

Beyond Ritual: Exploring Organic Markets in Turkey

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Abstract

Organic markets have quickly gained popularity and are now a promising subject of study for communication studies. As often repeated actions and behaviors are involved, consumers are engaging in conversation with vendors and other shoppers, and carefully selecting items to purchase. Moreover, these actions can take on symbolic significance as they represent a commitment to healthy, sustainable living and a connection to nature and the environment. This study aims to bring on factual and interpretative answers to the above questions by discussing whether visiting organic marketplaces has a ritualistic aspect. The French anthropologist Marc Augé's definition of ritual is taken as a reference point for our discussion. To explore whether Augé's definition of ritual applies to the organic markets in Turkey, our research methodology is based on in-depth interviews and participant observations with the consumers and vendors of the Feriköy organic market.

1. Introduction

Organic agricultural products, including the applied technology and input, represent the production process. Organic farming requires the replacement of synthetic insecticides with the materials such as minerals and botanical and bacterial base insecticides that are approved by certification authorities. It applies soil management as well as cropping techniques to prevent problems caused by insects with no access to synthetic chemical additives (Le-tourneau and Bothwell, 2008). In general, consumers understand that the process applied in producing organic products is environmentally friendly and believe that the product has its own unique characteristics and reliable properties (Vindigni et al., 2002).

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The consumption of organic food in Turkey or the Turkish organic movement got its start by opposing GMOs and the current food distribution system in favor of local, healthy agriculture (genetically modified organisms). Consuming organic food and products is now portrayed in Turkish media as a new way of life that respects the environment and is concerned for one's future. The Feriköy Organic Market in Istanbul is described as the movement's epicenter in news articles on the growing number of organic marketplaces.

Organic markets have quickly gained popularity and are now a promising subject of study for communication studies. Why do people continue to visit there? How significant is the intake of organic foods for people's everyday diets? Can the market be seen as a public sphere?

This study aims to bring on factual and interpretative answers to the above questions by discussing whether visiting organic marketplaces has a ritualistic aspect. As often repeated actions and behaviors are involved, consumers are engaging in conversation with vendors and other shoppers, and carefully selecting items to purchase, it could be easier to see visiting these markets as a ritualistic attitude. Moreover, these actions can take on symbolic significance as they represent a commitment to healthy, sustainable living and a connection to nature and the environment. It involves repeated actions and behaviors that hold symbolic significance, a sense of community through shared experience, and a sense of intention and mindfulness.

In *An Anthropology for contemporaneous worlds* (1999), Augé defines ritual as the mutual recognition of a symbolic mediator through the form it attributes to a social field in a given time and place. He points out five characteristics that would render an activity a ritual:

The first one is the separation from daily life by spatial and temporal breakings. Secondly, repetition of gestures and words as if following a known code (word references, common language). Thirdly, the distinction between the roles of the participants. Fourth, there should be a common symbol and finally, he mentions the elimination of external social hierarchies. This essay aims to explore if shopping in Feriköy Organic Market could be considered a ritual according to Augé's definition.

1. Methodology

To explore whether these five characteristics of Augé's definition of ritual apply to the organic markets in Turkey, our research methodology is based on in-depth interviews and participant observations with the consumers and vendors of the Feriköy organic market. The interviews took place from

10.30 am to 1 pm over the course of two Sundays. Following Augé's idea of the ritualization of the truffle market, the interviews are examined. The purpose of the questionnaire created by Augé's beliefs is to ascertain whether the customers of Feriköy Market engage in the ritual's five components. To determine whether there are any external social hierarchies among the clientele/vendors and whether their typology has an impact on their relationship to the market, the questionnaire—which is created for both the clientele and the vendors—includes information on the interviewee's age, gender, professional occupation, and neighborhood. We called the market regulars the usual, or the usual clients, and the sporadic visitors the seldom arrivals. The distinction is made based on how frequently they visit the market: The regulars are those who declare they have been visiting the market for more than two years, attending every week.

In this essay, we will first introduce the Feriköy organic market and conduct a literature analysis on the different types of consumers of organic products. We'll then talk about Marc Augé's theory of restricted ritual apparatus using Michele de la Pradelle truffle market as an example.

2. Feriköy Organic Market

In 2006, the Buğday Association, an environmental group, launched the Feriköy Organic Market project. The Buğday Association, often known as the Buğday Movement, was established in Bodrum at the start of the 1990s as a restaurant and an eco-cultural center. Under the name “Buğday Association for Promoting Ecological Living”, it was formally established in 2002. They maintained a restaurant and an education center that, for eight years, served as a gathering place for ecologists both domestically and globally until 2006, when Istanbul's first 100% ecological market opened. They also held seminars on healthy eating and began to produce the bimonthly journal “Buğday Ecological Living.”

The first of its kind in Turkey, the 100% Ecological Public Market opened in Feriköy/Şişli in 2006. In Şişli, there were initially 48 stalls. With the initial success of this first organic market, the number of stalls increased to a total of 250 within four years, extending to other cities including Antalya, Burhaniye, Konya, and Samsun as well as to other neighborhoods like Bakırköy, Beylikdüzü, and Kartal. The biggest organic market in Turkey continues to be Feriköy, which is open every Saturday from 7 am to 5 pm. In addition to cleaning goods, toiletries, and cosmetics like shampoo and soap, it also sells 600 tons of organic fruits and vegetables annually. (bugday.org)

3. Literature Review on the Consumption of Organic Products: Who, Why and When?

The level of Modern health worries (MHWs) are the worries individuals have about their health (Petrie et al., 2005) in modern times as a consequence of such factors as food additives, pollution, and chemical contaminations to food, etc. (Petrie et al., 2001) have an impact on the occurrence of health-related symptoms (Filipkowski et al., 2010). MHWs direct consumers' choices toward organic products (Devcich et al., 2007). Wildman (2007) stated that people who aim to avoid diseases tend to prefer more natural products. Consumers have been trying to adapt themselves to modern city life and, on the other hand, have intentions to consume more reliable and safer products like organics (Dolekoglu et al., 2015).

It is also stated in the publications that the consumption of organic products is closely related to health consciousness, and environmental awareness (Shin and Mattila, 2019; Parashar, Singh, and Sood, 2023; Suryavanshi, Bhatt and Singh, 2023, Kirmani et al., 2022.) and lifestyle which is a crucial factor that affects beliefs, attitudes, and organic purchase intention (Chen, 2009; Chen and Lobo, 2012). Nafees et al.'s study (2022) asserts that consumers who use organic products for health reasons have a greater affinity for them, but consumers who use them for environmental reasons are less sensitive to price and are more inclined to actually buy them. In addition, research shows the health benefits of consuming organic food during pregnancy (Liu et al., 2022).

Some of the publications emphasize that females are more inclined to consume organic products compared to males (Magnusson et al., 2001; Magnusson et al., 2003; Doorn and Verhoef, 2011; Yang et al., 2016), on the other hand, some studies find that there is no difference between the consumption attitudes of the two genders (Bellows, Alcaraz, and Hallman, 2010; Bryła, 2015). In Bryła's 2015 study consumers in the 25-34 and 55-65 age groups were stated as the frequent organic buyers. Some studies show that as the income level increases, the frequency of organic purchases increases (Gracia and Magistris, 2007).

Organically produced foods were bought mostly by "adventurous", then by "rational" consumers. Inattentive consumers were less likely to buy organic food, while careless and conservative consumers were not at all enthusiastic about organic purchases (Nie and Zepeda, 2011).

Children in households had an impact on paying for more price premiums for organic food than conventional counterparts and attitudes

towards organically produced foods (Davies et al., 1995; Thompson and Kidwell, 1998; Hill and Lynchehaun, 2002; Durham, 2007; Akin et al.'s 2010; Çelik, 2013; Eryilmaz et al., 2015; McFadden and Huffman, 2017).

It is stated in the literature that the main reasons for organic food intake are altruistic (promoting the local economy, concerns for animal welfare, and the environment), egoistic (food safety, health-related considerations, etc.), and hedonistic (such as taste and quality) motives (Vega-Zamora et al., 2013a). The main motives related to organic consumption are nutritional value (Gracia and Magistris, 2007; Hughner et al., 2007; Çelik, 2013), health related considerations (Magnusson et al., 2003; Gracia and Magistris, 2007; Hughner et al., 2007; Chen, 2009; Pearson et al., 2011; Roitner-Schobesberger et al., 2010:195; Stolz et al., 2011; Ozguven, 2012; Çelik, 2013; Long and Murray, 2013; Cene and Karaman, 2015; Bryła, 2016), quality (Bryła, 2016), taste (Gracia and Magistris, 2007; Hughner et al., 2007; Bryła, 2015), ecologically-friendly characteristics (Gracia and Magistris, 2007; Hughner et al., 2007; Roitner-Schobesberger et al., 2010:195; Pearson et al., 2011; Stolz et al., 2011; Çelik, 2013; Long and Murray, 2013; Bellon and Penvern, 2014b:349; Bryła, 2016), appearance (Gracia and Magistris, 2007), food safety (Hughner et al., 2007; Aygen, 2012; Teng and Lu, 2016), distrust of the conventional food industry (Hughner et al., 2007), support of local economy (Hughner et al., 2007), fashionable (Hughner et al., 2007; Pearson et al., 2011), local production (Gracia and Magistris, 2007).

Durham and Andrade (2005) revealed that the perceived nutritional quality was an influential factor in choosing organically produced foods, especially fruits. Consumers perceive organically produced food as healthier than its conventional counterparts (Magnusson et al., 2001; Hughner et al., 2007; Aldanondo-Ochoa and Almansa-Sáez 2009; Pearson et al., 2011; Zagata, 2012; Vega-Zamora et al., 2013a; Sivathanu, 2015; Annunziata and Vecchio, 2016; El de Marchi et al., 2016). Organic food buyers are more sensitive to the risk of pesticide residues in their food and the potential effects of pesticides on their health than average consumers, who are not inclined to buy organically produced foods (Kuchler et al., 2000). Another reason for buying organics is that organic foods are generally perceived as high-quality products (Özguven, 2012; Kahl et al., 2012).

The quality characteristics specified for food products mentioned in the literature are food safety profile (e.g. Pesticide residues) and nutritional density (e.g. vitamins, fiber) (Caswell and Mojduzka, 1996; Caswell, 1998; Nijmeijer et al., 2004) that has also been mentioned as the quality aspect of

organic foods (Essoussi and Zahaf, 2012), taste (Hjelmar, 2011; Mascarello et al., 2015) which is a quality aspect of organic food (Ankomah and Yiridoe, 2006; Fang and Lee, 2009; Essoussi and Zahaf, 2012), naturalness (Nijmeijer et al., 2004), value (e.g., taste, appearance) (Caswell, 1998; Fang and Lee, 2009), packaging qualities (e.g., taste, appearance), labeling and process-related qualities (animal welfare, environmental effects) (Caswell and Mojduszka, 1996; Caswell, 1998), price - quality relationship (Fang and Lee, 2009), and health (Nijmeijer et al., 2004; Fang and Lee, 2009).

It has been reported that organically produced products are perceived as high-quality products in various studies (Bryła, 2015; Ergönül and Ergönül, 2015; Loebnitz and Aschemann-Witzel, 2016; Bryła, 2016; Huang et al., 2017) and the quality is a critical indicator that determines the genuineness of organic products (Bryła, 2015). Safety characteristics of food include all attributes, signals, and effects on health that influence consumers' perceptions (Roosen, 2003). Ustaahmetoglu and Toklu (2015) and Ergönül and Ergönül (2015) state that perceived safety characteristics of organics have an impact on purchase intention and behavior (Bruschi et al., 2015). Pesticide-related safety concerns have been stated as an impact on willingness to pay a price premium (Boccaletti and Nardella, 2000).

There is also a risk that new allergens will be introduced into the food system through GMO foods (Wiley, 2015). In Zagata' (2012) study, where the behavior and decisions of Czech organic consumers were investigated, results were obtained showing that the process-based qualities of organically produced products, such as the non-use of GMOs, are perceived as an important feature of organic products. Consumers' attitudes towards GM foods and their purchasing intentions are influenced by negative perceptions about gene technology and its possible effects on ecological and environmental issues (Kim, 2014). Lu et al. (2016) stated that GMO content causes a horn effect and negatively affects sensory and quality-related evaluations of wine products. The results of another study showed that the perceived psychological benefits of an eco-labeled food product were invalidated by the presence of a GMO label on the same product (Sörqvist et al., 2016).

In the literature, it is stated that taste is the most important factor in the purchase of organically produced products (Honkanen and Frewer, 2009; Liu et al., 2013) and consumers perceived organically grown foods to be tastier than their conventional counterparts (Grankvist and Biel, 2001; Thøgersen and Zhou, 2012; Bryła, 2016; Kaya and Duman, 2017, p. 60).

In addition to these factors, previous experiences, perceived risks related to food, sensory-related satisfaction, and reward-related expectations, the origin of the product, and sensory characteristics are the factors that affect food acceptance (Bell and Marshall, 2003; Bryła, 2016).

Organic products have been perceived as more environmentally friendly (Annunziata and Vecchio, 2016), especially by consumers holding prior knowledge about organics (Gracia and de Magistris, 2007).

It has been reported that organic labels are one of the more reliable labeling schemes (Sønderskov and Daugbjerg, 2011). Trust in labels and labeling systems is the main determinant of the organic product purchase intention and loyalty level as it enables consumers to manage risk as well as uncertainty (Daugbjerg and Sønderskov, 2012; Müller and Gaus, 2015; Thorsøe, 2015; Anisimova, 2016).

Prada et. Al (2017) reported that the frequency of organic consumption is related to the perceived advantages. consumption frequency (Van Loo et al., 2013). Knowledge about organics (Van Loo et al., 2013) especially subjective knowledge level has been claimed as one of the important factors that determine the frequency of consumption (Gámbaro et al., 2013). A recent study has shown that consumers' knowledge has an impact on intentions, not attitudes (Nguyen and Dang, 2022).

Limited availability, and higher prices (Davies et al. 1995; Magnusson et al., 2001; Soler et al., 2002; Lea and Worsley, 2005; Krystallis et al., 2006; Essoussi and Zahaf, 2012; Doorn and Verhoef, 2015) and the cost of access (Li et al., 2007) have been mentioned as deterrent factors in the purchase of organic products.

4. Marc Augé's Theory on Restricted Ritual Apparatus: The Example of De la Pradelle's Truffle Market

The goal of Augé's book *An Anthropology for contemporaneous worlds* is to propose a methodology for using anthropology to define and describe the nature of contemporary worlds. Augé proposes a contrast between ritual as a "restriction device" and ritual as an "extended device" in the chapter titled "Politics as Ritual." The first group of rituals serves to support and sustain the current reproductive system, whereas the second seeks to alter social forces by influencing opinions. Because the organic market repeats itself every Saturday to continue the manufacture and sale of organic goods, we have regarded it in our research as a restricted ritual device. Anthropologist Michele de la Pradelle, in her investigation of markers in Carpentras, France,

uses the term ritual to describe repeated, institutionally choreographed social conduct in truffle trade operations. Augé (1999, s.73) writes that Pradelle's Carentras truffle market

“Easily lends itself to being treated as analogous to ritual. It sets apart temporally and spatially from everyday life and follows a predetermined sequential order; the gestures and words that are repeated from market to market seem to follow a code. The use of archaic instruments and a specific vocabulary, highly conventionalized verbal exchanges, and jokes around age-old themes may well be said to constitute a formal ritualization of exchange – in any case, a universe of recognition, where the intimate sharing of language and references creates a form of momentary identity.”

Following this explication, we can conclude five important properties that characterize a restricted ritual setup:

- a. The concept of a spatiotemporal rapture blends well with the Feriköy Market's features. Only on Saturdays do buyers and sellers travel to Feriköy from various areas in Istanbul.
- b. Repetition of gestures and paroles in accordance with a predetermined code (word associations, everyday language, and gestures): It appears that the organic market has its internal structure. After eating breakfast, many go shopping and then come back to the tables to catch up with friends. One of the topics that our study hopes to answer is whether the regular attendees have developed their vocabularies about spontaneous talks.
- c. Clarification of the players' responsibilities: It is clear how the roles of buyers and sellers differ from one another. Our poll will show whether there is a distinct difference between the market's regulars and the infrequent ones.
- d. Respect for organic products is a frequent symbol. According to Marc Augé, Gérard Althabe defines a ritual according to its structure, which includes the need for a symbolic intermediary and De La Pradelle fills this need by using the truffle:

“She wonders first of all if Gérard Althabe's notion of “symbolic mediator” can be applied to an object such as the truffle. Althabe defines ritual not as function but form, the form conferred on a social field in a given time and place by the shared recognition of a symbolic mediator. The nation, the state, the business firm can act as mediators, but the truffle? The truffle does play a mediating role on the mini

stage of the market: “In this space unified by worship of the truffle, in this mass-like procedure in which the truffle people commune every Friday, social relations are governed less by the spirit of competition than by the sort of solidarity implied by a common respect for a world that is, though marginal, still present in a world in which work, talent, luck, and passion are still closely intertwined”. (Augé, 1999, s.73)

By learning how important organic foods and products are to market patrons’ eating habits and ecological awareness, we hope to better understand the extent to which they are viewed as symbolic mediators.

e. Removal of external social hierarchies: Michèle de La Pradelle underlines that once market participants begin interacting with one another, all external social distinctions—including those between vendors and customers—are eliminated. Due to the high cost of organic goods, it appears that Feriköy Market customers are primarily from the middle and upper classes.

5. Reading Feriköy Organic Market as a Ritual

In light of the interviews and participatory observations that we have performed, we will now investigate each component that we have linked to the ritual aspect of markets.

Separation from daily life by spatial and temporal breakings: When asked if they thought going to the market was an occasion for a break from their daily routine, all six of the market’s regular customers responded favorably. Women characterized the ambiance of the market as calming and the feeling of separation as a release. It’s interesting to see that the four regular male customers saw the market as a place to mingle and talk. The act of visiting friends and conversing with them serves as a concrete representation for them of their sense of separation.

One of them even said that since there aren’t many public spaces in Istanbul, the market provides a chance to use it as one. So, it is evident in the eyes of regular customers that the market creates a setting where the customers may relax and enjoy interacting. One of the infrequent visitors said that because there is another market on Fridays at the same location, he doesn’t give the organic one a special position because they don’t notice the sense of difference that the market creates.

Repetition of gestures and language as though adhering to a predetermined code (word associations, everyday language, and gestures): Five of the six regular clients revealed that they have a personal bond with the market’s residents in a variety of ways. They either know every merchant by name or

are familiar with them, and occasionally they even fail to make payment for the items they take. They make an effort to engage each client at the table in conversation. One mentioned that they have a special word when asking for tea: “[...]when we ask for the tea to Hasan, we say ‘Red tea’, the communist tea.” She requests a tea and refers to it as a communist tea since it is red, a sign that it is an excellent tea, and because she identifies as a lefty and thinks that the organic movement is socialist.

The market’s main characters are undoubtedly regular customers. Sellers claim that regular customers make up about half of their clientele, while infrequent visitors frequently change. Also, they mention that their socioeconomic status is higher than Turkey’s average, as seen by their higher salary. Individuals I spoke with emphasized that most intellectuals, artists, and university professors frequent the market for shopping. There are also tourists who have been brought by their tour guide to the market to take pictures of it as though there was a performance going on. The typical customer base remained unchanged when the market gained notoriety, but more people began traveling to see and experience it, which is what leads to the constantly shifting profile.

According to all the sellers surveyed, those who come to the market to shop appear to prefer the early hours, between 8 and 10 am, which are also the busiest times of the day. One of the regular customers emphasized that people who visit in the afternoon do so to flaunt their appearance rather than to purchase organic goods.

A common symbol is a respect for the organic: Four regulars, three of whom are also Association members, claimed that they only buy organic food and never consume non-organic products. Eating inorganic is not a big problem for two of the interviewees. They also reported purchasing inorganic foods from supermarkets.

Even while the Association of *Buğday* is often cited as the most prominent emblem of organic living, it should be noted that since the association’s founder passed away, it has become heavily commercialized and no longer enjoys the public’s trust.

Even while the breakfast tables and the layout of the area remain the same, there is an antique market on Sundays at the same location, but the regulars only visit the organic one. As a result, for some of them who visit this market every Saturday and refuse to eat non-organic foods, organic can stand as a symbol of unity with others who lead similar lives.

Removal of external social hierarchies: Due to the market's high prices, only middle- and upper-class consumers buy there. All four of the vendors who were interviewed emphasized the price cap as a barrier to lower-income customers visiting the market. The former director of Sabancı Holding's organic product division was one of the vendors who "admitted" that the costs are excessive. Another person informed us that although the product is the same, the prices are lower at the Kartal organic market. Kartal is a district where a majority of residents have modest incomes, hence the market must be within their means. One of the regulars also noted that although people are visiting the market, they do not make purchases but rather observe, sip tea, and see people before leaving:

De La Pradelle's observation and reasoning regarding the abolition of hierarchies do not appear to hold true in the case of Feriköy because prices have already eliminated the lower-class clientele. The dominance of the middle class, the upper class, and intellectuals is also being displayed as the true property of the market since the market has been transformed into a spectacle by the media.

6. Conclusion

Turkey has a long history of agriculture, and the country's diverse landscape and climate conditions allow for a wide range of products to be grown. In recent years, organic farming has become increasingly popular in Turkey, and there are now an increasing number of organic markets throughout the country. One of the most well-known organic markets in Turkey is the Feriköy Organic Market, located in Istanbul's Şişli district.

We thought that organic markets serve as a symbol of a specific lifestyle and hence an intriguing subject for communication studies. We wanted to know where the practice of "buying organic" stood and how to interpret it in light of the cultural norms of daily life. We looked into whether the Feriköy Organic Market met the criteria Augé lists for the definition of a ritual.

Only one of the five characteristics of a nonreligious ritual—the regulars congregating around a shared symbol, the respect for organic—applies fully to the Feriköy market. Three of them have some merit regarding treating the market as a ritual: The regulars acknowledge that they view the area as a place to unwind, socialize, and escape from the daily grind, although these features can be found in any public setting. The ability of code manifests itself in certain behaviors and words, but an outsider can instantly comprehend what the user means by the phrase or by his or her activity. In other words,

unlike the rituals, the knowledge of the code is not acquired through a learning process. Also, there is a separation of responsibilities, although it is only apparent between consumers and sellers. The frequent visitors and the infrequent visitors cannot be distinguished with any degree of certainty. It solely reflects organizational differences. Furthermore, because of the comparable sociocultural backgrounds of the clientele, the eradication of social hierarchies cannot be applied to Feriköy's situation. According to our poll, both the typical and unusual respondents are university-educated professionals including doctors, attorneys, engineers, and artists.

The explanation of one of the norms could provide insight into the market's true purpose. He stated: "This setting is different. In Istanbul, there aren't many public spaces. We can access a public area at the market." As only a specific social group, mainly the middle-upper socioeconomic strata, can benefit from organic markets, we can understand them as a public place organized around respect for organic rather than as a ritual. So, while discussing ecological or organic movements as fresh approaches to environmental politics, it is important to consider who stands to gain from the behaviors and discourses of different social groupings as well as who pushes back and demands inclusion. What initiatives have been taken to promote organic farming, and do they aim to change patterns of unequal participation or do they only serve to strengthen them? Because it appears from our survey that organic has become a symbol devoid of its referent.

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