

# Social media analysis of anti-consumption in Turkey

Social media  
analysis

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the perceptions of food anti-consumption in fast growing markets within an emerging economy context of Turkey.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Recently posted customer comments, complaints and suggestions related to the selected fast-food chains were examined from the following domains: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Sikayetvar.com. These comments were reviewed, assessed and classified by four trained independent raters. After examining the comments one-by-one the raters arrived at the final (triangulated) decision regarding the comment's category after an iterative process including cross-examination.

**Findings** – Reasons for fast-food avoidance were primarily linked to customers' negative past experiences (experiential avoidance). Identity avoidance, moral avoidance and interactivity avoidance.

**Originality/value** – The paper adds to the anti-consumption literature by examining the food avoidance framework of Lee *et al.* (2009) in an emerging market context. New categories were identified for reasons of food avoidance which have not been identified before in the anti-consumption literature such as interactivity avoidance.

**Keywords** Turkey, Social media, Emerging economy, Food, Avoidance, Anti-consumption

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Food plays an important role in our lives. An increasing number of people in emerging economies find themselves gradually acculturated to the post-industrial ritual of eating out within well-designed commercial servicescapes (Ahmed *et al.*, 2013; Akarçay and Suğur, 2015). It appears that in some countries, for example, Turkey, a fast-food revolution is in a full swing (Akarçay and Suğur, 2015). Western-style fast-food chains and their local imitations vie for dominance, clutter the market with their promotional activities and employ best marketing practices to attract customers. Although the goal of marketing is to satisfy the customer, it can, in some circumstances, lead to a paradoxical incidence of consumer resistance including brand avoidance (Holt, 2002). In the same vein, there seems to be a growing number of consumers in emerging economies who refuse to jump on the bandwagon of the nationwide fast-food revolution (Kashif *et al.*, 2014). Many of them resolve to avoid specific fast-food choices at any cost.

To gain some insight into the mechanisms of the fast-food avoidance phenomenon, in this investigation we draw on theories of anti-consumption. The anti-consumption literature outlines broad reasons for why people might attempt to avoid certain food choices (Zavestovski, 2002; Cherrier and Murray, 2007; Sandikci and Ekici, 2009; Lee, 2010;



*Data collection and analysis*

Two fast-food chains were selected for the current investigation. Chain 1 represents a Turkish subsidiary of a major global fast-food brand. Chain 2 represents a local fast-food chain. The selection of the comments concerning these two chains was based on purposefulness. These two chains were selected on their potential capacity to warrant rich consumer comments which would best inform our research questions. Also, the rationale for selection was the size of the chain: Chain 1 is one of the global fast-food chains with most local branches, while Chain 2 is the largest local provider with a significant number of local branches. These two chains operate at a national level.

The number of downloaded and analysed comments from each domain is given in Table I. We downloaded recently posted customer comments, complaints and suggestions related to the selected fast-food chains from the following domains: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Şikayetvar. The comments constituting this study were downloaded during the period February 2017–2018.

Once downloaded, these comments were reviewed, assessed and classified by four trained independent raters. The raters first assessed whether a comment contained any reason for possible future non-consumption. To accomplish this, they were asked to read a comment several times and identify a major reason expressed in the comment as to why a commenting person would not be involved in further consumption of the food item under focus. At the same time, the raters classified the comments/reasons into one of the categories proposed by Lee *et al.* (2009). The major categories in Lee *et al.*'s table were experiential, identity and moral avoidance reasons. If the reason did not fit the classification, it was treated as a new (sub)category. The inter-rater reliability for this classification task was 95 per cent.

For example, a typical comment would be:

[...] in the [X] branch of Chain 2, we asked our meal to be replaced due to finding a strand of hair. The replacement meal was served without fried butter and sauce. I think this was their punishment for asking a replacement. They a zero understanding of service.

The rater can identify two potential reasons from such a remark. These are finding a foreign object in the meal and a problem with a service. Relating these two comments to Lee *et al.*'s framework, these two reasons represent experiential avoidance, specifically, experiences related to unmet expectations about the product/service attributes. To finalise the data collection and classification results, the raters met several times among themselves and the researchers to cross examine and validate their interpretation of the comments. In their final meeting, the raters examined the interpretations and classifications one-by-one, and then attempted to arrive at the final triangulated decision regarding the comment's category. The interpretation process was iterative, that is, moving back and forth between the general context of categories (as posited by Lee *et al.*, 2009) and the specific meanings of the comments.

The researchers compiled all these evaluations and compared the results. The comments that did not fit any category were further analysed by the researchers, which resulted in new categories and subcategories (Table II).

Fast-food chains	Branches in Turkey	Number of comments analysed			
		Sikayetvar.com	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram
Fast-food chain 1	606	292	50	88	170
Fast-food chain 2	106	299	43	50	161

**Table I.**  
The number of  
comments analysed

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Information exchange is an important element of market interactivity. Specifically, in the context of marketing communication, over-promising while under-delivering creates a negative perception of the exchange situation. The negative perception of the exchange may lead to relationship avoidance which spills over to the food consumption context. The complaints mention a divergence of real practices from advertised ones such as unavailability of specific offers (e.g. free coffee, complementary presents, buy one get one free offers). The communication gap, the differences between information, images, promises sent to the market and the actual state of affairs, signals a one-sided, asymmetric attitude that customers might find unfair.

#### *Interactivity avoidance: cultural insensitivity*

Turkey traditionally had strong hospitality culture centred on coffeehouses (Karababa and Ger, 2010). There are established commonly accepted standards of serving food which partially structure how food should be served and enjoyed in the public spaces (Karababa and Ger, 2010). One of such standards is to serve tea after food. The general expectation is that a cup of tea must be offered free of charge after a meal. Many customers complained about not being able to get their tea:

[...] my bill totalled almost 60 Turkish liras [which is a significant amount in the Turkish context] and I asked the reason why I didn't get my [traditionally expected] tea. I was told that they don't serve tea in weekends. This is certainly not an ethical clean business. (Chain 2 customer)

The above quote illustrates dissatisfaction with the business because it fails to follow the etiquette of acceptable interaction with customers. It is perceived to be "not clean" which in this context might mean that the business does not uphold its responsibility, set by customary norms and traditions, within exchange relationships.

Another aspect of cultural insensitivity is given in the following quote:

We had dinner at [the fast-food restaurant] in the evening of a weekday. I wish we didn't. Never experienced such a thing. They were so busy with their Arab customers that they ignored us. We asked for bottled water but we didn't get it. They didn't bring fork and knife for ten minutes, as a result we had to eat cold food. There is no working ethic. Turks should never go there because they don't care about Turks, but they only take a strong interest in their Arab customers. (Chain 2 customer)

This quote illustrates the tendency of some customers observing how the business serves other customers. The cultural norm in Turkey dictates that "guests" are treated equally, while only deserving groups (e.g. elderly, community leaders) would be allowed to get preferential treatment. The violation of such etiquettes, in their different forms, leads to negative impressions of the food vendor and consequently leads to food avoidance.

#### **Limitations and future research directions**

The current research explored a limited number of fast-food chains in Turkey, which provides an interesting platform for future research involving more businesses in the same context. A diverse inclusion of businesses in the analysis is likely to yield specific perceptions of food avoidance in relation to the nature of business. For example, reasons to avoid fast food may differ from food anti-consumption behaviours in other type of eateries.

This paper focusses on understanding a specific context where the majority population belongs to a particular faith (i.e. Muslims) within an emerging economy setting. While it provides a unique canvas to provide an exploratory investigation, it would be insightful to examine additional countries classified as emerging economies with varying degrees of

not be seen as an indistinguishable commodity. In the research context under focus, we realised that food avoidance does not mean abstaining from an abstracted food category. The avoidance behaviour is not absolutist or totalistic, rather it resembles micro-context manoeuvring in dynamic situations. Second, food seems to depict a spatial-temporal form within the Turkish context. It is perceived to be a unique happening that has distinct spatial and temporal features. This investigation shows that the food's sphere includes its features, its agents, ambiance, relevant places, third parties, cultural norms and social settings. Hence, the customer experiences "food" as a hallmark of concrete socio-cultural settings. Third, food may well be a part of holistic exchange relationship. The category of "interactivity avoidance" indicates that the food, its unique socio-cultural form, becomes an integral part of exchange relationships. Most often, its physical quality is indistinguishable from, in most cases well integrated into, the quality of market interaction.

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