IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS ON EATING DISORDERS

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Impact of Social Media Advertisements on Eating Disorders

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ABSTRACT

Impact of Social Media Advertisements on Eating Disorders

This thesis examines the effects of social media advertisements, especially those promoting healthy foods, on consumer attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. The study also considers how eating disorder symptoms moderate these relationships. The research integrates both cognitive and emotional factors and includes data from two countries: Turkey and the United States. A total of 278 valid survey responses were collected and analyzed separately for each country. The results show that social media ad value is a strong predictor of positive attitudes toward healthy food promotions in both samples. While hedonic and utilitarian values had weaker effects, attitude significantly influenced both behavioral intention and consumer response, especially in the Turkish sample. Eating disorder symptoms moderated the relationship between social media ad value and attitude. This suggests a possible emotional or cognitive distancing from food-related content among at-risk individuals. These findings offer practical implications for digital marketing and health communication. They highlight the need for more sensitive and trustworthy messaging, especially when targeting consumers who may be psychologically vulnerable to food-related content.

ÖZET

Sosyal Medya Reklamlarının Yeme Bozukluklarına Etkisi

Bu tez, özellikle sağlıklı gıdaları tanıtan sosyal medya reklamlarının, tüketicilerin tutumları, niyetleri ve davranışları üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Ayrıca, yeme bozukluğu belirtilerinin bu ilişkilerde nasıl bir rol oynadığı da araştırılmıştır. Çalışma, Değer–Tutum–Davranış modeline dayanarak hem bilişsel hem de duygusal faktörleri içeren bir yaklaşımla Türkiye ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde yürütülmüştür. Her iki ülkeden toplam 281 geçerli anket yanıtı toplanmış ve veriler ülke bazında ayrı ayrı analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, sosyal medya reklam değeri değişkeninin, her iki örneklemde de sağlıklı gıda reklamlarına yönelik olumlu tutumların güçlü bir etkeni olduğunu göstermiştir. Hedonik ve faydacı değerlerin etkisi ise daha zayıf kalmıştır. Tutum, özellikle Türkiye örnekleminde, hem davranışsal niyet hem de tüketici tepkisi üzerinde anlamlı etki göstermiştir. Yeme bozukluğu belirtileri, sosyal medya reklam değeri ile tutum arasındaki ilişkiyi Türkiye'de anlamlı biçimde etkilemese de Amerika örnekleminde düşük oranda zayıflatmıştır. Bu durum, yeme bozukluğu riski taşıyan bireylerin, gıdayla ilgili içeriklerden bilişsel ya da duygusal olarak uzaklaşabileceğini göstermektedir.

Bu bulgular, dijital pazarlama ve sağlık iletişimi açısından önemli çıkarımlar sunmaktadır. Özellikle psikolojik olarak kırılgan tüketici gruplarına yönelik daha hassas ve güvenilir mesajlar geliştirilmesi gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır.

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This thesis is dedicated to all individuals struggling with eating disorders, especially women, who are constantly subjected to societal and systemic pressures to conform to idealized body standards. May this work contribute, even in a small way, to challenging these norms and promoting healthier, more inclusive perspective

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 5

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 14

3.1 Research framework 14

3.2 Survey design and sample 14

3.3 Constructs and measurement 18

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 23

4.1 Statistical analysis and interpretation 23

4.2 Correlation matrix and discriminant validity 25

4.3 Healthy food advertisement model – path coefficients 26

4.4 Moderation effect of EDEQ – simple slopes analysis 33

4.5 Age group 18–25 – Turkey vs USA comparison 34

CHAPTER 5: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 40

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION 42

APPENDIX: ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL 46

REFERENCES 47

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographic Breakdown of Türkiye 15

Table 2. Demographic Breakdown of USA 16

Table 3. Survey Questions 17

Table 4. Reliability and Validity Measures – Turkey Sample 23

Table 5. Reliability and Validity Measures – USA Sample 24

Table 6. Correlation Matrix of Türkiye 25

Table 7. Correlation Matrix of USA 26

Table 8. Hypothesis Support Table 28

Table 9. Influence of EDEQ For The Countries 29

Table 10. Path Coefficients of Young Age (18-25) 34

Table 11. Path Coefficients of Young Women Age (18-25) 38

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Theoretical model of social media advertisement impact 12

Figure 2. Path coefficients of the model 27

Figure 3. Path coefficients by country 31

Figure 4. Slopes of SMAV on attitude by EDEQ 33

Figure 5. 18-25 age group construct comparison 35

Figure 6. 18-25 age group top platform used comparison 36

Figure 7. 18-25 age group daily social media time 36

Figure 8. 18-25 age group female participants path coefficients comparison 38

Figure 9. Front of pack labeling system Nutri-Score 40

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As of 2023, the global urban population has reached 57.34% and is forecasted to increase to 68% by 2050 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018). This rapid urbanization has led to a rise in the consumption of processed foods and a shift toward sedentary lifestyles. The surge in obesity and diet-related diseases is forcing regulators to take precautionary policy actions (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2024). The global obesity epidemic has heightened consumer awareness regarding the importance of healthy eating, generating a growing preference for functional foods, superfoods, and natural products that align with contemporary wellness trends (Aschemann-Witzela, 2013).

Given the increasing urban population and the rise in processed food consumption, eating disorders and their underlying causes have emerged as critical subjects of research. Eating disorders are severe mental health illnesses marked by maladaptive eating practices, excessive concern about body weight or form, and distorted self-image. These conditions can have serious emotional and physical consequences and are frequently caused by a combination of environmental, social, psychological, and genetic parameters (van Strien, 1986). Diagnostic guides such as the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) and ICD-11 (International Classification of Diseases) provide behavioral, psychological, and physical criteria that are used to identify eating disorders. These definitions concentrate on long-term disruptions in eating patterns and related feelings or ideas that seriously harm one's physical or mental well-being. For instance, bulimia nervosa, which is characterized by frequent episodes of binge eating followed by

compensatory behaviors like purging and an excessive influence of body shape on self-evaluation, anorexia nervosa is characterized by restrictive eating that results in a significantly low body weight, an intense fear of gaining weight, and a distorted body image. Frequent episodes of binge eating without compensatory activities and feelings of discomfort are symptoms of binge-eating disorder (Association, 2013). Clinical interviews, behavioral observations, and medical testing to rule out other illnesses are included in the diagnosis process. According to the article, the DEBQ (van Strien, 1986) is not a diagnostic tool in and of itself, but it does assist in evaluating particular eating patterns (such as emotional or constrained eating) that may be indicative of or contribute to these disorders.

The global prevalence of eating disorders has more than doubled since 2000, increasing from 3.5% to 7.8% by 2018. Among adolescents, the prevalence of disordered eating behaviors is notably higher, ranging from 14% to 22%. Binge Eating Disorder (BED) is the most common, affecting 3.5% of women and 2% of men (Bhatia, 2023) (Eating disorder statistics 2024, 2024). A scoping review published in PLOS Global Public Health (2023) highlighted an 8%, increase in eating disorder prevalence, rising since 2013, particularly among social media users, young adults, and women who are highly susceptible to beauty standards propagated online (Dane & Bhatia, 2023). Recent studies display a significant role of social media on unhealthy eating habits and eating disorders. Social media platforms significantly contribute to body dissatisfaction by promoting the "thin ideal". 60% of social media users reported engaging with "pro-anorexia" or similar harmful content, further normalizing disordered eating behaviors (Filippone, 2022).

While women are often more prominently associated with susceptibility to the 'thin ideal' and body dissatisfaction, men are not exempt from these pressures, as

evidenced by a recent study that found that 40% of sexual minority men linked social media use to heightened body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptoms (Griffiths, 2018). Frequent social media use correlates with a higher risk of disordered eating, driven by exposure to content that promotes unrealistic beauty standards (Holland, 2016).

In terms of food marketing, retail social commerce sales in the U.S. reached approximately $68.92 billion in 2023, a notable increase from $53.10 billion in 2022. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube play essential roles for food brands aiming to connect with consumers, particularly younger audiences. Notably, 76% of users report purchasing products they encountered on these platforms, illustrating the direct impact of social media on consumer behavior. Furthermore, 90% of social media users follow at least one brand, highlighting the necessity for food marketers to have a strong social media presence (Kumar, 2024). Despite extensive research on the impact of advertisements on consumer responses and body image, limited studies have explored the effects of "healthy food" advertisements on eating disorders in social media contexts. This study aims to investigate the impact of marketing strategies in the food industry, specifically focusing "healthy food" advertisements on social media. Unlike most existing research, this study will not address junk or unhealthy fast foods. In light of the ongoing obesity epidemic and harmful eating habits in urban settings, a new wellness-oriented lifestyle is emerging.

Despite limited regulatory oversight and varying scientific evidence, health claims such as "natural," "superfood," and "smart food" are frequently utilized in marketing strategies to attract health-conscious consumers (Innova Market Insights, 2025). Marketing campaigns often use persuasive visuals that create a perception of

healthiness. For example, images of fruits and vegetables alongside snacks that are not actually very healthy can convince consumers of the product's benefits. Additionally, social media targets advertisements to specific consumer groups. This means that vulnerable groups, such as young adults, may be directly exposed to trends and a sense of belonging, which can influence their decision-making processes. The frequency of exposure will also lead to the normalization of choices and the fulfillment of the need for social acceptance.

Temporary trends can rapidly affect consumer behavior without critical thinking or scientific evidence, potentially leading to serious long-term consequences (van der Bend, 2022). Alongside all this, there is a regulatory gap regarding the perceived concept of healthy food in marketing strategies. Such as the definitions of commonly used terms like "natural," "wholesome," and "healthy" are not clearly specified, which can lead to confusion among consumers. Brands can use these vague terms to market healthy foods. On the other hand, no penalties for exaggerated or untrue health claims are mentioned. In the absence of consumer knowledge, this insufficient regulation can lead to misleading marketing strategies.

Digital marketing, being a newly emerging channel, requires more comprehensive oversight, as control and enforcement are much more challenging in this area. The lack of transparency and regulation in marketing through influencers can lead to more harmful situations for consumers (Thevenot, 2014).

Interdisciplinary studies are crucial for understanding the impact of food marketing strategies on human psychology, consumer behavior, and eating disorders. This motivation can drive the implementation of preventive measures aimed at fostering healthier generations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing strategies within the food industry significantly shape consumers' perceptions of healthiness. The use of colors, claims, and packaging styles greatly influences buying decisions. Health-conscious consumers often perceive foods as healthier when they feature green colors, organic logos, or fat-reduced and high-protein claims on packaging (Vidal, 2022).

A study investigates the effects of orthorexia nervosa, a condition briefly defined as an obsessive focus on eating healthy foods, on the food marketing sector, revealing that companies are aware of the shift in consumer preferences toward healthy foods and are pursuing new marketing strategies accordingly. These strategies are primarily determined by profitability and emphasize offering products that meet consumers' health and hedonic needs. While the study acknowledges that companies adapt to health-conscious trends (e.g., organic or clean-label products), they avoid targeting niche behaviors like orthorexia nervosa. Instead, they prioritize profitable, scalable strategies aligned with mainstream consumer demands (Duarte, 2019).

Another study, conducted in Denmark, Finland, and the U.S., analyzed consumer perceptions of functional foods (e.g., vitamin-enriched products). It found that health claims, enrichment types, and base products (e.g., yogurt vs. bread) strongly influence perceived healthiness. Strict EU regulations limit health claims compared to the U.S., leading to market-specific strategies. While cultural values (e.g., American acceptance of innovation vs. Nordic emphasis on natural coexistence) play a role, product-specific attributes like organic processing and low-

sugar claims were more impactful than culture (Larsen, 2023). Moreover, the influence of celebrities, opinion leaders, and influencers is profound, especially via social media, which is increasingly important for reaching young adults (Rounsefell, 2020). The prevalence of "image marketing" and social pressure regarding appearance among adolescents can increase body dissatisfaction and the risk of eating disorders.

A research examined what Croatian Generation Z (born 1997–2010) consumed in connection with social media influencers. 178 participants (59% female, 41% male) were interviewed to evaluate their social media use, influencer interaction, and eating habits. According to the outcomes, 60.6% of participants said they ate a healthy diet that included meat, dairy, and vegetables. Cooking at home and avoiding street food were more common among physically active people. Healthy eating was considered beneficial by the respondents, who also thought influencers were trustworthy and followed them for information and inspiration. Influencer engagement was higher among women and urban residents. While older respondents utilized conventional media to obtain nutrition information, younger participants explored social networks. Although harmful food advertising continues to have a greater impact than healthy advertising, influencers have raised consumer awareness of products and their willingness to buy them. The study concludes that influencers have a big impact on the food preferences of Generation Z, especially those who are health-conscious. Nonetheless, it emphasizes the necessity of precise, fact-based nutrition messages on social media to avoid deceptive information (Jandroković, 2022). For instance, false trademarks, deceptive trade descriptions of goods and services, or misleading oversights are examples of misleading communications about the sponsored goods or services. This technique involves

publishing evaluations of products and services that contain false, unclear, overvalued, or disinformation about the products and services they are promoting. The approach has similarities to the position of deceptive messaging in other forms of marketing, even though it is also typical of influencer marketing. One complaint in Belgium concerned an influencer who was endorsing a Nestlé beverage product by using false information. The complainant pointed out that the marketing claimed that the drink's components assisted with "post-natal ailments" on the one hand. The assertion could not be confirmed, though, because it was unclear what conditions were addressed. However, the same compounds were said to "boost the immune system" instead. The complaint claimed that this was a meaningless claim and that there was no scientific proof that any particular meal or substance could have any effect on the immune system (Michaelsen, 2022).

A consumer protection group in Italy informed the competition authorities about many violations related to food supplements. The “investigation159” found that some influencers were providing inaccurate information about the advantages of herbal tea and dietary supplements, encouraging followers to believe incorrect information about the product's qualities. The following emerged to be the most significant acts that place consumers at risk: Targeting vulnerable consumer groups, failing to distinguish between advertising and content, and lacking transparency and clear disclosure. The vulnerable consumer categories are addressed as young, low-education, and or low-income people. Because they are either more susceptible to marketing tactics or run the risk of experiencing negative outcomes from greater consumption. The first is a lack of knowledge, namely a lack of advertising literacy, as well as a lack of formal education in general. Understanding conceptual persuasion is crucial for determining the advertising goal of tactics like influencer

marketing. Customers may also be more susceptible to being directly targeted if they lack the knowledge necessary to differentiate between objective and subjective influencer messaging (Michaelsen, 2022).

In addition, the lack of sufficient oversight and regulation of social media advertising increases the risk of harm to vulnerable groups. Mühlhoff and Willem's article addresses the ethical and data protection issues surrounding social media advertising in clinical studies. Targeted ads can exploit users' health data and enable the development of predictive medical models. Current ethical guidelines remain inadequate and slow to adapt to the dynamic nature of platforms and the influence of data analytics companies. This fosters participant bias, reducing the validity of scientific studies (Mühlhoff & Willem, 2023).

Cross-sectional studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between engagement with appearance-related content on platforms like Instagram and Facebook and concerns about body image. Recent research has begun to explore the specific types of social media content that emphasize appearance ideals related to health, food, and fitness. One notable example is "fitspiration" or "fitspo," which promotes exercise and a "healthy" diet. Content analyses indicate that approximately 20% of fitspiration posts contain messages about food or eating. Individuals frequently viewing fitspiration content often engage with social media posts about "clean eating," finding such content enjoyable as a way to learn more about health and fitness. A study comparing 101 women who posted fitspiration images with 102 women who posted travel images found that those in the fitspiration group scored higher on measures of disordered eating, compulsive exercise, and the drive for thinness and muscularity. Notably, nearly 17.5% of the fitspiration group were at risk

for clinically significant eating disorders, compared to 4.3% in the travel group, highlighting the potential risks associated with fitspiration content (Holland, 2017).

The study titled “Eat clean, train mean, get lean” examined the relationship between engagement with fitspiration and clean eating imagery on Instagram and its impact on body image, disordered eating, and compulsive exercise among women. The research involved 269 women aged 18-30 who completed a questionnaire regarding their Instagram habits and health behaviors. The findings indicated that viewing fitspiration and clean eating content was positively associated with thin-ideal internalization, disordered eating, and compulsive exercise. Both thin-ideal and athletic-ideal internalization mediated the relationship between viewing fitspiration/clean eating content and negative health outcomes, suggesting the need for interventions to mitigate these adverse effects (Wu, 2022).

Social media influencers significantly impact body image by promoting unrealistic beauty and fitness ideals. Exposure to their curated, edited content often leads to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and anxiety, particularly among young audiences. Fitness or beauty influencers framing thinness or muscularity as achievements fuel harmful behaviors like disordered eating. "Perfect motherhood" posts—showcasing idealized postpartum bodies or parenting—heighten guilt and self-doubt. Even body-positive content sometimes inadvertently reinforces narrow standards by focusing on "acceptable" curvy aesthetics. Constant social comparison, amplified by algorithm-driven platforms, traps users in cycles of negative self-evaluation against unattainable norms (Powell, 2024).

Perceived healthiness plays a crucial role in consumers’ purchasing decisions (Arruda Pinto, de Carvalho, & Perrone, 2021). Studies indicate that perceived healthiness is strongly related to various factors, including brand names, package

information, food marketing, and consumers' emotional responses toward brands or consumption experiences. Consumers with specific health issues, such as obesity, are more vulnerable to negative eating emotions and are likely to choose healthier food options. Conversely, the phenomenon known as the “health halo effect” can mislead consumer decisions. Research has shown that participants consumed about 35% more when food was labeled as healthy compared to unhealthy. This effect leads individuals to underestimate the caloric content of healthy foods, potentially contributing to overeating (Provencher, 2009). This study also examined the impact of dietary restraint and weight salience, concluding that restrained eaters consumed more when food was labeled as healthy, despite their overall caloric intake being lower throughout the day. These findings underscore the significance of food-related beliefs in influencing eating behaviors.

The study by Vasconcelos et al. (2021) explores how online influencers promote "healthy eating" trends and evaluates the reliability of such information. The research emphasizes the societal risks of health-related misinformation, particularly in nutrition. Globalization and social media have increased access to information, but also amplified the spread of unverified or misleading content. Many influencers without formal nutritional expertise share advice that lacks scientific evidence, often prioritizing engagement over accuracy. Popular diets like Paleo, Keto, and Whole30 are frequently marketed for quick results but are rarely sustainable long-term. These trends, driven by commercial interests, often overlook potential health risks. Social media's portrayal of "healthy lifestyles" also reinforces unrealistic body image standards, contributing to eating disorders, especially among young people. When followed without proper guidance, diets such as veganism or vegetarianism may lead to nutrient deficiencies. The study concludes that unregulated health content online

poses significant public health risks. It recommends stricter policies, such as requiring expert verification for health-related posts and restricting misleading advertisements. Additionally, it stresses the need for improved public awareness and critical thinking to encourage reliance on scientifically backed sources (Vasconcelos, 2021).

The model taken as a reference (Valiño, 2020) explains the factors that create the value of social media advertisements in affecting consumer behavior via attitudes. The study develops a theoretical framework based on the Value-Attitude-Behavior (VAB) model to understand consumer responses to healthy food advertising on social media. It introduces the Social Media Advertising Value (SMAV) variable, exploring its relationship with consumer attitudes and responses. The framework suggests that consumer intention serves as a partial mediator between attitude and response, with attitudes influenced by either utilitarian or hedonic values. Additionally, the study draws on Ducoffe's model, which outlines critical factors affecting advertising value, including informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and irritation, all of which are vital for assessing the SMAV of healthy food advertising. The study examines how the advertising value model applies to social media, specifically analyzing responses from Spanish consumers regarding healthy food advertising. The findings reveal that consumers place a high value on Social Media Advertising Value (SMAV), with a particular emphasis on informativeness and credibility. Among these factors, credibility has the strongest influence on advertising value, whereas irritation and entertainment are less impactful.

In our study, we will advance the inquiry by examining the hypotheses after consumers view healthy food advertisements. This research aims to determine

whether individuals with eating disorders respond differently to healthy food advertisements compared to those without such vulnerabilities. Consequently, in the modified version of the model (Valiño, 2020), disordered eating is included as a factor that may influence consumer attitudes.

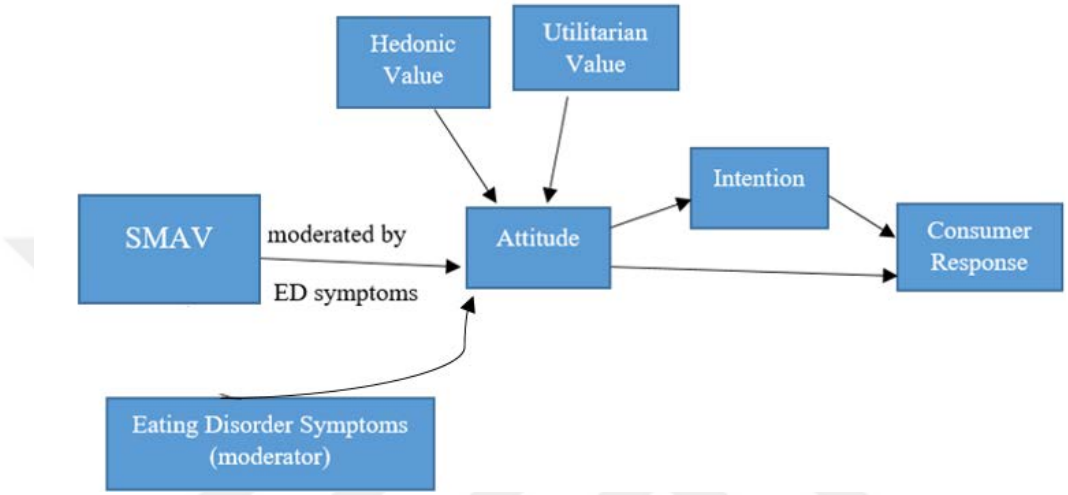

Figure 1. Modified model of SMAV and EDEQ effects on consumer response

The hypotheses will be developed based on the established model and will be tested using primary data collected through a questionnaire, which is intended to be administered in both the United States and Türkiye. The Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire Short Version (Gideon, 2016) and the Model of Healthy Food Advertisement on Social Media Questionnaire (Valiño, 2020) are combined for the study. The following hypotheses will be tested;

H1. Social Media Ad Value (SMAV) has a positive effect on attitude toward the advertisement.

H2. Attitude positively affects consumer response.

H3. Attitude positively affects intention.

H4. Intention positively affects consumer response.

H5. Attitude partially mediates the relationship between SMAV and consumer response.

H6. Intention mediates the relationship between attitude and consumer response.

H7. Eating disorder symptoms (EDEQ) moderate the effect of SMAV on attitude.

H8.a Hedonic value significantly predicts attitude.

H8.b Utilitarian value significantly predicts attitude.

H9. There is a conditional serial indirect effect of ad perception on consumer response, through attitude and intention, moderated by eating disorder scores.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research framework

This study adapts and extends the Value–Attitude–Behavior (VAB) model proposed by Cuesta-Valiño et al. (2020) to examine how individuals respond to healthy food advertisements on social media. The structural model includes advertising value (SMAV), utilitarian and hedonic eating values, consumer attitudes, intention, and final consumer response. A distinctive contribution of this study is the inclusion of the disordered eating score (EDEQ) as a moderating variable in the SMAV → Attitude path, highlighting how eating disorder risk may influence consumers' perception of healthy food advertisements.

3.2 Survey design and sample

A cross-sectional online survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire in two countries: Türkiye and the United States. The questionnaire integrated two validated scales:

i. The short version of the Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDE-QS; Gideon et al., 2016)

ii. The Social Media Advertising Value (SMAV) framework based on Cuesta-Valiño et al. (2020)

Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for most items. The EDEQ scale used a 4-point format based on behavioral frequency. The questionnaire was distributed through social media channels and completed via smartphones, tablets, or computers.

3.2.1. Demographic Breakdown of Türkiye

Table 1. Demographic Breakdown of Türkiye

Category	Subgroup	n
Gender	Female	72
	Male	21
	Unspecified	1
Age	18-25	33
	26-33	14
	34-41	19
	42-65	27
	Unspecified	1
Income (TL)	≤20k (min wage)	18
	20k-30k	11
	30k-40k	4
	40-50k	8
	50-60k	12
	60k+	38
	Unspecified	3
Education	High school	11
	University	66
	Post graduate	16
	Unspecified	1
Person in house	1	10
	2	27
	3	27
	4+	29
	Unspecified	1

The Turkish survey was conducted online between March 24 and May 6, 2025, with a total of 94 participants. Among them, 73 identified as female and 20 as male, while one participant did not report their gender.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 65, with the largest subgroup being those aged 18–25 (n = 33). The inclusion of various age groups allowed for additional age-based comparisons in the study, unlike the U.S. sample, which only included university students aged 18–22.

The USA survey was conducted in April 2025 at the University of Oklahoma with 188 participants, mainly between the ages of 18 and 22. The gender distribution included 122 females, 64 males, and 2 non-binary/not specified participants.

3.2.2 Demographic breakdown of USA

Table 2. Demographic Breakdown of USA

Category	Subgroup	n
Gender	Female	122
	Male	64
	Non-binary/Other	2
Age	18-25	185
	26-33	1
	42-65	1
	Unspecified	1
Income (USD)	≤$1,000	12
	$1,000–$1,999	11
	$2,000–$2,999	23
	$3,000–$3,999	28
	$4,000–$4,999	21
	$5,000+	93
Education	High School	28
	Some College	158
	Post-graduate	2
Person in house	1-2	4
	3-5	132
	6+	50
	Unspecified	2

3.2.3 Survey question sets overview

Table 3. Survey Questions

Construct	Question Code	Item Description	Response Scale
Demographics	Q1-Q7	Age, gender, income, education, family size	Categorical/Open-ended
Social Media Ad Value (SMAV)	Q8 –Q10	"Social media ads are useful/valuable/important for healthy foods"	1-5 Likert (Strongly disagree-Strongly agree)
Attitude	Q11-Q13	"Ads help me find products matching my interests"	1-5 Likert
Intention	Q14-Q16	"I intend/expect/plan to eat healthy foods"	1-5 Likert
Consumer Response	Q17-Q20	"I will click/pay attention/purchase products from ads"	1-5 Likert
Utilitarian Values	Q21-Q23	"Foods should control weight/prevent health issues"	1-5 Likert
Hedonic Values	Q24-Q26	"Foods should be enjoyable/fun"	1-5 Likert
Consumer Response	Q27	“I bought healthy foods from social media.”	Yes or no
Frequency and experience	Q28-Q29	“How often do you buy/were you satisfied”	Categorical/5-point scale
EDEQ (Eating Disorder Risk)	Q30-Q38	"Days restricting food/fear of weight gain"	0-7 days (Frequency)/ 0-3 point scale
Body Dissatisfaction	Q39-Q40	"Weight/shape influenced self-evaluation"	Categorical/0-3 point scale

3.3 Constructs and measurement

After data cleaning and removal of incomplete responses, the final sample consisted of 92 valid participants from Turkey and 186 valid participants from the USA, covering an age range of 18 to 65 years.

For subgroup analyses, 72 female participants aged between 18 and 25 were included from Turkey, and 123 female participants in the same age range from the USA. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree.” Each construct—such as advertising value, utilitarian eating value, hedonic eating value, attitude toward advertisements, intention, and satisfaction—was calculated by taking the average of the numerical scores from its respective section.

Disordered eating tendencies were measured using the short version of the Eating Disorder Examination Questionnaire (EDEQ). Participants were asked how many days in the past week they experienced specific behaviors or thoughts (e.g., dietary restraint, shape concern). Response options were provided as ranges (0 days, 1–2 days, 3–5 days, 6–7 days) and were analyzed numerically on a 0 to 3 scale. The last two questions are related to self-image dissatisfaction, they were analyzed numerically on a 0 to 3 scale as well. The composite EDEQ score was standardized prior to use as a moderator in the model.

Consumer response was measured through a combination of self-reported behaviors (e.g., purchasing, clicking) and satisfaction, using both Likert-based and binary items. All responses were numerically coded and analyzed using statistical software.

Construct	Calculation
SMAV	Average of 3 ad value items
Utilitarian Value	Average of 3 items (e.g., usefulness)
Hedonic Value	Average of 3 items (e.g., fun, pleasure)
Attitude	Average of 3 items (favorable ad view)
Intention	Average of 3 items (intent to eat healthy)
Consumer Response	Based on direct responses (binary + Likert)
EDEQ	Average of 12 items (Q30 to Q40), coded 0–3

3.3.1 Measurement model evaluation

To evaluate the measurement quality of the constructs used in this study, four main steps were followed: internal consistency, factor loadings, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

- Internal Consistency – Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test how consistently the items in each construct measured the same concept. A Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 is generally considered acceptable. In this study, all constructs had alpha values higher than this threshold. For example, the construct Attitude had an alpha of 0.839 in the Turkish sample, which shows that its three items reliably measured the same concept.

- Factor Loadings

Factor loadings show how well each item (question) represents the construct it belongs to. These values were estimated using a structural equation modeling software. A loading above 0.70 means that the item has a strong connection with the construct. For the Attitude construct, the factor loadings were 0.746, 0.818, and 0.830, indicating that all items are appropriate indicators of this construct.

- Convergent Validity – AVE

To check convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated. This value tells us how much of the variation in the items is explained by

the construct. The AVE is the average of the squared factor loadings. A value above 0.50 means that the construct explains at least half of the variation in its items. For example, Attitude had an AVE of 0.638, which indicates good convergent validity.

- Discriminant Validity – Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Discriminant validity shows whether each construct is truly different from the others. The Fornell–Larcker test was used to assess this. According to this method, the square root of the AVE of a construct should be greater than its correlation with other constructs. In this study, all constructs met this condition. For example, the square root of the AVE for Attitude was 0.80, while its correlations with other constructs were lower. This result confirms that the constructs are conceptually distinct.

To test how consistently items in each scale measured the same construct, we calculated Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency, indicating how closely related a set of items are as a group. It is widely used to assess the reliability of scales and survey instruments in social sciences. A higher alpha value suggests that the items measure the same underlying construct. The concept was introduced by Lee J. Cronbach in his seminal article (Cronbach, 1951). This value ranges from 0 to 1:

Cronbach's Alpha Scale

Rule of Thumb	Interpretation
> 0.9	Excellent
0.8–0.9	Good
0.7–0.8	Acceptable
< 0.7	Weak / Problematic

Another reliability factor, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), was calculated to assess convergent validity, indicating the degree to which items within a construct explain the variance of that construct. It is calculated by averaging the squared factor loadings of a construct's items. An AVE value of 0.50 or higher suggests satisfactory convergent validity (Fornell, 1981).

[SMAV + Hedonic + Utilitarian + EDEQ + (SMAV×EDEQ)] → Attitude → Intention → Response

In this formulation:

- SMAV, Hedonic, and Utilitarian values are independent predictors of Attitude.
- EDEQ is modeled both as a direct predictor and a moderator of the SMAV → Attitude path.
- Attitude fully mediates the effect on intention, which in turn predicts actual Consumer Response.
- The interaction term (SMAV×EDEQ) tests for conditional moderation.

Beta and p-values in Regression Analysis

This study reports standardized beta coefficients (β) and p-values to interpret the strength and significance of relationships in the model. Beta values indicate the direction and magnitude of the effect between variables — a higher absolute value means a stronger relationship.

The p-value shows how likely it is that the observed relationship occurred by chance. A p-value less than 0.05 is considered strong evidence of a significant relationship. If the p-value is between 0.05 and 0.10, it is interpreted as weak but still present

evidence of a relationship. A p-value greater than 0.10 suggests the relationship is not statistically supported.

These metrics are used to assess the validity of each hypothesized path in the structural model.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Statistical analysis and interpretation

Table 4 presents the reliability and validity results of the measurement constructs used in the Turkey sample. The table includes Cronbach's Alpha values, AVE scores, and factor loadings for each item. All constructs were measured using three to four items on a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 4. Reliability and Validity Measures – Turkey Sample

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	Item Description	Factor Loading
SMAV	0.779	0.481	Advertisements are useful	-0.708
	0.779	0.481	Advertisements are valuable	-0.665
	0.779	0.481	Advertisements are important (information)	-0.706
Attitude	0.839	0.574	Ads help find products matching interests	-0.743
	0.839	0.574	Ads show brands with desired features	-0.763
	0.839	0.574	Ads help learn what products are available	-0.767
Intention	0.925	0.757	I intend to eat healthy foods regularly	-0.869
	0.925	0.757	I expect to eat healthy foods regularly	-0.879
	0.925	0.757	I plan to eat healthy foods regularly	-0.863
Consumer Response	0.822	0.273	I will click on ads	0.489
	0.822	0.273	I will pay attention to ads	0.558
	0.822	0.273	I will search for info about ads	0.57
	0.822	0.273	I will buy a product from ads	0.568
Utilitarian	0.809	0.521	Foods should not increase weight	-0.75
	0.809	0.521	Foods help avoid health issues	-0.653
	0.809	0.521	Foods help control weight	-0.757
Hedonic	0.733	0.475	Foods are fun to eat	-0.622
	0.733	0.475	Foods provide good sensory feelings	-0.697
	0.733	0.475	Foods are enjoyable to eat	-0.743

As shown in the table, all constructs reached acceptable or good reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha values are mostly above 0.80, indicating strong internal

consistency. Factor loadings are also high, suggesting that each item is strongly related to its construct. These results support the validity of the measurement model for the Turkish participants.

Table 5 shows the reliability and validity measures for the USA sample. It includes Cronbach's Alpha, AVE, and factor loadings for each item under the related constructs. The constructs were measured using standard items adapted from previous literature.

Table 5. Reliability and Validity Measures – USA Sample

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	Item Description	Factor Loading
SMAV	0.891	0.676	Advertisements are useful	-0.82
	0.891	0.676	Advertisements are valuable	-0.836
	0.891	0.676	Advertisements are important (information)	-0.81
Attitude	0.91	0.72	Ads help find products matching interests	-0.857
	0.91	0.72	Ads show brands with desired features	-0.847
	0.91	0.72	Ads help learn what products are available	-0.841
Intention	0.899	0.694	I intend to eat healthy foods regularly	-0.834
	0.899	0.694	I expect to eat healthy foods regularly	-0.833
	0.899	0.694	I plan to eat healthy foods regularly	-0.832
Consumer Response	0.761	0.187	I will click on ads	-0.429
	0.761	0.187	I will pay attention to ads	-0.46
	0.761	0.187	I will search for info about ads	-0.411
	0.761	0.187	I will buy a product from ads	-0.449
Utilitarian	0.839	0.571	Foods should not increase weight	-0.784
	0.839	0.571	Foods help avoid health issues	-0.693
	0.839	0.571	Foods help control weight	-0.786
Hedonic	0.809	0.525	Foods are fun to eat	-0.705
	0.809	0.525	Foods provide good sensory feelings	-0.726
	0.809	0.525	Foods are enjoyable to eat	-0.742

The results confirm that the constructs are reliable and valid in the USA sample. Most Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.85, showing excellent internal consistency. All factor loadings are above acceptable levels, which confirms that the

items represent the constructs well. This supports the use of the model for American participants.

Possible explanation for low AVE and factor loadings in consumer response could be construct of the consumer response which includes diverse behavioral items such as sharing, clicking, and purchasing, participants may not have responded positively to all of them. This variation in behavioral engagement could have lowered both the internal consistency and factor loadings.

4.2 Correlation matrix and discriminant validity

Türkiye sample

Table 6 presents the correlations and the square root of AVE values for the Turkish sample. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell, 1981). Each diagonal cell shows the square root of AVE for the related construct, and other cells represent Pearson correlations between constructs. Discriminant validity is supported when the diagonal value is greater than the correlations in the same row and column.

Table 6. Correlation Matrix of Türkiye

	SMAV	Attitude	Intention	Consumer Response	Utilitarian	Hedonic
SMAV	0.69	0.66	0.39	0.49	0.11	0.28
Attitude	0.66	0.76	0.48	0.52	0.03	0.26
Intention	0.39	0.48	0.87	0.32	0.20	0.08
Consumer Response	0.49	0.52	0.32	0.54	0.09	0.16
Utilitarian	0.11	0.03	0.20	0.09	0.72	–0.07
Hedonic	0.28	0.26	0.08	0.16	–0.07	0.69

As seen in the table, most constructs in the Turkish sample demonstrate good discriminant validity. The square root of AVE values is generally higher than the inter-construct correlations, especially for SMAV, Attitude, and Utilitarian Value. This means the constructs are clearly distinct from each other in measurement.

USA Sample

Table 7 shows the correlation coefficients and the square root of AVE values for the USA sample which is developed by Fornell-Lackert test (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Diagonal values reflect the square root of AVE for each construct. Other values show the correlations between different constructs. Each construct's square root of AVE values is greater than its correlations with other constructs, indicating that each construct is properly discriminated.

Table 7. Correlation Matrix of USA

	SMAV	Attitude	Intention	Consumer Response	Utilitarian	Hedonic
SMAV	0.82	0.67	0.15	0.47	0.17	0.22
Attitude	0.67	0.85	0.14	0.41	0.16	0.20
Intention	0.15	0.14	0.83	0.13	0.57	0.19
Consumer Response	0.47	0.41	0.13	0.73	0.09	–0.04
Utilitarian	0.17	0.16	0.57	0.09	0.76	0.26
Hedonic	0.22	0.20	0.19	–0.04	0.26	0.75

In the USA sample, the results also confirm discriminant validity. Each construct's square root of AVE is higher than its correlations with other constructs, indicating that the items represent distinct concepts clearly.

4.3 Healthy food advertisement model – path coefficients

The diagram below illustrates the proposed model for analyzing the effects of social media advertisement value, eating values (utilitarian and hedonic), and disordered

eating on attitude, intention, and consumer response. For each path, standardized regression coefficients (β) and p-values are displayed for both Turkey (β_1 , p_1) and USA (β_2 , p_2).

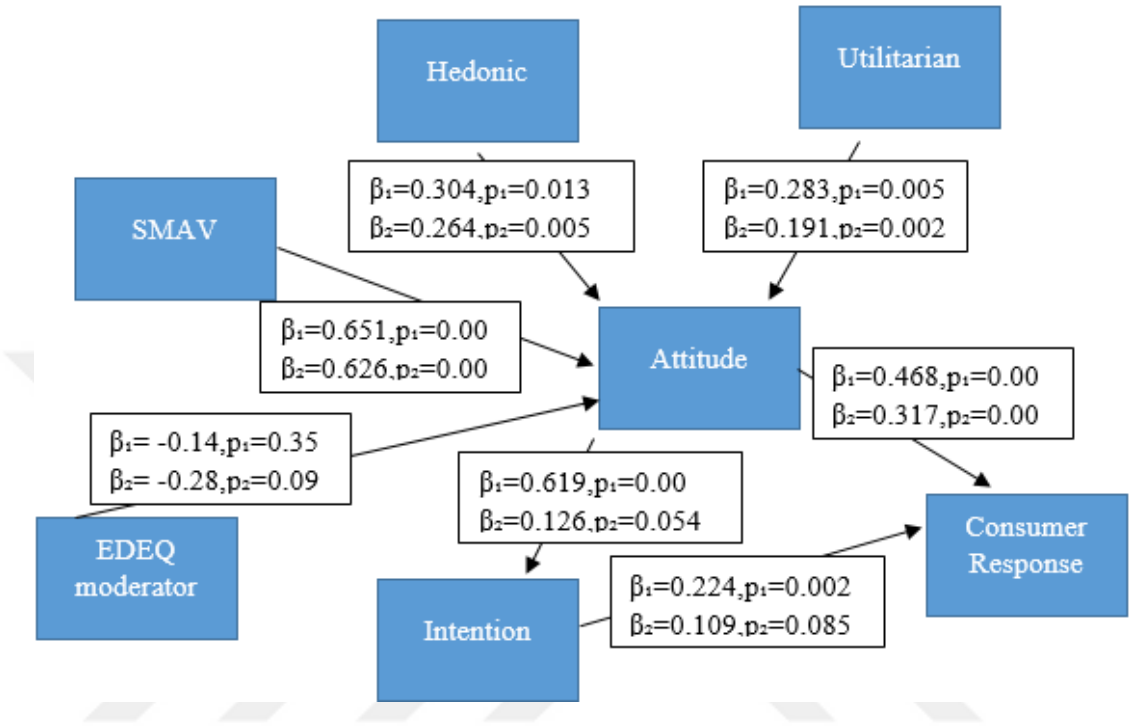

Figure 2. Path coefficients of the model

Results of the model:

- SMAV significantly influences Attitude in both samples (p_1 and p_2 < 0.001).

- Hedonic value significantly predicts Attitude in both samples.

- Utilitarian value has a positive and significant effect on Attitude.

- The interaction effect of SMAV and EDEQ on Attitude was not statistically significant in Türkiye, but weak significant and negative moderation effect observed in the USA.

- In the Turkish sample, attitude significantly predicted both behavioral intention and consumer response. In the US sample, attitude also significantly predicted consumer response, while its effect on intention was marginally significant.

- Intention significantly predicted consumer response in Turkey but weakly significant for the US sample.

Overall, the model supports the role of both emotional and cognitive processes in Türkiye. In the US sample, however, only initial perception-related effects were statistically significant, suggesting cultural variation in the decision-making pathways.

Table 8. Hypothesis Support Table
Hypothesis Summary with Beta and P-values

Hypothesis	Description	Turkey β (p)	Turkey Supported	USA β (p)	USA Supported
H1	SMAV → Attitude	0.651 (p=0.000)	✓✓	0.626 (p=0.000)	✓✓
H2	Attitude → Consumer Response	0.468 (p=0.000)	✓✓	0.317 (p=0.000)	✓✓
H3	Attitude → Intention	0.619 (p=0.000)	✓✓	0.126 (p=0.054)	✓✓
H4	Intention → Consumer Response	0.224 (p=0.002)	✓✓	0.109 (p=0.085)	✓✓
H5	SMAV → Attitude → Consumer Response	via H1 & H2	✓✓	via H1 & H2	✓✓
H6	Attitude → Intention → Consumer Response	via H3 & H4	✓✓	via H3 (p=0.054), H4 (p=0.085)	✓✓
H7	EDEQ moderates SMAV → Attitude	–0.158 (p=0.351)	✗	–0.094 (p=0.086)	✓✓
H8a	Hedonic Value → Attitude	0.304 (p=0.013)	✓✓	0.264 (p=0.005)	✓✓
H8b	Utilitarian Value → Attitude	0.283 (p=0.005)	✓✓	0.191 (p=0.002)	✓✓

The table summarizes the statistical support for each hypothesis tested in this study across Turkish and U.S. samples. A hypothesis is considered strongly supported (✓✓) if the relationship was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and in the predicted direction and weakly supported (✓✓) if it is between 0.1 and 0.05.

H1–H4 represent direct and mediated relationships within the Value–Attitude–Behavior (VAB) framework. H5 and H6 refer to indirect mediation paths, H7 examines moderation by eating disorder risk (EDEQ), and H9 tests conditional serial mediation. H8a and H8b assess the independent effects of hedonic and utilitarian values on attitude.

These results highlight important cultural differences in how social media advertising influences consumer behavior and the potentially varying role of disordered eating symptoms in shaping these responses.

Most hypotheses were supported in the Turkish sample, including both mediation paths (H5, H6) and value-driven influences on attitude (H8a, H8b), except the moderation effect of EDEQ (H7). U.S. sample confirmed the direct influence of SMAV on Attitude (H1) and the link between Attitude and Consumer Response (H2) and offer only weak evidence for the moderation hypothesis (H7). H9 remains to be tested through slope or PROCESS-based analyses.

Table 9. Influence of EDEQ for the countries

EDEQ Level	Turkey β (SMAV → Attitude)	USA β (SMAV → Attitude)
Low (–1 SD)	0.7313	0.9090
Mean	0.6532	0.6141
High (+1 SD)	0.5750	0.3192

The table shows that as EDEQ increases, the influence of Social Media Ad Value (SMAV) on Attitude decreases in both countries. This effect is more pronounced in the USA sample.

H9 proposed that the indirect effect of Social Media Ad Value (SMAV) on consumer response, through attitude and intention, would be moderated by

disordered eating symptoms (EDEQ). While the interaction term between SMAV and EDEQ was not statistically significant in either country ($p_{\square r} = 0.351$, $p_{u\square a} = 0.086$), slope analysis revealed meaningful patterns.

As shown in Table 9, the influence of SMAV on Attitude decreased as EDEQ levels increased in both samples. In the Turkish sample, the slope dropped from 0.73 at low EDEQ to 0.58 at high EDEQ, while the effect in the U.S. sample declined more sharply from 0.91 to 0.32. These findings suggest that individuals with higher eating disorder risk are less responsive to the perceived value of social media advertisements when forming attitudes toward healthy food products.

Although the interaction effect did not reach conventional significance thresholds, the observed trends imply a potential moderating role of EDEQ, especially in the U.S. context, on the early stages of the value–attitude–behavior chain.

4.3.1 Path coefficients by country

Figure 3 below compares standardized beta coefficients for the structural model paths across participants from Turkey and the USA. In addition to the original model paths, it includes the direct effect from Attitude to Consumer Behavior, allowing for analysis of both direct and indirect influence of attitudes on behavioral outcomes.

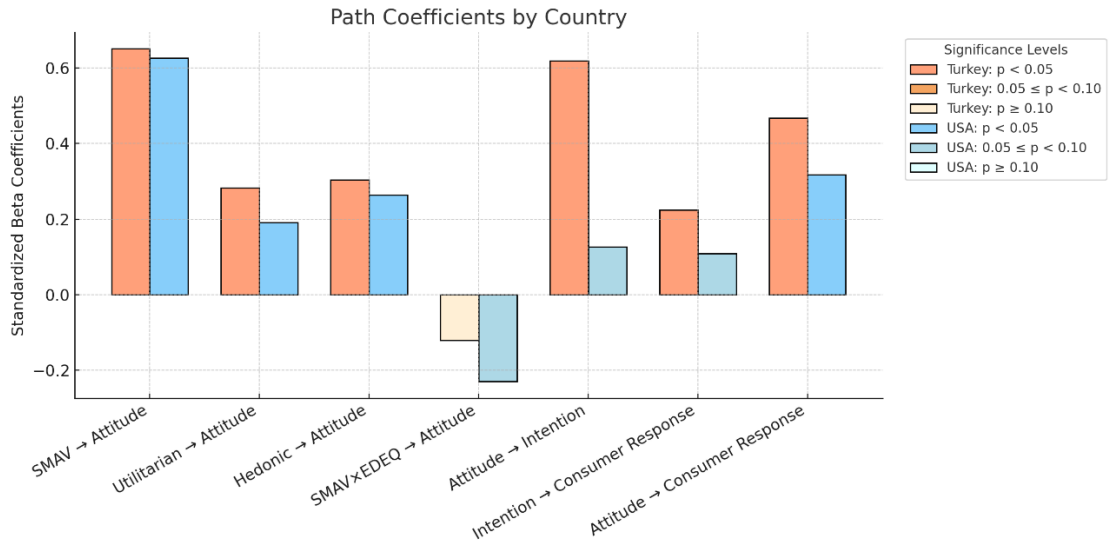

Figure 3. Path coefficients by country

The chart compares the standardized path coefficients for Turkey and the USA, revealing both cross-cultural similarities and divergences in the conceptual model.

- SMAV → Attitude

  This path demonstrates a strong and positive effect in both countries, with nearly identical standardized beta values (~0.65). This suggests that Social Media Ad Value (SMAV) significantly enhances consumers' attitudes toward healthy food advertisements in both cultural contexts.

- Utilitarian → Attitude

  The effect is modest in both samples, with a slightly stronger impact in Turkey. Although statistically significant, utilitarian motivations (e.g., health or functionality) appear to play a secondary role in shaping attitudes compared to other drivers.

- Hedonic → Attitude

  Hedonic value positively influences attitude in both countries, with the effect slightly stronger in Turkey. This indicates that enjoyment and emotional appeal are relevant across cultures, though not dominant factors.

- SMAV × EDEQ → Attitude (Moderation Effect)

  The interaction term shows a negative moderation effect in both samples, more pronounced in the USA. This implies that individuals with higher disordered eating symptoms (EDEQ) respond less positively to perceived ad value, particularly in the U.S. sample.

- Attitude → Intention

  This relationship is considerably stronger in Turkey ($\beta \approx 0.62$) than in the USA ($\beta \approx 0.13$), suggesting that attitudes translate more directly into intentions among Turkish participants. In contrast, the weaker link in the U.S. may reflect cultural or motivational differences.

- Intention → Consumer Response

  The effect is moderate in Turkey and weak in the U.S., implying that intention alone may not be sufficient to predict actual consumer behavior (e.g., clicking, sharing, purchasing) in either setting.

- Attitude → Consumer Response

  The path from Attitude to Consumer Response is statistically significant in both countries, and notably stronger in the Turkish sample. This suggests that attitudes may translate more directly into behavior in Turkey, whereas in the USA, the influence may be more independent from intermediate factors such as behavioral intention.

4.4 Moderation effect of EDEQ – simple slopes analysis

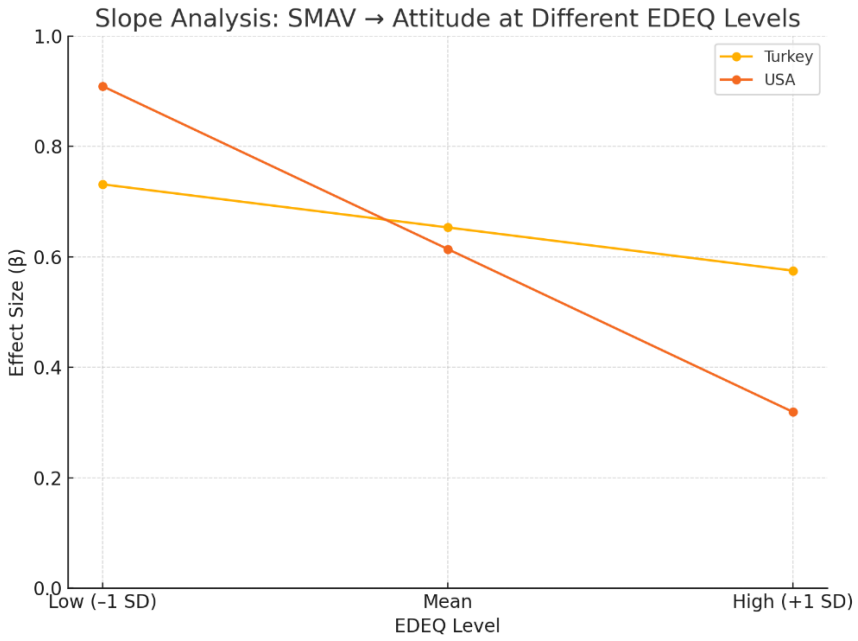

Figure 4. Slopes of SMAV on Attitude by EDEQ

Although the moderating effect of EDEQ on perceived ad value, attitude, and behavior was not statistically significant in Türkiye context and weakly significant in US context, the increase in EDEQ scores appears to negatively influence consumer responses, contrary to initial expectations. This trend is especially more pronounced in the U.S. sample. The finding may reflect a more skeptical attitude or restrictive eating patterns among individuals exhibiting higher disordered eating symptoms.

Direct effect of EDEQ on attitude (general sample)

Country	β (Beta Coefficient)	p-value	Significance
USA	+0.0009	0.968	Not Significant
Turkey	+0.2120	0.313	Not Significant

In the general sample, the direct effect of EDEQ on Attitude was found to be statistically insignificant in both countries.

4.5 Age group 18–25 – Turkey vs USA comparison

This figure compares the average construct scores between Turkey and USA among participants aged 18–25. There is 33 participants from Türkiye and 185 participants from USA for the age group. The comparison includes attitude, intention, consumer response, utilitarian value, hedonic value, and EDEQ score. Because SMAV p values are not meaningful for both countries.

Table 10. Path Coefficients of Young Age (18-25)

Path	β (Turkey)	p (Turkey)	Impact	β (USA)	p (USA)	Impact
SMAV → Attitude	0.271	0.086	✓	0.302	0.018	✓
Utilitarian → Attitude	0.383	0.000	✓	0.125	0.197	✗
Hedonic → Attitude	0.226	0.045	✓	0.312	0.006	✓
Attitude → Intention	0.578	0.000	✓	0.131	0.080	✓
Attitude → Consumer Response	0.427	0.002	✓	0.215	0.014	✓
Intention → Consumer Response	0.157	0.078	✓	0.223	0.001	✓
SMAV x EDEQ → Attitude	-0.0619	0.840	✗	-0.0934	0.091	✓

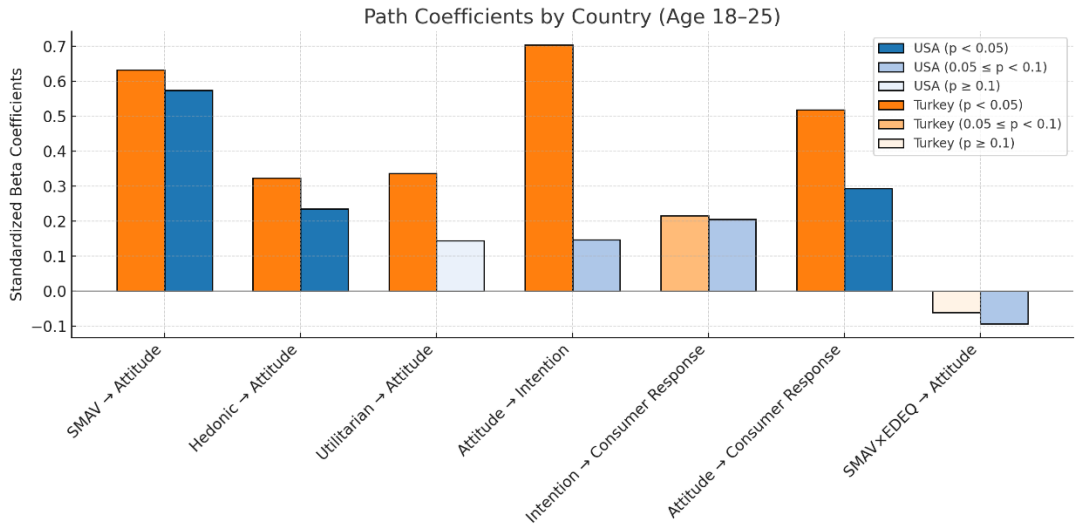

Figure 5. 18-25 Age group construct comparison

The comparison reveals that U.S. participants in the 18–25 age group scored higher across most constructs, including SMAV, attitude, intention, consumer response, and utilitarian value, indicating greater engagement with health-related food advertising and stronger behavioral responses. Turkish participants reported slightly higher hedonic scores, suggesting a more emotion-driven or enjoyment-based relationship with food. Notably, EDEQ scores were substantially higher in the U.S. sample and slightly effective, pointing to a risk of disordered eating among American youth compared to their Turkish counterparts. Intention is meaningful for USA but weak for Türkiye, still not very effective on the consumer response. The biggest difference is, effect of attitude on intention for Türkiye which is strongly higher than USA. Turkish youth is shaping their intentions by the attitude about healthy foods.

4.5.1 Social media behavior – young participants (Turkey vs USA)

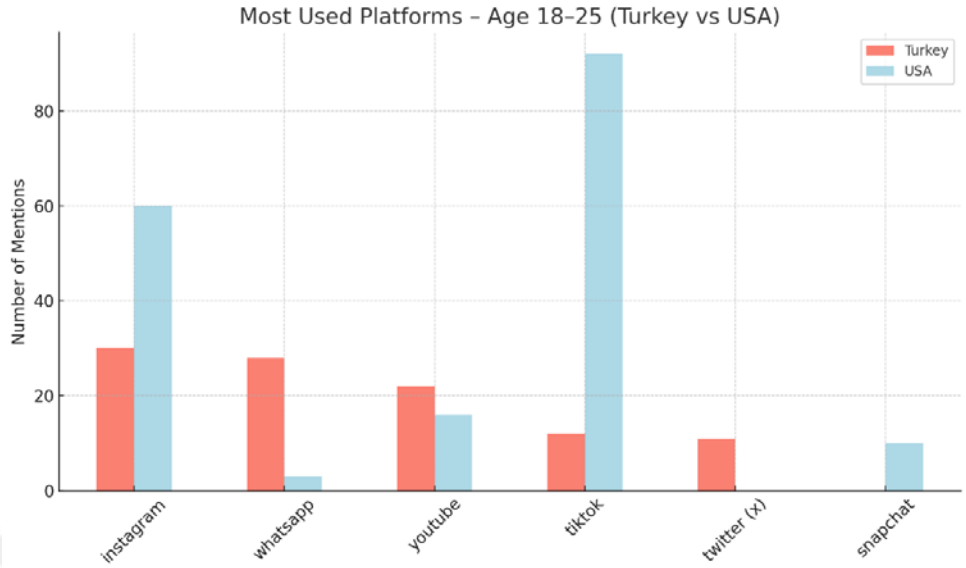

Figure 6. 18-25 Age group top platform used comparison

Figure 6 shows the number of young participants aged 18–25 who reported using each platform. Instagram is the most used platform in both countries. TikTok and Instagram are more popular among USA participants, while WhatsApp appears more frequently in Turkey.

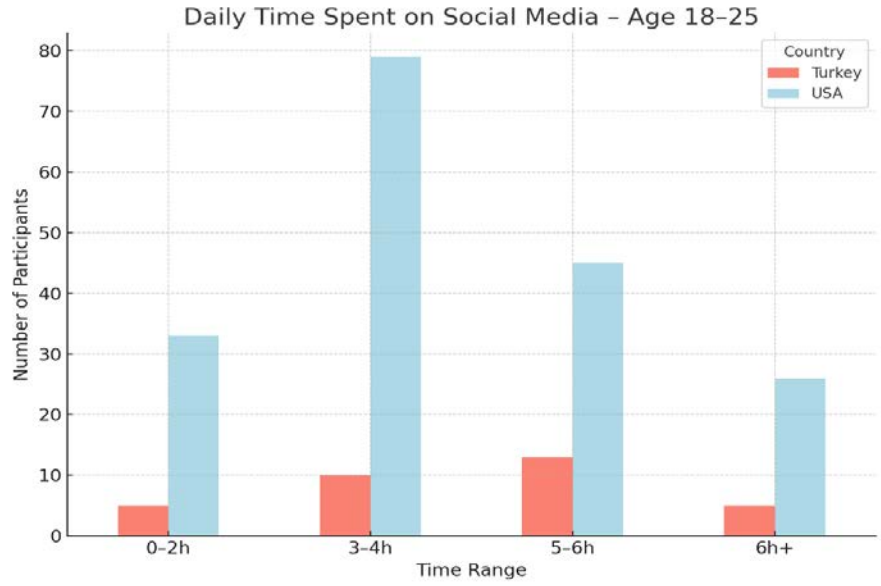

Figure 7. 18-25 Age group daily social media time

Figure 7 compares how much time young participants spend on social media daily. USA participants tend to spend more time overall, with higher numbers in the '3–4 hours' and '4+ hours' categories. In contrast, most Turkish participants spend between 1 and 3 hours per day.

4.5.2 Comparing young female participants

This comparison focuses specifically on female participants aged 18 to 25 in both Turkey and the USA. The main reason for selecting this subgroup is that in both datasets, female participants make up the majority of respondents. Additionally, age data in the USA sample is mostly limited to a narrow university-age range, making it more meaningful to focus on young adults.

More importantly, existing literature in the fields of body image and eating behavior has consistently shown that young women are more vulnerable to ideal body standards and are more likely to experience disordered eating patterns. As a result, analyzing how young women from different cultural backgrounds respond to social media advertising of healthy food can offer deeper insights into both marketing effectiveness and public health concerns.

Figure 8 compares standardized path coefficients from young female participants aged 18–25 in Turkey and the USA. The model includes the influence of social media ad value (SMAV), utilitarian and hedonic values, and eating disorder risk (EDEQ) on attitude, and then how attitude affects intention, and intention influences consumer response.

Table 11. Path Coefficients of Young Women Age (18-25)

Path	β (Turkey)	p (Turkey)	Impact	β (USA)	p (USA)	Impact
SMAV → Attitude	1.0856	0.0213	✓	0.8612	0.00	✓
Utilitarian → Attitude	-0.0628	0.6697	✗	-0.0711	0.3091	✗
Hedonic → Attitude	0.7543	0.0596	✓	0.1511	0.1118	✗
Attitude → Intention	0.5300	0.0266	✓	0.0725	0.4418	✗
Attitude → Consumer Response	0.5003	0.0013	✓	0.3886	0.000	✓
Intention → Consumer Response	0.0224	0.8430	✗	0.1166	0.1162	✗
SMAV x EDEQ → Attitude	0.0238	0.9605	✗	–0.2155	0.0022	✓

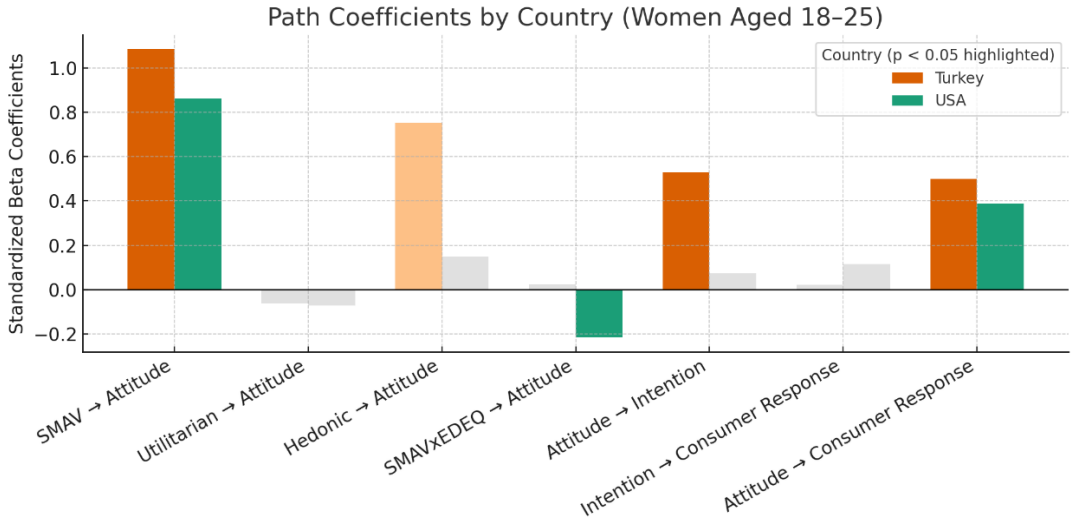

Figure 8. 18-25 Age group female participants' path coefficients comparison

Figure 8 shows that SMAV strongly predicts attitude in both countries, with similar effect sizes. This suggests that young women in both Turkey and the USA perceive healthy food advertisements on social media as valuable and engaging.
Hedonic value plays a more notable role in shaping attitude among Turkish women, indicating a more emotionally driven connection with food-related messages. Utilitarian value has no influence in both groups.

The moderation effect of SMAV×EDEQ is not meaningful for Türkiye, but a slightly negative effect can be seen on behavior among American women. This suggests that American women with higher eating disorder symptoms may be even more skeptical toward the persuasive value of social media ads—possibly due to emotional restraint or psychological distancing.

Attitude strongly predicts intention in Turkey, whereas this link is not meaningful in the U.S. sample. Additionaly, intention is not effective for both samples.

These findings suggest that American women respond more strongly at the perception and evaluation stage, forming clearer attitudes, while Turkish women are more likely to act on their intentions and with emotions when it comes to healthy food choices promoted through social media.

CHAPTER 5

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the increasing impact of healthy food marketing on consumer behavior, especially among vulnerable groups such as individuals with disordered eating symptoms. Based on the findings and cross-cultural comparisons, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

i. Standardized Front-of-Pack Labeling (FoPL)

Consumers should be able to access clear and standardized nutritional information at a glance. Systems such as traffic light labels or letter-based scoring (e.g., Nutri-Score), already used in several EU countries, could be expanded and made mandatory. This would reduce the cognitive load of reading complex ingredient lists and improve transparency across products.

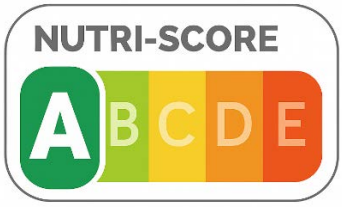

Figure 9. Front of pack labeling system nutri-score

ii. Mandatory disclosure of influencer advertising

Influencer content promoting health or food-related products should be clearly labeled as “advertisement” or “sponsored content.” Current self-regulatory practices are insufficient. Regulatory frameworks should obligate both platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) and brands to ensure that advertising intent is visible, standardized, and easily understood by consumers.

iii. Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms

National and EU-level institutions should develop digital tools to automatically monitor influencer activity and detect unlabeled or misleading promotions, particularly those targeting minors or vulnerable users. These tools could support compliance with consumer protection directives like the UCPD and Digital Services Act (DSA).

iv. Psychological sensitivity in health messaging

Regulations should consider the psychological impact of wellness advertising, especially among users with eating disorders. Campaigns should avoid triggering imagery, unrealistic body ideals, or emotionally manipulative language, and promote healthy behaviors through evidence-based, inclusive messaging.

v. Education and media literacy initiatives

Governments and educational institutions should invest in programs that improve digital media literacy, especially for adolescents and young adults. Consumers must learn to distinguish between commercial content, opinion, and fact, particularly in health-related fields.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how social media advertisement value (SMAV), hedonic and utilitarian eating values, and disordered eating symptoms (measured via EDEQ) affect consumer attitudes, intentions, and behaviors toward healthy food products. Based on comparative survey data from Turkey and the United States, the findings offer key insights for both theory and practice.

First, SMAV emerged as the strongest predictor of consumer attitude in both countries. Participants who found healthy food ads valuable, informative, and credible developed significantly more favorable attitudes. This reinforces the importance of content quality in shaping perceptions, especially in digital environments.

Second, hedonic and utilitarian values had limited influence on attitudes. While hedonic value showed a slightly stronger effect among Turkish participants, these internal food-related values were generally secondary to perceived ad value. This suggests that the format and credibility of social media advertising may be more impactful than personal food preferences in determining ad effectiveness.

Third, the EDEQ score moderated the SMAV → Attitude relationship. Higher EDEQ levels weakened the positive impact of SMAV, particularly in the U.S. sample. This indicates that individuals at greater risk of disordered eating may psychologically distance themselves from even health-oriented advertisements. Simple slopes analysis confirmed this pattern, revealing a declining SMAV effect as EDEQ scores increased.

Furthermore, attitude influenced consumer behavior both directly and indirectly. It significantly predicted intention, and also had a direct effect on

consumer response—such as clicking on or purchasing advertised products. This dual influence highlights that consumers may act upon positive perceptions even without strong conscious planning.

Notably, subgroup analysis revealed that young American women (ages 18–25) scored higher across all constructs, including SMAV, attitude, intention, and consumer response. This suggests a heightened responsiveness to health-related digital ads among this demographic, possibly due to greater exposure to body image messaging or health-related norms.

Although the initial hypothesis proposed that higher EDEQ scores would increase susceptibility to healthy food ads, the findings contradicted this expectation. Instead, individuals with disordered eating symptoms appeared less responsive. This could reflect emotional detachment, cognitive restraint, or even defensive avoidance toward food-related media stimuli.

An alternative explanation may lie in the ad format studied. This research focused on perceived ad value (informativeness, credibility), not on socially engaging features like influencer presence or peer interaction. Such cues may have stronger effects among individuals with elevated EDEQ scores. Future studies should explore how emotional or community-driven content interacts with psychological vulnerability.

In sum, this study highlights that consumer responses to healthy food advertising are shaped not only by ad content but also by individual psychological factors. While social media ads can foster positive attitudes and behaviors, their effectiveness may be reduced among those with disordered eating symptoms. These findings call for more psychologically sensitive, inclusive, and evidence-based approaches to food marketing, particularly when targeting vulnerable groups.

This study provides valuable insights, but it also has several limitations that should be considered. In this study, most of the responses from the United States were collected from students at the University of Oklahoma. In contrast, the Turkish sample included not only students from Boğaziçi University but also individuals of various ages, income levels, and cities. This discrepancy limits the ability to make clear cultural comparisons or interpret general behavioral tendencies.

Future studies should aim to collect data from more comparable groups (e.g., university students in both countries) to ensure more meaningful cross-cultural analysis. The study can be repeated with a larger and more diverse sample**,** including people from different age groups and backgrounds. It may also help to use credible sources, like experts, micro-influencers, or real user comments**,** to better understand how people respond to healthy food ads. Using interviews or open-ended questions could also help explain why some people avoid or ignore health messages, especially those with eating concerns. Since social media is always changing and becoming more interactive, future models should include emotional and social factors**,** not just how useful or informative the ad is.

Moreover**,** some participants may have misunderstood the meaning of "social media advertisement." They might have thought of traditional brand ads instead of influencer content or user-generated posts. This could especially affect participants with higher EDEQ scores, who may already feel negative toward commercial advertising in general. The questionnaire did not include some important factors like credibility**,** trust**,** or similarity to the influencer**,** which are known to affect how people respond to social media content. Since influencer posts are not always seen as regular ads, future research should separate these types of content more clearly. In addition, even though most participants found the ads informative or useful, the

actual behavior (such as clicking or purchasing) was lower than expected in some groups. This might be explained by a lack of trust in the ad source, rather than low interest. Future studies could look at how trust, comment sections, or likes and shares affect engagement.

Lastly**,** EDEQ scores were based on self-reported answers. Because the questions were personal and emotional, some participants may have answered less honestly or misunderstood them. This could affect the accuracy of the results, especially when analyzing how EDEQ influences behavior.

APPENDIX

ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

T.C.
BOĞAZİÇİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ
Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (Sbinarek)

Sayı : E-84391427-050.04-202217 14.10.2024
Konu : 2024-50T Kayıt Numaralı Başvurunuz Hakkında

Sayın Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Mehtap IŞIK

Tez danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz öğrenciniz Fatma Avcı'nın "Impact of Social Media Advertisements on Eating Disorders" başlıklı projesi ile Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (SBİNAREK)'e yaptığınız 2024-50T kayıt numaralı başvuru 18.09.2024 tarih ve 2024/07 sayılı kurul toplantısında incelenmiş ve projeye etik onay verilmesi uygun bulunmuştur.

Bu karar tüm üyelerin toplantıya on-line olarak katılımıyla ve oybirliği ile alınmıştır. Onay mektubu tüm üyeler adına Komisyon Başkanı tarafından e-imzalanmıştır. Bilgilerinizi rica ederiz.

Saygılarımızla,

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Işıl ERDUYAN
Kurul Başkanı

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