

Understanding Levels of Voluntary Simplicity in Turkey

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*Manifest plainness,
Embrace simplicity,
Reduce selfishness,
Have few desires.
Lau Tzu*

Abstract

Nowadays, many individuals are concerned about the consequences of overconsumption. Therefore, individuals have become more interested in non-materialism, environmental consciousness and spiritual well-being. A “Voluntary Simplicity” lifestyle, defined as being outwardly simple and inwardly rich, is becoming an alternative way of living for some consumers. This study aims to understand the interest in this concept within the context of Turkey as an emerging market. For this study a sample of Turkish consumers has been divided into groups with similar characteristics related to their voluntary simplicity attitude and behavior; with these the demographic profiles of these clusters are determined. The results are believed to provide insights for firms active in marketing in Turkey.

Keywords: voluntary simple lifestyle, anti-consumerism, cluster analysis.

Türkiye’de Gönüllü Sadelik Düzeyleri Üzerine Bir Çalışma

Özet

Günümüzde birçok birey aşırı tüketimin çevre ve insanlar için olumsuz sonuçlar yaratacağı endişesi içindedir. Bu nedenle, bireyler anti-materyalizm, çevre bilinci ve ruhsal sağlık konularıyla daha fazla ilgilenmeye başlamışlardır. Maddesel olarak sade, içsel olarak zengin bir hayat tarzı olarak tanımlanabilecek “Gönüllü Sade” yaşam tarzı bazı tüketiciler için alternatif olmaya başlamıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, gelişen pazarlardan biri olan Türkiye’de gönüllü sade yaşam tarzı hakkında bir inceleme yapmaktır. Çalışma Türk tüketicilerinden oluşan bir örnekleme gönüllü sade yaşama bakış açısı ve gönüllü sade davranış bakımından benzer özelliklere göre gruplara ayırmayı ve oluşturulan

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grupların demografik özelliklerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sonuçların Türkiye’de pazarlama faaliyeti gösteren firmalara değerli bilgiler sağlayacağı tahmin edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: gönüllü sade yaşam tarzı, tüketim karşıtlığı, kümeleme analizi.

Globalization, the Internet, the rise of the middle income group coupled with increasing marketing and advertising activities have created a consumption culture which has forced individuals to consume more. Therefore they must earn more and buy bigger houses, more expensive cars and more fashionable clothes. However, some individuals have noticed that this way of living cannot last forever, and that inner peace is not achieved through consumption. Television programs, social media, newspapers, magazines, acquaintances, and most importantly the consumer society has forced them to make purchases that eventually will make them feel unhappy rather than happy. These individuals have also become concerned about the environment, about the abuse of it by the developing nations, and the extensive aggressive advertising (Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002). Hence, more and more they began to become societally and environmentally conscious and interested in a voluntary simple lifestyle and ideology (Connolly and Shaw, 2006). Elgin and Mitchell (1977: 2) defined “Voluntary Simplicity” as being “outwardly simple and inwardly rich, a process of paring down to the essentials of life, what is important to you” (Mazza, 1997: 12).

A growing interest in this new trend has become apparent in the last decades. There are many campaigns and events such as “Buy Nothing Day” in the United States and “In Town without My Car” in the United Kingdom. This movement can be viewed both as a threat and as a strategic opportunity. At first, reduced consumption may seem as a threat to the consumer society. However, it provides marketers with new opportunities to create value, to put together a new product, with price, distribution, and communication strategies for the group of consumers who have the purchasing power and willingness to pursue a voluntary simple lifestyle. These consumers can be target markets for durable, functional, and environmentally friendly products.

Voluntary simplicity has also captured academic attention with some studies to uncover consumer behavior related to voluntary simplicity. Most of these studies took place in developed country contexts such as the USA, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia (Leonard-Barton, 1981; Iwata, 1997; Iwata, 1999; Iwata, 2006; Huneke, 2005; Roubanis, 2008; Alexander and Ussher, 2012; Boujbel and D’astous, 2012). However, there is lack of research in emerging countries. Thus, this paper addresses this gap with a cluster analysis and tries to examine Turkish consumers’ attitude towards voluntary simple lifestyle, the degree of their voluntary simplicity, and determine their overall levels of voluntary simplicity.

Turkey is an important country for many companies and institutions since it is now one of the seven largest emerging market economies in the world, the E7 (group of seven countries with emerging economies) (Hawksorth and Tiwari, 2011). By 2050, it is estimated that Turkey’s economy (and of course the economies of the other

E7) will be larger than the G7 (group of seven countries with advanced economies) economies (Hawksworth and Tiwari, 2011). It is identified as an emerging market that offers marketing opportunities for multinational companies given its young middle class population and increasing economic growth (Özsomer and Altaras, 2008). Therefore, it is essential to conduct such a research to see the level of voluntary simplicity in this expectedly consumer-oriented country, and to draw implications for marketing in the country.

Voluntary Simplicity

Historically, the voluntary simplicity concept is not new. It is supported by many religions and has been practiced by important figures such as Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tse, Moses and Mohammed, and also by leaders such as Lenin and Gandhi (Gregg, 1936; Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; Bengamra-Zinelabidine, 2012). It was Gregg (1936), a student of Gandhi, who first talked about the concept and defined it. However, the concept did not attract a lot of attention until the hippie movement in the 1960s. Then life was simple and meaningful; people were against over-consumption as a way of living, preferring a voluntary simplicity ideology (Bekin et al., 2005). By the 1970s, a voluntary simple lifestyle became a valuable concept and was analyzed by many researchers. Attention to the concept peaked with Duane Elgin's book, "Voluntary Simplicity", published in the USA in 1981 (Bengamra- Zinelabidine, 2012). Then the interest lied down until the middle of the 1990s (Chieh-Wen et al., 2007). It was because of the economic crises in the mid 1990s that people were motivated to seek for meaning in their lives without materialism, once again leading the way for voluntary simplicity (Zavestoski, 2002).

Voluntary simplifiers may be thought of as anti-consumers and anti-capitalists who are maintaining a 'non-consumption style' (Walther and Sandlin, 2011). Oates et al. (2008: 352) define voluntary simplifiers as "individuals who are searching for a simpler lifestyle for societal reasons like ethical concerns, green consumption, or community development." Elgin and Mitchell (1977) specify five values that clarify the meaning of a voluntary simple lifestyle. These are "Material Simplicity," "Human Scale," "Self-Determination," "Ecological Awareness," and "Personal Growth." Material simplicity includes less consumption of products and services (McDonald et al., 2006). It is the core value of voluntary simplicity (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977), implying that voluntary simplifiers do not rely on materialism for achieving their fulfillment. Their behavior is associated with a strong cautious attitude in shopping (Iwata, 2006). Human Scale expresses a commitment to environments that are smaller, decentralized, and less complex (McDonald et al., 2006). A preference for human-sized living and working environments is a central feature of the values embraced by voluntary simplicity (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977). According to Elgin and Mitchell (1977: 6) "self-determination manifests itself in consumption as a desire to assume greater control over one's personal destiny and not lead a life so tied to installment payments, maintenance costs and the expectations of others." The ecological awareness aspect includes conservation of physical resources, reduction of environmental pollution, and maintenance of the beauty and integrity of

the natural environment (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977). Voluntary simplifiers' values are associated with environmentally friendly and socially responsible behavior (Huneke, 2005; Brown and Kasser, 2005; Iwata, 2006). Some practices that voluntary simplifiers implement include a simplified diet or vegetarianism, the consumption of organically grown foods and environmentally friendly goods, recycling, and preferring public transportation. Finally, personal growth means "inner growth." This value implies a self-realization/self-actualization concern (McDonald et al., 2006): "the intrinsic growth of what is already in the organism or more accurately, of what the organism is" (Maslow, 1964: 22).

Previous Research on Voluntary Simplicity

Previous academic studies about voluntary simple lifestyles were mostly in social-psychology literature (McDonald et al., 2006). The initial studies (Shama, 1981 and Leonard-Barton, 1981) were focused on a quantitative measurement of values and behaviors related to voluntary simplicity. Leonard-Barton (1981) determined the socio-demographic characteristics of voluntary simplifiers, whereas Shama (1981) profiled voluntary simple consumers. Many researchers (Iwata 1997, 1999, 2001; Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002; Huneke, 2005) adapted the scales developed by Leonard-Barton (1981) and Shama and Wisenblit (1984) in the 1980s and used them in their studies. Some research on voluntary simplicity focused on lifestyle and motivations related to voluntary simplicity (Zavestoski, 2002; Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002; Huneke, 2005). Other studies focused on the relationship between voluntary simplicity and happiness, success, and well-being (Bekin et al., 2005; Brown and Kasser, 2005). Ethical issues and voluntary simplicity were analyzed by Shaw and Newholm (2002), Connolly and Shaw (2006), Black and Cherrier (2007). Environmentalism and voluntary simplicity was also another area of study. Iwata (2006) focused on the relationship between a voluntary simple lifestyle and environmental consciousness. Roubanis (2008) analyzed environmentally responsible consumerism and voluntary simple lifestyle in a women's college in the United States and compared the results with Iwata's study. Consumption behavior of voluntary simplifiers was also another important objective of some studies. Ballantine and Creery (2010) analyzed the disposition activities of voluntary simplifiers within their consumption behavior. Black and Cherrier (2010) discussed anti-consumption practices, and Friedman and Friedman (2010) explored the effects of overconsumption and the solution "voluntary simplicity." Yet another field of voluntary simplicity research was on classifying the individuals according to their level of voluntary simplicity (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; Shama, 1981; Etzioni, 1998; Huneke, 2005; Oates *et al.*, 2008).

Voluntary simplicity research in the Turkish context is very limited. Only a few authors have done research on the subject since the late 2000s. The first study was by Özkan (2007) who defined Turkish families' voluntary simple household behaviors. Following Özkan (2007), Özgül's (2010) study was about the relationship between

the value structure of consumers and voluntary simple lifestyle. Still another study by Özgül (2011) explained the relationship between the reasons for hedonic consumption and voluntary simple lifestyle. Finally, Kaynak and Ekşi (2011) examined the power of ethnocentrism, religiosity, and environmental and health consciousness in voluntary simplifiers.

It is believed that this study will contribute to the existing literature on voluntary simplicity in Turkey where the trend is growing slowly. There is already a Facebook group called “Simple Life” (<https://www.facebook.com/sadeyasamgrubu>) in Turkey. Additionally, the number of articles on voluntary simplicity in the forums and green newspapers are increasing every day (e.g., <http://www.aktuel.com.tr/ozel/2013/10/08/kredi775-kartlarinizi-televi775zyonunuzu-kapatin>; <http://kitap.radikal.com.tr/kitap/guncel-genel-konular/uc-ekoloji-9--gonullu-sadelik-ekolojik-yasam-329127>), alongside academic interest in the subject. The purpose of this study falls within the stream of voluntary simplicity research, since for better strategy development it is timely and relevant to take a snapshot of the Turkish consumers and understand their differing levels of voluntary simplicity.

Classification of Voluntary Simplifiers

The first study on classifying voluntary simplifiers dates back to 1977. It was Elgin and Mitchell (1977) who first divided voluntary simplifiers into four distinct categories: 1) full voluntary simplicity, 2) partial voluntary simplicity, 3) sympathizers towards voluntary simplicity and 4) those indifferent, unaware or opposed to voluntary simplicity. Elgin and Mitchell (1977: 17) claimed that full voluntary simplifiers “constitute the active, leading edge of the trend toward simple living.” This group’s activities were organized around gardening, recycling, natural foods, simple clothing, biking to work and backpacking on vacations, family orientation, and engagement in meditation or personal growth. The partial voluntary simplicity group also acted on some of the basic tenets of voluntary simple lifestyle, but not on all. Sympathizers in voluntary simplicity had many values associated with voluntary simplicity, but they did not act on this sympathy. Finally, Elgin and Mitchell (1977: 18) gave detailed information about the group who were indifferent, unaware or opposed to voluntary simplicity group: “This group draws its numbers from both ends of the income spectrum. First there are those who are involuntarily simple –that is, who live in poverty and have not yet experienced the life of abundance. These people oppose voluntary simplicity because they are unwilling to forego the opportunity to attack the rich. Second, at the other income extreme, there are those who are strongly achievement oriented and see simple living as a threat to their lifestyle.”

After Elgin and Mitchell (1977), Etzioni (1998) categorized voluntary simplifiers by the level of intensity. The levels were named as “downshifters,” “strong simplifiers,” and “the simple living movement.” Both voluntary simplifiers and downshifters reduced consumption as a behavioral approach (Shaw and Newholm, 2002). Voluntary

simplifiers were a group of consumers who were well-off but limited their consumption by their own choice even though they were able to afford luxurious consumption (Etzioni, 1998). On the other hand, downshifter were concerned about having a balance between consumerism and non-materialism (Shaw and Newholm, 2002). Middle class members and many professionals changed their lifestyle to simplicity accordingly. This change was also supported and encouraged by many businesses. In some work places, employees may have simplified their dress on some day of the week such as Friday (Etzioni, 1998). Some of the simplifiers, on the other hand, dedicated their lives according to the principles of voluntary simplicity. This type of voluntary simplifiers moved their homes from the wealthy part of the big or major cities to small towns and non-urbanized places. Besides that, the countryside and farms were the residences preferred by simplifiers. Simplifiers aimed to maintain a simple life. This type of a small-connected social movement was called “a simple living movement” (Etzioni, 1998). However, there were also some critics of Etzioni’s classification. According to Hamilton and Mail (2003), Etzioni claimed that simplifiers were very affluent while he ignored a group of simplifiers who had low incomes and were blue-collar households (Hamilton and Mail, 2003).

Finally, Oates *et al.* (2008) categorized the consumers into three types: non-voluntary simplifiers, beginner voluntary simplifiers, and voluntary simplifiers. Oates *et al.* (2008) used a new term “beginner voluntary simplifiers.” This term was considered as necessary because it was believed that there should be some simplifiers who could not behave exactly like voluntary simplifiers. They might make decisions like non-voluntary simplifiers, but they also would have environmental concerns. According to Oates *et al.*’s (2008) research, non-voluntary simplifiers found environmental performance insignificant for their purchase intention. Likewise, some criteria were important for non-voluntary simplifiers such as price, size, brand name, past experience, and others’ experiences. The research also showed that non-voluntary simplifiers valued brand reputation. This group relied on brand and did not seek more information even from in-store sales people (Oates *et al.*, 2008). As distinct from non-voluntary simplifiers, beginner voluntary simplifiers took decisions keeping the environmental concerns in mind and asked sales people about the products with the intention of being “green” in their purchases (Oates *et al.*, 2008).

Methodology

A descriptive, single cross sectional research design was implemented in this study using survey method in order to explore the “voluntary simple lifestyle of Turkish consumers and to determine their levels of voluntary simplicity.” Data for the research was collected in May, 2013. The questionnaires were implemented with face-to-face surveys of people resident in 10 major Turkish cities (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Antalya, Bursa, Samsun, Konya, Adana, Diyarbakir and Malatya). A total of 853 questionnaires were gathered. After screening the questionnaires, 805 usable questionnaires (those not missing data) were used in the analysis. The gender proportion of the sample included

44.1% women and 55.9% men. The majority of the respondents were young between ages of 21-25 (28.2%) and 26-30 (24.4%). Other married respondents totaled 38.3 and 61.2% were single. The results indicated that majority of the respondents (65.1%) had undergraduate degrees.

The scales used in the questionnaire were adopted from a voluntary simplicity life-style scale (Iwata, 2006), a voluntary simplicity associated attitudes and behaviors scale (Iwata, 1997), practices associated with voluntary simplicity scale (Huneke, 2005), and a frequency of pro-environmental behaviors scale (Iwata, 1999). A 5-point Likert type scaling was utilized to measure respondents' agreements with 57 statements ranging from 5 (I totally agree) to 1 (I totally disagree).

Findings

In this study, a K-Means cluster analysis preceded by a hierarchical cluster analysis was used. While applying the hierarchical method, Ward's Method (the distance between two clusters is how much the sum of squares will increase when they are merged) was used (Hair et al., 2010). According to the agglomeration schedule, the analysis produced three clusters. The clusters were named as 1) "consumerists" (those likely to consume and are interested in materialism compared to other groups), 2) "cautious buyers" (those not materialists who seem to live like simplifiers, but limit every type of spending including hobbies, and who are less environmentally conscious compared to beginner voluntary simplifiers), and 3) "beginner voluntary simplifiers" (those similar to their Western counterparts, even though they are not extremists). Below are the profiles of each cluster.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Clusters

	Cluster		
	1	2	3
1. Avoiding impulse purchases	2,64	3,53	3,68
2. Recycling.	3,47	3,38	4,10
3. Eliminating clutter.	3,49	3,60	3,89
4. Working at a satisfying job.	3,37	3,25	3,67
5. Buying locally grown produce.	3,24	3,16	3,69
6. Limiting exposure to ads.	3,14	3,60	3,66
7. Buying environmentally friendly products.	3,52	3,33	4,00
8. Limiting car use.	3,38	3,46	3,67
9. Buying from socially responsible producers.	3,44	3,21	3,98
10. Buying from local merchants.	3,55	3,60	4,12
11. Limiting/eliminating TV and social media.	2,38	2,83	3,19
12. Limiting wage-earning work.	2,34	2,72	2,97

Table 1- continued	Cluster		
	1	2	3
13. Being active in the community.	3,57	3,31	3,99
14. Being politically active.	2,23	2,44	2,60
15. Making rather than buying gifts.	2,07	2,30	2,75
16. Maintaining a spiritual life.	4,12	3,90	4,53
17. Buying organic foods.	3,21	3,12	3,67
18. Being friends with neighbors.	3,43	3,62	4,04
19. Eating a vegetarian diet.	1,64	1,85	2,00
20. I try to live a simple life.	3,00	3,63	3,82
21. I try not to buy articles which are not necessary.	3,19	3,79	4,20
22. When I shop, I decide to do so after serious consideration of whether an article is necessary to me or not.	2,94	3,61	4,09
23. I am more concerned with mental growth and fulfillment than with material affluence.	3,35	3,57	4,08
24. Material affluence is very important to me.	3,26	2,64	2,71
25. Even if I have money, it is not my principle to buy things suddenly.	3,26	3,72	4,33
26. Except for traveling, I enjoy my leisure time without spending too much money.	2,66	3,01	3,39
27. A life of convenience and comfort is most important for me.	4,12	3,33	3,68
28. I prefer products with simple functions to those with complex functions.	3,61	3,48	3,86
29. Products designed to promote convenience and comfort make people spoiled.	3,41	3,00	3,57
30. As far as possible, I do not buy products with sophisticated functions.	2,10	2,75	2,83
31. It is desirable to be self-sufficient as much as possible.	3,74	3,82	4,09
32. In the future, I want to lead a life that can be self-sufficient as far as possible.	3,78	3,69	4,11
33. I try to use articles which I bought as long ago as possible.	3,90	4,06	4,49
34. When I shop, I take a serious view of being able to use an article for a long time without getting tired of it.	3,23	3,55	4,13
35. I want to buy something new shortly after it comes out, even if I have a similar thing already.	2,70	2,09	2,13
36. I tend to buy something that can be used for a long time, even if it is expensive, rather than buying cheap new things frequently.	4,05	3,63	3,84
37. I want to live simply rather than extravagantly.	3,37	3,73	4,18
38. Since a simple life is miserable, I do not want to live such a life.	3,09	2,67	2,73
39. So far, I have intended to lead an affluent and comfortable life.	3,58	2,74	2,99
40. People should intend to lead a simple life voluntarily.	3,02	3,26	3,65
41. If I could, I would not want to do domestic chores.	3,64	3,17	3,12
42. I decide my present behavior while considering my future.	3,82	3,62	4,19
43. I prefer to put more money into travelling.	3,86	2,87	3,17

Table 1- continued	Cluster		
	1	2	3
44. I prefer to put more money into participating in sports.	3,25	2,46	2,92
45. I prefer to put more money into my hobbies and improving myself.	4,08	3,25	3,73
46. I would rather put more money into my clothes and accessories.	3,91	2,71	2,79
47. I prefer to save money rather than spend it lavishly.	2,85	3,17	3,61
48. I make it a rule to buy goods of famous brands as little as possible.	2,24	2,90	3,32
49. I make it a rule to not to buy what I can make.	2,59	2,92	3,50
50. I am not very interested in fashion.	2,27	3,37	3,33
51. I shop with my credit cards.	3,89	3,32	3,69
52. I buy some food ready cooked.	3,16	2,62	2,49
53. I eat out.	4,09	3,41	3,53
54. I conserve electricity, gas and water.	3,37	3,42	4,13
55. I separate the trash in my house.	2,73	2,48	3,44
56. I leave food half-eaten when eating out.	3,48	3,63	4,16
57. I shop cheaply using newspaper advertisements.	3,35	3,74	4,28

Mean scores are over 5 (ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to Strongly Agree")

Table 2 indicates the demographic characteristics of the clusters.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of the Clusters

		Consumerists n=234		Cautious Buyers n=252		Beginner Voluntary Simplifiers n=319	
		n	%	N	%	n	%
Gender	Female	125	53,4%	95	37,7%	136	42,6%
	Male	109	46,6%	157	62,3%	183	57,4%
Marital Status	Married	65	27,8%	101	40,1%	149	46,7%
	Single	169	72,2%	151	59,9%	170	53,3%
Education	Elementary S.	0	0,0%	8	3,2%	10	3,1%
	High School	21	9,0%	30	11,9%	37	11,6%
	Associate Degree	9	3,8%	35	13,9%	29	9,1%
	Undergraduate	166	70,9%	156	61,9%	203	63,6%
	Graduate	34	14,5%	23	9,1%	35	11,0%
	Doctorate	4	1,7%	0	0,0%	5	1,6%
Income	1000 TL or less	14	6,0%	24	9,5%	26	8,2%
	1001 TL – 2000 TL	49	20,9%	71	28,2%	63	19,7%
	2001 TL – 3000 TL	43	18,4%	66	26,2%	95	29,8%
	3001 TL - 4000 TL	39	16,7%	40	15,9%	55	17,2%
	4000 TL or above	89	38,0%	51	20,2%	80	25,1%

Group Characteristics

Group 1: Consumerists

Compared to the other groups, the attitude of the consumerists towards a simple lifestyle is less supportive. They consider that they are pursuing an average level of simplicity in their life even though they say they want to pursue a simple lifestyle rather a lavish one. They think it is hard to keep up with a simple lifestyle. Their aim has been to have a rich and comfortable life. Their belief is that it should be up to people to decide for themselves to live a simple lifestyle or not.

Self sustainability is important for this group, and they believe they sustain their lives today and will do so in the future. They have a strong tendency to plan their lives ahead of time. Just like the rest of the groups, they say that they do not work up to the level of earning a living. Still, they are somewhat satisfied with their work life as well.

This group scores the worst in terms of cautious buying when compared to other groups. Even though they say they think before buying, their tendency to do so is lower when compared to other groups. They are inclined to do impulse buying, and sometimes buy unnecessary products. On the other hand, they cannot easily get rid of excessive products in their lives. They want to buy expensive, but durable products and use them for a long time. Thus, they like to buy from well-known brands. They prefer products with sophisticated qualifications, but expect them to be easy-to-use. They believe that products designed for enhancing comfort somewhat impair people.

They are interested in fashion, yet they are not innovators, and do not immediately buy the newest version of a product that they already own.

In terms of recycling, they do some recycling, but still they are not good at decomposing their waste. They are also the least likely group to use public transportation, even though they sometimes use it. In terms of doing things on their own, this group does not do well. They like buying things even if they can make/do them themselves. Similarly, they prefer to buy presents rather than making them on their own. They definitely want to reduce the household chores if possible.

This group is interested in consuming eco-friendly and organic food. They buy and care about buying from socially responsible producers. They also do local shopping from small, local merchants. They sometimes buy frozen food, but compared to other groups they make more purchases. They are not vegetarians.

In terms of communication tools, this group does not watch TV commercials much, but they do not limit their social media or other communication tools usage. They get involved with activities for the social good of the public. However, they are not at all interested in active political participation.

Spirituality is very important in the lives of this group. Achieving self-fulfillment in life is more important than material wealth. However, material wealth is still of importance to them.

They like using credit cards and are not interested in saving money, but in spending it. They care about gas and electricity spending, but much less than the third group. They check the prices in the markets less than the other two groups.

In their free time, they like spending money. They like dining out, and sometimes leave their food on their plate. They have some connections with their neighbors. They like to spend money on travelling. They are the only group that is interested in spending money for sports even though their interest is still about average. Similarly, they want to put more money on personal development and hobbies than the other groups. They also prefer to spend significantly more money on clothing and accessories more than other groups.

This group consists of slightly more women than men. The percentage of singles (72.2%) is considerably more than married people in the group. The education level of the group is mostly undergraduate level. The mean age of this group (27) is the lowest, and the largest number has the highest income (4000 TL and above).

Group 2: Cautious Buyers

Group 2 consider themselves to be living a somewhat simpler life. Their attitude towards a simple lifestyle is positive. They think it is better to live a simple lifestyle than a lavish one, and that it is not hard to pursue a simple lifestyle. Having a rich and comfortable life has not been their aim in life. They believe that people should live simply voluntarily.

Self-sustainability is important for this group as well. They try to be self-sustaining today and believe that they will also sustain their life in the future. They plan their life in advance. On the other hand, they claim that they do not currently earn as much as they spend. In terms of job satisfaction, they are somewhat satisfied (however they are the least satisfied group compared to the others). They are very similar to the first group in their ideas on sustainability and work life.

This group can be considered as more cautious than to the first group. They keep away from impulse purchasing, and are less likely to buy unnecessary items. They think before purchasing, and want to use the products that they buy for a long time. They say that they can buy expensive, but durable products; yet their inclination to do so is lower than the other groups. Thus, they sometimes buy well-known brands. They also believe that products that are made to enhance comfort in life harm people, but their belief is not as strong as the other two groups. They are neither innovators (they do not buy the newest version of a product that they already own) nor are they much interested in fashion. They can get rid of excessive items from their lives better than the first group.

In terms of recycling, they do some recycling, but still they are not good at decomposing their waste. They also use public transportation. They are not good at doing things or making a present on their own even if they have the ability to do so; this is similar to the first group. They also would like to decrease their household chores if they can.

Just like the first group, this group is also interested in consuming eco-friendly and organic food. They buy from socially responsible producers. They also shop locally from small, local merchants. However, their scores are a little lower than the first group. They rarely buy frozen food. They are certainly not vegetarians.

In terms of communication tools, this group does not watch TV commercials much, but they do not limit their social media usage or other communication tools. They get

involved with activities for the social good of the public. However, they are not interested in active political participation.

Spirituality is very important for this group as well. They care about self-fulfillment more than material wealth. Thus, material wealth is not a life goal for this group.

This group sometimes uses credit cards for their consumption, but it is the group least likely to do so. They are somewhat interested in saving money rather spending it. They care about gas and electricity spending, but much less than the third group. They check the prices in the markets when they do shopping more than the first group.

In their free time, they try not to spend money. They sometimes dine out, and sometimes leave their food on their plate. They are friends with their neighbors. They are not very likely to spend money for travelling. They are the group that is least interested in spending money for sports. Compared to other groups, they are not that interested in spending money on personal development and hobbies. Significantly, they prefer not to spend more money on clothing and accessories than the other groups.

This group consists of mostly men (62.3%). The number of singles is more than married ones as well. The education level of the group is high in line with the whole sample characteristics. The majority had an undergraduate education. The mean age of the second group is 30. About 28% of the group members have a monthly income of between TL 1001 and TL 2000; about 26% of them have between TL 2001 and TL 3000 monthly.

Group 3: Beginner Voluntary Simplifiers

This group favors a simple lifestyle most strongly. They consider themselves to be pursuing a simple lifestyle. They believe that it is not hard to pursue a simple lifestyle and they believe that people may pursue a simple lifestyle voluntarily. Pursuing a rich and comfortable life is not their goal and they would rather pursue a simple lifestyle than a lavish one.

In terms of sustainability, they are the group with the highest rankings. They have a high tendency to plan their life beforehand. This group also scores highest in terms of working as much as possible to earn their living. They rank the highest in terms of job satisfaction as well.

This group is the most cautious buyer of all groups. They think well before they make a purchase. They think about how much they would use a product beforehand, and do not buy unnecessary products. Thus, they are not impulse purchasers. They are not much interested either in fashion or in buying well-known brands. Yet, they are more likely to buy expensive items that last long. However, just like the other groups, they are not inclined to buy the newest version of a product that they already own. They prefer easy-to-use products but may also sometimes buy products with sophisticated qualifications. They believe that products that enhance comfort in life harm people.

This group is better in recycling; they both recycle and decompose their waste. They can get rid of excessive items in their lives more easily than the other groups. Thus, overall, they seem to be more conscious and active recycling and reducing waste. They also use public transportation and act environmentally friendly. They like to make/do things if they can rather than buying them. However, they still prefer to buy presents, rather than making them, and would reduce household chores if they could.

This group is the most interested in consuming eco-friendly and organic food. They buy from socially responsible producers. They do most of their shopping from small, local merchants. They rarely buy frozen food. However, they are not vegetarians.

In terms of communication tools, just like the other two groups, they do not watch TV much. However, they limit their social media and other communication tool usage as well. They usually get involved with activities for the social good of the public. They score highest on this dimension. However like the other groups, they are not interested in active political participation.

Spirituality plays a very important part in the lives of this group as well as self-fulfillment. They care about self-fulfillment more than material wealth.

They sometimes use credit cards. They are more interested in saving money than in spending it. They try to save on gas and electricity. They usually check the prices in the markets when they do shopping.

In their free time, they try not to spend money. They have strong relationships with their neighbors. They sometimes dine out, but rarely leave their food on their plate. They sometimes spend money for travelling, but are less likely to do so than the first group. They are not interested in spending money for sports even though they score better than the second group. They are more likely to use some money on personal development and hobbies than the other groups. They prefer less to spend more money on clothing and accessories than the others.

This group consists of slightly more men than women. The distribution of married to singles is more or less even for this group even though singles are still the majority. Considering the education of the group, the undergraduates make up most of the group population. The mean age of the third group is 33. The monthly income of 29% of the group is between TL 2001 and TL 3000.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to classify a sample of Turkish consumers according to their levels of voluntary simplicity. The results indicated three different consumer clusters according to their attitude and behavior related to voluntary simplicity. They were named as “consumerists,” “cautious buyers,” and “beginner voluntary simplifiers.” In terms of demographic characteristics, the whole sample consisted of young and well-educated people in general. Therefore, there is little difference between the clusters in terms of demographic characteristics. However, it must be noted that women are the majority only in the consumerist group and this group also had the highest percentage of singles. Overall, all these groups show a positive attitude towards voluntary simplicity, and prefer living a simple life rather than a lavish one. However, when the dimensions of voluntary simplicity are analyzed in detail, their scores vary from each other in terms of cautious buying, saving behavior, environmentally conscious living, and spending on extracurricular activities. On the other hand, the groups also resemble each other in dimensions of locality, pursuit of a non-vegetarian diet, spirituality, self-sufficiency, job satisfaction, and preference for durability in product choices.

Cautious buying is described by several authors (Sandlin and Walther, 2009; Iwata, 2006) as an important indicator of voluntary simplicity. According to the results of our study, cautious buyers and beginner voluntary simplifiers are the two groups who act cautiously in their buying behavior, and think well before purchasing. The consumerists can engage in impulse buying behavior, and think less before buying compared to the other two groups. Similarly, consumerists are not very likely to save money; they are more interested in consumption. Their interest in fashion is more than the other two groups as well. Even though consumerists have more of a tendency to shop, still they are concerned for their future just as cautious buyers and beginner voluntary simplifiers are. In fact, all the groups plan for their future and want to pursue a self-sustainable life. One explanation for this outcome might be Turkish society's tendency to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity in their lives, to control the future, and to minimize changes or risks. This explanation also matches Hofstede's study (<http://geert-hofstede.com/turkey.html>), where Turkey scored high on uncertainty avoidance. Turkish consumers could be said to be worrying about their future, and want to pursue a self-sufficient life despite the uncertainty or economic crises that frequently hit them. Because of past experiences, scarcity is said to be in the genes of the country (Kravets and Sandikci, 2014). Therefore, taking precautions, planning the future, and saving are common behaviors of many in the country. This fear of future risks and volatility in the country might also be an explanation for the fact that they are not satisfied with their job, and think they do not earn up to the level of self-sufficiency since they always need more money to feel safe and secure.

Environment is a concern for all the groups in the study. They value environmentally friendly and socially responsible producers. They also have a preference towards organic products. Therefore, there is room for environmentally friendly and healthy products in their lives. Trends of healthy living and environmentalism may be said to fit well with the young, well-educated Turkish consumers in general. The environmentally conscious consumers are aware of ecological effects related to a product or service and they want to minimize these effects with their purchase decisions (Schwepker and Cornwell, 1991). Thus, firms could position themselves to relate to this trend and increase their green products both in durable and non-durable markets. Durability is also a valued qualification for the products by all groups. They ask for goods that last long. Hence, value for money, rational appeals of quality, durability and performance also rate high with the young and well-educated Turkish consumers.

There is one important fact that worth noting with respect to environmentalism. Despite the awareness of environmentalism, waste recycling is rare. Only beginner voluntary simplifiers decompose their waste. Therefore, more awareness needs to be built on this subject. Given that there is a positive attitude for environmentalism in general, a social marketing campaign could be effective in creating a public awareness about waste decomposition.

Another important commonness among the groups is the importance that they place on spirituality. All the groups place more importance on spirituality than on material wealth. This may fall in with the rising religious ideology in the country, and on the

importance placed on spiritual well-being in the Muslim religion. However, one must note that gaining material power is still important for the consumerists. Even if they care for spirituality, they dream of a rich and comfortable future for themselves. Consumerists can be said to blend spirituality with materialism in their lives, unlike the other groups.

All the groups also possess locality, and deviate from the more independent and urban lifestyles of the Western societies. They buy from local merchants in the neighborhood and establish good relationships with their neighbors. Living in a small circle in a neighborhood is common for all the groups. This attitude supports a voluntary simple lifestyle which calls for staying and buying local and reducing complexities in consumption. None of the groups is interested in a vegetarian lifestyle. This is again in line with the Turkish traditional cuisine based on the consumption of meat. Living simply or not, meat is a preferred dish in the society.

In terms of recreational activities, consumerists and beginner voluntary simplifiers lead. It is not surprising to see that consumerists want to enhance their lives with hobbies, sports, and travelling. However, they also lay out money on clothing and accessories. Beginner voluntary simplifiers, on the other hand, want to fulfill their self-actualization needs rather buying non-essential items. Their consumption of clothing and accessories is minimal compared to consumerists. A striking fact is that a sports activity is the least preferred of all. Only the consumerists are interested in sports. This might be considered for another topic of study. It is interesting that sports is not a part of the culture even though there is more than an average positive attitude towards healthy living and organic food. Future studies may consider this result and build on it.

The results of the cluster analysis based on the aforementioned factors yielded 3 clusters, consumerists, cautious buyers, and beginner voluntary simplifiers. A significant finding of the study is that a group of strong “voluntary simplifiers” does not exist in the Turkish context. This might again be attributed to the uncertainty avoidance behavior of the Turkish people who want to keep to the middle road and to act within limits, not knowing what the future may bring. They may not be prone to extreme behaviors such as voluntary simplicity. It is known that the desire for ordinary, normal, average living is chosen when the society is in flux (Kravets and Sandıkci, 2014). Nevertheless, there is one group of buyers who are called beginner voluntary simplifiers. They limit their consumption, are environmentally conscious, and do smart buying. It may be interesting to track them in the future and see how far they can go in voluntary simplicity.

Contrary to beginner voluntary simplifiers, there is also another group, consumerists, who pretty much resemble the global consumer society in that the consumption and acquisition of goods and services is celebrated as a tool of achieving satisfaction and happiness (Hakansson, 2014). This is not surprising since it is known that emerging markets are considered as ideal places to create a consumer culture, given their huge young population and rising economic growth (Özsomer and Altaras, 2008). It is especially the middle class population in these countries that is said to aspire to the global middle class segment, and who adjusts their consumption behavior to enhance their identity to this group (Kravets and Sandıkci, 2014; Strizhakova et al., 2012). The consumerists in our study may be members of this middle class segment in emerging markets. However, they also show characteristics related to Turkish culture such as

blending spirituality with materialism, sensitivity to self-sufficiency and future planning. Therefore, some adaptation to country specific characteristics is needed when targeting the consumerists in Turkey. Additionally, given that this group consists of mostly young, single, and well-educated women, firms may have to adjust their marketing methods to better target them for revenue generation.

What is interesting is this dichotomy between the young population in terms of attitude towards and practice of voluntary simplicity. It raises the question of whether there are there two opposing groups in Turkey related to attitude towards consumption. The results of this research are not sufficient to reach such a conclusion. In-depth research is needed to understand young consumers' perspective on voluntary simplicity. Thus, future studies may focus on young consumers and their behavior towards the voluntary simplicity lifestyle and consumerism. This is a necessary approach since Turkey is considered as one of the target emerging markets of multinational companies for future expansion. A possible rise of an anti-consumerist group in the country may challenge this thinking and may need strategy refinement from the perspective of local and multinational companies.

Limitations

This study has important findings about the concept of voluntary simplicity in Turkey. However, it has several limitations. First of all, the results cannot be generalized for the whole of Turkey. Another limitation of the study is that it used a non-probabilistic sampling method. Because of the budget and time limitations, a convenience sample was used in order to reach respondents. Although the study possesses a high sample size, respondents who completed the survey may not be totally representative of the population in Turkey. Due to the convenience sampling, the majority of the sample is young, the respondents are mostly between ages 21-25 (28.2%) and ages 26-30 (24.4%). The older groups are not well represented in the study. However, that is not surprising given that half of the Turkish population is below the age of 30 (<http://www.radikal.com.tr/saglik/turkiye-nufusunun-yarisi-30-yasin-altinda-1243580/>). A further study may emphasize older groups in order to have a better understanding of them. The sample in international studies consists of highly educated respondents as is so for, this study's results. Although highly educated respondents are appropriate for studying voluntary simple lifestyle (e. g. Boujbel and D'astous, 2012; Walter and Sandlin, 2011; Roubanis, 2008; Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002; Zavestoski, 2002; Etzioni, 1998; Elgin and Mitchell, 1977), is overrepresented in the sample. In further researches less highly educated individuals can also be studied.

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