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CONSUMERS´ INFORMATION SEARCH BEHAVIOR ON WHOLESOME NUTRITION AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS HEALTH PRODUCTS; A FIELD STUDY FROM ESKISEHIR, TURKEY

Abstract:

This survey intends to find out the attitudes of the consumers towards health products such as organic food, healthy foodstuffs and their information seeking behavior on wholesome nutrition. A survey is applied to 480 respondents selected via stratified sampling from Eskişehir, a city of Turkey with 700.000 inhabitants where 470 of the responses are found eligible... The respondents are required to answer 50 questions of which five are related to demographic characteristics of these respondents. The rest 45 are statements which are designed to reflect the behavior of these people. The study consists of five parts. The first part is an introduction where the scope and the purpose of the study are concisely stated. The second part relates to the theoretical background of the subject matter and the prior researches carried out so far. The third part deals with research methodology, basic premises and hypotheses attached to these premises. Research model and analyses take place in this section. Theoretical framework is built and a variable name is assigned to each of the question asked or proposition forwarded to the respondents of this survey. 42 statements or propositions given to the respondents are placed on a five-point Likert scale. Three questions are on an ordinal scale reflecting the most-used information sources of the respondents. The remaining five questions about demographic traits as age, gender, occupation, educational level and monthly income are placed either on a nominal or ratio scale with respect to the nature of the trait. Ten research hypotheses are formulated in this section. The fourth part mainly deals with the results of the hypothesis tests and a factor analysis is applied to the data on hand. Here exploratory factor analysis reduces 42 variables to eight basic components as: " Nutritional knowledge, nutritional labels and health claims; care for health products; consumer positive and negative attitudes toward organic foods; fast-food involvement; prior product knowledge; e-health information search; information search behavior; and system beaters". In addition non-parametric bivariate analysis in terms of Chi-Square is applied to test the hypotheses formulated in this respect. The fifth part is the conclusion where findings of this survey is listed.

Keywords:

Nutritional knowledge, health claims, health products, organic foods, fast-food involvement, prior product knowledge, e-health and health related information , information search behavior,

JEL Classification: M31

1. Introduction

1980s is a period and milestone for the people of medicine who asserted the importance and the effect of dietary choice on the risk of chronic diseases. Increasing attendance to the change in eating habits which could lead to better health raised the interest to better nutrition information to consumers and also raised to opportunity to put forth better policies and programs to choose better food products. Health-related claims are henceforth took place in ads designed for food consumption and became an indispensable part of the food product claims. Since that time communicating health related information to consumers by the food producers became a major issue of promotion activity. For the individuals to reach the expected life quality depends upon increase in the nutrition consciousness of the community, and transforming the healthy nutrition into a life style. The nutrition habit of the communities has been altered by the passage of time. At first, human beings has been nourished for satisfying their hunger, Human beings has been nourished at first for the sake of satisfying their hunger, starting with 1990s they started to adopt the style of healthy and environment-friendly nutrition. In communities where economic and social welfar1e has increased, the individuals exhibit more responsive attitudes as a subject-matter of food. Exhibiting consumers' knowledge and attitudes about foodstuffs, will enable them to specify the direction of their needs and wants and also enable the companies to determine right strategies which produce and market such products. For his reason, the companies which produce healthy food products, should thoroughly understand different demographic traits, motivations and attitudes so as to achieve right planning (Çelik, 2013). Sufficient, balanced, and healthy nutrition is not only for vital activities of the individuals, but the basic condition for the progress of the total community. Instead of more consumption habits, proper and balanced consumption intelligence has been developed by the positive effects of the healthy nutrition to mental development and work productivity and decrease of the health risks. Turkey bears the common features of the developed and developing countries from the point of nutrition characteristics. Although the consumption of total protein level is sufficient, most of the consumed proteins are of vegetable origin (Topuzoğlu, Hıdıroğlu , 2007). The nutritional condition of people varies significantly and distributed unequally with respect to the regions, seasons, socio-economical level and urban-rural settlement places. This situation is effective upon the characteristics of the nutrition problems and the frequency of appearance (Pekcan, 1998; Pekcan and Marcheish, 2001). In the course of time, changes due to the socio-economical structures of the consumers and thereupon their lifestyles also caused the differentiations of their wants and expectations. Today's consumers take into consideration especially three important factors in their foodstuff preferences: Health, convenience and pleasure. Recently, consumers started to give more attention to health together with flavor and content, when selecting foodstuffs. (Özdemir, Fettahlıoğlu, Topoyan, 2009). This situation has been effective on the increase of demand for healthy products.

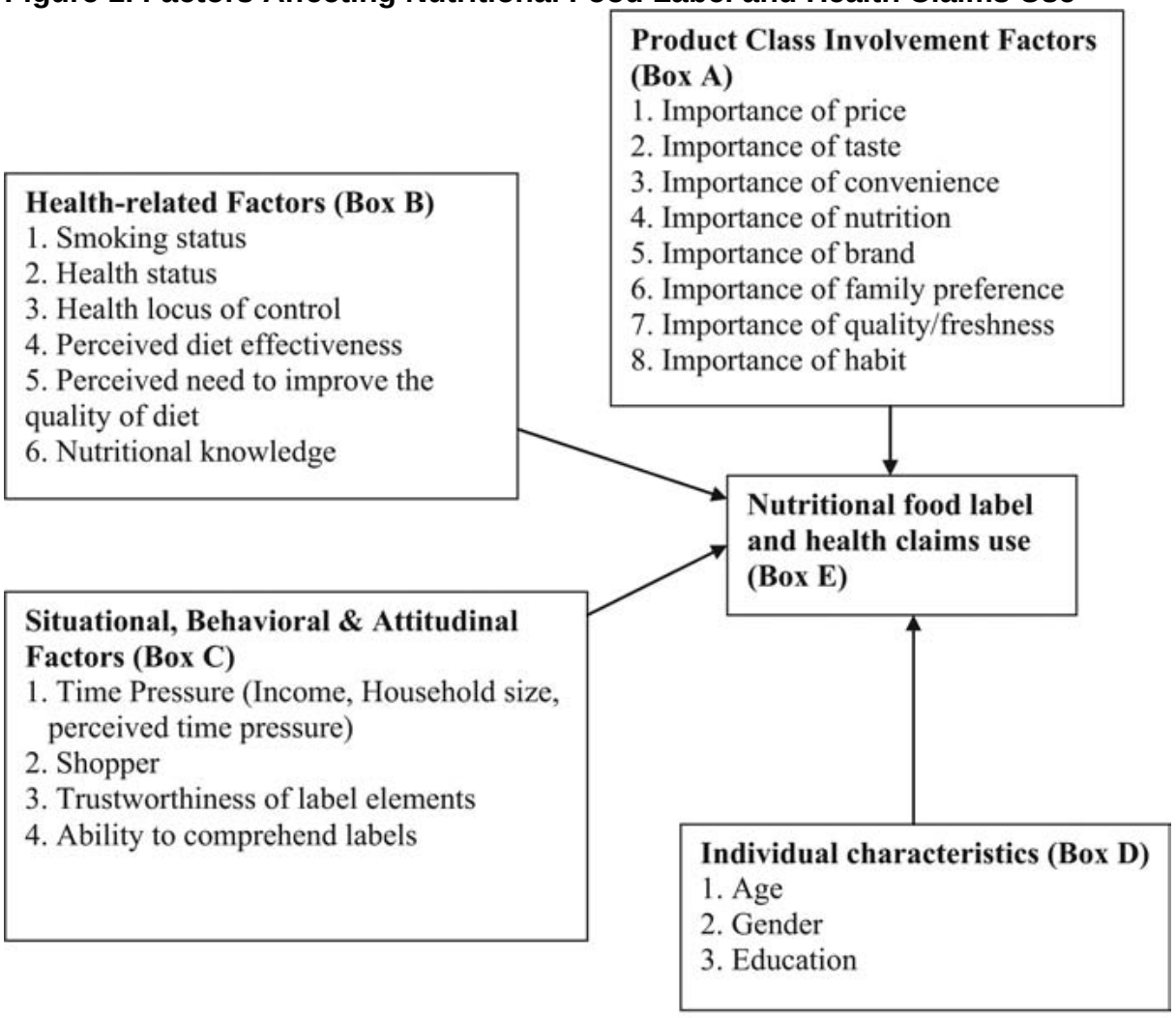
2. Literature Review and Prior Research

2.1 External Consumer Information Search and Theory of Planned Behavior

"The theory of external consumer information search and theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) inform the proposed framework of factors influencing consumer usage of food labels as a source of nutrition information. According to Beatty and Smith (1987) a consumer's decision to purchase food is linked to the process of information

search. Moore and Lehmann (1980) define external search as a step preceding a purchase decision with packaging information and advertisements given as examples. From an economics perspective (Moore and Lehmann, 1980), a person will continue to search and acquire information as long as the additional costs are less than the additional benefits gained from this search. The main costs are the time used to read the labels and process the information while the main benefit is a more nutritious diet, reflecting better food choices and leading to reduced risk of chronic diseases (Pomerleau et al., 2003). The theory of external consumer information search posits that consumer behavior is influenced by a wide range of determinants of information search including internal and external factors (Moore and Lehmann, 1980; Nayga et al., 1998). These can be categorized as individual characteristics, situational, attitudinal and behavioral variables and product class involvement factors. In addition to these categories of predictors, we propose the addition of health-related factors (e.g. perceived need to improve the diet, perceived importance of dietary quality) which has been overlooked in previous studies (e.g. Drichoutis et al., 2005). In addition to previous Nutritional knowledge 769 studies (e.g. Nayga, 2000; Kim et al., 2001) the proposed model integrates predictors informed by the health cognitive models in the form of locus of control (Rutter and Quine, 2002). It is argued that the use of nutrition information is sustained by diet efficacy as well as beliefs that health outcomes are subject to controllable factors. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework used in this study, to predict the consumer use of NFI, NCL and HCL" (Petrovici et al., pp. 769-770).

Figure 1. Factors Affecting Nutritional Food Label and Health Claims Use

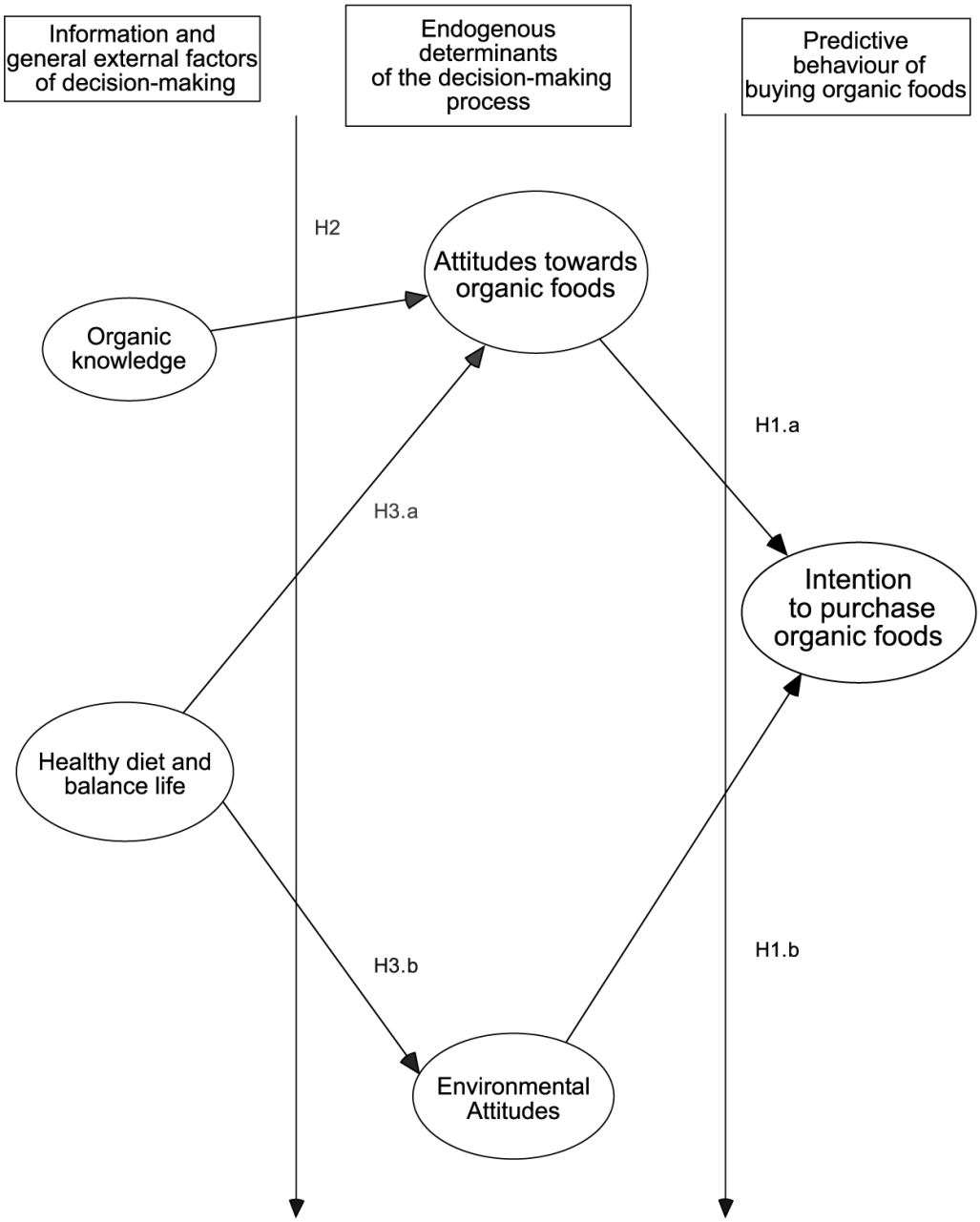


2.2 Consumers' Decision Making Process for Organic Foods

Organic food farming is a rapidly growing concern for the European Union countries, as well as Turkey, which is yet not a member but a candidate for this union. "Organic production is a production system that combines best environmental practices, a high level of biodiversity, the preservation of natural resources, and the application of high-animal welfare standards, thus providing specific higher quality products that would be able to respond to certain consumers' demand. In particular, consumers highly concerned on health and safety of food product and on friendlier with the environment production systems would be more willing to buy organic products. Therefore, the demand for organic products in Europe showed a remarkable growth in all Member States in recent years (Official Journal of the European Union, 2007). However, the future development of the organic market in Europe is still facing some shortcomings, pointed out by the European Action Plan or Organic Food and Farming (European Commission, 2004)" (Tziana an Gracia, p. 929). "Consumer's knowledge is a relevant construct that affects how and what consumers decide to buy. Organic food information perceived by consumers is an important issue in the organic food market because it represents the only instrument that consumers have to differentiate the attributes of organic food products from those of conventional ones, and build positive attitudes towards organic food. Yiridoe et al. (2005), in their literature review, stated

that knowledge on organic food products can affect consumers' organic buying decision for two reasons. The first one, the lack of knowledge, is considered the number one reason why consumers do not buy organic food. The second reason is that consumers who do not consider that organic food products have enough detailed information cannot clearly differentiate the unique attributes of organic from conventionally grown alternatives". (Tziana an Gracia, p. 932). The figure below depicts the organic food products decision making process (Tziana an Gracia, p. 933):

Figure 2. Organic Food Products Decision-Making Process



2.3 Labeling Foodstuffs

A healthy lifestyle for consumers could be possible by making proper and healthy preferences. In this respect, a labeling system which would include an easy and correct information is needed fort he consumers to make their correct preferences. Nourishment labels are elements which give information about the products, protect them from false knowledge and enable the consumers to make conscious choices. The main purposes of labels could be arranged as follows (Einsiedel, 2000): Providing sufficient and correct information about health, security, and economical matters; Protecting consumers and producers from false and misleading advertisements and labels; Supporting equitable competition and product marketability; Facilitating healthy, and conscious decision making for the consumers, since the food labels possess valuable information about the product mixture, price, expiration date, usage period, source, and nutrition value. (Özgül and Aksulu, 2006). Increasing number of problems regarding nutrition increased the emphasis given upon reading the foodstuff labels in their decision making to buy such products. Recently many researches about reading the labels of the foodstuffs have been carried out and these researches proved that labels have been taken into consideration by the consumers in their decisions to buy foodstuffs. (Peters, Texeira and Badrie, 2005; Özgül and Aksulu, 2006; Osei, Lawer, Aidoo, 2012). These information given about the product mixture, usage period, and nutrition values take effect on the consumers to make correct and conscious decisions. The information on the foodstuff labels it is crucial that simplified food information should take place on product labels so that consumers can benefit from food labels and make proper decisions. (Glanz, Mullis and Snyder, 1989). From healthy nutrition point of view, labeling system is the most important factor to enable us to be informed about the foodstuffs we purchase. Demand from the consumers so as to be informed explicitly about the foodstuffs they purchase continuously increasing day by day. Turkish food producers inform the consumers not only throughout food labels, but also by advertisements, pamphlets, or internet websites. Moreover, producers utilize food labels as an important promotion tool. The greatest impediment in informing the consumers arise from providing the information so that they can make their decisions simply and correctly during their purchase decisions. According to the “Labeling Regulation” which went into effect in Year 2011, from nutrition point of view, labeling, nutrition introduction or advertising and/or health claims are mandatory. In order to build up consumers’ foodstuff literacy and enable them to make more conscious choices, a volunteering system called Daily Intake Amount (DIA) has been developed by the initiation of World Health Organization (WHO). This system aims to provide comprehensible and useful information on the labels to the food industry consumers to help them to select the foodstuffs that would help to their sufficient and balanced nutrition. Consumers can evaluate the place of a product in their daily nourishment with the help of this label (www.tgdf.org.tr). A consortium by the name of FLABEL has been established in the year 2008 so as to determine the how informing the consumers effect their nutrition preferences and habits. This consortium is financed by the European Union. This organization inspected more than 37.000 products’ labels so as to investigate nutrition labeling application in 28 countries (including Turkey). Within the scope of this research, it has been recognized frequently that DIA labeling is present on the front side of the package (www.tgdf.org.tr). Organic food, and organic food market is a continuously expanding market in the World and in Turkey. Especially recently demand for organic products is increasing in

conformity with the increase in environment and health concern in USA, EU and in other developed countries. Consumers who worry about topics such as healthy nutrition and providing reliable products, exhibit a positive attitude towards organic products (Karabaş, Gürler, 2012). Yet organic food market, which is continuously growing and becoming popular makes it necessary the solution of some questions in terms of governments, producers, marketing people, intermediaries etc. For example, who are the consumers of organic food? What are the forces and effects causing the consumption of organic food? What will be the future outlook of organic food market? Which policies should be applied so as to contribute to the market and customer satisfaction? (Çelik, 2013).

3. Research Model and Hypotheses

This survey intends to find out the attitudes of the consumers towards health products such as organic food, healthy foodstuffs and their information seeking behavior on wholesome nutrition. A survey is applied to 480 respondents selected via stratified sampling from Eskişehir, a city of Turkey with 700.000 inhabitants where 470 of the responses are found eligible... The respondents are required to answer 50 questions of which five are related to demographic characteristics of these respondents. The rest 45 are statements which are designed to reflect the behavior of these people. Research model and analyses take place in this section. Theoretical framework is built and a variable name is assigned to each of the question asked or proposition forwarded to the respondents of this survey. 42 statements or propositions given to the respondents are placed on a five-point Likert scale. Three questions are on an ordinal scale reflecting the most-used information sources of the respondents. The remaining five questions about demographic traits as age, gender, occupation, educational level and monthly income are placed either on a nominal or ratio scale with respect to the nature of the trait. The variables used in the analyses and their explanations are as follows:

Table 1. Variables and Their Explanations

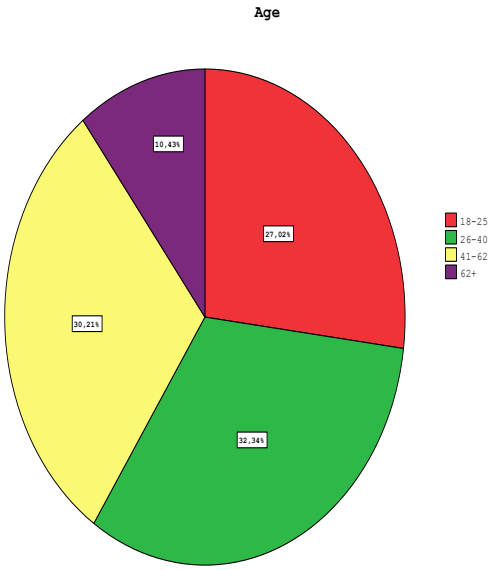
Variable	Explanation	Mean	SD
TASTEBET	Food produced by modern farming methods tastes better, than food produced using traditional farming methods.	2.40	1.27
HIGHVITA	Organic foods have higher levels of vitamins and nutrients than foods normally available.	4.06	1.05
BEHSCENE	I am interested to see behind the scenes (e.g. kitchens, equipment) in fast-food restaurants.	3.60	1.19
KNOWLEDG	I consider myself knowledgeable about healthy foodstuffs.	3.38	1.09
GENFRESH	Organic foods are generally fresh.	3.68	0.99
PAYHIGHP	I am ready to pay a higher price for organic food and healthy foodstuffs.	3.20	1.27
QUALHINF	The quality of online health information influences the level of my knowledge about health.	3.21	1.09

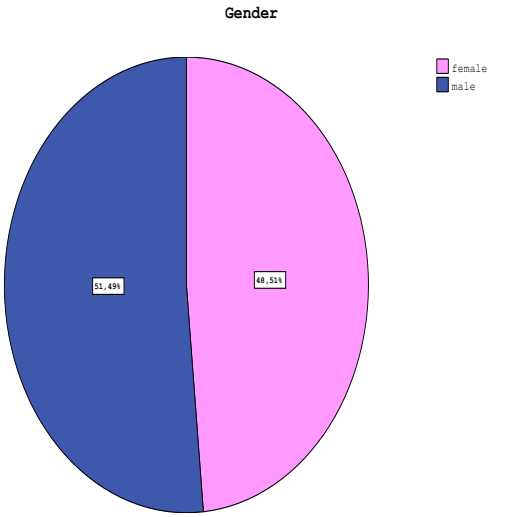
FREECHEM	Organic foods are free from chemical and pesticide residues.	3.62	1.18
CHEMFERT	Nowadays most food contains residues from chemical sprays and fertilizers.	4.01	0.96
RISOBESI	Fast-food products cannot be blamed for rising rates of obesity in Turkey.	2.02	1.13
MOREFLAV	Foods normally available have more flavor than organic food.	2.55	1,22
POSBLINF	I will not give up searching till I am convinced that I have collected all possible information about health products.	3.10	1.09
DFFUNDRS	It is difficult to understand all the nutritional information on food labels	3.61	1.10
TRENDHEL	I think in recent years, there has been an increasing trend towards healthier eating.	3.51	1.10
INFOWISE	My choice to search health information on the internet was a wise one.	3.30	1.06
CHKUNIPR	I always check the unit prices of foodstuffs that I purchase.	3.71	1.14
WIDERANG	A wide range of organic foods can be bought where I shop.	3.39	1.07
DFFTORED	It is difficult to read all the nutritional information on food labels	3.58	1.10
ESTHELST	The online health information provided the data necessary to estimate my health status.	3.12	1.02
GEMAXINF	I will try and get maximum information even if it delays my purchase of healthy foodstuffs.	3.15	1.09
UNAPPEAL	Organic food and vegetables look unappealing.	3.04	1.16
LARGORGS	Fast-food companies should have a larger organic range.	3.72	1.07
HEALTHCL	The health claims on food packages are always accurate	2.50	1.01
ADDIPRES	I am very concerned about the amount of artificial additives and preservatives in food.	3.12	1.16
OUTOFSEA	I like to purchase fruits and vegetables out- of-season with higher prices.	2.45	1.19
RELONINF	I always rely on the information sources by which I use to obtain health related information for healthy eating.	3.41	0.96
ORGHEALT	Organic foods are usually healthier to eat than foods normally available.	3.99	1.08
QUALINGR	Only quality ingredients are used to manufacture fast-food products.	2.02	1.07
ACCUINFO	I think the nutritional information on food labels are always accurate	2.83	1.03
MOREFRES	I buy more fresh fruit and vegetables now than I did a few years ago.	3.34	1.12
NOTAVAIL	Organic foods are not widely available.	3.69	0.92

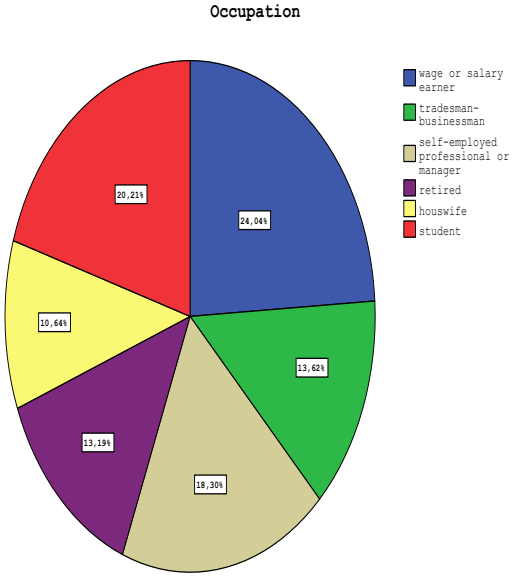
DIFFASPC	I fully understand different aspects (calories, nutrition factors as macro and micronutrients (*), etc.) of foodstuffs that I purchase and consume.	2.86	1.17
QUALONLN	The quality of online health information influences my purchases of health products.	3.21	1.04
COMPUNPR	I compare unit prices of foodstuffs across different package sizes.	3.78	1.07
WELLPROM	Organic foods are not very well promoted.	3.65	0.96
TOOLNGRD	It takes too long to read all the nutritional information on food labels.	3.54	1.08
VISITFST	I now visit fast-food outlets more as a result of their healthy eating promotions.	2.74	1.11
MOREFAMI	I am more familiar with health products as compared to a common man.	3.35	1.13
LEARNNEW	I learn new things from online health information.	3.30	1.03
CHECKPRI	Before buying a foodstuff I always check the price.	3.92	1.09
BUYATONE	I like to be able to buy all my food at one shop.	3.70	1.14
TOOEXPEN	Organic foods are too expensive.	3.73	1.08
CHOOSEA	a-first	N.A.	N.A.
CHOOSEB	b-second	N.A.	N.A.
CHOOSEC	c-third	N.A.	N.A.
AGE	Age	2.25	1.00
GENDER	Gender	1.53	0.54
OCCUPATI	Occupation	N.A.	N.A.
EDUCALEV	Education level	2.35	0.71
INCOME	Monthly personal income	2.48	1.11

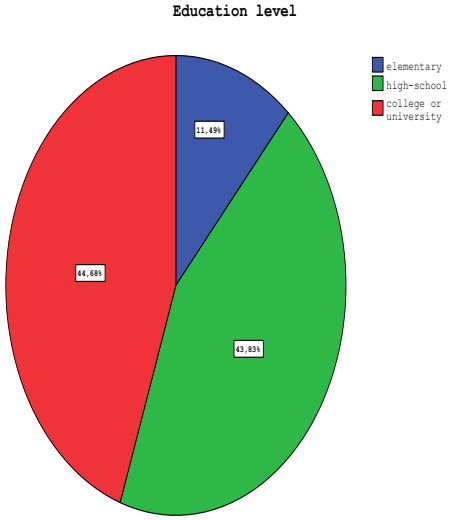
3.1 Distribution of Consumer Demographics

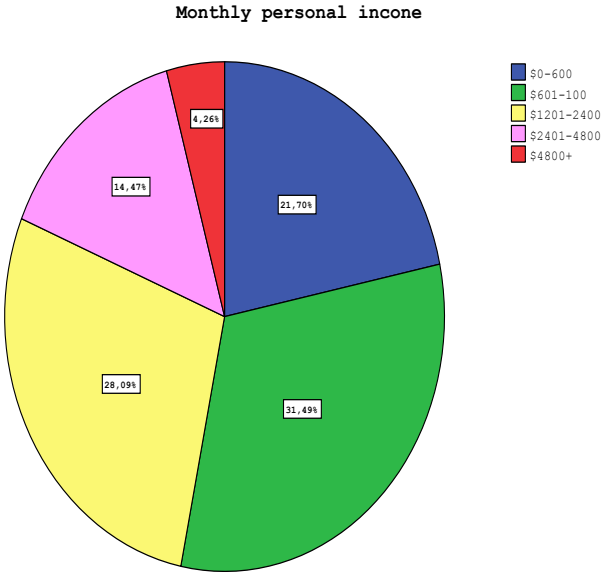
Consumer demographics play an important role in this study since they act as either as moderating or independent variables in the analyses. So as to give a broader understanding to the subject matter the following charts are included in this study;


Age
10,43%
27,02%
30,21%
32,34%
18-25
26-40
41-62
62+


Gender
51,49%
48,51%
female
male


Occupation
20,21%
24,04%
10,64%
13,62%
13,19%
18,30%
wage or salary earner
tradesman-businessman
self-employed professional or manager
retired
housewife
student


Education level
11,49%
44,68%
43,83%
elementary
high-school
college or university



53.6	36.0
14.2	40.0

3.2 Research Hypotheses

Several research hypotheses are formulated in this part to find out the relationship between difference consumer characteristics and their attitudes toward healthy nutrition:

Relationship Between Consumer Price Consciousness and Care for Health Products

H1. *There is a positive significant relationship between price consciousness and consumers care for health products*

Relationship Between Nutritional Knowledge and Positive Attitudes Towards Organic Food

H2. *High level of nutritional knowledge develops positive attitudes towards organic and healthy foods*

Relationship Between Consumer Information Search and Consumer Demographics

H3. *Consumers Differ Significantly from the point of their demographic traits as far as the information search on organic food and health products are concerned.*

4. Analyses and Results

Hypotheses Tests Results

4.1 Relationship Between Risk Consumer Price Consciousness and Care for Health Products

Table 2. Consumer Price Consciousness and Care for Health Products

	Health Care Variables					
	I am more familiar with health products as compared to a common man.		I fully understand different aspects (calories, nutrition factors as macro and micronutrients (*), etc.) of foodstuffs that I purchase and consume.		I am very concerned about the amount of artificial additives and preservatives in food.	
Consumer Price Consciousness (**)	**High Care %**	**Low Care %**	**High Care %**	**Low Care %**	**High Care %**	**Low Care %**
I always check the unit prices of foodstuffs that I purchase.	58.2 43.4	8.6 25.4	68.9 56.1	6.7 14.3	57.6 48.9	12.1 18.9
I compare unit prices of foodstuffs across different package sizes.	58.8 56.4	1.9 14.0	63.0 60.3	2.9 12.3	59.3 66.5	3.1 11.4

(**) Accept % Reject %

4.2 Relationship Between Nutritional Knowledge and Positive Attitudes Towards Organic Food

Table 3. Consumer Nutritional Knowledge and Positive Attitudes Towards Organic Food

	Positive Attitude s Towards Organic Food					
	Organic foods are free from chemical and pesticide residues.		Organic foods have higher levels of vitamins and nutrients than foods normally available.		Organic foods are usually healthier to eat than foods normally available	
Level of Nutrition Knowledge (**)	**Positive Attitudee %**	**Negative Attitude %**	**Positive Attitudee %**	**Negative Attitude %**	**Positive Attitudee %**	**Negative Attitude %**
The quality of online health	53.6 14.2	36.0 40.0	51.2 20.1	31.3 37.5	56.0 18,3	43,8 30.5

information influences the level of my knowledge about health.						
I learn new things from online health information.	58.2 17.6	31.3 45.8	52.3 19.6	37.5 37.6	58.2 14.6	28.0 40,0

(**) Accept % Reject %

4.3 Consumer Demographic Traits and Information Search Behavior

Relationship Between Consumer Information Search and Consumer Demographics

Table 4. Relationship Between Consumer Demographic Characteristics and Consumer Information Search Behavior

	CONSUMER DEMOGRAPHICS									
	Age		Gender		Occupation		Education		Income	
Information Search Behavior	Average Acceptance and Rejection %	Mod Value % (**)	Average Acceptance and Rejection %	Mod Value % (**)	Average Acceptance and Rejection %	Mod Value % (**)	Average Acceptance and Rejection %	Mod Value % (**)	Average Acceptance and Rejection %	Mod Value % (**)
My choice to search health information on the internet was a wise one.	49.0 % 26.0 %	18-25yo 55.1 % +62yo 38.8 %	49.0 % 26.0 %	Rejected	49.0 % 26.0 %	Self-Employed Professional or Manager 68.3% Trades-man-Businessman 29.7%	49.0 % 26.0 %	College-University 56.2 % Element-ary 55.6 %	49.0 % 26.0 % 5 %	Rejected
The quality of online health information influences my purchases of health products.	46.6 % 27.2 %	18-25yo 57.5 % +62yo 46.9 %	46.6 % 27.2 %	Rejected	46.6 % 27.2 %	Self-Employed Professional or Manager 66.3% Retired 43.6 %	46.6 % 27.2 %	College-University 57.6 % Element-ary 62.9 %	46.6 % 27.2 %	Rejected

I learn new things from online health information.	50.4 % 25.6 %	26-40yo 55.2 % +62yo 42.9 %	50.4 % 25.6 %	Rejected	50.4 % 25.6 %	Self-Employed Professional or Manager 66.3% Retired 43.5 %	50.4 % 25.6 %	College - University 62.9 % Elementary 62.9 %	50.4 % 25.6 %	Rejected
The quality of online health information influences the level of my knowledge about health.	47.4 % 28.8 %	18-25yo 56.7 % +62yo 44.9 %	47.4 % 28.8 %	Rejected	47.4 % 28.8 %	Self-Employed Professional or Manager 63.9% Retired 40.3 %	47.4 % 28.8 %	College - University 55.7 % Elementary 66.7 %	47.4 % 28.8 %	Rejected
The online health information provided the data necessary to estimate my health status.	40.0 % 30.2 %	Rejected	40.0 % 30.2 %	Rejected	40.0 % 30.2 %	Self-Employed Professional or Manager 57.0% Retired 38.8% (**)	40.0 % 30.2 %	College - University 45.7% Elementary 59.3 %	40.0 % 30.2 %	Rejected

(*) All tests are made at □<0.01 significance level
(**) Accepted at □<0.05 significance level
Average Acceptance or Rejection: Strongly Agree + Agree; Strongly Disagree + Disagree

Conclusion

This study reveals some important considerations about consumers' attitudes towards health products and their information search behavior in conformity with such products and mainly with organic food.
At first instance the relationship between consumers' price consciousness and the attention they pay on the health products prove a significant positive relationship between these two variables at all levels where people who take care on their expenditures also give importance on health products.
The relationship between consumers' knowledge on nutrition and their positive attitudes towards organic products proves to be highly significant, In this respect positive attitudes overwhelm negative attitudes at levels of variables.

Finally the relationship between consumer demographics and their information search behavior differ significantly with respect to their age, occupation and educational level; but no evidence is obtained from gender and income level points of view. Young generation (18-45 years of age), self-employed professionals or managers and college or university graduates prove to be information leaders, whereas senior citizens (+62), retired people and elementary school graduates appear to be information laggards.

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