

Views Regarding Dietary Supplements in Turkey and a Research to Profile the Consumers

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Extensive Summary

Introduction

The dietary supplements' consumption is increasing in many markets including the Turkish market. Turkish dietary supplements market size is which is aprox. 150-200 million USD (dunya.com., istanbuleczaciiodasi.org., www.zaman.com.tr) and it is expected to be 205 million Euro by 2020 (www.nutraingredients.com).

Local and multinational companies develop and introduce many new products for Turkish dietary supplements market. However, in marketing literature few academic research could be found regarding Turkish consumers' behavior about dietary supplements. In this respect, understanding the demographic profiles of the consumers, usage reasons and recognition of these products are important for companies and health sector to define their strategies accordingly.

Dietary supplements are the tablets, capsules or liquids that contain one or more ingredients like (vitamin, mineral, herbal product, amino asit, fatty acids) in order to support nutrition (Kılınç, 2008). They are pills, coated tablets or drops with a health-enhancing function (De Jong et. al, 2003). Much international research indicates that multivitamins and minerals are the most commonly taken supplements (Chen et.al, 2011). Many supplements (vitamin D, calcium, and fish oil) have strong supporting evidence. Multivitamins can be especially valuable for various groups of people, such as many elderly persons and many women during their reproductive years in order to achieve an adequate intake of iron and folic acid. Exotic fruit juices, herbs and cocktails are other supplement types. The marketing of supplements is accompanied by claims for a wide variety of actions in the body and of health benefits (antioxidants, detoxification, immune boosters, weight-loss products) (Temple, 2010).

On the other hand most of the marketing of supplements are concentrated on those where the supporting evidence is far weaker but the profit potential far stronger. Another potential problem is that supplements may cause a person to delay taking appropriate action to deal with a treatable condition. Casual approaches may cause weak treatments, causing the delay of some illnesses' diagnosis, hiding some symptoms and undesirable drug interactions (Erden and Tanyeri, 2004; Temple, 2010). For the

vitamins and minerals the minimum daily needed amounts are not exactly determined. The resistance of individuals to the lack of these substances varies. If the products that are sold without prescriptions and control are taken overdose, they are dangerous for the health (Erden and Tanyeri, 2004).

The factors effecting the interest in dietary supplementers are (Kılınç, 2008) (i) increase in the scientific implications about illnesses and their reasons (ii) increase in the research about the chemical contents and biological effects of the natural products (iii) desire of individuals to increase their Quality of Life (iv) increase in welfare (v) increase in the observed side effects of chemical drugs.

A research held in UK with 303 respondents shows that the supplement users believed that taking these supplements would stop them from getting ill and help them to be healthy. They also believe that taking dietary supplements would be the best thing they can do for themselves. Interestingly only 1% of the sample were given supplements on prescription from their doctors (Conner et. al, 2001).

Research held in Australia by O’dea, 2003 (focus group interviews with 78 adolescents aged 11-18 years) shows that no participants discussed the potential of supplements to prevent lifestyle diseases such as coronary heart disease or cancer, but they focused on more short-term benefits such as prevention of colds, flu and cold sores. None of the participants discussed any negative or potentially dangerous effects of nutritional supplementation. Research of dietary supplement consumption practices among the Taiwanese population over the age of 65 (456 men and 458 women) showed that (Chen et. al, 2011) the elderly with higher education levels were more likely to take two kinds of supplements. The top five supplements consumed from highest to lowest were: glucosamine, multivitamins and minerals, calcium, fish oil and vitamin B complex. The major reason for supplements use for men was to supplement an unbalanced diet, and that for women was to prevent joint degeneration. The result of a large American study found that (Ervin et. al, 1999) nutritional supplementation was more likely to occur among females, children aged 1-5 years, those with a higher income, higher educational status and greater self-reported health status. Individuals who already have a healthy lifestyle are more likely to buy dietary supplements (De Jong et. al, 2003). They see supplement taking as an “insurance” against possible illnesses (Conner et. al, 2001). Individuals might actually use functional foods and/or dietary supplements as a means to compensate for an unhealthy lifestyle (De Jong et. al, 2003). From earlier studies that investigated dietary supplement use it was concluded that supplement users are more likely to be female, better educated, affluent, non-smokers, light drinkers, and tend to have an adequate nutritional intake (De Jong et. al, 2003; Chen et. al, 2011). People living in metropolitan areas have higher rates of supplement use than those living in non-metropolitan areas (Chen et. al, 2011).

Methodology

Less is known about dietary supplement users’ demographics, dietary supplements’ recognition and consumption in Turkey. This is an exploratory research conducted with convenience sampling. The study involved 673 Turkish consumers from Istanbul. Data were obtained from self-administered questionnaires. The study examines the characteristics of the respondents regarding demographics, reasons for using dietary supplements, dietary supplements recognition and consumption rates. The research questions are as follows:

Q1: How is the dietary supplement products' recognition and consumption level in Turkey?

Q2: What are the reasons for consumption of dietary supplements?

Q3: What are the demographic profiles of the users and non-users in terms of each dietary supplement type?

The dietary supplements included in the questionnaire were the most popular ones in Turkey at that time (literature, drugstore data, expert opinion). To measure the familiarity and consumption frequency of respondents following items were measured using a 5-point scale . 1= I do not recognize this product, 2= I recognize this product, but I have not tried it, 3= I have tried this product, but I do not use it, 4= I use this product occasionally, 5= I use this product frequently. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were measured by a nominal scale. Chi-square and frequency statistics are measured by SPSS.

Findings and Conclusion

Descriptive statistics show that 65,8% of the respondents were female, 58,3% were single. 36,9% were between 18-25, 17,1% were between 26-35 and 30,2% were between 36-49 ages. 39,1% had undergraduate degree and 16,7% had graduate degree. 47,6% of the respondents had monthly income of 4000 TL and above. 39,8% of the respondents are working more than 10 years. It is found that top three reasons to consume dietary supplements are immunization, prevention of exhaustion and increasing physical and mental performance. The usage frequency of vitamins C, B, D and calcium are the highest among all. Glucosamine recognition and usage frequency was found very low in the sample. This research is believed to provide valuable information for further causal research that will be conducted in healthy lifestyle products market. The implications show that the recognition of dietary supplements is very high in the sample (Table 1). Glucosamine recognition is the lowest. It is usually used by people with arthritist and perceived as a kind of medicine. Vitamin B, C and D usage frequency is higher than other supplements.

Table 1. Descriptions of the products and share (%) of respondents who recognized / used dietary supplements

	<i>Product description</i>	<i>Not recognized^a</i>	<i>At least recognized^b</i>	<i>Users^c</i>
		% of respondents	% of respondents	% of respondents
F1	Multivitamin	12,4	59,3	28,4
F2	Glucosamine	53,6	39,3	7,2
F3	Calcium	2,6	54,4	43,1
F4	Vitamin B	1,5	48,2	50,3
F5	Vitamin C	1,2	35,3	63,5
F6	Vitamin D	2,1	55,2	42,6
F7	Vitamin E	2,9	59,1	38
F8	Fish oil	3,2	65,3	31,5
F9	Herbal essences	9,9	61,8	28,3

^a "I do not recognize this product",
^b "I recognize this product, but I have not tried it", and "I have tried this product, but I do not use it"
^c "I use this product occasionally" and "I use this product frequently"

As most of the customers are using dietary supplements for immunization, preventing exhaustion and physical performance, more dietary supplements could be developed to meet this need. Dietary supplements to increase mental performance could be promoted to consumers who need more mental power i.e. students, academicians, white collar workers etc. As single people are using more Vitamin E, this dietary supplement can be promoted more intensively to this target group. Vitamin D consumption is high in highly educated people. The most recognized brands among the respondents were Solgar (16,9 %) and GNC (9,2%). This shows that Turkish brands need to do more effective marketing in the market. Turkey has a wide range of flora. If the use of herbal substances can be supported with scientific results, valuable Turkish dietary supplement brands can be built and this can both contribute to country's economy and health status of the public. Lastly, due to high amount of health information shared via word of mouth, TV programs and health articles in the newspapers, a huge proportion of the citizens are interested in both functional and dietary supplement products in Turkey. However, wrong and overdose consumption is a big danger. So, the related government authorities' legislations for the production and import of these products play vital role for public health. For further studies, it is recommended to segment dietary supplements users according to lifestyle and motivations. Qualitative research with doctors, pharmacists and consumers to find out more about dietary supplement consumption in Turkey is recommended. The motives for using dietary supplements and which dietary supplement to use (professional advice versus word of mouth) can be researched. Research on non-users to find out the reason for not using (feeling no need, high price, dissatisfaction etc.) can be researched.