gather data from undergraduate students at Sakarya University. The survey was conducted with a stratified random sample of 740 students, ensuring representation across different faculties, years of study, and demographic backgrounds. The data were analyzed using statistical methods to identify correlations between variables, including religiosity, urbanization, and sexual attitudes.

Determination of the Research Universe and Sample

This study utilizes data from a doctoral thesis conducted at Sakarya University by one of the authors (Kaya, 2024). Initially, the research universe was identified as undergraduate students at Sakarya University. All necessary ethical approvals and research permissions were obtained from the university's rectorate. Given the use of a stratified sampling technique, data regarding the number of students registered in each faculty and their gender distribution were obtained from the university's student affairs office. Grad-

uate schools and institutes providing postgraduate education were excluded from the target population. Additionally, for reasons of cost and time efficiency, certain faculties deemed to have similar descriptive characteristics and thus not significantly affecting the study's effectiveness were also excluded. Consequently, the revised research population was determined to comprise seven faculties with a total of 25,466 students, consisting of 12,756 males and 12,710 females. This new population retained the gender ratios (51% female and 49% male) of the total registered student body at Sakarya University (45,683 students). To ensure that the findings could be generalized to the entire research universe and thus maintain representativeness, a stratified sampling technique was chosen. As Creswell (2012) explains, "In stratified sampling, researchers divide (stratify) the population on some specific characteristic (e.g., gender) and then, using simple random sampling, sample from each subgroup (stratum) of the population (e.g., females and males). This guarantees that the sample will include specific characteristics that the researcher wants included in the sample" (p. 144). This technique's advantage is the ability to compare different subgroups with distinct characteristics. Therefore, the ratios of faculties and gender within the research universe were considered to achieve a balanced distribution among participants. Using an online sample size calculator (qualtricks.com), the ideal sample size was determined to be 740 participants, based on a 90% confidence level, a population size of 25,466, and a 3% margin of error. The consistency of this tool's calculations with those presented by Rea and Parker (2014, p. 171) for populations between 500 and 100,000 further validated the sample size. Subsequently, the ratios of male and female students within each faculty were calculated (see Table 1) to ascertain the number of participants for the survey.

Table 1*Population Ratios and Stratified Sample Size*

Research Population and Ratios				Stratified Sample Size		
Faculty	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
State	231	121	352	7	3	10
Conservatory	0,66	0,34	0,0138			
Law	625	769	1394	18	23	41
	0,45	0,55	0,0547			
Theology	1123	2299	3422	33	66	99
	0,33	0,67	0,1343			
Communication	799	966	1765	23	28	51
	0,45	0,55	0,0693			
Humanities and Social Sciences	2326	4148	6474	68	120	188
	0,36	0,64	0,2542			
Engineering	4774	1858	6632	139	54	193
	0,72	0,28	0,2604			
Political Sciences	2878	2549	5427	84	74	158
	0,53	0,47	0,2131			
Total	12756	12710	25466	372	368	740
	0,5009	0,499	1			

Development of the Questionnaire and Selection of Survey Questions

The research process began with preliminary interviews with a randomly chosen group of seven students to gather initial information about the challenges that university students face in forming and maintaining romantic relationships. These interviews explored topics such as the duration, frequency, and reasons for the termination of romantic relationships, expectations from partners, sexual attitudes, infidelity, civil and religious marriages, religious and ideological tendencies, cohabitation, consanguineous marriages, family relationships, language used in social settings, social media usage, and consumption habits, as well as descriptions of soulmates. This process, conducted compared with the existing literature, resulted in an initial pool of 160 questions. Following extensive consultations with the thesis advisor over approximately nine months, these questions were refined and categorized on the basis of societal dynamics presumed to influence close relationships among university students. The final questionnaire comprised 93 questions, excluding the participant information form, organized into multiple-choice Likert-type questions (with 6-point, 4-point, and combined 3-point scales for ease of analysis). Johnson and Morgan (2016, p. 50) emphasized the importance of clear and straightforward wording to ensure that survey items are easily understood by participants. Therefore, to prevent potential comprehension issues, the wording of the items was reviewed for everyday language suitability. A pre-test was conducted with a few students, establishing an average completion time of 10-12 minutes.

Data Collection and Analysis

To achieve the required participant ratios and numbers, surveys were conducted with 820 participants in two stages. In the first stage, surveys were administered in classroom settings during lecture hours, with the support and permission of the instructors. Conducting the survey in a formal and quiet classroom environment, often with the presence of supportive faculty members, significantly enhanced the seriousness with which participants approached the survey. Before distributing the survey, the researcher provided brief explanations to the participants about the study's purpose, the importance of their voluntary and anonymous participation, and the necessity of completing the entire survey. Foreign students and married students were excluded from the study, and this information was communicated to the classes in advance. Despite surveying slightly more students than planned in each faculty, the expected gender ratios were not achieved, particularly in faculties other than engineering, where male participation in classes was low. This necessitated a second round of data collection with 60 additional male students, conducted in the faculty cafeterias and the central library rather than classrooms. Data from the 820 participants were entered into IBM SPSS Version 26, and the final dataset was adjusted to the stratified sample size of 740 by removing incomplete responses and excess female participant data.

The Landscape of Romantic Engagements Among Students

The findings of this study reveal the implications of a cultural transformation in romantic relationships among students, based on variables such as religiosity, education, urbanity, ideology, and the number and duration of romantic relationships.

From Faith to Flexibility: The Role of Religion in Premarital Intimacy

Table 2*Changing Religious Attitudes As A Sign of Secularization*

	Very Religious		Religious		Less Religious		Indifferent to Religion		Non-Religious		Anti-Religious	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mothers	136	18,04	484	65,4	110	14,9	10	1,4	-	-	-	-
Fathers	101	13,6	410	55,4	181	24,5	40	5,4	5	0,7	3	0,4
Students	26	3,5	258	34,9	279	37,7	128	17,3	38	5,1	11	1,5

The data in Table 2 indicate that the religiosity levels of the participants' parents are predominantly concentrated in the categories of "very religious" and "religious." In contrast, participants' own religiosity levels notably shifted toward the "less religious" category. Additionally, there is a relative increase in the proportion of individuals who identify as "indifferent to religion," "non-religious," and "anti-religious," respectively.

Secularization, often regarded as a component of the modernization experience, originated in Europe. Industrial modern societies are organized rationally, meaning they are structured around bureaucratic, economic, political, professional, artistic, and scientific spheres that have become increasingly autonomous through specialization and division of labor. As a result, religious references lose their function in explaining the meaning of life in such societies (Wilson, 2016). Similarly, with the adoption of the Western modernization paradigm, Turkish society has also been undergoing a process of secularization—either *manifestly*, as those advocating modernity embrace secular practices in line with their progressive outlook, or *latently*, as conservative segments of society are inevitably exposed to secular practices in various ways (Amman, 2010). Therefore, Table 2 appears to confirm this situation.

Table 3*Religious Attitudes and Premarital Intercourse*

		Very Religious		Religious		Less Religious		Indifferent to Religion		Non-Religious		Anti-Religious	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Students' Sexual Experience	YES	5	19,2	69	26,7	152	54,5	105	82	36	94,7	10	90,9
	NO	21	80,8	189	73,3	127	45,5	23	18	2	5,3	1	9,1
$X^2 = 158,008$ d.f.: 5 $P = 0,000$													

The crucial data in Table 3 reveal a clear, statistically significant correlation between religiosity and premarital sexuality: As the students' level of personal religiosity decreases, the incidence of their premarital sexual experiences increases ($P < 0,01$).

According to Schreck and Hirschi's (2009) social control theory, if individuals' social attachments and emotional commitments to society are strong enough, they are less likely to engage in socially disapproved behaviors, including crime, drug abuse, and premarital sex. The four key qualities—attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief—lie at the core of their social control theory, and undoubtedly, secularization reduces their strength and efficiency in society. Thus, the engagement of students in premarital sexuality appears to be a consequence of the weakening of social values and norms in Turkish culture, which is influenced by the process of secularization. The results of a similar study conducted with 2,200 participants across Turkey also significantly align with the findings in Table 3 (see Yıldız & Yıldırım, 2023).

Table 4*Qualities Expected from Potential Partners*

No.	Qualities Expected	Mean
1.	Loyalty	3,83
2.	Honesty	3,82
3.	Trust	3,8
4.	Respect	3,77
5.	Love	3,75
6.	Empathy	3,73
7.	Compassion	3,72
8.	Politeness	3,69
9.	Sexuality	3,25
10.	Appearance	3
11.	Material resources (wage, assets, etc.)	2,87
12.	Social status (standing, reputation, etc.)	2,68
13.	Age gap	2,65
14.	Religiosity	2,58

Participants marked multiple options in this question.

Students were asked to rank 14 essential attributes they ideally expect in a potential romantic partner. According to the data presented in **Table 4**, religiosity received the least emphasis, indicating that religion holds minimal significance in their preferences regarding finding a partner for a romantic relationship. In contrast, more personal qualities, such as loyalty, honesty, trust, respect, and love, appear to be prioritized. Additionally, in a similar study conducted in 2013 in the capital city of Ankara, a total of 3,177 university students (1,955 women and 1,222 men) from various faculties and departments across five different universities were surveyed regarding their preferences for potential spouses. Participants were presented with a list of 50 attributes and asked to rank them based on their perceived importance. The findings revealed that the importance attributed to religiosity (female-male ; 3.22 on a 5-point Likert scale) ranked 49th among the given attributes (Efe, 2013, p. 50).

Table 5

4 Point Likert Scale	
1	Not important at all
2	Not important
3	Important
4	Very important

The narrowing space granted to religion in romantic relationships, alongside the increasing significance of ethical values as independent principles, can be considered an indication of secularization. This is because this form of profane morality has been shaped “within the framework of a modern order in which our purposes align within the scope of our mutual interests” (Taylor, 2019, p. 269).

Religion, according to Berger (1990), serves as the sacred canopy that provides members of society with a meaningful, shared worldview, thereby ensuring a sense of ontological security. However, in Western societies, the unifying influence of this sacred worldview has increasingly diminished and become fragmented

due to the secularizing effects of modernization. As a result, this pluralistic shift leads to a “crisis of meaning” in human life (Berger & Luckmann, 2015, p. 43). Taking these data into account, it can be argued that a similar process of secularization is also evident among the young people in Türkiye. To provide a national-level example, between January 25 and February 2, 2025, the Gezici Research Center conducted a face-to-face “Love Research Analysis” with 5,276 individuals aged 18 and over across 38 provinces in Türkiye. According to the results, in response to the question “If you were in love, would you marry someone from a different religion?” 41% of participants answered “yes, I would,” 44% responded “no, I would not,” and 15% stated “it depends on the situation.” These findings also suggest that nearly half of the respondents prioritize a secular ideology of love over institutionalized religion, offering significant insight into the extent of secularization in Türkiye (Sözcü, February 2025).

How Education Shapes Romantic and Sexual Attitudes

Table 6

Faculties and Premarital Intercourse

	Students' Sexual Experience			
	YES		NO	
	N	%	N	%
Conservatory and Law Faculties (combined)	38	74,5	13	25,5
Faculty of Theology	20	20,2	79	79,8
Four Other Faculties (combined)	319	54,1	271	45,9
Total*	377	50,9	363	49,1
$\chi^2 = 51,075$ d.f.: 2 $P = 0,000$				

*The faculties have been grouped into a triple categorization, based on similarities in the quality of education provided, the observed student profiles, and their degrees of secularization, with expert opinions being consulted in the process.

In a comparative study between Turkey and European countries, Turkey's secular education policy has been identified as notably successful. According to the research, while 92% of participants who have completed compulsory education consider themselves religious, this percentage decreases to 59% among university graduates (Kaymakcan, 2021). Building on this trend, the data in **Table 6** also show a clear, statistically significant relationship between faculties and premarital intercourse ($P < 0.01$). Faculties with weaker ties to traditional religious teachings, such as Law and the Conservatory, along with four other faculties, exhibit higher rates of premarital intercourse, reflecting a more secular lifestyle. In contrast, the Faculty of Theology remains largely unaffected by this secular trend.

This situation does not imply that students outside the theology faculty do not have belief; rather, it reflects that they perceive faith in a more individualized manner. In other words, secularization, according to Luckmann [1967], does not necessarily denote the complete disappearance of religion. Instead, it reflects a shift away from the authority of institutionalized religion toward a more specialized and individualized form of belief in modern society. As the influence and doctrinal framework of organized religion diminish in contemporary societies, spirituality increasingly becomes a matter of personal choice, often manifested in subjective forms such as self-help therapies or personal meaning-making efforts (Luckmann, 2023). These individualized forms of belief, thus, appear to facilitate the premarital sexual experience in romantic relationships.

The Impact of Urbanization on Romance

Table 7

Urbanization and Premarital Intercourse

“People should get to know each other sexually before getting married”			
(%)	Disagree	Somewhat	Agree
Metropolis	26,4	29,3	44,2
City Center	32,3	32,6	35,1
Countryside	45,6	30,9	23,5
Total	32,6	31,1	36,4
$\chi^2=21,759$ d.f.: 4 P = 0,000			

According to the data in [Table 7](#), students from metropolitan areas exhibit a distinct trend toward more liberal sexual experiences, whereas students from rural areas tend to maintain more traditional views ($P<0.01$). This shift in premarital sexual experiences from rural to urban areas reflects the broader characteristics of urbanization. Urban life, with its promotion of multiculturalism (Glaeser, 2011) and high population density, fosters both anonymous social interactions (Simmel, 2015, pp. 157-161) and a reflection of social stratification. Economic inequality, geographic segregation, and cultural fragmentation in cities often lead to divisions among different socioeconomic groups (Bourgois, 2003). Moreover, cities resemble fast-paced marketplaces where goods and products are distributed and sold, which is why, in many cases, competition and self-interest between buyers and sellers take precedence over solidarity and cooperation. This competitive environment, compounded by the pressures of global neoliberal policies, has also led to the commodification of culture. In *The Crisis of Culture* (2024), Roy introduces the concept of "deculturation" to describe the process in which the shared meanings of socio-cultural values and norms that guide behavior become meaningless due to the forces of globalization, neoliberalism, individualism, and the pervasive influence of the internet. This disintegration of cultural coherence not only distorts the common framework of values but also prevents individuals from adopting a new, cohesive culture, leaving them in a fragmented world of identities. Consequently, it can be stated that industrial urban life, designed to meet the needs of capitalism, has been experiencing a cultural crisis, which also contributes to the fluidity and fragility of romantic relationships, particularly since the 1980s, a period marked by the global rise of neoliberal policies.

From Idealism to Materialism: Ideological Divides in Intimacy

Table 8

Ideological Predisposition and Premarital Intercourse

Student's Sexual Experience			
		(%)	
		NO	YES
Group 1	1. Communist	22,2	77,8
	2. Capitalist	26,8	73,2
	3. Social democrat	30,4	69,6
	4. Liberal	33,7	66,3
	5. Secular	34,8	65,2
	6. Kemalist	36,4	63,6
	7. Feminist	40,4	59,6

Student's Sexual Experience			
Student's Sexual Experience		NO	YES
Group 2			
	8. Socialist	42,4	57,6
	9. Democrat	43	57
	10. Nationalist	50,2	49,8
	11. Religious	71,7	28,3
	12. Conservative	74,2	25,8
	13. Islamist	79,9	20,1
$\chi^2 = 424,612$ d.f.: 14 P = 0,000			

Note: Participants marked multiple options in this question.

According to the data in **Table 8**, there is a statistically significant relationship between students' ideological worldview and their premarital sexual experience ($P < 0.01$). Accordingly, it is observed that students in Group 1, which represents materialist-secular views, have a higher prevalence of premarital sexual experience compared to students in Group 2, which represents idealist-spiritual views.

Worldly ideologies (Group 1) embrace the Enlightenment legacy, characterized by humanism, libertarianism, rationalism, and individualism—qualities that align closely with the process of secularization. Central to these ideologies is the a priori belief that a better social world can be constructed through human agency. In contrast, spiritual worldviews (Group 2) tend to prioritize the preservation of guidance derived from ancient socio-cultural values and norms, seeking to maintain their assurance to the greatest extent possible. Therefore, this case duly fits into a distinction between *manifest* and *latent* secularization, a conceptualization as a contribution to the secularization theory asserted by Amman (2010). According to this, the individuals in Group 1 enthusiastically embrace the external influences of modernity as they are in manifest secularization, whereas those in Group 2 are more reluctant and hesitant to accept the secularizing impacts as they are in latent secularization.

The second half of the 20th century witnessed a struggle between young individuals representing these two distinct worldviews, each shaping their own projects of society. Within this struggle, the meaning attributed to sexuality also diverged. For instance, Marcuse (1964) identified the Sexual Revolution of the '68 youth as an agency for socio-political transformation. However, it can be argued that today's sexual freedom, largely shaped by neoliberalism, serves depoliticization rather than socio-political transformation. Consequently, these findings suggest that ideological orientation plays a vital role in forming sexual norms, with secular and left-leaning students embracing more liberal sexual attitudes, while those with religious or conservative ideologies adhere more closely to traditional sexual mores.

The Contemporary Landscape of Romantic Relationships Among Students

Table 9

Number of Relationships and Premarital Intercourse

		Counts of Relationships						$\chi^2 = 250,476$ S.D: 5 P = 0,000
		0	1	2	3	4	5 +	
Sexual Experience	YES	-	43,2	59,8	71,3	85,7	92,9	
	NO	100	56,8	40,2	28,7	14,3	7,1	

The data in Table 9 illustrate a clear and statistically significant correlation between the score of relationships and the chance of engaging in sexual intercourse ($P < 0.01$). According to this, as the number of relationships increases, the proportion of individuals engaging in premarital sexual activities also increases significantly. This trend indicates that having more romantic relationships is linked with a greater possibility of premarital sexual experience, highlighting how greater exposure to romantic relationships correlates with more liberal sexual attitudes and behaviors. Besides, for the longest relationships, the data from Table 10 indicate that the majority of participants have had relatively short romantic relationships, with the highest percentage of participants (36.8%) reporting that they have not had a long-term romantic relationship lasting a year or more. Only a small percentage of participants reported having relationships lasting four years (5.3%) or longer (6.9%). Accordingly, regarding the shortest relationships, the data in Table 10 show that many participants experienced very brief romantic relationships, with 35.4% of participants reporting that their shortest relationship did not last beyond a month.

Table 10

Duration of Participants' Romantic Relationships

How many years did your longest romantic relationship last?						
0	1	2	3	4	5+	Total (%)
36,8	24,3	16,8	10	5,3	6,9	
How many months did your shortest romantic relationship last?						
0	1	3	5	7	9+	Total (%)
35,4	29,1	18,9	6,6	3,8	6,2	

The findings presented in Tables 8 and 9 provide insight into the quality of romantic engagements. Romantic relationships tend to be relatively short in duration, as a considerable number of participants have never experienced a long-term relationship lasting more than a year, and many have had only brief romantic encounters. First and foremost, such limited timeframes make it difficult for individuals in a romantic relationship to develop a deep understanding of each other or cultivate an intimate bond. Furthermore, frequent partner changes within short periods do not contribute to sustaining a stable and healthy romantic relationship.

One possible explanation for younger individuals' preference for short-term relationships is the opportunity cost associated with commitment, given the abundance of alternatives within the campus environment. In this regard, Bauman (2003, pp. 20-21) introduces the concept of "top-pocket relationships," where individuals maintain romantic ties that are accessible but non-binding—relationships that can be "pulled out" when convenient and discarded when no longer needed.

Furthermore, Twenge and Campbell (2013) argue that, within the new cultural climate of the late modern era, young people have internalized the belief that, due to being treated as "heirs and princesses" by their parents—who never deny their wishes—they are entitled to the best of everything without the need for responsibility or effort. This sense of entitlement is a consequence of their upbringing, in which no request is ever refused. Therefore, their expectations, shaped by a hedonistic, conformist, and impulsive lifestyle, may also hinder the sustainability of long-term relationships. Illouz (2012) also regards this lifestyle of the younger generation due to emotional capitalism, reflecting that contemporary relationships are shaped by market-like dynamics, where romantic ties are increasingly commodified. Consequently, the prevalence of short-term relationships and the high turnover of romantic partners may be a result of the superficial nature of romantic engagements within a market-driven lifestyle.

Limitations

The generalizability of the findings to other institutions, age groups, or cultural contexts may be limited because this study focuses on undergraduate students at Sakarya University. Due to the absence of financial support for this research, the sample size was determined based on an optimal balance between time and cost management. Given that the study examines premarital relationships among Turkish youth, participants were informed both verbally and in writing just before the administration of the questionnaire in the classroom to prevent any adverse impact on the research findings. Consequently, married students and international students were excluded from the study. The chosen quantitative research method, the questionnaire, has certain limitations, such as its inability to fully capture complex emotions or detailed perspectives. Therefore, future researchers interested in similar topics may consider adopting a mixed-methods research design. Additionally, grouping faculties with similar characteristics ensured the representativeness of the stratified sampling technique due to an insufficient number of students in some faculties for independent evaluation.

Conclusion

It can be asserted that, over the past 40 years, secularization trends worldwide have contributed to an increase in the prevalence of sexual experiences among younger generations. For example, a global study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014, which surveyed 40,000 participants across 40 countries, found that the percentage of individuals in European countries who considered premarital sexual relations to be “morally unacceptable” was as follows: 13% in the United Kingdom, 11% in Italy, 11% in Greece, 8% in Spain, 6% in France, and 6% in Germany (Pew, 2014). Similarly, a 2021 study in the United Kingdom, which surveyed 50,000 university students, revealed that 44% of female students and 41% of male students (averaging 43%) reported having had no sexual experience prior to starting university (Hillman, 2021). These findings indicate that approximately 67% of the students had sexual experience before entering university.

Although these rates still remain lower than those observed in many European countries, this global trend of secularization can also be observed in Turkey, where secularization has been gradually increasing over recent decades. Some scholars who examine the theory of secularization largely agree that Turkey has experienced a similar process (see Amman, 2010; Çapçioğlu, 2018; Ertit, 2019). For instance, according to Ertit (2019), young people in Anatolian cities in the early 1990s were often discouraged from going out alone or holding hands with their partners, even if they were engaged. However, this situation began to change in the 2000s. Referring to two studies conducted in 1996 and 2004, he noted a significant increase in sexual activity and dating among male students. In 1996, only 19.9% of male students had experienced full sexual intercourse, but by 2004, this proportion had risen to 34.4%. Similarly, the percentage of young people who were dating increased from 29.7% in 1996 to 42.3% in 2004 (pp. 277-278). Current research findings, including dimensions such as religiosity, ideology, urbanization, and expectations from partners, continue to support these ongoing cultural shifts in Turkey.

Meanwhile, the Turkish Statistical Institute's Family Report (TÜİK, 2022) reveals that 5.9% of marriages in 2010 were between relatives, with this percentage steadily decreasing over the years to 4.4% in 2017 and 3.9% in 2022. Accordingly, cousin marriages were not widely accepted by a significant majority of students (73.7% of males and 83.4% of females) in our survey, despite being permissible according to religious (Islamic) rules and conventions. Consequently, these overlapping findings, which clearly show a growing negative

perception of cousin marriages among young people in Turkey, can be indirectly interpreted as another indicator of secularization as well.

In a study conducted in 2004 with 687 students, 20.6% of the participants believed that there was no relationship between premarital intercourse and the concept of *namus*³ (girls: 19.3%, boys: 21.5%) (Ceyhan, 2005:161). However, according to the findings of a recent doctoral research study we referenced earlier, 56.8% of students stated that there was no relationship between a man's premarital intercourse and the concept of *namus* (girls: 67.4%, boys: 46.2%), and 55.5% of students stated that there was no relationship between a woman's premarital intercourse and the concept of *namus* (girls: 68.2%, boys: 43%) (Kaya, 2024:131).

In a 2006 study involving 340 students, which highlighted the tendency among religious students to disapprove of premarital intercourse, 71.4% of religious students reported having a negative attitude toward premarital sexual relations or believed that sexuality should be experienced in a limited manner (Kaya et al., 2007:445). Correspondingly, our research findings also indicate that as religiosity decreases among young people, there is a tendency for positive attitudes toward premarital sexual experiences to increase.

In another study conducted in 2010 with 1,314 students, the average age at first sexual intercourse was found to be 17.80 ± 2.58 for females and 16.75 ± 2.01 for males. More strikingly, the same study found that students who consumed alcohol, an indicator of a secular lifestyle, were significantly more sexually active than those who did not consume alcohol (Saraçoğlu et al., 2015).

In addition to all these, we in this survey, directed the entire participants a multiple-choice question regarding the reasons for the end of their close relationships. The results were as follows: 64.7% cited "lying/selfishness/infidelity"; 44.9% mentioned "consuming everything quickly/getting bored easily"; 19.5% referred to "high expectations related to living standards"; and 12.8% marked "religious/cultural/familial differences." These results imply that students are being influenced by cultural shifts, which are already aforementioned as signs of a secular society. Consequently, it is evident that there is a growing trend of fluid and fragile relationships among students, particularly when considering the frequency (Table 9) and duration (Table 10) of these relationships.

In summary, the increase in premarital intercourse, driven by the combination of the aforementioned cultural transformations shaping a secular-modern society, is viewed as a key aspect of Ertit's theory of secularization. In his theory, Ertit asserts, with a Nietzschean tone, that "God is dying in Turkey as well" (Ertit, 2018: 195). Furthermore, these shifts facilitate and accelerate dating among young people, leading to more fluid and fragile relationships (Bauman, 2003). Such hasty and vulnerable relationships lack the ethics of authenticity, which Taylor (2003) identified as one of the main challenges of modernity. Consequently, this paper aims to highlight a significant challenge that may lead to profound structural transformations in the future family structure in Turkey—namely, the asymmetric relationship between declining religiosity and increasing premarital intercourse, which contributes to the rise of more fluid and fragile romantic relationships. Ultimately, this process seems to lead to a phenomenon of "living/aging alone," initially observed in the United States and Western Europe, along with the tragic consequences it has engendered, such as dying in solitude and being found only after the body has decomposed (see Klinenberg, 2013). Without the implementation of necessary policies, it appears likely that similar outcomes will become increasingly evident in Turkey within a few decades.

³Although the term is etymologically derived from the ancient Greek word "nomos," in Turkish culture it carries a religiously connoted nuance. In this respect, it bears more resemblance to the English word "chastity" rather than "dignity."



Acknowledgments	The authors wish to extend their deepest gratitude to the academic and administrative staff of Sakarya University for their continuous support and invaluable guidance. We would also like to express our sincere appreciation to the students whose participation was essential to the successful completion of the research.
Ethics Committee Approval	This study was approved by the Social and Humanities Ethics Committee of Sakarya University (Meeting No. 62, Decision No. 20, dated 11.10.2023).
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- M.T.A., Ö.K.; Data Acquisition- M.A.A.H.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- M.T.A., Ö.K.; Drafting Manuscript- M.T.A., Ö.K.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- M.T.A., Ö.K.; Final Approval and Accountability- M.T.A., Ö.K.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Research Article

Open Access

The Role of Digital Images in Migration Management: “One Picture a Thousand Stories”



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Abstract

This study examines the representation of refugees in Türkiye’s visual migration management. It conducts a content analysis of 44 photographs and a social semiotic analysis of three selected photographs from the e-catalog “One Picture a Thousand Stories” published on the official website of the Presidency of Migration Management. This digital catalog comprises 44 photographs submitted to a photography competition organized by the Presidency of Migration Management in 2021, which were subsequently selected for publication based on their thematic relevance and visual representation of migration-related narratives. The initial review of the photos focuses on analyzing the depiction of refugees with particular attention to their representation and interactions with various social actors, including local communities and state representatives such as law enforcement and government officials. This study examines the role of visual narratives in Türkiye’s migration governance and how migration-related imagery contributes to state-led discourse on refugee management. Considering the significant impact of visual communication on shaping public perceptions of political issues, government institutions have increasingly incorporated photographs on their websites and social media platforms to convey strategic messages. Additionally, this study examines the broader role of photography in migration management with a particular focus on its influence in shaping public perceptions of the “acceptable” migrant within the context of state policies and social integration.

Keywords

Migration management • social semiotic • content analysis • policy discourse



“ Citation: Manap, Ç. (2025). The role of digital images in migration management: “One picture a thousand stories”. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 258–273. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2025-1647352>

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The Role of Digital Images in Migration Management: “One Picture a Thousand Stories”

The internet, social media, and widely accessible digital technologies have significantly transformed the role and impact of photographs. These improvements have facilitated the creation and dissemination of photographs, thereby increasing the influence of visual media in shaping perceptions and representations (Massari, 2023, p. 4). Social and digital media have increased the global visibility of refugee experiences through a diverse range of photographs. These photographs depict scenes ranging from distress and loss to moments of relief and joy, capturing refugees as they cross borders, seek shelter, or reunite with loved ones (de Laat, 2018, p. 16). Photographs function as a form of visual documentation that provides insight into times and places that might otherwise remain obscured, while also emphasizing details that may otherwise be overlooked. Photographers deliver their perspectives through intentional choices, including the selection of the shot's location, the arrangement of the subject, and the use of lighting. These decisions influence how viewers interpret the intended message of the photograph. While historically significant actors in the traditional public sphere, state institutions continue to play a crucial role in the contemporary digital communications landscape (Massari, 2023). Adler-Nissen, Andersen, and Hansen (2020) emphasize the significant political impact of photographic imagery in their analysis of visual representation within international politics.

Their analysis centers on the widely circulated photograph of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian child who tragically drowned while attempting to reach Europe as part of a perilous refugee journey. The photo, which shows his lifeless body washed up on a Turkish beach, became an iconic symbol of the human cost of the Syrian refugee crisis and attracted global attention to the desperate plight of displaced persons seeking asylum in Europe. This photograph played a crucial role in shaping public opinion, generating widespread support for Europe's open-door migration policy in 2015. However, as political dynamics shifted, the same photograph was later used to justify the 2016 EU-Türkiye agreement, which significantly restricted migration routes from Türkiye to Greece. This case highlights the influential role of visual media in shaping public discourse on migration and informing policy decisions. The fields of migration governance (Poljak, 2018; Carmel et al., 2021; Mayblin, 2021; Natter, 2021) and the visual representation of refugees (Williams, 2003; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Zhang & Hellmueller, 2017) have been extensively examined in academic research. There has been a marked increase in scholarly attention to the role of photographic imagery within the context of migration governance recently (Wilmott, 2017; Massari, 2023). Studies on the visual representation of migration have emphasized the media's critical role in influencing public perceptions, shaping policy discourse, and constructing state narratives. Visual framing functions as a key mechanism through which migration is depicted, commonly either as a humanitarian crisis or a security threat, under prevailing political ideologies. Brader et al. (2008) underlined the influence of elite discourse in shaping opposition to immigration by emphasizing its costs rather than benefits, frequently evoking anxiety through racial or ethnic distinctions. Similarly, Dunaway et al. (2007) argue that media coverage strengthens the prominence of migration-related issues, thereby reinforcing prevailing narratives. The credibility of visual representations is increasingly questioned in the digital age. Allan (2019) observed that the “authority of news imagery” is frequently challenged due to manipulation and selective framing, raising concerns about the reliability of visual narratives.

Blinder and Allen (2016) analyzed the representation of migration in British news media between 2010 and 2012, demonstrating how journalistic narratives selectively emphasize asylum seekers, irregular migration, and economic migrants while rendering other migrant groups largely invisible. This selective framing shapes public perceptions that frequently misalign with statistical realities, reinforcing misconceptions and contributing to the development of restrictive immigration policies. The study further examines the impact of metaphorical language, such as characterizing immigration as a “flood,” in shaping policy responses by framing migration as a security threat. Media narratives can affect social integration by marginalizing migrant communities and reinforcing exclusionary attitudes beyond influencing public opinion. Although the study focuses on the UK, its findings shows that similar media-driven patterns exist in other countries, highlighting the broader role of the media in shaping migration discourse and policy.

Caple and Knox (2015) identified a shift toward visual storytelling in which photographs not only shape public discourse but, in some cases, become the focal point of the narrative. They further emphasize the evolving role of online news galleries as an emerging storytelling medium that, while influenced by traditional newspaper reporting practices, facilitates the development of distinct genres (Caple & Knox, 2012, p. 233). Their analysis reveals that online galleries are particularly well-suited for soft news and human-interest stories, rather than hard news reporting, which typically requires greater depth and further investigation. Moreover, the interaction between text and photographs, particularly the role of captions in shaping meaning, remains an area of interest. The authors also highlight the increasing significance of ‘text complexes’ - integrating written narratives, photograph galleries, and videos—within digital news platforms. Aiello (2020, p. 60) emphasizes the significance of analyzing the formal characteristics of data visualizations to understand their role in shaping the interpretation of knowledge, facts, and perspectives. A social semiotic approach provides a structured framework for examining semiotic resources — including color, layout, graphs, and charts —by linking their design to broader societal meanings and contextual implications. This approach emphasizes how data visualizations function in practice and how they are refined to achieve more effective and ethical communication rather than merely describing visual materials. Researchers can contribute to the evolution of its production and application in everyday life through the systematic cataloging and contextualization of these visual elements provided they critically engage with both the political and practical dimensions of data visualization.

From a theoretical standpoint, Foucault’s (1982) concepts of “governmentality” and “biopower” provide a critical framework for analyzing how states employ visual media to construct migration narratives that serve political objectives. These photographs function as ideological instruments that shape public perception and influence policymaking, rather than merely serving as documentary representations. Harrison (2003) argues that photographs serve as potent communicative tools, embedding cultural, social, and political meanings. The strategic sharing of images on government platforms, in the context of Türkiye’s migration governance, simultaneously reinforces both a humanitarian narrative and a discourse of control highlighting the role of the state in regulating migration. This study explores the visual representation of migration governance as depicted by Türkiye’s Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), the primary state institution overseeing migration-related policies and operations. Employing a visual content analysis approach informed by visual social semiotics, the research examines 44 photographs. These photographs were selected from the “One Picture A Thousand Stories” photography contest organized by the PMM in 2021 and featured in an e-catalog of images deemed worthy of exhibition¹. The photographs seem to be strategically

¹yarisma.goc.gov.tr

curated to depict migration in a manner that aligns with Türkiye’s migration management policies, international perspectives on migration, and the country’s emphasis on humanitarian aid. This analysis centers on five key themes: Türkiye’s role in shaping migration discourse, the humanization and aestheticization of migrant imagery, the country’s international positioning in migration management, the representation of migrants as either victims or resilient individuals, and the intersection of migration with Türkiye’s national identity. The photographs are strategically framed to redefine Türkiye’s role in international migration governance by highlighting the themes of hospitality, humanitarian responsibility, and social solidarity. These photographs shared by a country hosting the largest refugee² population in the world³ have two purposes: They seek to create a favorable perception of refugees among the local population domestically while they show Türkiye’s humanitarian initiatives and advocate for a collective approach to migration management internationally. A common characteristic of migration photography is the use of remarkable and powerful imagery to highlight the human dimensions of migration crises.

The PMM’s photo catalog adopts a visual strategy that juxtaposes representations of hardship with photographs of hope, resilience, and social integration. This approach moves beyond the victim narrative by portraying refugees as active participants in society, engaging in employment, education, and daily interactions with local communities. Additionally, the incorporation of traditional motifs and cultural elements reinforces the themes of integration and social cohesion, framing migration as an opportunity for solidarity rather than exclusively as a crisis. As Berger (1980) notes, photographs are inherently selective, capturing specific moments representing both visible realities and underlying narratives, ultimately shaping interpretation through their framing. The photographs curated by the PMM function as both visual documentation and ideological instruments. These photographs reinforce the portrayal of migration as a structured and controlled process by integrating migration management within the context of Türkiye’s cultural identity and humanitarian tradition. Furthermore, they position Türkiye as a “model country” in migration governance, underlining its leadership within the framework of EU-Türkiye agreements and broader regional strategies. However, this visual narrative has certain risks. While the emphasis on solidarity and integration is significant, the use of refugee imagery to advance national and international agendas raises ethical concerns. It is crucial to balance the representation of migrants’ experiences with the perspectives of host communities to ensure that such portrayals promote authentic understanding and meaningful support. The PMM’s photographic collection thus underscores both the possibilities and challenges of using visual materials in migration governance. This study offers valuable insights into the visual construction and communication of migration at both national and global levels by critically examining the human, esthetic, and political dimensions of these photographs.

Methodology

Scott (2024, p. 234) claims that “migration is visually constructed through conventions formed at abstract and material levels of society.” This perspective underlines the necessity of critically examining

²While this study employs the term “refugee” as an umbrella concept to refer to individuals from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Somalia residing in Türkiye, it is essential to acknowledge the specific legal definitions established in Türkiye’s national legislation. According to the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), the status of refugee is granted exclusively to individuals who arrive from European countries and meet the criteria outlined in the 1951 Geneva Convention. In contrast, individuals from non-European countries are defined as conditional refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, or individuals under temporary protection, as is the case for most Syrians. Despite these distinctions in Turkish immigration law, the term “refugee” in this study has a broader sociological meaning, emphasizing shared experiences of displacement, forced migration, and seeking protection rather than just legal status.

³Colombia, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye and Uganda hosted almost one-third of the world’s refugees and other people in need of international protection. See also: Refugee Statistics 2024, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>

the visual representation of migration in media and public discourse to uncover the underlying narratives and ideological frameworks shaping public perceptions. This study adopts a methodological framework that integrates visual content analysis with social semiotic analysis to investigate the visual strategies employed by government institutions in migration management. These approaches enable the systematic categorization of visual materials and the interpretation of their deeper semiotic meanings, providing valuable insights into how such representations shape the public understanding of migration. A visual content analysis was conducted on a dataset of 44 photographs from an e-catalog published by PMM. According to Bell (2001), visual content analysis provides a systematic method for quantifying and categorizing visual media, thus facilitating the identification of recurring patterns in the portrayal of individuals, events, and situations. In this study, the quantitative component serves as a descriptive tool that illuminates pervasive visual conventions and guides the selection of photographs for further qualitative interpretation. The social semiotic analysis integrates both quantitative methods and in-depth interpretative strategies. Specifically, this descriptive phase is designed to explain common visual conventions and to inform the selection of photographs for comprehensive analysis. The analysis primarily focuses on representational and interpersonal meta-functions to determine the most frequently depicted elements and understand how images are situated relative to viewers (Scott, 2024, p. 189).

The analysis begins with the systematic coding of each photograph using a framework informed by the social semiotic theories of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). This framework is further refined inductively through a preliminary review of the dataset, following Hall's (1975) interpretive approach. Twelve coding categories were developed, including the stage of migration (pre-journey, journey, settlement, post-settlement), number of migrants in the frame, children present in the frame, action represented by migrant, reaction represented by migrant, border wall represented, action by other represented participants, the environment of photographs (outside/inside), the authority figure in a frame, image act and gaze, social distance, and vertical perspective to capture key aspects of visual representation. The quantitative analysis of these categories serves as a foundational step in identifying patterns in the representation of migrants and migration-related themes. This phase involves the systematic cataloging of key visual elements, such as the presence of authority figures, the social distance between subjects, and the environmental context, with the aim of identifying recurring visual tropes and dominant representational strategies. Following the quantitative analysis, three award-winning photographs from the e-catalog were selected for in-depth interpretative analysis. These photographs were chosen based on their prominence in the competition and their representational significance within the broader dataset. The photographers provided informed consent for the photos included in the study. This consent ensured adherence to ethical research standards concerning the use of visual materials.

The qualitative phase involved a detailed examination of key visual elements, including the composition and arrangement of subjects, gaze dynamics, and the interaction between foreground and background elements. This analysis aimed to uncover the narratives and ideological messages embedded within the photographs. The analysis examined key variables such as group size, foreground objects, and background contrasts, along with thematic elements including resilience, displacement, and urban inequality. The analysis focused on the postures and facial expressions of family members to assess how migration resilience was visually conveyed. It also examined the contrasts between informal shelters and urban infrastructure to illuminate the underlying socioeconomic disparities. The analysis interpreted symbolic elements such as pathways and trains as representations of movement and hope, illustrating how visual motifs interact with and contribute to broader migration narratives. This methodological approach enables a comprehensive

examination of how visual elements are used to construct migration narratives by integrating quantitative content analysis with qualitative social semiotic analysis. The findings of the research provide valuable insights into the strategies employed by government institutions to frame migration, with an emphasis on the themes of resilience, integration, and national identity. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how visual materials reflect and actively shape societal perceptions of migration through qualitative analysis.

Findings and Discussions

Descriptive Statistics of the Data

The analysis uncovered numerous visual conventions that contributed to the construction of migration narratives in Türkiye. In terms of representational content, 95% of the photographs prominently depict migrants as central subjects. Two photographs did not visibly depict individuals: One captured a caravan of buses and ambulances evacuating people from a city devastated by destruction with the elevated perspective obscuring the passengers inside. The other photograph, also taken from above, depicted a tent camp located across the border. These results indicate that nearly all photographs included representations of migrants. The migrants were also present even in photographs where law enforcement officers or PMM personnel were the focal subjects. Some photographs depicted migration through representations of migration routes or temporary accommodation centers rather than individuals. Photographs of migration routes and temporary shelters carry significant representational and interpretative weight as enduring symbols closely associated with migration.

The majority of migrant subjects were depicted in groups of three or more individuals, accounting for 56.82% of the photographs (twenty-five photographs), three of which specifically portrayed families. A single migrant was featured in 10 photographs (22.73%), while pairs of migrants were represented in seven photographs (15.91%), "reflecting a visual emphasis on community over individuality" (Dellas, 2020, p. 37). The dataset of paired photographs includes seven photographs categorized as follows: One depicting two girls, one featuring a boy and a girl, two depicting two boys, two capturing a mother and child, and one illustrating an interaction between a teacher and a student. Additionally, two photographs (4.55%) did not depict any individuals; one showed a refugee camp while the other presented vehicles on a migration route, captured from an aerial perspective.

Thirty-one photographs (70.45%) feature children, whereas 13 photographs exclude any children. The representations of the settlement phase vary depicting scenes such as families residing in temporary shelters, children studying or playing in the streets, migrants sitting alone at home, young migrants socializing in domestic settings, individuals playing music in a café or outdoors, migrants walking through urban spaces, and a wrestling match taking place on a beach.

The photographs portray a wide array of experiences across various stages of displacement within the broader context of migration. Five photographs (11.36%) capture the journey to Türkiye, while one photograph (2.27%) documents the migration route from Aleppo to another destination. The largest portion of the collection, comprising 24 photographs (54.55%), portrays refugee settlements within Türkiye, emphasizing the predominant trend of long-term resettlement in the country. Additionally, two photographs (4.55%) depict settlements in other countries: One shows a tent settlement in Atme village on the Türkiye Syria border, while the other features a tent settlement within Syria. The migration journey from Türkiye to Europe is represented in 11 photographs (25%), illustrating the continued movement toward European destinations.

Finally, one photograph (2.27%) captured the pre-settlement phase, documenting the period before the final relocation. The photograph is classified as representing the pre-settlement phase depicting a Turkish soldier offering chocolate to a Syrian girl in Tel Abyad. However, neither the photograph nor its accompanying description provides clear evidence of the girl’s intent to migrate. Due to the ongoing conflict in her country and inclusion in a photograph featured in a migration-themed competition, she is considered a potential refugee. These photographs construct a visual narrative of the diverse trajectories and decisions faced by displaced individuals throughout their migration journeys. One depiction of the journey from Türkiye to Europe illustrates migrants attempting to cross the Meriç River by boat. Additionally, two other attempts to migrate from Türkiye to Europe were unsuccessful, with the individuals being rescued during their crossings.

Thirty-six photographs (81.81%) depict migrants in outdoor environments, highlighting the emphasis on border crossings, waiting areas, and informal living conditions under open skies. One photograph contains both indoor and outdoor elements, with an interior scene captured from an external angle blurring the line between public visibility and private experience. One of the indoor photographs shows a moment in a café that gives the impression of a temporary shelter, while the others, taken largely in accommodation centers, illustrate controlled and often restricted spaces of residence. Moreover, three nighttime photographs show individuals near the Edirne border attempting to keep warm by lighting a fire, visually emphasizing the themes of vulnerability, resilience, and survival. These spatial portrayals often juxtapose wide-open, uncontrolled outdoor spaces with the confinement of accommodation centers and controlled zones, producing a contrast that reinforces the narratives of humanitarianism and securitization (Massari, 2021, p. 122)

Authority figures appear in three photographs (6.81%) depicting various interactions between officials and migrants. These include two police officers carrying refugee children, a soldier offering chocolate to a Syrian girl, and a PMM staff member addressing a group of migrants assembled in Edirne to cross the border. These scenes reflect a broader visual strategy where law enforcement and military personnel are often portrayed in compassionate or protective roles, particularly in interactions with children, reinforcing humanitarian narratives while also legitimizing state control at borders.

From a formal semiotic perspective, a considerable proportion of the photographs were taken at a close distance between the subject and the photographer, representing 47.7% of the total, while 70.5% were captured from an eye-level perspective. Direct eye contact with the camera was observed in 13.6% of the photographs, whereas the majority depicted migrants looking downward or away from the frame. Notably, only the children made eye contact in the photos. This is consistent with the findings of Šarić (2022, p. 113), who observed that children in refugee photographs are more frequently shown making eye contact, functioning as “demand images” that emotionally engage the viewer through gaze, while adult subjects are often photographed from a distance or with diverted gazes, signaling vulnerability and detachment.

Qualitative analysis of the three winning photographs from the competition

While the analysis of photographs initially focused on identifying their content, a qualitative approach was later used to investigate the composition and arrangement of visual elements, emphasizing their positioning relative to the viewer. This qualitative analysis aimed to further refine the conceptualization of visual conventions through an in-depth examination of the top three photographs from the competition.

The winning photograph of the contest, taken by K. Deniz Kalaycı, presents a compelling urban scene that encapsulates the themes of migration and urbanization (PMM, 2022). In the foreground, a family of three—two adults and a child—is depicted with their backs turned, standing closely together, their identities and

faces obscured, leaving only their silhouettes visible. As Banks (2012, p.301) notes, refugees are “portrayed as shadowy strangers”. This photograph serves as a powerful representation of how refugees are frequently anonymized with their identities and narratives often overlooked. The family’s gaze toward an uncertain future underscores the symbolic representation of displacement, embodying the themes of lost hope and pervasive uncertainty. The adults, clad in dark, traditional clothes, carried bags, that identified them as newly arrived migrants. The child, holding the hand of one adult while grasping a small suitcase in the other, stands alongside them. Positioned on a paved road at the boundary of a grassy area, they direct their gaze toward a dense and expansive cityscape in the background. The mid-ground features a cluster of tightly packed, low-rise residential buildings with red-tiled roofs, reinforcing a sense of urban congestion. The tightly clustered homes create a sense of overwhelming density, emphasizing the crowded living conditions. The three imposing modern high-rise buildings dominate the skyline, creating a visual juxtaposition with the older, more compact residential areas. This contrast emphasizes the effects of rapid urbanization and the widening divide between traditional and contemporary living spaces. This visual juxtaposition aligns with Aiello’s (2020, p. 60) discourse that photographs in migration contexts often operate on multiple semiotic levels, both documenting reality and shaping public narratives through esthetic and ideological framing. The overcast sky casts a gray, somber tone over the scene, reinforcing an atmosphere of uncertainty and transition.

Figure 1

A family of three in İstanbul. Photograph by K. Deniz Kalaycı.



The photograph effectively captures the challenges associated with migration and the impact of urban expansion on cities such as İstanbul. This theme is further emphasized in the accompanying text, which states, “İstanbul is a city that receives migrants from all over the world. The mass migration is also affecting urbanization negatively.” The photograph serves as both a poignant narrative of migration and a purposeful tool of political and visual storytelling. The photograph depicts a migrant family moving toward a densely urbanized environment, encapsulating the themes of displacement, integration, and the complexities of migration-induced urban transformation. The family, carrying their belongings, symbolizes the migrant

journey from displacement to resettlement, while the urban landscape in the background highlights the socioeconomic disparities inherent in this transition. The strong visual contrast between modest apartment buildings and towering skyscrapers serves as a representation of broader urban inequalities, emphasizing the pressures migration places on urban infrastructure and city planning.

The winning of this photograph in the competition reflects a strategic application of “visual migration governance” in which carefully curated photographs are employed to influence public perceptions of migration. This approach reinforces the government’s narrative of humanitarian responsibility while asserting its control over migration processes. This photograph prompts viewers to reflect on both the resilience of migrants seeking integration and the broader societal challenges associated with their presence by juxtaposing the human dimension of migration with a prominently featured urban landscape. This balance between evoking empathy and highlighting infrastructural and policy considerations enables the government to position itself as a compassionate host while simultaneously underscoring the complexities of migration management. The photograph encapsulates both the aspirations and complexities of migration as a visual representation of policy themes. It presents Istanbul as a microcosm of global migration dynamics, a city that accommodates migrants from diverse backgrounds while contending with the pressures on housing and public services. The depiction of densely packed, modest housing reflects the lived experiences of many migrants, standing in stark contrast to the high-rise buildings, which symbolize both economic opportunity and structural inequality. This visual framing aligns with Türkiye’s broader migration narrative, positioning the country as a key actor in migration governance—one that actively supports integration while acknowledging the infrastructural and policy challenges it entails. The PMM conveys a broader message regarding migration’s influence on Türkiye’s urban and social landscapes by incorporating this photograph officially. The photograph humanizes migration by highlighting the personal experiences of migrants while also acknowledging the infrastructural and systemic challenges associated with rapid urbanization. These dual narratives frame migration not solely as a crisis but as a transformative societal process, reinforcing Türkiye’s evolving role as both a host country and a key player in global migration governance. The PMM, through this visual representation, asserts its authority in migration management while shaping public discourse to promote both awareness and support for its policies.

This photograph functions as a compelling medium for conveying migration narratives through visual social semiotics. It operates on multiple semiotic levels, employing representational, interactive, and compositional elements to illustrate the complexities of migration in Türkiye. The family walking together evokes themes of displacement, movement, and resilience in the foreground. Their modestly carried belongings symbolize both the hardships of migration and the potential for new beginnings. In the background, the urban landscape presents a stark contrast between densely packed, modest housing and modern high-rise buildings, serving as a visual metaphor for the socioeconomic inequalities inherent in urban migration processes. The juxtaposition of modest housing with towering skyscrapers conveys a dual message: It underscores the structural inequalities that migrants face upon arrival in urban areas while also symbolizing the prospects for integration and upward mobility. This photograph is particularly significant in Türkiye, which hosts one of the largest refugee populations globally. Cities like Istanbul, which have hosted significant migrant communities, exemplify the challenges of balancing opportunities for migrants with the strain on urban infrastructure and resources. The spatial composition of the photograph, which situates the family at the periphery of the cityscape, symbolizes the physical and social liminality of migrants in urban environments. Their placement on an unpaved path leading into the city emphasizes their precarious position between displacement and settlement. The application of visual social semiotics is essential for analyzing

how the photograph functions as a tool within the broader framework of visual migration governance. The PMM, which awarded this photograph in this competition, uses it as a narrative device to humanize migration while reinforcing its governance efforts. The depiction of the family in motion aligns with the broader institutional framing of migration as a transformative process, highlighting both the resilience of migrants and the responsibilities of the host society. The strong contrast within the urban landscape highlights the infrastructural challenges and socioeconomic disparities intensified by migration, reflecting the ongoing tension between inclusion and marginalization. The photograph strengthens Türkiye’s role as a key actor in global migration governance. It captures the dual reality of migration, portraying both the potential for integration and the concrete pressures placed on social and urban infrastructures. The family depicted in the photograph serves as a visual representation of the experiences of millions of migrants, while the urban backdrop symbolizes the broader socio-political framework of migration management in Türkiye. This interaction between human subjects and structural elements positions the photograph as both a powerful artistic composition and a strategic tool of state-led visual storytelling. The PMM strengthens its role in shaping public perceptions of migration, presenting it as both a challenge and an opportunity within the context of Türkiye’s evolving urban and social landscape by featuring this photograph.

The second place-winning photograph, taken by Murat Bakmaz, captures daily life within a refugee accommodation center, specifically the Midyat Accommodation Center (PMM, 2022). The photograph is shot from an elevated vantage point providing a bird’s-eye view of a vast expanse of beige, rectangular tents systematically arranged in uniform rows extending into the distance.

Figure 2

Life at Midyat Accomodation Center. Photograph by Murat Bakmaz.



The repetitive and uniform arrangement of the tents underlines the vast scale of displacement and the temporary nature of this living environment. A woman wearing a blue headscarf is seen hanging clothes on a makeshift clothesline stretched between two poles in the foreground. She holds up a pink and red patterned garment, introducing a contrast of color against the otherwise muted tones of the camp. The clothesline, filled with garments swaying in the breeze, serves as a visual representation of daily life and resilience

despite adversity. The ground appears dry and dusty, characteristic of conditions commonly found in refugee camps. The tents were decorated with logos from humanitarian organizations, signifying the collaborative efforts to provide shelter and support. Some tents feature makeshift doors or small extensions, which are likely added to enhance privacy.

The photograph emphasizes the resilience and adaptability of the residents as they create moments of normality within an otherwise precarious environment despite the challenging circumstances. The tightly packed arrangement of identical temporary shelters visually reinforces a sense of uniformity and structured migration management. The repetitive pattern of the tents symbolizes a coordinated and systematized approach to providing shelter, highlighting the state’s capacity to address the logistical complexities of accommodating displaced populations. In contrast, the foreground presents a humanizing element, providing a focal point that personalizes the otherwise vast and impersonal expanse of temporary dwellings. The woman’s activity in the photograph -engaging in laundry- serves as a symbolic representation of resilience, routine, and efforts to reestablish a sense of normality within an otherwise temporary and restrictive environment. Her presence within this setting underscores the lived experience of displacement while affirming the fundamental human dignity of refugees. The woman’s dress and the traditional patterns in the fabric she holds serve as a visual marker of her cultural identity and heritage. These elements show that despite the disruptions caused by forced migration, refugees maintain a connection to their cultural roots, which remain evident even within institutionalized settings. The presence of hanging laundry and everyday objects, such as rugs and makeshift doors, reflects the material precarity of the environment. However, these same objects also symbolize adaptability and self-sufficiency, highlighting the agency of displaced individuals in shaping their living spaces. The photograph avoids explicitly depicting suffering; instead, it offers a narrative of hardship and resilience structured around institutional support. The accompanying caption, “Life at Midyat Accommodation Center,” reduces the complexities of refugee experiences to a neutral and somewhat sanitized depiction. The title omits any reference to the underlying causes of displacement, or the systemic challenges faced by refugees, instead directing attention toward the accommodation center itself. This framing implicitly positions the facility as a testament to Türkiye’s role in providing structured care and security. Additionally, the institutional brand in the photograph, including visible logos and signboards, further reinforces this narrative. This photograph exemplifies Türkiye’s strategic use of visual migration management to influence public perceptions of its refugee policies. The photograph constructs a narrative centered on efficiency, humanitarian responsibility, and orderly migration governance by highlighting a well-organized accommodation center and capturing a moment of daily life. However, the visual framing of the photograph also hides certain underlying realities. The photograph normalizes prolonged displacement, presenting accommodation centers as adequate solutions while ignoring critical systemic issues such as integration, legal rights, and long-term resettlement by depicting an institutionalized environment. Additionally, the photograph disregards the root causes of displacement and the broader socio-political challenges associated with hosting millions of refugees, offering a constrained and carefully curated perspective on migration. The photograph also shifts attention away from the structural inequalities and the systemic dependencies that such environments inherently perpetuate by highlighting individual agency. This photograph operates within a deliberately constructed narrative framework that aligns with the dual objectives of migration management: Documenting state efforts while promoting a humane representation of refugees. This reflects Türkiye’s broader strategy of positioning itself as a responsible and capable actor in migration governance, benefiting from visual storytelling to emphasize its humanitarian commitments.

However, the absence of critical engagement with systemic challenges underscores the selective nature of the visual migration discourse, where what is presented is as significant as what remains omitted.

The third-place winning photograph, taken by İsmail Coşkun, captures a tense and emotionally charged moment in the migration process (PMM, 2022). The photo depicts a family of five cautiously crossing a shallow yet fast-moving section of the Meriç River near Edirne, Türkiye. Migrants who are likely trying to reach Greece are going through difficult and risky conditions on their journey to Europe. The family moves in a single line along a narrow, rocky path elevated just above the river, with the fast-flowing water rushing under them. The turbulent current generates white, frothy waves as it crashes against the rocks, intensifying the sense of danger. Everyone carefully navigates the narrow path, maintaining balance to prevent slipping. One man, presumably the father, carries a baby in his arms, while others carry bags and personal belongings wrapped in plastic bags for protection against moisture. They are dressed in dark, weather-appropriate clothes with hoods pulled up to shield themselves from the elements. The overcast sky and muted atmosphere create a cold and somber tone, symbolizing the family’s arduous journey and the uncertainty they endure. The vast expanse of calm water in the background contrasts sharply with the turbulent river in the foreground, symbolizing the challenges faced and the aspirations pursued during the migratory journey.

Figure 3

A family is walking through the Meriç River. Photograph by İsmail Coşkun.



Kress and Adami (2010, p. 185) claim that all media and communication technologies inherently possess affordances, encompassing both material and social possibilities as well as inherent constraints. They argue as Kress and Pachler (2007) stated, that identity and subjectivity are fundamentally shaped through the process of meaning-making to oneself and one’s lived experiences. Within this framework, the media encountered along with their affordances—what they facilitate, restrict, or prevent—significantly influence the construction of meaning and, consequently, the shaping of identities. This photograph depicts a moment of vulnerability as a group of migrants, including children, navigate shallow yet visibly dangerous waters. The photo emphasizes the themes of hardship, perseverance, and risk, highlighting the migrants’ resilience despite adversity. The composition centers on the human figures, while the surrounding environment,

including the flowing water and subtle indications of rapids, serves to frame and emphasize the unstable nature of their journey. This composition underlines the challenges that migrants encounter, highlighting both the physical and symbolic obstacles to their aspirations.

The act of crossing water serves as a powerful metaphor often associated with migration, symbolizing transition, struggle, and the search for a better future. The presence of a child reinforces the themes of fragility despite adversity and the strength of family ties. The light color palette, dominated by shades of gray and blue, creates a somber atmosphere that emphasizes the gravity of the migrants' situation. This visual approach aligns with the overarching narrative of migration as a significant humanitarian and political issue that requires attention. The caption of the photo also supports this perspective: “Migrants who go to Edirne with the hope of going to Europe are trying to cross to Greece with the difficult journey. “A family is walking through the shallow point of the Meriç River, which flows through the interior part of Edirne.” Phrases such as “difficult journeys” and “trying to cross to Greece with the hope of going to Europe” highlight both the challenges migrants endure and the aspirations that motivate their movement. These expressions reflect the physical and emotional toll of migration and highlight the migrants' enduring hope for a better future. At the same time, the narrative “emphasizes risk and a need for mechanisms to preserve health and life” drawing attention to the inherent dangers of such journeys and the urgent need for systems that can ensure migrants' safety and well-being throughout their passage (Greenwood & Thomson, 2020, p. 157). The photographer positions himself as an objective observer documenting the migration experience without overt intervention or judgment. The PMM presents itself as both an observer and administrator of migration, underlining its dual role in managing migration processes while addressing humanitarian concerns by documenting and disseminating this narrative. The interplay between text and photograph frames migration as a deeply human experience.

The depiction of a family in the photograph humanizes migration, shifting the focus from statistical representations to the lived experiences of migrants. While the caption of the photograph remains descriptive, its publication by a migration management authority situates it within the broader discourse on border control, migration policies, and humanitarian responses. The lack of a clear policy language allows the photograph to independently convey its message, subtly reaffirming the role of governance in migration management while encouraging empathy. This photograph and accompanying text are part of a broader strategy used by authorities in migration governance to balance competing narratives. On the one hand, the humanitarian perspective emphasizes the hardships faced by migrants, fostering public empathy and reinforcing the necessity of structured migration policies. On the other hand, the emphasis on control and surveillance is evident; by visually documenting and framing migration, the authority asserts its role and responsibility in overseeing and regulating migratory movements. The inclusion of this photograph agrees with international migration governance practices, where visual representations of border crossings serve multiple functions. This photograph evokes empathy from both domestic and international audiences and illustrates the challenges encountered by both migrants and authorities and reinforces the state's role in overseeing and managing migration processes. This photograph and its contextual framing contribute to a discourse that integrates humanitarian narratives with migration governance. It presents migration management as both a compassionate and authoritative effort by emphasizing the human dimension while simultaneously affirming the role of state oversight.

Visual representations of refugees are “both highly selective and profoundly political” and are shaped by governmental discourse and policy requirements (Bleiker et al., 2013, p. 411). These representations are rarely

objective; rather, they are strategically distributed to serve state interests—whether to elicit compassion in support of humanitarian agendas or to cultivate fear and justify restrictive immigration controls. Governments use visual images as a tool of biopolitical governance, framing asylum seekers as either passive victims in need of state intervention or potential threats to national security and social cohesion. This selective framing obscures the individuality, complexity, and agency of those seeking asylum, reducing them to abstract figures within broader narratives of state sovereignty, border protection, and national identity.

Conclusion

The visual portrayal of migration is instrumental in shaping public perceptions, informing policy decisions, and constructing political narratives. These representations often align with ideological and policy-driven discourses, influencing how migration is framed with its perceived advantages and challenges. Frequently associated with racial or ethnic identity, such framing can provoke public anxiety and significantly shape societal attitudes toward migration. Agenda-setting theory emphasizes the media’s capacity to focus public attention on specific issues, thereby reinforcing the importance of visual storytelling in shaping societal priorities. However, this influence has its complexities and limitations. The authenticity of photographs is increasingly scrutinized, particularly in an era marked by digital manipulation and growing skepticism toward media, thereby raising concerns about the reliability of visual narratives. Despite these challenges, the profound influence of visual materials in shaping public discourse and perceptions remains unquestionable. The rapid advancement of digital technologies has reshaped storytelling, elevating photographs from supplementary elements to the central components of modern narratives. Photographs, beyond their esthetic function, serve as powerful vehicles for transferring complicated cultural, social, and political meanings, profoundly shaping public perception and discourse. The strategic use of visual representation by the state further highlights its role as a governance instrument. Contemporary states employ visual strategies not only to depict migration as a broader societal concern but also to frame it at an individual level, reinforcing state authority and control. This dual role is particularly evident in migration governance, where carefully selected images serve to balance humanitarian narratives with state messages and influence both national and international perceptions of migration management.

The findings of this study emphasize the dual function of visual materials within Türkiye’s migration governance as they serve both humanitarian and political objectives. On the one hand, photographs evoke empathy by depicting refugees as individuals confronting adversity, emphasizing themes of resilience, displacement, and survival. These visual narratives humanize migration by focusing on personal struggles, family interactions, and moments of relief, reinforcing Türkiye’s portrayal as a humanitarian actor. On the other hand, these representations simultaneously serve as strategic instruments that reinforce state narratives of control, national identity, and institutional responsibility. The state frames migration as a managed process and presents itself as both a guardian of national interests and a provider of humanitarian aid through strategically selected photos. These visual representations convey the idea that migration is subject to strict control and reinforce the perception of state authority by depicting refugees within controlled settings, such as state-run camps, border checkpoints, and interactions with law enforcement. Furthermore, photographs that position migrants next to national symbols or official institutions contribute to a visual discourse that links migration governance with state sovereignty and national identity. These representations play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions by influencing whether migrants are perceived as vulnerable individuals in need of assistance, potential threats to social stability, or valuable contributors to the host society. The framing of migration has significant implications for policy development and social

attitudes as visual materials increasingly shape public discourse. The selective portrayal of refugees influences national and international perceptions that either promote solidarity and humanitarian engagement or reinforce exclusionary policies and xenophobic narratives. It is crucial to take a more balanced and ethically sound approach to visual storytelling considering the growing influence of digital platforms in disseminating migration-related images. The transition from politically motivated portrayals to representations that acknowledge the agency and complexity of migrant experiences encourages a more inclusive and nuanced discourse on migration.



Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Review

Open Access

An Integrative Model of Migrant Women Entrepreneurship in Family Businesses (MWE-FB): The Substratum Market System Perspective



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Abstract

This article develops and explains an integrative model of migrant women entrepreneurship in family businesses (MWE-FB). The model contributes to the literature in three ways. First, we offer a comprehensive summary of the findings derived from 30 articles exploring entrepreneurship at the intersection of migrant women and family businesses. Second, we extend the conventional frameworks such as the interactionist model, mixed embeddedness model, entrepreneurship imagery and disadvantage model, ethnic minority and women's enterprise model, and resources-strategies-outcomes model by considering several additional groups of variables such as migrant women's motives, migrant women's conditions, distinct migrant women's strategies, and additional outcomes. Third, we develop a distinct interpretation of the proposed model based on the substratum market system perspective. This interpretation locates family-business-driven migrant women's entrepreneurship within fundamental authentic provisioning activities rather than the realities of opportunity search and resource utilization. The substratum interpretation indicates that service delivery strategies offer a direct path of moving from the substratum level to the formalized level of the market. This work also detects some avenues for further exploration. One of the most prevalent gaps in the extant literature on migrant women's entrepreneurship is the exploration of entrepreneurial movement between developing countries.

Keywords

Migrant Women • Integrative Model of Migrant Women Entrepreneurship • Migrant Women Entrepreneurship



Citation: Allayorava, N., Kadirov, D., Wood, B. & Bardakci, A. (2025). An integrative model of migrant women entrepreneurship in family businesses (MWE-FB): the substratum market system perspective. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 274–291. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1485810>

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An Integrative Model of Migrant Women Entrepreneurship in Family Businesses (MWE-FB): The Substratum Market System Perspective

This article synthesizes an integrative model of migrant women entrepreneurship in family businesses (MWE-FB) based on 30 research articles exploring migrant women entrepreneurs in family business settings. The model sheds light on an important phenomenon as researchers increasingly consider female immigrant entrepreneurship an important component of the world economy (De Luca & Ambrosini, 2019).

Existing research articles deal with topics such as women entrepreneurs in family firms (Campopiano et al., 2017; Maseda et al., 2022; Sentuti et al., 2019), migrant entrepreneurship (Sinkovics & Reuber, 2021; Bolzani, 2020), and migrant women entrepreneurship (Chreim et al., 2018). While these articles focus on the components of MWE-FB, no research currently exists that integrates all these streams into a comprehensive framework. Moreover, we find that scholarly articles specifically focusing on MWE-FB are sparse. A notable exception is the qualitative investigation of migrant women entrepreneurs from Eastern Europe setting up family businesses in the UK by Vershinina et al. (2019).

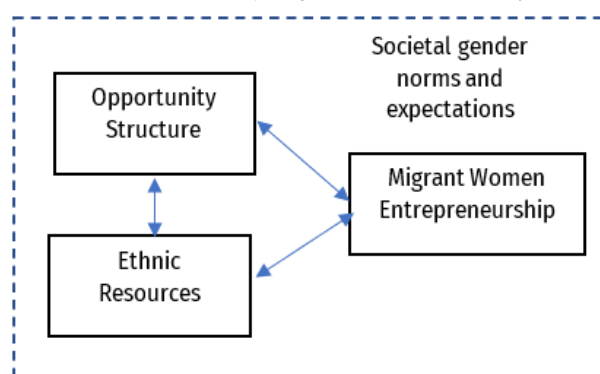
This article contributes to the literature in three ways. First, we offer a comprehensive summary of the findings derived from 30 articles exploring entrepreneurship at the intersection of migrant women, cross-cultural entrepreneurship, and family business. Second, we extend the conventional frameworks such as the interactionist model, the mixed embeddedness model, the ethnic minority and women's enterprise model, and the resources-strategies-outcomes model by considering several additional groups of variables such as migrant women's motives, migrant women's conditions, distinct migrant women's strategies, and additional outcomes. Third, we develop a distinct interpretation of the proposed model of MWE-FB based on the substratum market system perspective. This interpretation locates family-business-driven migrant women's entrepreneurship within fundamental authentic provisioning activities rather than the neoliberal market realities of opportunity search and resource utilization.

Existing Models of the MWE-FB

Existing research relies on the four common models when discussing issues related to MWE-FB. These models are the interactionist model, the mixed embeddedness model, the ethnic minority and women's enterprise (MWE) model, and the resources-strategies-outcomes (RSO) model.

The Interactionist Model

The interactionist model interprets the need for migrant entrepreneurship as the outcome of the interaction between ethnic resources and the opportunity structure in the host market (Romero & Valdez, 2016; Cifci & Atsız, 2021). This model of migrant entrepreneurship is the fundamental framework upon which other models are built (Ram, Jones, et al., 2017). It has a positive outlook: immigrants are seen to be advantaged by their privileged access to unique ethnic resources. Extending this model to the context of MWE, we note that the interactionist model predicts market activity as arising from the combination of heritage-driven ethnic resources uniquely available to migrant women and the host-country market structure imbued with opportunities for doing business (Figure 1).

Figure 1*The interactionist model of migrant woman's entrepreneurship*

The interactionist model has been criticized for its sterile approach to the cultural aspects of entrepreneurship. Specifically, it assumes perfect market conditions where market actors behave rationally. It also assumes free markets with an insignificant effect of state regulation. Researchers note that although some of these neoliberal assumptions come close to describing markets in the US or the UK, the situation in many other countries, such as European markets, which tend to be highly regulated, differs significantly (Ram, Jones, et al., 2017). At a minimum, it is argued that the model should incorporate societal norms and expectations for gender in both home and host cultures. These norms determine the extent to which MWE is facilitated, what opportunities arise in the market, and which ethnic resources become available for use.

Mixed Embeddedness Model

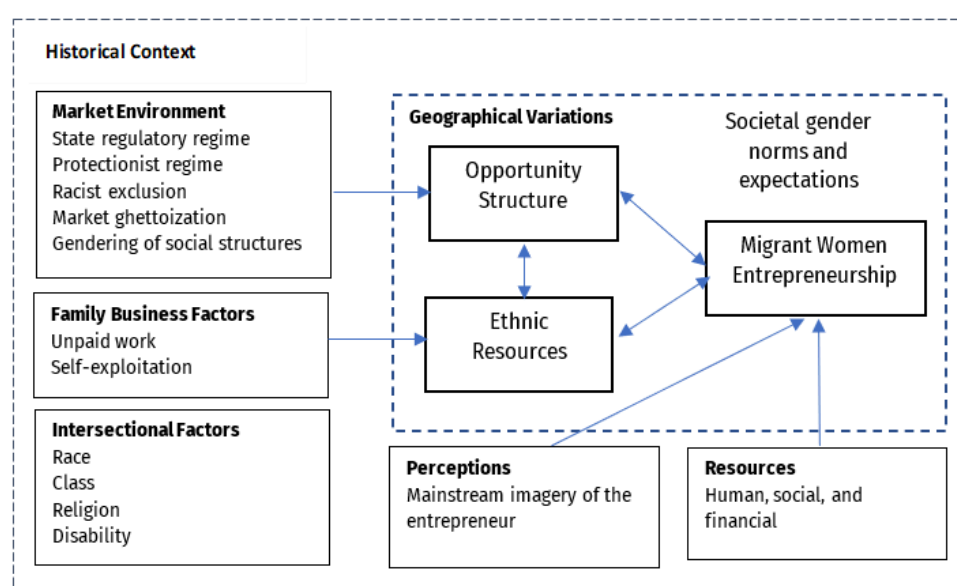
The mixed embeddedness perspective has strongly influenced the studies of migrant entrepreneurship (Rath & Kloosterman, 2000). Mixed embeddedness focuses on two levels of interaction: meso and macro. The meso-level includes the interaction of resources (human capital, social capital, and financial capital), family business characteristics, and the opportunity structure in the market. The macro-level focuses on cultural embeddedness, state policies, societal institutions, and national market trends. The mixed embeddedness model extends the interactionist model (Jones et al., 2014; Kloosterman, 2010) by highlighting the disadvantages of migrant entrepreneurship. It introduces additional external factors that determine the opportunity structure. It is argued that migrant entrepreneurs are relatively disadvantaged in comparison to indigenous entrepreneurs due to a hostile market environment and a protectionist state regulatory regime which may hinder migrant entrepreneurship activities. This perspective highlights the embedded structural disadvantages that migrants might face in host markets. In addition, migrant women might be forced to deal with racial discrimination, market exclusion, market ghettoization, and gendered processes (Ram, Jones, et al., 2017). Migrant women face difficulties in accessing financial resources due to being detached from mainstream support networks, while at the same time dealing with racism, enclave mentalities, and ghettoization (Figure 2). However, over time, family businesses that survive go beyond enclave mentalities, and move toward multiculturally hybrid structures (Arrighetti et al., 2014).

Researchers have also identified several family business factors. The specific structural factors of family businesses impact ethnic resources. For example, unpaid work tends to be as important as paid work in family businesses (Ram, Edwards, et al., 2017). In a family business, the domains of formality and informality interpenetrate. In addition, women tend to be prone to self-exploitation, that is, spending more time and resources to make things happen both in the productive and reproductive spheres.

Mixed embeddedness has been extended through the intersectional approach that focuses on the entrepreneur's social location which is the combination of race, gender, class, religion, and disability (Villares-Varela et al., 2017). Intersectional factors affect how migrant women entrepreneurship forms and evolves. Factors such as privilege, oppression, contestation, and empowerment related to gender and class are considered important in understanding the dynamics of the phenomenon (Ram, Jones, et al., 2017).

Further mixed embeddedness involves the consideration of broader macrorends and historical developments. Note that migrant women entrepreneurship happens within a broader historical context (Ram, Jones, et al., 2017). In some countries, the historical context favors migrant family entrepreneurship, while in others it might hinder the business activities of women.

Figure 2
Mixed Embeddedness Model



González-González et al. (2011) discussed the geographical variations of the mixed embeddedness model. The Neo-American variation that is found in English-speaking countries highlights the migrant entrepreneur motivation of attaining increased job mobility and higher income. The Rhineland variation (Germany, France) highlights the motivation for breaking through tough institutional hurdles favoring indigenes over migrants. The Nordic variation (Denmark, Sweden, Norway) recognizes the welfare state conditions, where entrepreneurship competes with the standard labor market.

Entrepreneurship Imagery and the Disadvantage Model

MWE is affected by the mainstream imagery of “the entrepreneur”. In many advanced economies, the mainstream imagery tends to be [white, male, middle-class] (Carter et al., 2015). MWE is in stark contrast to this imagery; therefore, it can create disadvantages at three levels: female versus male perceptions, white versus colored perceptions, and lower class versus higher class perceptions. Depending on the extent of such perceptions, migrant women entrepreneurs may need to exert additional efforts to fight against stereotyping, misconstrued perceptions, and disrespect.

The disadvantage model assumes that migrant women entrepreneurs create family businesses to avoid unemployment (Azmat, 2013). Hence, the main motivation is not to attain financial “success”, but it is to

survive economically in the context of a new culture and relationships. Researchers note a *double disadvantage* (i.e., migrant, women) as well as a *triple disadvantage* (i.e., migrant, women, developing country citizen) (Azmat, 2013). These disadvantages are believed to push migrant women to engage in familiar business activities which most often result in family businesses in low-skilled sectors.

Ethnic Minorities and the Women's Enterprise (EMW) Model

MWE is also considered as part of the ethnic minority and women enterprise (EMW). Enterprise diversity and success policies in industrial economies focus on promoting EMW (Carter et al., 2015). Considering the significant challenges in boosting EMW numbers, the EMW model focuses on different types of barriers that hinder the progress (Carter et al., 2015).

One of the major barriers appears to be the gendered perceptions of business activity. The consistent trend in many countries is that women tend to create a significantly smaller number of businesses compared to men. Moreover, on average, women are likely to both spend less time on their business due to family commitments and use their home as a base for their business. In some places and circumstances, self-employment is not considered a "proper business". According to Carter et al. (2015), another barrier is the low capitalization of EMWs.

In general, women entrepreneurs are discouraged from taking big risks and borrowing more money. EMWs, especially migrant family businesses, tend to concentrate on mature markets as well as low-value and low-skill sectors such as food, catering, cleaning, and non-for-profit support. Grimshaw and Rubery (2007) summarize the undervaluation of women work under the 5V framework: visibility (low diversity), valuation (undervaluation of women work), vocation (confusing affect/care with business), value-added (low value-added sectors), and variance (differences in perception). Not all factors considered to be barriers have a one-way impact. Factors such as family, culture, and social capital may have both positive and negative impacts on migrant women entrepreneurs (Azmat, 2013).

The Resources-Strategies-Outcomes (RSO) Model

Chreim et al. (2018) offer a general review of research on MWE. The authors confirm the role of resources such as human capital, social capital, and financial capital. Chreim et al. further summarized the strategies followed by migrant women entrepreneurs under the headings of sector strategies, generic strategies, and market strategies. Generic strategies such as aligning with a male partner and adopting informality appear to be directly relevant to the family business context. The review also highlights the individual, business, and social-level outcomes of ethnic women entrepreneurship (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Resources-Strategies-Outcomes (RSO) Model



The models reviewed in this section predict that migrant women's entrepreneurship is generally determined by the character, nature, intensity, and impact potential of both enabling and hindering factors. Some of these factors pertain to the meso environment of family, community, and firms, while most hindering factors pertain to the macroenvironment. These include government regimes, societal institutions, racism,

discrimination, protectionism, gender expectations and norms, gendered perceptions, and perceptions of migrant groups. Moreover, it is recognized that migrant women's entrepreneurship delivers beneficial outcomes at the individual, business, and societal levels.

Method

This study involved the search for relevant literature that investigates topics at the intersection of migrant women, entrepreneurship, and family business. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, a systematic literature review was conducted. The initial phase involved a broad search on Google Scholar, utilizing the keywords "migrant," "foreign," "women," "female," "entrepreneurship," and "family business." This search restricted to English language articles published through December 2023, yielded a vast pool of potential studies.

To refine the selection process, a focus was placed on recent publications with high citation counts, indicative of scholarly impact within the field. This initial screening identified four seminal articles directly addressing the research topic: migrant women in family entrepreneurship (MWE-FE). Building upon this foundation, Google Scholar was utilized again to identify articles citing the four seminal works. This broader search encompassed diverse disciplines, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the topic's nuances. The selection criteria included the number of citations with preference given to well-cited papers and the research's direct relevance in terms of including the search keywords in the abstract. We excluded the articles lacking a specific focus on women within the migrant entrepreneurial landscape or those analyzing migrant entrepreneurs as a homogenous group to maintain the study's specific scope.

Furthermore, the "Elicit" platform was employed to scrutinize the expert commentary and discussions surrounding each identified article. This process facilitated the identification of additional relevant studies situated at the nexus of migrant women, entrepreneurship, and family business. Through this multi-layered approach, a final corpus of 30 articles deemed relevant to the research topic was compiled for in-depth analysis.

Family Business-Centered Entrepreneurship of Migrant Women

The review of the identified literature shows that research on migrant women entrepreneurship in family businesses is still sparse. There are many areas that still need to be thoroughly examined. Our review and analysis identified the following sub-streams: striving to triumph over barriers; variable extent of family support; sustaining family harmony; community leadership of migrant women; religion, spirituality, and emotions; and politics and political discourse (Table 1).

Table 1

Literature on migrant women's entrepreneurship in family businesses

RESEARCH	CONTEXT	METHOD	FACTORS	OUTCOME
<i>Striving to triumph over barriers</i>				
González-González et al., 2011	Migrant women in Spain	Interviews	Self-exploitation Invisibility Family business as a moral	Social mobility Social prestige
Pio and Essers, 2014	Indian women in New Zealand	Life-stories	Styles of fighting "othering": Subtle, integrative Aggressive, combat Provocative non-conformist	Rupturing and reworking fixed categories
Njaramba et al., 2018	African women in Australia	Interviews	Barriers and challenges	Business creation

RESEARCH	CONTEXT	METHOD	FACTORS	OUTCOME
Vershinina et al, 2019	Eastern European women in the UK	Biographical narratives	Transnational space Female subordination Female invisibility Transmission of the values	Maternal identity transformation Emancipation Legitimacy and credibility Strong extended family ties
De Luca and Ambrosini, 2019	Migrant women in Italy	Semi-structured questionnaire and interviews	Family strategy Independence strategy Mixed network strategy	New and original enterprises Local integration
Nyiri & Beck, 2020	Chinese women in Hungary	Narratives	Evading gender constraints	-
Patrickson and Hallo, 2021	Chinese women in Australia	Interviews	The need for independence Financial comfort Feeling of control Expanding social networks	New relationships
<i>Variable extent of family support</i>				
Anthias and Mehta, 2008	Ethnic women in the UK	Interviews	Life crisis Hectic lifestyle Domestic work Community for men only	Independence from the partner Empowerment Social inclusion
Azmat & Fujimoto, 2016	Indian women in Australia	Interviews	Family embeddedness Extended family	Entrepreneurship experience
Dannecker & Cakir, 2016	Migrant women in Austria	Interviews	Mobility capital	Stigmatization minimization
Munkejord, 2017	Ethnic women in Norway	Interviews	Family participation Avoiding unemployment	Rural development
Essers et al., 2021	Muslim Moroccan females in the Netherlands	Ethnographic case study	Entrepreneurial belonging Family involvement and support Flexibility	Ethnic need satisfaction Religious need satisfaction
<i>Sustaining family harmony</i>				
Kuah-Pearce, 2016	Migrant women in China	Interviews	Feminized social networks Embedded translocalize	Superwomen reputation
Villares-Varela, 2018	Latin American women in Spain	Interviews	Husband's masculinity	Class repositioning Restoring the default
Ng & Fu, 2018	Foreign women (from developed countries) in China	Interviews Questionnaire	Success orientation Autonomy and independence Family orientation	Patience Adaptability Resilience
Zybura et al, 2018	Migrant women in Germany	Microcensus	Qualification Family responsibilities	-
Liu, 2020	Returning Migrant Women in China	Interviews	Nominal conformity Online entrepreneurship Co-performance	Marital power
Lassalle & Shaw, 2021	Polish women in Scotland	Interviews	Trailing wives Constrained agency	Career prioritization (lack of)
<i>Community leadership of migrant women</i>				
Ribeiro et al., 2012	Migrant women in Europe	Review	Feminization of the economy	Family care

RESEARCH	CONTEXT	METHOD	FACTORS	OUTCOME
Webster & Haandrikman, 2017	Thai women in Sweden	Mixed methods	Creativity Risk-taking	Identity negotiation
Bijedić & Piper, 2019	2 nd generation migrant women in Germany	Panel data analysis	Second-generation migrants	Job satisfaction
Yeröz, 2019	Turkish women in Sweden	Life story narratives	Agency Symbolic capital	Cultural capital development
Ratten and Pellegrini, 2020	Migrant women in Portugal	Interviews	Transnational networks	Open ecosystems
Aman et al., 2021	Migrant women in Kazakhstan	Interviews	Entrepreneurial ecosystems	Resilience to shock
Kwiatek & Villares-Varela, 2022	Migrant women in the UK	Biographical narratives and photos	Female solidarity networks	Non-economic societal benefits Mentoring others Community leadership
<i>Religion and spirituality</i>				
Dryjanska, 2020	Migrant women in Western countries	Conceptual paper	Religion and spirituality	Adaptation Successful training
Webster, 2020	Migrant women in Sweden	Life course narratives	Emotions Emotional citizenry	Hoping to succeed Hoping to be recognized
Essers et al., 2021	Muslim Moroccan females in the Netherlands	Ethnographic case study	Entrepreneurial belonging Family involvement and support Flexibility	Ethnic need satisfaction Religious need satisfaction
<i>Politics and political discourse</i>				
Ozasir Kacar & Essers, 2019	Turkish women in the Netherlands	Life-stories	Political discourse Class	Belonging to heritage culture Non-assimilation
		Interviews	Regulatory environment Incorrect perceptions	Improved policies

Striving to triumph over barriers

Most research articles focus on how migrant women entrepreneurs engage in family businesses to break through ethnic, institutional, and regulatory barriers in host countries (Njaramba et al., 2018). In some cases, these barriers are the result of heritage cultures that tend to loom over migrant women entrepreneurs in multinational spaces (Vershina et al., 2019). González-González et al. (2011) argue that family business is the moral and spiritual space for migrant women entrepreneurs which helps them to fight institutional barriers. However, the authors note that the contribution of women in family businesses tends to be invisible. That is, women's contributions tend to be silenced by the more powerful members of a family. Hence, migrant women entrepreneurs work hard, frequently self-exploiting, to attain better social mobility in a new environment.

Our study also indicated that the mainstream perception of migrant women in Western countries is an important factor. Inaccurate imagery systematically misrepresenting the autonomy, agency and also the priorities of migrant women needs to be addressed (Kahf, 1999; Said, 1978; Shaheen, 2003). Migrant women face triple discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and minority status; they are frequently perceived to be helpless, passive, illiterate, and uneducated (Pio & Essers, 2014). Therefore, it is argued that migrant women entrepreneurs develop family businesses to regain power to fight the widely held Anglo/Eurocentric views

of migrant women in Western countries (Wood et al, 2021). The styles of fighting-back include strategies that are either subtle/integrative or aggressive and combat-like. Other strategies are in-between these two extremes and involve non-conformist provocative practices (Pio & Essers, 2014). For example, migrant women in Italy use a mixed-network strategy in addition to a family and independence strategy (De Luca & Ambrosini, 2019).

The heritage country values can also act as a barrier. The negative aspects of a home culture such as female subordination and invisibility persist even after migration (Vershina et al., 2019). Vershinina et al. (2019) showed that these structural restrictions are removed within transnational spaces through involvement in a family business. Transnational spaces are used as a conduit enabling migrant women to challenge the feelings of inferiority and attain more respect and legitimacy in both home and host communities. Their research concludes that family businesses are of a heterogeneous nature and that this nature depends on transnational spaces. Migrant women who can create or develop a cross-border family business end up strengthening extended family ties (Vershina et al., 2019).

Researching Chinese women entrepreneurs in Australia, Partickson and Hallo (2021) observed that these women act in response to social and institutional barriers. They strive to attain better engagement independence, enhanced control over their lives, and financial comfort. Most importantly, their view of family business centers on the idea of an enterprise that allows them to build new relationships without relying on extended family support. This brings us to the next sub-stream of relevant research.

Variable extent of family support

Some research documents variable levels of immediate family support. Some migrant women entrepreneurs receive little support from their partners or husbands (Anthias & Mehta, 2008). Contrary to the interactionist model assumptions, the immediate family cannot be seen as an absolute ethnic resource. The extent of support is variable, and in some cases, partners/husbands do not get involved. In such circumstances, family business for migrant women means a business that is separate from their husband's affairs. They desire independence and empowerment in a sense of being less dependent on other family members (Anthias & Mehta, 2008). Migrant women's business activities are embedded in family relationships. Therefore, family can become both an enabler and an obstacle to migrant women's entrepreneurship activities (Azmat & Fujimoto, 2016).

Ironically, a family business could develop in the context of low or no immediate family support, as seen in the case of migrant women entrepreneurs in Austria (Dannecker & Cakir, 2016). These women emphasize social mobility as a form of mobility capital (Dannecker & Cakir, 2016). Here, mobility is defined as the general ability to act and survive in a foreign business environment characterized by uncertain circumstances. Mobility means the ability to progress toward a better societal position.

For some family businesses, immediate family support is substantial (Bastian et al, 2023). The support of a husband/partner makes a big difference for migrant women in Norway (Munkejord, 2017). Munkejord shows that partners/husbands tend to join in and fully support the businesses started by migrant women entrepreneurs in a rural Norwegian context. These businesses contribute to the development of the rural infrastructure.

Another study conducted with Muslim Moroccan migrant women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands showed the positive role of husbands in running daily family business activities (Essers et al., 2021). The

researchers indicate that such support by male relatives and husbands is a novel finding that is rarely mentioned in the literature on Muslim women entrepreneurs (Essers et al., 2021; Bastian et al, 2023).

Sustaining family harmony

Migrant women entrepreneurs do not always strive to break through common cultural norms and restrictions. Research finds that Latin American women in Spain are involved in family businesses and engage in entrepreneurship for different reasons depending on their social class (Villares-Varela, 2018). Middle-class migrant women entrepreneurs engage in entrepreneurship to sustain their husband's masculinity through doing their best to avoid low-skill jobs. Lower-class migrant women use their business to attain upward mobility in the societal class structure. Notably, in the case of middle-class women, family business is used to promote the partner's career, which means the attempt to restore the default of home country cultural norms.

Liu (2020) documents the growing power of return migrant women entrepreneurs working in online businesses, who work in close cooperation with their family members (e.g., husbands, partners). These women migrated back to Chinese villages from developed coastal cities to run their family businesses. Liu notes that these women are engaged in co-performance of traditional male masculinity for the external observers, while in fact exercising a great deal of marital power.

Research shows that foreign women's entrepreneurship in China focuses on family/work balance and family-orientation in business (Ng & Fu, 2018). The expats are driven by success and independence, while at the same time learning adaptability and resilience from the Chinese culture. In another study, a micro-census of women migrant entrepreneurs in Germany showed that family responsibilities are strongly associated with migrant women's entrepreneurship (Zybura et al., 2018). Sustaining harmony within the family appears to enable business activities. Moreover, most migrant women entrepreneurs in Germany tend to lack vocational qualifications. They are involved in the un-skilled and labor-intensive service sectors.

Recent research argues that Polish migrant women entrepreneurs in Glasgow fit the description of "trailing wife" (Lassalle & Shaw, 2021). A trailing wife follows the lead of her husband in settling in a new country, while doing everything to maintain household wellbeing and smooth settlement. Their family business is considered by the members of the family to be secondary to other family priorities. Migrant women entrepreneurs are considered "superwomen" in China because they successfully integrate family-care with entrepreneurship in their daily struggles (Kuah-Pearce, 2016). These abilities are underscored by the embedded translocalize and feminized social networks of *guanxi*.

Community leadership of migrant women

Women are prepared to go through difficult challenges to create comfortable lives for their families (Ribeiro et al., 2012). This tendency has led to the mass-migration of women from struggling economies to wealthy societies, which in turn has led to the general feminization of economic activity in some countries (e.g., post-Soviet countries) (Ribeiro et al., 2012). Migrant women are taking leadership in terms of using transnational diaspora networks and facilitating open global business ecosystems (Ratten & Pellegrini, 2020). Thai migrant women entrepreneurs in Sweden, for example, are found to be highly creative and innovative (Webster & Haandrikman, 2017). Webster and Haandrikman argue that this finding challenges the typical view of migrant women entrepreneurs as being reactive to their context. Rather, migrant women were shown to be resourceful, creative, and knowledgeable. Turkish women entrepreneurs in Sweden are found to be particularly skillful in combining and orchestrating different resources (Yeröz, 2019).

Migrant women entrepreneurs are confident participants in entrepreneurial ecosystems (Aman et al., 2021). Migrant women entrepreneurs, as time passes, successfully adapt to the host country's circumstances, which allows them to create more societal value and maximize their community rootedness (Kwiatek & Villares-Varela, 2022). Research shows that second-generation female migrant entrepreneurs are more satisfied with their self-employment than their native counterparts (Bijedić & Piper, 2019). Migrant women entrepreneurs gradually turn into community leaders supporting other women, assisting other female entrepreneurs, and fostering inter/intra-ethnic business networks (Kwiatek & Villares-Varela, 2022). In this way, migrant women entrepreneurs are shown to significantly contribute to host economies and general societal well-being.

Religion, spirituality, and emotions

Extant research highlights the role of religion and spirituality (Dryjanska, 2020) in the migrant women's entrepreneurship process. Religion offers moral and ethical resources to migrant women when dealing with both private and business challenges. For example, Muslims are found to maintain strong family traditions where husbands are extremely supportive of their wives and businesses (Essers et al., 2021). Although the real role of Islam in entrepreneurship and Muslim family business practices are misunderstood by outsiders, evidence indicates that strong support by male relatives and husbands is grounded in Muslim religiosity and spirituality (Essers et al., 2021; Sadeq, 1987).

In addition, emotions play a significant role in institutional spaces and policy fields (Webster, 2020). Emotions affect how migrant women entrepreneurs see themselves and feel about their personal worth. These emotions are grounded in sensitivities such as hoping to succeed and hoping to be recognized (Webster, 2020).

Politics and political discourse

Heritage and host country political discourses significantly influence migrant women entrepreneurs. Turkish women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands are engaged in political discourses involving their heritage country and use these discourses to construct their identities (Ozasir Kacar & Essers, 2019). This shows how political and sociocultural factors shape the entrepreneurial identities of migrant women.

Ozasir Kacar and Essers (2019) found that Turkish women strategically construct their identities based on their perceptions of gender, ethnicity, and class within the existing opportunity structures. This identity negotiation involves navigating complex situations, leading migrant women to carefully present specific facets of their identities within entrepreneurial spaces. The findings highlight the diversity of experiences among migrant women entrepreneurs, with some emphasizing transnational and cosmopolitan identities, while others deeply engaging with their ethnic identities in the Dutch context. Notably, Ozasir Kacar and Essers' (2019) research observes a trend toward less traditionally gendered, ethnic, or working-class businesses, with many women pursuing ventures associated with upward social mobility. This strategic identity work allows migrant women to challenge negative stereotypes and act as role models within the Dutch society. The authors show that these identity construction processes may be more relevant to middle-class, second-generation migrant women due to their unique social and political consciousness.

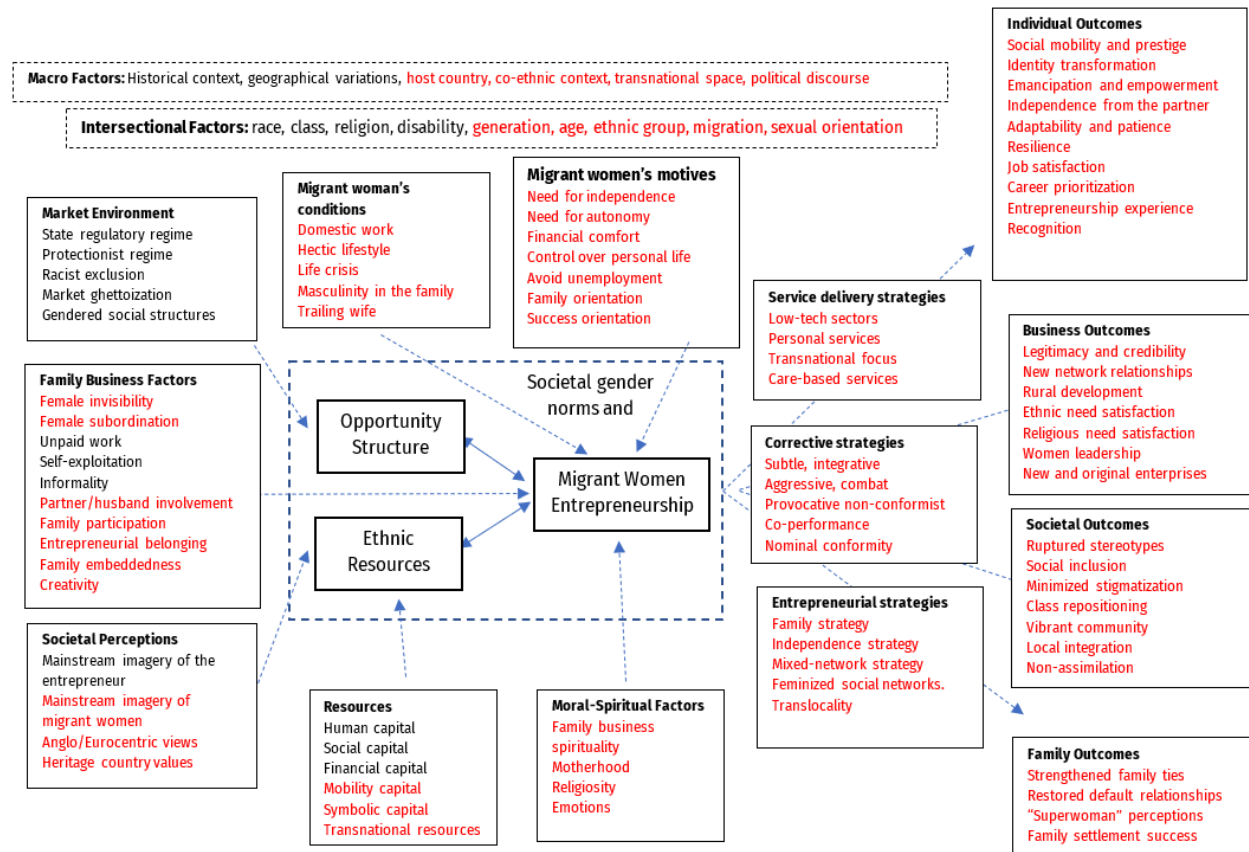
The Integrative Model of MWE-FB

Figure 4 illustrates the comprehensive summary of the findings derived from the 30 articles reviewed exploring entrepreneurship at the intersection of migrant women and family businesses and represents the

integrative model of MWE-FB. This model extends the conventional frameworks discussed earlier: namely the interactionist model, the mixed embeddedness model, the EMW model, and the RSO model, by considering several additional groups of variables (Figure 4). The additional factors are highlighted in red.

Figure 4

The integrative model of migrant women's entrepreneurship in family businesses



The interactionist model of MWE-FB is placed at the heart of the integrative model. The macro factors from the mixed embeddedness model are enriched with factors such as the host country, co-ethnic context, transnational spaces, and political discourses. The intersectional factors were extended through the addition of generations, age, ethnic group, migration circumstances, and sexual orientation.

The meso-level factor groups such as market environment, family business factors, and societal perceptions are acknowledged and enriched with new variables. A number of additional family business factors were identified: female invisibility and subordination, partner/husband involvement, entrepreneurial belonging, family embeddedness, and entrepreneurial creativity. These factors are assumed to directly impact the MWE. The model considers additional important societal perceptions such as the imagery of migrant women, Anglo/Eurocentric (ethnocentric) views, and heritage country values. It is recognized that ethnic resources will be impacted by a variety of other resources such as mobility, symbolic and transnational capital, in addition to human, social, and financial capital.

Three unique groups of factors determining MWE are identified. These are moral-spiritual factors (e.g., family business spirituality, motherhood, religiosity, emotions), migrant women's motives (e.g., the need for

independence, financial comfort, control, avoiding unemployment), and migrant women's conditions (e.g., domestic work, hectic lifestyle, life crisis, masculinity in family).

The RSO model is extended through the consideration of additional strategies and outcomes. In addition to the enriched content of individual, business, societal outcomes, we consider family outcomes as well. Migrant women entrepreneurs use a variety of strategies to pursue these outcomes. We identify service delivery strategies, entrepreneurial strategies, and corrective strategies.

Interpreting the Integrative Model of the MWE-FB

Substratum system perspective

The substratum system perspective calls for the recognition of non-formalized, culturally entangled, non-monetary provisioning activities in society as the bedrock of commercial activities (Kahiya & Kadirov, 2020). Individuals create and exchange value not only within formalized market arrangements but also outside the market. Institutions such as householding, reciprocity, barter, redistribution, sharing, gifting, care, and communal support are used as the provisioning mechanism of society (Benton Jr, 2021). These activities are primeval, natural, authentic, and context-free. Provisioning activities at the substratum can be found in all human cultures.

In households, women play an important role in the ongoing process of social, cultural, and symbolic reproduction. Women create value that is beyond any economic valuation. For instance, attempts to put a dollar sign on intimacy-driven provisioning and service relationships are considered to be highly controversial (Hofmann & Moreno, 2017). Motherhood relationships or care beyond the call of duty are not subject to economic valuation (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). In fact, attempts to price these phenomena lead to issues with human dignity. Although the market highly values authentic services, not all authentic services are part of the market.

Substratum interpretation of the MWE-FB

From the substratum market system perspective, MWE-FB can be interpreted as the cross-country formalization of unique societal provisioning skills, where migrant women entrepreneurs do not haphazardly decide to engage in business once they move to a Western country. In other words, contrary to what the interactionist model assumes, migrant women's entrepreneurship is neither a "blessing" of opportunity structure in the host culture nor the effect to leverage the "ethnic resource". MWE-FB is a complex process impacted by a multiplicity of factors which signals the existence of a broader substratum of value-creation processes meeting at the intersection of cultures, gender, family responsibilities, and migration.

The integrative model enumerates several market environment barriers and family business factors. The notions of informality, unpaid work, family embeddedness, invisibility, and self-exploitation surfaced as major explanations that directly point to the substratum provisioning arrangements. In Western countries where individually earned money and market valuation are the mainstream logic, these notions are given a degenerative twist. However, from the substratum perspective, one could also interpret these notions as care, dedication, wholeheartedness, motherhood, and invaluable contribution. It must be recognized that the various heritage cultures and values might harbor entangled and embedded entrepreneurship modes that might not be readily recognizable within the current discourse. Migrant women, moving into western contexts, can be seen as entrepreneurs adapting from complex cultural worlds to relatively simplified and highly rationalized markets.

Substratum-based migration and adaptation requires migrant women to follow specific strategies. Research indicates that migrant women entrepreneurs feature unique service delivery strategies that mostly focus on low-tech sectors and care-based services. It is simplistic to interpret this trend as a lack of skills and knowledge, and this assumption is refuted by existing research (Webster & Haandrikman, 2017; Yeröz, 2019). The substratum interpretation leads us to believe that service delivery strategies (see [Figure 4](#)) are the most direct and smooth ways of moving from the substratum level to the formalized level of the market.

A woman ripped from her socially embedded context (due to the varying forms of migration) need to re-assert herself in the new environment. Therefore, individual outcomes such as recognition, respect, legitimacy, adaptability, patience, and resilience come to the forefront. The substratum values take over when migrant women entrepreneurs emphasize social outcomes such as inclusion, non-stigmatization, vibrant communities, and local integration. Similarly, the agency and empowerment of these women may be successfully rendered within their heritage cultural parameters without being recognizable to a western audience. Considering the varied elements and weightings that go into this calculation and their valuation within a heritage culture is essential to the development of the discourse around women's entrepreneurship and the agency and empowerment it can/does represent (Ng et al, 2022).

In some cases, the negative aspects of the rationalized market logic might push migrant women entrepreneurs to stay within ethnic enclaves while asserting non-assimilation. This is done, perhaps, to create less disruption to their substratum roles and to attain harmony between old and new realities. It must be recognized that the migration of women entrepreneurs intensifies a clash between localized orthodox values and the neo-liberal market logic. Hence, factors such as spirituality, religiosity, motherhood, and emotions become central.

Conclusion and future research

The integrative model proposed in this article offers a comprehensive view of the MWE-FB. We recognize that it is a complex phenomenon where multiple factors intersect. Based on the review of relevant articles, we identified important factors that we classified into several groups that must be considered when studying this phenomenon. In contrast to the mainstream models of MWE, we argue that the totality of these factors points toward the substratum provisioning system that forms the nurturing base of MWE-FB.

In addition, we detected several avenues for further exploration. First, research on migrant women entrepreneurs moving from a developing country to another developing country is nearly non-existent. Considering that millions of migrants settle in developing countries, the oversight of this area of research is remarkable. It is wrong to assume that entrepreneurship is a unique characteristic of developed markets; in fact, it is likely that the opposite is true. The review of 30 articles indicates that most research tends to hold this assumption, since most research explores women entrepreneurs migrating from a developing country to a developed one. We anticipate a plethora of new factors arising from the interaction of the rich provisioning substrata of the two developing countries.

Second, researchers should consider MWE-FB in internal migration milieus. Out of 30 journal articles, we identified only one study that explored internal migrants (Liu, 2020). Internal migration tends to be a more common mode of migration. Factors affecting the growth, formation, and dynamics of MWE-FB are expected to be distinct in this context.

Third, in this research area, the dominance of qualitative methodologies is striking. Qualitative methodologies, such as in-depth interviews and life-story narratives, indeed offer a rich understanding of MWE-FB,

but are also context driven; therefore, the generalizability of some findings may not be strong. We call for more research using quantitative methods to add to, strengthen and allow triangulation within the canon.

Finally, it is important to investigate the impact of the latest technologies on the growth and development of MWE-FB. The rapid advances of technologies allow traditional barriers to be overcome or circumvented while potentially increasing/creating others for migrant women setting up businesses in new localities. The way technology is/can transform these spaces and realities is an area for future attention.



Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- N.A., D.K., B.W., A.B.; Data Acquisition- N.A.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- N.A., D.K., B.W., A.B.; Drafting Manuscript- N.A., D.K., B.W., A.B.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- N.A., D.K., B.W., A.B.; Final Approval and Accountability- N.A., D.K., B.W., A.B.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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Journal of Economy Culture and Society

Theoretical Article

Open Access

Necessary Conditions for the Existence of Organizational Legitimacy



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Abstract

Organizational legitimacy is a crucial factor for ensuring survival, securing resources, facilitating growth, and stabilizing the work environment. To achieve this, an organization must determine whether it currently possesses legitimacy or needs to take steps to attain it. This requires the use of measurement tools that enable effective evaluation. When scholars assess organizational legitimacy, they typically base their evaluation on audience perceptions. However, we argue that an organization either possesses or lacks legitimacy as an objective fact, grounded in its inherent properties. In this study, we propose a legitimacy framework that aligns with what a legitimate organization should exhibit. We analyze the foundational premises of organizational legitimacy and provide a roadmap for achieving it. Our position is that perceptions or sentiments are not the most reliable means of assessing an organization's legitimacy, as they are inherently subjective and shaped by multiple variables that are difficult to quantify. We emphasize the need for a strong connection between intrinsic legitimacy—defined by its properties—and perceived legitimacy. We argue that the former constitutes a necessary condition, while the latter serves as a sufficient condition to ensure the coherence of organizational legitimacy.

Keywords

Organizational legitimacy · consistent legitimacy · legitimacy as a property · legitimacy as a perception · congruence



“ Citation: Díez-Martin, F., Díez-de-Castro, E., Cruz-Suárez, A. & Prado-Roman, C. (2025). Necessary conditions for the existence of organizational legitimacy. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, (71), 292–303. <https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2024-1555154>

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Necessary Conditions for the Existence of Organizational Legitimacy

Organizational legitimacy is a fundamental concept in various scientific disciplines, including sociology, social psychology, management, agency theory, marketing, and finance (Díez-Martín, et al. 2021). Despite its importance, legitimacy remains a nebulous and difficult-to-define concept. "In contemporary social research, legitimacy is an indeterminate concept—widely used but empirically nebulous" (Schoon et al., 2020: 478). The evaluation of organizational legitimacy varies significantly across industries and situations, further complicating its understanding and measurement (Ruef & Scott, 1998; Chung et al., 2016).

The research problem lies in the lack of a unified theoretical framework that allows for an objective and consistent evaluation of organizational legitimacy. The current literature is divided into two main approaches: one based on the intrinsic characteristics of the organization and the other based on audience perceptions. These complementary approaches have been studied separately, resulting in inconsistent findings and a fragmented understanding of legitimacy. The disconnect between the two approaches originates from the proliferation of studies that develop their own methodologies while either creating new definitions or partially adopting existing ones. Bitektine (2011) identified the existence of 18 types of legitimacy, while Díez-de-Castro et al. (2018) found 19 types, but if we conducted an updated analysis, we would find many more. The measurement of legitimacy used by researchers is rarely measured using the same attributes as other authors, and it is common to find the same terms defined differently than how other researchers use them.

The large number of existing empirical studies might lead us to believe that a good level of consistency in measuring organizational legitimacy has been achieved. In our opinion, this is not the case. The proof is the increase in the types of legitimacy, the enormous variety of evaluation systems, and the different audiences used in the studies. As Van der Steen et al. (2021) indicate, legitimacy is held by an organization in a measurable way, yet the specific extent and the fundamental factors that determine its position remain undefined.

The objective of this research is to develop a theoretical framework that integrates both approaches to measuring organizational legitimacy, providing a more comprehensive and coherent evaluation. We propose a legitimacy framework that aligns with what a legitimate organization should exhibit, analyzing the foundations of organizational legitimacy and providing a roadmap to achieve it. Our position is that perceptions or feelings are not the most reliable means to evaluate an organization's legitimacy, as they are inherently subjective and influenced by multiple variables that are difficult to quantify. We emphasize the need for a strong connection between intrinsic legitimacy—defined by its properties—and perceived legitimacy.

This research contributes to the legitimacy theory by integrating measurement approaches based on characteristics and perception, providing a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of organizational legitimacy. The implications of this research are significant. By providing a unified theoretical framework, we facilitate a more accurate and consistent evaluation of organizational legitimacy, allowing organizations to identify and address areas that require improvement more effectively. Additionally, this framework can serve as a valuable tool for scholars and practitioners in evaluating and developing strategies to improve organizational legitimacy.

The following sections examine the concept of organizational legitimacy and explore the relationship between legitimacy as a property and as a perception. Next, we identify the key characteristics of legitimate organizations. We then introduce the concept of consistent legitimacy, integrating legitimacy based on both characteristics and perceptions. Finally, we present our conclusions and suggest directions for future research.

Organizational Legitimacy: Legitimacy as a Property Versus Legitimacy as a Perception

Legitimacy is a term traditionally associated with the legal field, where something is considered legitimate if it complies with established legal norms. However, organizational legitimacy is a term widely used in the social sphere, making it a much more complex concept. Legitimacy is linked to issues such as adherence to management standards related to economic activity, executive commitment to work, compliance with the law, and, most importantly, commitment to and observance of society's moral norms.

There are multiple definitions of legitimacy (Deephhouse & Haack, 2025) that include terms such as: acceptance or compliance by audiences (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975); acceptance of the organization by its environment (Kostova & Zaheer 1999); social acceptability granted to a set of activities or actors (Washington & Zajac 2005); social acceptance by constituents (Randrianasolo & Arnold 2020); endorsement of an organization by social actors (Deephhouse 1996); congruence with the cultural environment (Dowling & Pfeffer 1975); and consistency or congruence with cultural models (Ruef & Scott 1998). The breadth of the term and its diversity complicate its generalized definition.

These definitions can be considered under at least two perspectives (Suddaby *et al.*, 2017): legitimacy as a property and legitimacy as a perception. Scholars have attempted to evaluate legitimacy using various direct or indirect measures related to sources of legitimacy (Loos & Spraul, 2024). In this line, they developed the term legitimacy as a property. The idea is that legitimacy is not in the eye of the beholder but in the reality of its facts and behaviors, in its characteristics as long as they are congruent with the culture and values of its environment. On the other hand, a large number of researchers support the idea that legitimacy is based on perceptions (Haack *et al.*, 2021), and even on the feeling one has about the organization (Haack *et al.*, 2014). Legitimacy is not directly observable. Ultimately, it resides in the psyche of social actors, who may be aware of the role of legitimacy in their thinking and decision-making. In fact, researchers often argue that legitimacy has its greatest influence on social actors when its source is not reflected upon (Powell & Dimaggio, 1991).

However, perceptions or feelings are not the best way to judge an organization; they are laden with subjectivity and influenced by multiple variables that are very difficult to include in quantitative studies. If legitimacy were based solely on perception or sentiment, an organization could be considered legitimate simply because audiences accept it, even if that acceptance is founded on false beliefs, deception, or flawed communication practices.

Essential Characteristics of the Legitimate Organizations

From a philosophical perspective, consistency refers to the necessity that all premises be true, necessarily and simultaneously. To achieve consistent legitimacy, the premises on which legitimacy is based must be exclusive; if any premise is negatively evaluated, the organization cannot be considered legitimate. Legitimacy is not attained merely by paying taxes, being legally established, or functioning as a public entity

—much more is required. It demands the identification of the fundamental aspects that constitute legitimacy within an organization. An organization may be deemed legitimate under one type of legitimacy while failing to meet the criteria for another (Chung *et al.*, 2016). Siraz *et al.* (2023) identified different states of legitimacy, including conditional legitimacy. From our perspective, an organization lacks legitimacy if the answer to any of the essential questions is not positive. Considering only certain dimensions of legitimacy undermines its multidimensional nature (Suddaby *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, all essential questions must be positively assessed for an organization to be deemed legitimate; organizational legitimacy requires alignment with its core elements.

Organizational legitimacy is a multifaceted construct, with each facet highlighting the specific characteristics of an organization. Legitimate organizations stand out because they share distinct attributes that differentiate them from others (e.g., Cruz-Suárez *et al.*, 2020; Rivero-Gutierrez *et al.*, 2024). These characteristics refer to the attributes that influence an organization's legitimacy (Ivanova & Castellano, 2011). Legitimacy is initially earned by adopting widely accepted organizational characteristics (Elsbach, 1994). The literature identifies key characteristics that organizations must possess, including a mission aligned with the public interest (Roper & Schoenberger-Orgad, 2011); identifiable routines (Deephouse, 1996); a recognizable strategy (Haveman, 1993); a clear organizational structure (Chan & Makino, 2007); inspiring leadership; and transparency in information (Aerts & Cormier, 2009). Some scholars have made significant efforts to systematically identify these properties (Schoon, 2022). Jeong and Kim (2019) stated that there are a series of generic variables found in all organizations. Lee and Raschke (2023) point out the specific elements that must be present in an organization to consider it legitimate, based on the legitimacy of Glassdoor stakeholders.

A key criticism of measuring legitimacy is the potential infinity of the attributes or characteristics that define it. As Deephouse and Suchman (2008) observed, theorists continually propose new traits or components of legitimacy, yet few are empirically tested. Another criticism concerns the challenge of identifying appropriate empirical measures of the construct (Tornikoski & Newbert, 2007). Given its multifaceted nature, most empirical studies tend to focus narrowly on one or two attributes, overlooking others that might provide competitive explanations. However, significant efforts have been made to address these issues. Schoon (2022: 479) states, "My goal is to discern the common characteristics of existing definitions of legitimacy and use them to identify properties of the construct that (1) are measurable and (2) distinguish legitimacy from related constructs". For instance, a widely used instrument to assess the legitimacy of a supplier is the Prequalification Questionnaire (PQQ). Before hiring a supplier, the contracting organization must ensure the contractor's suitability, which translates into verifying their degree of legitimacy for acceptance. To determine this, a list of questions based on the company's requirements is sent to suppliers. The contracting organization then uses this information to decide whether the contractor can be considered legitimate and, therefore, a valid supplier.

We consider that an organization's legitimacy is a function of the degree to which its key identifying characteristics align with the surrounding institutional environment, the norms, and the expectations of its audiences (Foreman & Whetten, 2002). A review of the literature has allowed us to identify six common traits shared by legitimate organizations: (i) the organization's existence is useful and/or necessary to its audiences; (ii) the organization's behavior is fair and aligns with the values and ethics of society; (iii) the organization achieves its objectives through efficient management; (iv) the organization complies with regulations set by public authorities and professional bodies; (v) the organization adapts to the environment; and (vi) the organization is transparent in its information.

(i) The social utility of the organization. Legitimacy is essentially linked to the normative notion of "public good," whether applied to corporate or governmental organizations (Roper & Schoenberger-Orgad, 2011). Utility is understood as the quality that the organization possesses through its goods and services to meet the desires and needs of stakeholders. Both private and public organizations must benefit society in some way. The organization must act to create utility and value for those interested or related to it. Selznick (1996) points out that perhaps the most significant aspect of institutionalization is the infusion of value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand. Organizations are not born legitimate. Legitimacy is built. Regarding the benefits provided by the organization, Bitektine (2011:163) reflects them in the following questions: "Is the organization beneficial or dangerous for (a) me, (b) the social groups I belong to, and (c) the society I live in?" In summary, utility is not just a matter of interest to the organization's owners, but it must reach and have a positive impact on stakeholders. The organization legitimizes itself because it is a project that genuinely increases well-being, meets a need, and provides new facilities.

There are at least four aspects that identify a useful organization. Two related to economic sustainability, and two focused on social sustainability. The legitimate organization: a) Offers quality products or services. An organization must design and produce goods or provide services that meet stakeholders' needs efficiently and effectively. By providing quality solutions, the company adds value by meeting stakeholders' demands and expectations; b) it innovates and differentiates itself. An organization's ability to innovate and differentiate itself from other organizations can be key to adding value (Phillips, et al. 2024). Trapido and Koppman (2023) consider creativity as the generation of results that are both novel and useful. Thus, innovation is considered the implementation of creativity within organizations. By developing new products, adopting innovative technologies, or implementing more efficient processes, an organization can stand out and satisfy stakeholders (Peeters et al., 2014); c) Creates advantages for stakeholders without generating imbalances or unequal behaviors. These advantages can be of various natures: lower costs, job creation, generating economic activity in places where it is needed, offering goods and services close to those who can use them, etc.; d) Maintains relationships with stakeholders. Fostering a strong relationship with stakeholders is important for creating long-term value. By understanding stakeholders' needs and desires, maintaining constant communication, offering excellent after-sales service, and personalizing the stakeholder experience, an organization can differentiate itself and foster a lasting bond with its stakeholders.

(ii) The organization's behavior is fair and appropriate to society's values and ethics. Organizations can build and reinforce their legitimacy if they are socially responsible (Blanco-Gonzalez et al. 2023), adopt sustainable practices, respect labor rights, contribute to the community, and have ethical management (Blanco-Gonzalez et al., 2023; Díez-Martín, et al. 2025). Researchers on moral legitimacy have studied various essential factors in the organizational context that contribute to ethical behavior. We know that moral norms and values are instilled in organizations, and this contributes to the acceptance of ethical behavior. People prefer following the norm of behavior embedded in a given context. Norms clearly define what is right in a given context, which refers to legitimate behavior. Specifically, we assume that people prefer complying with this legitimate behavior beyond the material benefits caused by their behavior. The degree to which behaviors and actions align with social values and beliefs serves to judge the organization as appropriate and correct according to those values.

(iii) The organization achieves its objectives with efficient management. From a management perspective, organizations develop processes for planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling resources to achieve their objectives efficiently and effectively. Beyond that, they undertake actions, react to difficulties,

and behave according to norms and values to achieve success. Organizations gain legitimacy from good leadership and the efficient achievement of objectives.

Leadership is a set of managerial skills that an individual must influence how people behave or act within a group. Leadership is partially linked to authority within the organization and partially to managerial skills. Legitimacy refers to the acceptance of authority by individuals and groups within a society (Beetham, 1991). It is a fundamental component of effective governance, as it provides a basis for social order and stability. Legitimacy depends not only on legal and institutional frameworks but also on the perception of those affected about the fairness and effectiveness of these frameworks (Tyler, 1990). This perception can be influenced by the leadership styles of political leaders (Mexhuani & Mexhuani, 2023). Individuals' feelings toward institutions are a key predictor of their commitment. An organization's legitimacy is closely linked to the efficient achievement of its objectives (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Yu *et al.*, 2019). This means that the organization must have objectives, achieve them, and do so with the greatest efficiency, using resources in such a way that tasks are accomplished with minimal resource use. Efficiency and process optimization are crucial for adding value. By reducing costs and improving productivity and quality, a company can offer competitive prices and provide better service to customers or users.

(iv) The organization complies with regulations established by public administrations and professional bodies. Compliance with regulations seems an obvious factor for achieving legitimacy, but it is also a factor often considered indispensable. Organizations have commitments to society; in some cases, these are exclusively moral, while in others, they are legal due to government regulations. In addition to regulations and procedures established by governments, organizations must comply with stipulations established by relevant professional organizations or business associations. Organizations lose their legitimacy if they do not meet the expectations set by certain non-governmental regulatory bodies.

(v) The organization adapts to the environment. The organization adapts by balancing its stage of evolution with the new environment. Organizations adapt to their social environment to gain legitimacy, just as they adapt to their economic environment to obtain material resources. Organizations need to develop their capacity to adapt to adverse situations, that is, to be resilient, which implies the ability to handle adverse situations flexibly and recover from them despite destabilizing events. Fisher *et al.* (2017) suggest that new companies face multiple legitimacy thresholds because they need to attract different audiences to obtain resources at various stages of development. These audiences have varied and generally stricter criteria for evaluating companies as they develop. Agile organizations are flexible, allowing them to respond effectively to market demands and emerging challenges. These aspects directly influence the organization's legitimacy because, as the theory of "multiple legitimacy thresholds" indicates, legitimacy is not achieved at one point and lasts forever; it must be maintained and continuously adapted to its environment.

(vi) The organization is transparent in its information. Organizational transparency allows all interested people or groups to understand what decisions are being made, why, and where (Drew & Nyerges, 2004). Transparency in information increases the understanding of an organization's actions or decisions (Rawlins, 2008). This implies that an organization's real information can be consulted by audiences, allowing them to make informed decisions. Transparency can reduce uncertainty about managerial behavior in situations characterized by moral hazard, leading audiences to gain more trust (de Fine Licht *et al.*, 2014; Díez-Martín, *et al.*, 2022). Transparency strengthens stakeholders' trust and understanding of an organization's actions and decisions as long as it is consistent (Christensen & Langer, 2009). Transparency provides transparency (Aggerholm & Thomsen, 2024; Argenti, 2017) and should encompass both results and procedures (Auld

& Gulbrandsen, 2010). "Transparency can contribute to a better understanding of the reasons behind a decision and, therefore, to higher levels of legitimacy for both decisions and decision-makers" (de Fine Licht et al., 2014:114). As a reference, researchers Escamilla-Solano et al. (2023) detailed 35 indicators in their work, based on the 149 indicators of the Spanish Association for Transparency Accreditation (Acreditra).

Consistent Legitimacy. Linking Characteristics And Perceptions

To explore how evaluators form their judgments about organizational legitimacy, Tost (2011) introduces three underlying dimensions of these judgments: instrumental, relational, and moral. An organization is perceived as instrumentally legitimate when it is seen as supporting individuals or groups in achieving their internally defined goals. Relational legitimacy is achieved when individuals and groups perceive that their dignity is respected by the organization. Moral legitimacy results when evaluators perceive compatibility between the organization and its moral and ethical values.

Thus, legitimacy judgments are based on facts. Legitimacy is a fact although perception or feelings serve as good indicators. Perception or feelings reflect how information has reached the audiences and how they have processed it to form a judgment. This judgment is subjective and not objective.

We reject the notion that legitimacy is purely in the eye of the beholder; in other words, we do not accept that legitimacy is solely a perception or feeling held by audiences. Legitimacy is something that is either possessed or lacking and must be demonstrated. A person is not guilty of a crime simply because others believe so, but because their guilt can be proven. Why should this be different for organizations? Perceptions or feelings are manipulable, and such manipulation can be highly beneficial for organizations, especially in the short term. However, this undermines the essence of legitimacy, where normativity is crucial and survival is the primary expected outcome.

There is a gap between legitimacy based on characteristics and legitimacy based on perception. Managers must develop strategies to reduce or eliminate this gap through the accurate dissemination of legitimacy and the use of media. Closing the gap between the organization's characteristics and audience perception requires additional effort by organizations to communicate and adequately disseminate that they possess legitimacy (Gordo-Molina et al., 2022). The greater the dissemination and use of appropriate communication tools, the closer the alignment between consistent legitimacy and perception.

Van der Steen et al. (2021) argued that legitimacy is a property of organizations that can be accumulated by establishing an alignment between the organization's attributes and audience expectations. This alignment involves not only a connection between the organization's structural attributes and audience expectations but also adherence to widely accepted standards and beliefs. From this perspective, legitimacy can be generated at the nexus between organizations and their audiences.

The concept of consistent legitimacy emerges here. Consistency refers to the coherence among elements within a set; in this case, it highlights the need for alignment between an organization's characteristics and audience perceptions. We propose that there are a set of unquestionable elements or characteristics that provide legitimacy beyond mere perceptions. We term this type of legitimacy measurement *consistent legitimacy*, as it is grounded in pillars representing the essential characteristics of organizational legitimacy. Consistent legitimacy is a necessary condition for legitimacy. Not having consistent legitimacy implies not having legitimacy. Therefore, perceived legitimacy is a sufficient condition to have legitimacy.

Consistent legitimacy is largely built through actions that bring facts closer to the audience. However, audiences may not perceive these facts unless they are communicated and disseminated. A significant

part of perceptions originates from limited information. Thus, many stakeholder judgments are based on sensations, intuitions, or feelings that can lead to evaluations that are quite distant from the organization's objective facts. Scholars working from this perspective have suggested that legitimacy can be obtained not only by following regulations but also by strategically using communication tactics (Chung *et al.*, 2016). The media act as propagators of organizational legitimacy and examine its impact on the degree to which audiences perceive the organization's actions and behaviors as desirable and appropriate (Jeong & Kim, 2019). Thus, to achieve legitimacy, an organization needs to have consistent legitimacy and then communicate it.

Conclusions

In this research, we have addressed the existence of two approaches to legitimacy. We emphasize the recognition that organizations possess legitimacy, acquiring it objectively through their characteristics. However, we acknowledge that much of the research and literature focuses on organizational legitimacy as an external perception acquired through audience perception. Our approach is normative, based on what should be, which leads us to support a concept of legitimacy where the objective evaluation of the organization is not only the first step but also a necessary condition for granting legitimacy. This approach aligns with the concept of "legitimacy as a property," which states: "legitimacy as a thing—that is, a property, a resource, or a capacity of an entity" (Suddaby *et al.*, 2017:451).

We have argued that the perception-based legitimacy approach is laden with feelings and sensations. Organizations cannot lose sight of the fact that they depend on their environment and the perception that audiences have of them. We do not reject this approach; on the contrary, we consider perception a sufficient condition. However, every sufficient condition requires prior fulfillment of the necessary condition. This implies that, although audiences may consider an organization legitimate, if it does not objectively meet the necessary characteristics according to our study, it cannot be considered legitimate. Furthermore, evidently, an organization that meets the necessary conditions does not guarantee its survival if it is not perceived as legitimate. This leads to two concepts of legitimacy that must be consistent with each other. This implies that using a single evaluation approach can obscure situations for organizations that cannot be considered legitimate. This also highlights the need for a practical connection between both concepts, which, as we indicate, can only be achieved by the organization through the dissemination and communication of the essential characteristics linked to legitimacy.

We have also developed the concept of consistent legitimacy. After asserting that legitimacy is possessed, not a belief, feeling, or perception, we affirm that legitimacy must be demonstrated to exist. The elements that constitute legitimacy are identified as exclusive; that is, the absence of any of them indicates that legitimacy has not been achieved. Legitimacy is based on organizational characteristics that must align with the local culture where it operates, the accepted values in that society, social expectations and needs, and its economic environment, forcing organizations to make changes over time to maintain their legitimacy.

We have identified the characteristics of a legitimate organization and defined them as necessary conditions for the existence of organizational legitimacy. The way these necessary characteristics have been described allows their use in evaluating all types of organizations, whether public or private, new or mature, small or large. The advantage of this approach is its universal application.

The lesson for managers is that it is not enough to have legitimacy; it must be demonstrated and disseminated through the media using communication. Audiences must perceive the organization's reality, and this is only possible when the organization strives to convey organizational knowledge to audiences,

which can be improved and perceived equally or even more favorably than reality, but it should never be perceived below its levels of legitimacy or ignore any of the necessary characteristics. Can we train new entrepreneurs with communication skills aimed at improving their legitimacy? (Llorente et al., 2023)

Currently, research on organizational legitimacy has been conducted using a characteristics-based approach and a perception-based approach. These studies have always been conducted as two independent streams of work without connection. We indicate that the two approaches to evaluating legitimacy are connected, and it would be a mistake to overlook that one is a necessary condition and the other a sufficient condition. Accepting this approach requires new studies on the connection between them and the influence of the media. What are the means used by organizations that yield the best results in disseminating organizational legitimacy? Answering this question will allow managers to act with greater confidence in their decisions and scholars to develop models that more accurately indicate the variables to consider for disseminating the legitimacy that the organization possesses.

It is evident that the study we present lacks empirical verification. Although we have relied on theoretical works and articles that conduct quantitative analyses, all these studies refer to partial approaches concerning what we present here. We know that studies using only some variables and partial concepts of legitimacy provide indicative and guiding results, but they are not sufficient when considering the complete content and relationships between organizational legitimacy approaches.

Some additional questions that researchers could develop in the future are as follows: Do organizations benefit from better access, survival, and growth to resources when they do not have complete legitimacy? What benefits does consistent legitimacy produce? Do organizations' outcomes differ when there are differences between consistent and perceived legitimacy?



Ethics Committee Approval	This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. The article is a theoretical investigation and therefore does not include a methodology section. The manuscript does not report any studies involving human participants.
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions	Conception/Design of Study- F.D.M., E.D.C.; Data Acquisition- F.D.M., E.D.C., A.C.S.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- F.D.M., E.D.C., A.C.S.; Drafting Manuscript- A.C.S., E.D.C.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- F.D.M., E.D.C., A.C.S., C.P.R.; Final Approval and Accountability- F.D.M., E.D.C., A.C.S., C.P.R.
Conflict of Interest	The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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