

Exploring the Factors Shaping Organic Food Choices: Insights from Adana, Türkiye

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Abstract

The consumption of organic food is rapidly becoming more widespread. This study aims to explore the attitudes of consumers in the city center of Adana, Türkiye, toward organic products and identify the factors that influence their purchasing behaviors. The research is based on data collected through a survey conducted with individuals selected from the city center. A detailed analysis of participants' demographic characteristics was carried out, examining variables such as gender, age, income level, marital status, and occupation. The findings reveal that individuals working in the education sector and food industry professionals demonstrate significant awareness and concern regarding organic food. Additionally, demographic factors, including age, gender, marital status, and income, play a crucial role in shaping consumers' preferences and behaviors toward organic food. However, income level emerges as a critical determinant, often acting as a barrier to the broader adoption of organic products due to their higher cost. Among those who reported consuming organic products, 11.5% preferred fresh fruits and vegetables, followed by eggs (11.3%), olive oil (10.9%), dairy products (8.9%), and honey (8.7%). The insights gained from this study are valuable for understanding consumer attitudes toward organic products in Adana and for identifying the factors that influence their choices in detail.

Keywords: Organic Products, Consumer behavior, Demographic analysis, Occupational impact, Regional influences

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the growing interest in organically produced foods has garnered significant attention in both developed and developing nations. Organic foods are defined as products cultivated without the use of herbicides, pesticides, antibiotics, or genetically modified organisms, while adhering to principles of animal welfare and environmental sustainability (Marwa & Scott, 2013). This surge in demand for organic food products is largely attributed to concerns over the potential health risks of intensive agricultural practices and their environmental impact (Apaolaza et al., 2018; Yin et al., 2010).

Consumers generally perceive organic foods as superior to conventional alternatives due to their chemical-free nature, environmental benefits,

improved health attributes, better taste, and higher price. However, a portion of consumers remains skeptical, questioning whether organic foods differ from conventional options or whether producers leverage the organic label solely for higher profits. Addressing this skepticism requires rigorous certification processes and greater consumer awareness of certification standards and labeling (Janssen & Hamm, 2012; Sobhanifard, 2018).

Turkey has a long-standing tradition of organic agriculture, with most organic products being exported to international markets. Between 1990 and 2010, the organic food sector experienced substantial growth in Turkey, particularly between 2008 and 2010, when the number of producers and production areas increased significantly.

Currently, there are 79,563 organic food producers and 646,247 hectares of organic farming land in Turkey (Inan et al., 2021). Despite Turkey's potential as a leading organic food producer, domestic consumption remains lower than in developed countries. Understanding consumer behavior is essential for aligning production with preferences and addressing barriers to consumption.

Consumer behavior is influenced by a complex interplay of individual, social, and cultural factors. Socio-economic changes, such as rising income levels, increased education, and the growing role of women in the workforce, have significantly impacted purchasing habits (Dölekoğlu, 2002). Research indicates that health and nutritional benefits are the primary motivators for consumers choosing organic foods (Paul & Rana, 2012; Lee & Yun, 2015). Additionally, preferences for organic foods reflect broader consumer behaviors that promote environmental sustainability and green production systems (Scalco et al., 2017).

Studies in various contexts highlight the multifaceted nature of consumer attitudes. For instance, in Poland, sensory attributes, price, and safety were found to be key motivators for purchasing organic food, while price-conscious consumers were less likely to buy organic products (Zakowska-Biemans, 2011). In Turkey, promotional efforts and consumer education have been identified as critical factors for increasing organic consumption (Karabas & Gurler, 2012; Sarica et al., 2023). Other research, such as a focus group study in Denmark, reveals diverse consumer understandings of health as a justification for organic food preferences, including health as purity, pleasure, or a holistic concept (Ditlevsen et al., 2019).

This study seeks to build on these insights by examining the factors influencing organic food consumption in Adana, Türkiye. Specifically, it aims to analyze consumer beliefs and attitudes and assess their impact on purchasing behaviors. By addressing these questions, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer

preferences and offers practical recommendations for promoting organic food consumption in similar contexts.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between consumers' purchase intentions for organic food and factors such as organic food characteristics, health consciousness, subjective norms, and environmental concerns, with awareness as a potential moderating variable. The research focused on residents of Adana, Türkiye, who are knowledgeable about organic food products, excluding those without familiarity. This approach involves interpreting information through numerical data, collected in a standardized form and analyzed using diagrams and statistics, as articulated by Saunders et al. (2009). The numerical data were gathered from a specific sample, representative of the entire population in Adana.

Primary data collection was conducted through a questionnaire, chosen for its ability to obtain opinions and views from a large sample of individuals. The questionnaire was administered online, a method chosen for its efficiency in saving both time and costs associated with data collection. This approach also facilitates reaching a broad audience, irrespective of their geographical location, as highlighted by Ilieva et al. (2002).

Data were collected through an online questionnaire targeting a convenience sample of 200 participants, ultimately including 207 valid responses. The questionnaire comprised two sections: demographic data and items addressing key research variables. A 4-point Likert scale was utilized to assess respondents' perceptions, adapted from prior studies for constructs such as organic food characteristics, brand awareness, and purchase intention. The survey was initially designed in English, translated into Turkish, and back-translated to ensure accuracy.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed for hypothesis testing and data analysis. Reliability

analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.757. Non-parametric tests, including Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H, were conducted to explore demographic influences on attitudes toward organic food certification.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Adana Alparslan Türkeş Science and Technology University Ethical Evaluation Unit. Data privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aimed to comprehensively examine the factors influencing consumers' preferences for organic food in Adana province. Specifically, the study delved into understanding the purchasing behavior of organic food buyers and how it is shaped by their attitudes towards organic products.

In terms of demographical characteristics, the participants were categorized based on various factors, including age and gender distribution, marital status, income and etc. The demographical characteristics of participants were given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic distribution of the sample

Age	Count	%
18-25	69	33,33
26-35	100	48,31
36-45	31	14,98
46-56	7	3,38
Gender	Count	%
Female	138	66,67
Male	69	33,33
Occupation	Count	%
Student	58	28,02
Engineer	43	20,77
Teacher	27	13,04
Officer	20	9,66
Academician	14	6,76
Doctor	19	9,18
Nutritionist	7	3,38
Lawyer	4	1,93
Architect	2	0,97
Tradesman	6	2,90
Retired	2	0,97
Unemployed	5	2,42
Marital Status	Count	%
Single	149	71,98
Single/2 children	1	0,48
Single/3 children	1	0,48
Married	30	14,49
Married/1 child	14	6,76
Married/2 children	9	4,35
Married/3 children	3	1,45
Income (TL)	Count	%
<7500	66	31,88
7500-15000	16	7,73
15000-30000	45	21,74
30000-60000	72	34,78
>60000	8	3,86

The demographic profile of the surveyed participants provided valuable insights into the characteristics of consumers interested in organic food products. The distribution of respondents across various demographic variables reflects a diverse and multifaceted consumer base with unique preferences, needs, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35, followed by those aged 18 to 25. This skew towards younger age groups suggests a greater receptivity to organic food consumption among millennials and younger adults, potentially driven by factors such as health consciousness, environmental awareness, and lifestyle preferences. Gender distribution revealed a predominance of female participants, comprising 67% of the surveyed population. This gender imbalance may reflect existing trends in consumer behavior, where women are often more actively engaged in household food purchasing and decision-making processes, including choices related to organic and sustainable products.

Marital status data indicated that a significant proportion of respondents were single, representing the largest segment within the surveyed population. However, a notable portion of participants reported being married, with varying numbers of children. This diversity in marital status suggests that organic food preferences are influenced by household dynamics, family size, and life stage considerations. In a study conducted in Serbia, in a sample of 571 participants, by far the largest number of participants were those who were married (44.7%). They were followed by people who did not have a partner (26.1%), followed by people who did not have a partner. As a result of the study, there was no statistically significant difference in the scores of participants in different marital status (Mitić, & Čolović, 2022).

Occupational distribution highlighted the diverse professional backgrounds of the participants, with students, engineers, and teachers comprising the

largest occupational groups. This diversity underscores the cross-cutting appeal of organic food consumption across different professions and industries, indicating a widespread interest in health-conscious and environmentally sustainable dietary choices among individuals from various occupational backgrounds. In previous studies conducted on organic food consumption habits (Ergönül & Ergönül, 2015; Feil et al., 2020; İnan ve ark., 2021; Melovic et al., 2020) participants with very different demographic characteristics were studied, as in this study. Similar to our findings, it has been determined that the people who consume and are interested in organic foods are mostly university graduates and people who know organic foods. Analysis of income distribution revealed a range of earnings among the surveyed population, with a significant proportion falling within lower to middle-income brackets. However, a sizable segment reported relatively higher incomes, indicating a diverse spectrum of purchasing power and spending capacity among organic food consumers.

Participants were asked to rate the importance of various factors influencing their organic food consumption, such as health benefits, environmental concerns, taste, and price. This approach aligns with previous research, which has identified these factors as key determinants of organic food choices (Hjelmar, 2011; Hughner et al., 2007). Additionally, they were queried about their trust in organic food certifications and whether they actively check for these certifications when purchasing organic products. This aspect mirrors findings from studies by Patel et al. (2021) which highlighted the importance of certification trust and verification in consumer decision-making processes.

Table 2 presents the mean, standard deviation, sample size (N), median, and Cronbach's alpha values for various factors influencing organic food consumption among the survey participants. Firstly, the reliability analysis using Cronbach's

alpha coefficient indicates that the scale used to measure these factors has acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.757, ensuring the reliability of the measurement instrument.

In terms of the factors influencing organic food consumption, the participants rated advertisement as the most effective factor, with a mean score of

2.1981. This suggests that promotional activities, marketing campaigns, and advertising efforts play a significant role in shaping consumer preferences and behaviors towards organic food products. This finding resonates with research by Hemmerling et al. (2015) and Li and Cui (2021), which emphasized the impact of marketing and advertising on consumer behavior in the organic food sector.

Table 2. The reliability of the scale used in this study

Criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Median	Cronbach's Alpha
Quality	1.5169	0.87492	207	1	0.757
Price	1.5797	0.91491	207	1	
Health Benefits	1.6135	0.91663	207	1	
Environmental Benefits	1.7391	0.97022	207	1	
Knowledge of the Benefits of Organic Food	1.7633	0.97891	207	1	
Taste	1.9324	0.99282	207	1	
Brand Label Certification	1.9662	0.99211	207	1	
Animal Welfare	1.9710	0.99958	207	1	
Appearance	2.0000	1.00000	207	2	
Assortment/Availability in Shop	2.0773	1.01628	207	3	
Advertisement	2.1981	0.98256	207	3	

Among other factors, quality, price, health benefits, environmental benefits, and knowledge of the benefits of organic food also received relatively low mean scores, indicating their importance but lesser influence compared to advertisement. Interestingly, appearance, assortment/availability in shops, and brand label/certification were rated slightly higher, suggesting that factors related to product presentation, availability, and branding also contribute to consumer decision-making processes.

The findings from this study are consistent with previous research indicating that promotional activities and advertising play a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior and preferences in the organic food market (Hempel and Hamm, 2016; Hughner et al., 2007). Moreover, the relatively lower scores for factors such as price and

health benefits align with existing literature highlighting the multifaceted nature of consumer attitudes and motivations towards organic food products (Hjelmar, 2011; Sandhe and Joshi, 2017). Overall, these results underscore the importance of marketing strategies and promotional efforts in driving consumer demand for organic food products, while also highlighting the complex interplay of various factors influencing consumer decision-making in this market segment. Further research could delve deeper into understanding the specific mechanisms through which advertisement influences consumer behavior and explore potential interventions to promote sustainable food consumption practices.

Furthermore, non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H) were employed to examine the effects of demographic variables,

including gender, marital status, occupation, and income level, on responses to questions about organic food certification (Table 3). The analysis revealed significant effects of occupation and income level on the question regarding checking organic food certification, with p-values less than 0.05. Similar findings have been reported in studies by Wu et al. (2019) and Diagourtas et al. (2023), underscoring the influence of socioeconomic factors on consumer behavior in the organic food market.

Similarly, age demonstrated a significant effect on responses to questions about organic food certification, indicating its importance in understanding consumer behaviors related to organic food consumption (Table 4). This aligns with research by Aertsens et al. (2011) and Baudry et al. (2019), highlighting age as a key demographic variable shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors towards organic food.

Table 3. The effect of Gender on the evaluation of organic food certificates

Does gender matter on the answers given to the questions?			
	Do you check certificates	Does organic food have organic certificate	Do you trust certificates
Mann-Whitney U	4381.500	4761.000	4312.500
Wilcoxon W	13972.500	14352.000	13903.500
Z	-1.096	0.000	-1.343
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.273	1.000	0.179

Table 4. The effect of Age on the evaluation of organic food certificates

Does age matter on the answers given to the questions?			
	Do you check certificates	Does organic food have organic certificate	Do you trust certificates
Chi-Square	27.773	10.906	2.117
df	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.000	0.012	0.548

The results of the chi-square tests examining the relationship between demographic variables (marital status, profession, and income) and responses to questions regarding organic food certification reveal interesting insights (Tables 5, 6, and 7).

For marital status, the chi-square tests indicate that there is no significant association between marital status and the responses to questions about organic food certification ($p > 0.05$).

This suggests that marital status does not play a significant role in influencing consumers' attitudes towards organic food certification. Similarly, Aygen (2021) stated that there is no significant variation with respect to marital status, as married respondents believe to a greater extent than unmarried respondents that “there is not enough organic product variety” and that “they do not think organic foods to be that high in quality”.

Table 5. The effect of Marital Status on the evaluation of organic food certificates

Does Marital Status have any importance on the answers given to the questions?

	Do you check certificates	Does organic food have organic certificate	Do you trust certificates
Chi-Square	10.706	8.296	7.821
df	6	6	6
Asymp. Sig.	0.098	0.217	0.252

* Does not matter since Sig values are greater than 0.05

Table 6. The effect of Profession on the evaluation of organic food certificates

Does the profession matter on the answers given to the questions?

	Do you check certificates	Does organic food have organic certificate	Do you trust certificates
Chi-Square	21.857	19.191	11.820
df	11	11	11
Asymp. Sig.	0.026	0.058	0.377

* Do you check the organic food certification of the producer? Its effect on the answer to the question was significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 7. The effect of Income on the evaluation of organic food certificates

Does income matter on the answers given to the questions?

	Do you check certificates	Does organic food have organic certificate	Do you trust certificates
Chi-Square	10.403	5.144	6.991
df	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	0.034	0.273	0.136

* Do you check the organic food certification of the producer? Its effect on the answer to the question was significant ($p < 0.05$).

In contrast, the analysis reveals a significant association between profession and responses to questions about organic food certification ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, participants' professions have a significant effect on whether they check the organic food certification of the producer. This finding suggests that individuals' occupations may influence their awareness of and attention to organic food certification, possibly due to differences in knowledge, expertise, or professional standards related to food safety and quality and is in line with the statements of Bottonaki et al. (2006).

Similarly, income levels also show a significant association with responses to questions about organic food certification, particularly in the context of checking the organic food certification of the producer ($p < 0.05$). This implies that individuals with higher income levels may be more inclined to prioritize and verify the authenticity of organic food certification when making purchasing decisions. The findings are in line with the literature (Gundala et al., 2021; Pallathadka et al., 2022). Overall, these findings underscore the importance of considering demographic factors such as profession and income level in understanding

consumer behaviors and attitudes towards organic food certification. While marital status may not exert a significant influence, profession and income level emerge as important determinants that warrant further investigation in future research (Aschemann-Witzel and Zielke, 2017). These results could inform targeted marketing strategies and educational initiatives aimed at promoting consumer trust and confidence in organic food products.

Additionally, the participants' preferences for organic food items were asked and the results were given in Figure 1. The findings provide valuable insights into consumer behavior and consumption patterns in Adana province. When considering which products they would prefer to consume if

The most preferred organic food category, chosen by 113 participants, reflects the high demand for fresh and naturally grown produce. Organic farming methods, which avoid synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, offer health benefits and sustainability by reducing environmental impacts like soil erosion and water contamination. Consumers view organic fruits and vegetables as more nutritious, flavorful, and free from harmful pesticide residues, aligning with health-conscious and environmentally sustainable attitudes.

Chosen by 111 and 88 participants, respectively, eggs and dairy products are highly valued for being healthier alternatives free from antibiotics, synthetic hormones, and GMOs. Organic farming practices emphasize animal welfare, offering animals pasture access and improving product quality and taste. The popularity of these products is driven by their perceived safety and higher nutrient levels, such as omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants, which resonate with health-conscious consumers.

Olive oil and honey were favored by 107 and 86 participants, reflecting their importance as premium-quality, natural food items. Organic olive oil and honey are valued for their purity, authenticity, and health benefits, achieved through

labeled organic, several factors may influence their choices, including health concerns, taste preferences, and environmental consciousness (Smith and Paladino, 2010).

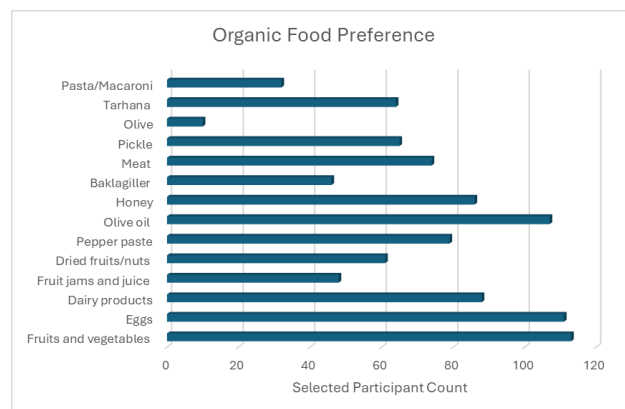


Figure 1. Organic food preference of participant

sustainable production methods that avoid synthetic inputs. Cultural and culinary traditions, especially in regions where these items are integral, may further contribute to their popularity.

Selected by 74 participants, organic meat appeals to consumers focused on animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and health. It is sourced from animals raised on organic feed and pasture without antibiotics or hormones, resulting in healthier, leaner, and more flavorful meat. The preference indicates a rising demand for ethically produced protein sources that align with consumers' values regarding sustainability and ethical food production.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explores the factors influencing organic food preferences in Adana province, highlighting the importance of health, environmental sustainability, and quality in shaping consumer choices. It reveals a shift in priorities towards healthier and more sustainable lifestyles. Demographic factors, such as age, income, and occupation, significantly impact organic food preferences. Younger individuals and higher-income groups show greater interest, while affordability challenges hinder adoption among

lower-income consumers. Gender and marital status, however, have minimal influence.

Fresh, nutrient-rich items like fruits, vegetables, eggs, and dairy are the most preferred organic products. Trust in certification mechanisms is crucial for fostering confidence in organic claims, though concerns about transparency and authenticity persist. Addressing these issues requires better certification processes and consumer education. Barriers such as limited availability and high prices restrict access to organic foods, particularly for lower-income groups.

Expanding distribution channels, reducing price disparities, and raising awareness about organic benefits are essential to overcoming these challenges.

The study offers actionable insights for stakeholders, emphasizing the need to align strategies with consumer values. By prioritizing transparency, affordability, and education, a more inclusive and resilient organic food market can be achieved, fostering sustainable growth and meeting evolving consumer expectations.

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