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**ECONOMIC, SOCIO-CULTURAL AND EXISTENTIAL
ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES DURING COVID-19
PANDEMIC: A SCENARIO-BASED EXPERIMENT**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to reveal the impact of the different engagement strategies used to respond to the economic, socio-cultural and existential pressures on the purchase intention of the adult consumers and to compare the purchase intentions of the engagement strategies across gender and income. We embodied a scenario-based within-group experimental design to investigate the effect of engagement strategies on purchase intention. We used a convenience sampling strategy with 221 university students enrolled in an elective course on public relations in Turkey. The results showed that the engagement strategies that respond to the existential pressures are at least essential as those strategies that respond to the economic pressures during the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, the findings

showed the purchase intentions on the different engagement strategies change across gender whereas there is no significant difference in various income groups. Unlike similarly themed studies, this study employed the quantitative analytical approach. This study shows that the engagement strategies developed for existential pressures have become as important as the economic pressures.

Keywords: Engagement strategies, covid-19 crisis, purchase intention, scenario-based experiment, Türkiye.

INTRODUCTION

The first Covid-19 cases were seen in China in December 2019. Within weeks, the virus had spread to 14 countries, from Finland to Philippines, Canada to Nepal (Taylor, 2021). On March 11, 2020, it was declared a “pandemic” by the World Health Organisation (WHO News, 2020). As of April 2021, over 131 million people were infected and 2.8 million people died due to the virus. At the time, Turkey ranked eighth (at nearly 3.5 million) on the list of countries with the most Covid-19 cases observed (Worldometer Report, 2021).

With the Covid-19 outbreak, the whole world has faced a crisis for which it was not prepared. To prevent the spread of the virus, many countries sought to enforce social distancing by closing crowded places such as shopping malls, cafes and stores. The environment created by the pandemic and the measures implemented had serious economic and political consequences for the whole world. While the contraction of the economy has brought job losses and financial problems, it also has caused changes in the consumer behaviour. Self-isolation and economic uncertainty have transformed consumer behaviour in all areas of life. The explosion in remote working has led to a decline in on-the-go consumption. Consumers’ media consumption patterns have shifted; the use of social media has increased worldwide. In shopping and consumption, there has been a surge in e-commerce, a decline in discretionary spending, reduced shopping frequency and a preference for trusted brands (Kohli et al., 2020; Statista, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic, which has deeply affected working styles and habits, requires brands to rethink their engagement strategies. This

pandemic has also had a significant impact on customer engagement. This effect is thought to be significant and permanent (Accenture, 2020; Merkle, 2020). In this process, consumers' expectations of brands have shifted. A few studies (Karpen & Conduit, 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2021; Zeren, 2021) have been published that seek to understand the relation between the Covid-19 pandemic and customer engagement or consumer behaviours. Those studies examine the effect of Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown on consumer behaviours and customer engagement based on literature review. Unlike those studies, the current research aims to analyse the change of purchase intentions by the effects of engagement strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic based on quantitative approach.

In this context, the research is mainly based on Karpen and Conduit's (2020) approach; the researchers argued that, "[t]he tripartite model of customer engagement informed by unilateral paradigmatic lenses is insufficient to understand why customers seek to engage with businesses during and after Covid-19" (page number?). They adopt three paradigmatic lenses (economic rationalism, institutionalism and existential humanism) to explore how brands are responding to the economic, socio-cultural and existential pressures experienced by customers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the purpose of the article is to reveal the impact of the different engagement strategies used to respond to the economic, socio-cultural and existential pressures on the purchase intention of adult consumers and to compare the purchase intentions of the engagement strategies across gender and income.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brands, Crisis and Covid-19

The 21st century is defined in different ways such as "fluid" (Bauman, 2009), an "age of turbulence" (Greenspan, 2008) and an "age of discontinuity" (Drucker, 2003). Despite the distinctive conceptualization, it is commonly emphasised that the new century addresses specific determinants: flexibility, uncertainty, discontinuity, turbulence, chaos and crisis. Kotler and Caslione (2010) claimed

that the age of turmoil will be the new normality. When the crisis is defined as “a moment of decisive change for better or worse, but no longer as the time when sensible decisions can be taken self-assuredly to secure a turn for better”, then it has become the “normal” state of the society. For Bauman (2000), crisis is not a sad reversal of the luck but an integral feature of the human condition. In this way, the word crisis becomes as superfluous as the expressions liquid water and butter made of milk (p. 156).

Overcoming crises was the mission of the state. However, with the rise of neo-liberal policies, the state shrinks as the international brands/companies gain both the economic and cultural power. While nation states, in the past, were seen as guarantors of social good, globalisation altered this understanding (de Bettignies & Lepineux, 2009, p. 159). The crises such as depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, terrorism, access to clean water and economic failure are not specific to a single state or a single region anymore. States are inadequate to produce solutions to these problems. Problems that create uncertainty and insecurity are global and are therefore beyond the reach of existing political institutions (Bauman, 2000, p. 60). “The current historical stage is marked by a waning role of government. Other economic and social actors progressively understand that they have a role to play in solving global problems too, and that they must, to some extent, use their resources for the common good. Corporations, NGOs and international organisations are increasingly expected to act on behalf of the public interest” (de Bettignies & Lepineux, 2009, p. 159). In other words, brands are expected to adopt the idea of “social responsibility” and take action on social problems.

On the other hand, an increasing numbers of consumers are seeking out and supporting brands which prioritise “social good” and contribute to a greater common good (Hughes, 2016). The new generation consumer is especially more concerned with social issues (Kotler et al, 2014). Many want brands that not only think about profits but also about the society they serve (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). The social, political, and ethical positions of the brand may cause the consumer not only to choose a particular brand, but also to boycott a brand (Kam & Diechert, 2019). In other words, when existential pressures rise, consumers care more about the meaning or the social good that a brand creates for themselves.

Studies show there is a trend in “belief-driven buyers” who choose, change, buy from or boycott a brand depending on how the brand positions itself on political or social issues that they value (Edelman, 2017). According to the Edelman Earned Brand Report in 2017, more than half of the respondents prefer brands that fit their values. In this survey, 65 percent of the respondents stated that they would reject a brand if it does not react when it needs to or if it does not take a stand in societal problems (Edelman, 2017). In 2018, the rate of “belief-driven buyers” increased by 13 percent compared to the previous year. The study also showed that consumers think that brands have the vital power to address social problems and drive change (Edelman, 2018).

Therefore, in a state of constant crisis, the brands should develop new strategies to survive the new environment. As consumers are more affected by the economic and environmental fluctuations in times of crisis, their expectations from brands differentiate. By offering answers/responses to consumers, brands provide close contact with them. It has become more vital than ever for brands to contribute to the solution of social problems apart from making profit. People have concerns about making the world a more livable place and are looking for solutions to these concerns. It is important for brands to be aware of this situation (Kotler et al., 2004).

Shortly after the Covid-19 virus emerged, it has become the primary concern for most countries. States have taken many steps and created support packages to cope with the economic, sociological and psychological results of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it is very difficult for states to mitigate the effects of the crisis without the support of other actors such as brands and non-governmental organisations. Consumers also expect brands to take responsibility and to be actors to assist the state fighting pandemic. In addition, they want brands to use the power not only to sell products but also to develop meaningful solutions for the problems people face because of pandemic. Consumers’ expectations from the brands have a great impact on consumption behaviour (Edelman, 2020). It shows that the actions and communication strategies of brands during the pandemic are critical in terms of brand-consumer communication. In times of crisis, the actions, communications and engagement strategies of brands are of a great importance for the future of the brand.

Brand Consumer Engagement in Covid-19

The term “engagement” was first used in the 17th century to describe legal or moral obligations (Lexico, 2021). It has since gained new meanings to describe specific engagement forms including “connection”, “attachment”, “emotional involvement”, and “participation” (Brodie et al., 2011, p.254). The term has been discussed within different contexts of various fields like psychology, sociology, organisational behaviour and marketing.

Engagement in business literature has been primarily studied in psychology. Kahn (1990), who is the first researcher that applied “engagement” to work, argued that employees who work in more supportive environment tend to be more engaged. The term “engagement” has also been characterized in various subfields of psychology as vigor, dedication, absorption, etc. (Vivek et al., 2012, p.128). In management literature, engagement has been described as an activity that involves the internal stakeholders. In marketing, the “engagement” concept used as “an activity toward the firm” (Pansari & Kumar, 2017, p.295). It is a complex topic because there is little consensus among publications regarding conceptualizations and scales (Rosado-Pinto & Loureiro, 2020). In a business world where there is harsh competition, forming emotional bonds, creating a meaning around the company and including customers in the “purpose” of the company (and “customer engagement”) is becoming more vital.

There are various different definitions for customer engagement. Bowden (2009) defined customer engagement as “a psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers”. According to Hollebek (2011), it is “the level of customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependend state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in brand interactions”. Gambetti et al. (2012, p. 669) defined it as “a multi-dimensional concept combining such elements as attention, dialogue, interaction, emotional, sensorial pleasure, and immediate activation aimed at creating a total brand experience with customers”. Besides different definitions, most of them advocate customer engagement is a multidimensional concept including emotional, cognitive and

behavioural dimensions. It creates the dominance of tripartite model of customer engagement.

This article follows the path of Karpen and Conduit (2020) who claimed that “the tripartite model of customer engagement informed by unilateral paradigmatic lenses is insufficient to understand why customers seek to engage with businesses during and after Covid-19”. This is the case because, although the pandemic will end, it will have a long-lasting, deep economic, social, political and cultural effects (He & Harris, 2020, p. 176). Furthermore, it will change the consumption habits and consumer expectations. Covid-19 has heightened anxiety concerning health issues, economics, and the future in general. The Accenture research (2020) showed that consumers fear the economic impact of Covid-19 more than the health impact. The perception of fear has affected consumer behaviour. Consumers have begun to prioritize savings over spending. Moreover, the trust level towards brands is decreasing compared to pre-Covid 19 period (KPMG, 2020). According to Kotler (2020, pp. 14-15), following the Covid-19 crisis, capitalism will enter a new stage. In this stage, consumers’ expectation from brands will change. People will be more conscious of issues such as the fragility of the word, water and air pollution. Therefore, brands will be asked to explain how they serve the social benefit. Similarly, He and Harris (2020, p. 178) expected that there may be a transformation toward responsible and pro-social consumption in the sense that consumers will consciously think about how to make brand choices that are more responsible to themselves, to society, and to the environment.

In assessing the changes in consumer expectations, one should reconsider the consumer-brand engagement during and post-Covid-19 period. Karpen and Conduit (2020) stated that the Covid-19 pandemic has rendered insufficient the existing philosophical assumptions of engagement theories. They used three paradigmatic lenses, which shorten much of academic complexity, to analyse customer engagement during the Covid-19 crisis: economic rationalism, institutionalism and existential humanism. They believed that the combination of three perspectives would help to overcome the limitations of current theorising. In the paradigm of economic rationalism, there is a rational actor equipped with an analytical decision making capacity, so he/she acts with reason. The actor desires to achieve intended outcomes

and also wants to maximise return on resource investment and usage. This perspective builds an important foundation in response to the economic pressures. Early customer engagement studies used economic rationalism for analysis. These studies showed why customers seek to engage with brands that can optimize their resource and outcomes.

The second paradigmatic approach is institutionalism, which considers both the rationality of actors and the socio-cultural context. In other words, it takes into account the social relations, norms and socio-cultural expectations. In contrast to the economic rationality, actors seek legitimacy, not productivity. This paradigm also provides another foundation for behavioural, social and cognitive engagement responses. Engagement studies based on institutionalism seek to understand why customers feel connected with other customers and how they gain a sense of both belonging to a team and achieving social status by having a relationship with the brand. The last paradigm is existential humanism which deals with the deeper meaning and purpose in one's life. This paradigm suggests that an individual's existential questioning and search for meaning guides behaviour. People seek meaning beyond efficiency and socio-cultural pressures. In terms of customer engagement, people are spiritually engaged. Such engagement is beyond cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions (Karpen & Conduit, 2020, pp. 1166-1168).

Three paradigmatic lenses correspond to three pressures. Economic rationalism is a response to economic pressures. Covid-19 created a global crisis, which cannot be compared to other financial crises like that of 2008. The current crisis is different in that it does not affect only low-middle income countries. Interest rates are at historical lows and with butterfly effect, it is affected supply and demand chains (Fernandes, 2020, p.5). Most countries went into lockdown mode, closing restaurants, shopping malls and many other lines of business. Many public events including sporting matches, concerts and theater are cancelled. Such lockdowns affect reduce incomes and alter consumption habits.

Institutionalism responds to socio-cultural pressures. Hand washing, social distancing, quarantines and isolation are the primary preventative efforts for the spread of Covid-19 (Saltzman et al.,

2020). Social distancing, in other words physical distancing, has become important all over the world, resulting in changes (Galea et al., 2020, p. 817) and different needs. Because of social distancing, the feeling of loneliness (Killgore et al., 2020) and the need for belonging has increased. People seek social interaction and engagement as an effective pathway to connect with others. They want to feel like a valued member in their communities (Karpen & Conduit, 2020, p. 1168). In response to socio-cultural pressures, brands can implement engagement strategies that mitigate the feeling of loneliness while creating an interaction between the brand and customers and among customers as well.

Finally, the existential humanism paradigm responds to existential pressures. Existential anxiety is inevitable for those who experience anxiety surrounding death, isolation, emptiness, and meaninglessness. When faced with existential anxiety, social interactions and the relation to one's self change (Tomaszek & Muchacka-Cymerman, 2020, p.1). Covid-19 created an existential crisis among communities because it pulls individuals out of their routines, which causes them to pause and reflect on habitual patterns of thinking, experiencing, relating and behaving. When individuals' life circumstances change, they cannot continue as before (Bland, 2020, p. 711). In this period, many people have started to realise what is really important in their lives (Johal, 2021). In other words, they reevaluate their purpose and meaning in the world.

“Attachment, loyalty and trust are notable customer engagement outcomes, which impact purchase intention” (Addo et al., 2021, p. 771). Many studies conceptualised customer engagement as an important tool to induce purchases and cultivate brand loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011, Prentice et al., 2018). That is why customer engagement became vital during Covid-19 as brands try to cope with an economic crisis. Some research has focused on purchase intention during Covid-19 pandemic. Zhang et al. (2020) found that personalised recommendation, visual appeal and system usability, which are mobile situation factors, have a positive impact on purchase intention. Qi et al. (2020) conducted a study on what motivates the purchase of green food during Covid-19. They found that health consciousness, perceived attributes, environmental consciousness, social influence, and family structure are the major

drivers. Brewer and Sebby (2021) found that consumers' desire for food and their perception of the convenience of online food ordering have a direct influence on purchase intention. These studies show that there is a change in factors affecting purchase intention. However, there are no studies focusing on the relationship between customer engagement and purchase intention during the Covid-19 pandemic. Formally, this gives the following hypothesis:

H₁ : Consumer purchase intentions differ in response to a brand's engagement strategies (economic, socio-cultural, and existential) during Covid-19 pandemic.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, brands have developed multiple engagement strategies in response to different pressures. To respond to economic pressures, brands can ease access to service, provide promotional gifts such as 'buy one get one free' or give away extra products or services, ensure free service (not to charge for shipping) or offer discounts. To respond to socio-cultural pressures brands can create online sport activities to both raise awareness about healthy lifestyles and encourage their customers to stay home, present new applications for their customers to fill their leisure time, create a socially interactive environment among its customers to decrease the sense of loneliness or create a sense of belonging around the brand. To respond to existential pressure, brands can create activities to support the community and to help government to cope with the effects of pandemic. For example, they can support healthcare workers or the healthcare system by donating needed supplies, organise activities to support society by involving its customers in these activities. They may even support their own employees to help the community. In this research, based on Karpen and Conduit's (2020) examples of engagement strategies for different pressures, sub-categories were created under the main categories to evaluate their influence on purchase intention.

H₂ : Purchase intentions differ across sub-categories of engagement strategies during Covid-19 pandemic (Economic engagement strategies: access to service, promotion, free service, discounts; Socio-cultural engagement strategies: brand-to-consumer engagement in sports, brand-to-consumer engagement in the leisure time, social interaction, creation of a

sense of community or belonging; Existential engagement strategies: support for healthcare workers, support for healthcare systems, support for the community, support for employees)

Current studies reveal that men and women differ on the purchase intentions and how they react to engagement strategies of brands. Research shows that females and males have different attitudes. For example, women are more motivated towards non-economic goals (Chaganti, 1986), while men engage riskier behaviour than women (Hinz et al., 1996). The difference in attitudes leads to the different purchase decisions (Chang, 2007). While women's behaviour is more influenced by emotion, men's are more influenced by logic. Likewise, in terms of trust, women rely on emotion while men depend on cognition (Xue et al., 2020). Dodd and Supa (2011) found that women are more likely to purchase products from socially responsible businesses. Additionally, women and men respond differently to engagement strategies of the brands (Van Doorn, et al., 2010; Islam, 2019; Islam & Rahman, 2017). Formally, this gives the following hypothesis:

H₃ : Purchase intentions of adult consumers change according to their gender concerning the economic, socio-cultural and existential engagement strategies.

H₄: Purchase intentions of adult consumers change according to their income concerning the economic, socio-cultural and existential engagement strategies.

Another variable in purchase intention is level of income. How consumers process information provided by brands vary according to the income levels (Walsh & Mitcell, 2005). Consumer impressions effect the purchase intention of various income groups. Many studies show that there is a difference in the purchase intention among various income groups (Casper, 2007; Tiruwa, et al., 2018; Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000). Thus, based on Karpen and Conduit's (2020) theoretical suggestions, this study proposes to reveal the impact of economic, socio-cultural and existential engagement strategies on the adult consumers' purchase intentions and, additionally, to compare the purchase intentions with the engagement strategies across gender and income.

METHODOLOGY

The Experimental Design

This work embodies a scenario-based within-group experimental design to investigate the effect of engagement strategies on the purchase intention. A scenario-based experimental design benefits from specifically generated scenarios which allow better control and manipulation of variables when compared to the retrospective survey designs (Bitner, 1990). Manipulating emotions and perceptions directly is a difficult task and might cause ethical problems (Anand & Gaur, 2018). This method can be replaced with other experimental treatments that have the potential to create an unpleasant or unethical condition. Prior research implemented it in service failure (Namkung & Jang, 2010) and in government initiatives (Anand & Gaur, 2018). Having students of different backgrounds, we preferred a within-group design instead of a between-group since creating equal groups within the course might also cause an inequality.

The independent variable is engagement strategies and it is manipulated at three levels: economic, socio-cultural and existential. For the first hypothesis, three different engagement strategies namely, economic, socio-cultural and existential, were compared. Then the three sub-categories of engagement strategies were compared: (i) Economic: access to service, promotion, free service, discounts; (ii) Socio-cultural: brand-to-consumer engagement in sports, brand-to-consumer engagement in leisure time, social interaction, creation of a sense of community or belonging; (iii) Existential: support for healthcare workers, support for healthcare systems, support for the community, support for employees. For the second and third hypotheses, the 2x3 factorial designs were used to compare the purchase intention across gender and income concerning the economic, socio-cultural and existential engagement strategies.

Experimental Design Phases

1st Phase: Preparation of 12 differently themed scenarios

2nd Phase: Informing participants about the brand engagement strategies

3rd Phase: 12 completely different scenarios for course hours (4 scenarios per 3 course hours)

4th Phase: 2X3 factorial based survey

We had one treatment group; the group was exposed to 12 different scenarios categorised under economic, socio-cultural and existential engagement strategies.

Sample and Procedure

We used a convenience sampling strategy with 221 university students enrolled in an elective course on public relations at a public university in Ankara University, at Ankara Turkey. Among them 134 were female, 87 were male ranging in age from 18 to 25. Since one of the researchers was offering the public relations course to the sample of these degree students, we conveniently selected the sample for our investigation. The monthly family income of students was self-reported between 500 to 2,000 USD dollars. We preferred a within-group design to avoid selection bias and to assure homogeneous groups throughout the treatments. The whole students were exposed to each engagement situation.

The experiment lasted nine course hours per three weeks. Since there were three engagement strategies, the lesson focused on one engagement strategy every week and the examples that could be used for this strategy were explained in the course. As part of the course content, students learned about different brand engagement strategies. In the first course hour, all students read four scenarios written about the economic engagement strategies, which were access to service, promotion, free service and discounts. Each scenario included a campaign conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. After evaluation of each scenario, they completed a scale consisting of four items that measure purchase intentions. In the second hour, all students were read another four scenarios about socio-cultural engagement strategies (brand-to-consumer engagement in sports, brand-to-consumer engagement in leisure time, social interaction, and creation of a sense of community or belonging). Similarly, they completed the purchase intentions for each scenario. Finally, students read the last four engagement strategies on existential activities (support for

healthcare workers, support for healthcare systems, support for the community and support for employees).

All subjects evaluated the scenarios. They were asked to indicate the likelihood of purchasing the given product/service or the brand, as well as the intention to share information about the product/service or the brand (that used the campaign during Covid-19 pandemic). The questions were the same across 12 different scenarios. All scenarios were written by the authors based on the theoretical paper of Karpen and Conduit (2020) stating economic, socio-cultural and existential engagement strategies. Before the implementation, permission from the institutional ethical review board was granted and students were informed about confidentiality and anonymity. The written consent form informed the participants about voluntary participation and their right to quit from the study at any time. All subjects volunteered to participate in the study. The course instructor offered five points extra credit for those who took part in the study. No student declined to participate. To remove the ordering effect in the experimental design, all subjects were asked to describe their favourite engagement strategy after completing each of the first four scenarios. Following the scenarios, all participants completed the purchase intention scale for each scenario.

Measurement and Data Analysis

The measurement scale consisted of some demographic questions and four items that measured purchase intention. Those four items are: “(1) I suggest this product/service or the brand to my friends and surroundings; (2) I try to learn where I can find this product/service or the brand; (3) I purchase this product/service or the brand; and (4) This engagement strategy convinced me to purchase this product/service or the brand” were adapted from the study of Bozyiğit and Karaca (2016). The response categories ranged from 1 (Never), to 5 (Always) on a Likert scale. A total score for purchase intention was calculated for each scenario. The sum of purchase intention scores on access to service, promotion, free service, and discount related scenarios comprised economic engagement strategy. The same computation was performed for socio-cultural and existential engagement strategies too. Based on the explanatory factor analysis of

purchase intention for 12 scenarios, 12 different factors were formed, indicating each engagement strategy as a separate factor. All items factor loadings were above 0.610. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ranged from 0.81 to 0.89 for purchase intention of each scenario.

In order to answer the hypothesis, one-way repeated measures ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was conducted twice. To answer the second and third hypothesis, two-way within-group MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis of Variance) was conducted. Gender (male, female) and income (below average, above average) were the independent variables; three different engagement strategies (economic, socio-cultural, and existential) were the dependent variables. The descriptive statistics were also provided. For the analysis of missing data, we created a dummy variable suggested by Allison (2001). There was no evidence of a pattern of missing values, and therefore they were replaced with mean scores. Before the main analysis, all assumptions of one-way repeated measures ANOVA and two-way MANOVA were controlled and no violation was observed. The descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 24 program.

RESULTS

We organised this section according to the order of the hypothesis.

Purchase Intentions across Engagement Strategies

Total scores of purchase intention on economic, socio-cultural and existential engagement strategies were compared. Table 1 indicates the mean scores and statistical significance based on one-way repeated measures ANOVA.

As depicted in Table 1, the highest mean score was observed on the existential engagement strategies (15.35), economic was the second (14.89) whilst the socio-cultural engagement strategies had the lowest impact on the purchase intention (12.34). Multivariate tests were conducted to check for statistical significance as shown in Table 2.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Purchase Intentions across Engagement Strategies

Engagement Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Economic	221	14.89367	3.40578	14.4422	15.3452
Sociocultural	221	12.34837	4.10403	11.8043	12.8924
Existential	221	15.35376	3.86089	14.8419	15.8656

Table 2 shows that the engagement strategies had a statistically significant effect on purchase intentions ($F(2, 219) = 95.046$, Wilk's Lambda = 0.535, $p < 0.05$) with a partial eta squared value of 0.465, which means large effect size. Mauchly's test of sphericity was non-significant (0.087), so we can assume that the condition of sphericity was met. Then, three paired samples t-tests were used to make post hoc comparisons between engagement strategies. We used 0.017 statistical significance rather than 0.05, because of performing three tests instead of just one ($05/3 = 0.017$).

Table 2

Multivariate Test for Purchase Intentions across Engagement Strategies

Multivariate Test ^a							
Effect	Wilks' Lambda	F	Df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared	Observed power ^c
Engagement Strategies	0.535	95,046 ^b	2	219	0.000	0.465	1.000

Note: a. Design: Intercept, Within Subjects Design: Engagement Strategies, b. Exact statistic, c. Computed using alpha = 0.05

The first comparison showed that there was a significant difference in the purchase intention scores for economic ($M = 14.89367$, $SD = 3.40578$) and socio-cultural, ($M = 12.34837$, $SD = 4.10403$) engagement strategies; $t(220) = 11.178$, $p = 0.000$. A second paired samples t-test

indicated that there was no significant difference in the intention scores for economic (M = 14.89367, SD = 3.40578) and existential (M=15.35376, SD=3.86089) engagement strategies; $t(220) = -2.272, p = 0.024$. A third paired samples t-test indicated a significant difference in the scores for socio-cultural, (M =12.34837, SD = 4.10403) and existential (M = 15.35376, SD = 3.86089) engagement strategies; $t(220) = -13.225, p = 0.000$. As a result, for the first hypothesis, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that existential and economic engagement strategies have a greater effect on purchase intention compared to socio-cultural ones. Another one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare purchase intention on the 12 different engagement strategies listed below for economic, socio-cultural, and existential activities for the hypothesis 1.1. Table 3 provides descriptive details.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Purchase Intentions across 12 Engagement Strategies

Estimates						
Engagement Strategies	Mean		Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		
	Mean	Std. Dev.		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
1	3.723	0.92831	0.062	3.600	3.846	
2	3.457	1.15521	0.078	3.304	3.610	
3	3.910	1.00517	0.068	3.777	4.043	
4	3.804	1.14648	0.077	3.652	3.956	
5	3.523	1.16776	0.079	3.368	3.678	
6	3.091	1.22857	0.083	2.928	3.254	
7	2.821	1.28072	0.086	2.651	2.991	
8	2.913	1.47848	0.099	2.717	3.109	
9	4.095	1.07947	0.073	3.951	4.238	
10	3.502	1.25883	0.085	3.335	3.669	
11	3.781	1.13087	0.076	3.632	3.931	
12	3.975	1.16299	0.078	3.821	4.130	

N: 221, Economic; 1: access to service, 2: promotion, 3: free service, 4: discount, Socio-cultural; 5: brand-to-consumer engagement in sports, 6: brand-to-consumer engagement in leisure time, 7: social interaction, 8: creating a sense of community / belonging, Existential; 9: support for healthcare workers, 10: support for healthcare system, 11: support for community, 12: support for employees

As seen from the Table 3, supporting healthcare workers (9) had the highest mean score ($M=4.095$, $SD=1.07947$), while socio-cultural engagement strategy about social interaction (7) had the lowest score of purchase intention. We conducted the multivariate test to significance across the engagement strategies. Table 4 shows the results. Twelve engagement strategies showed a statistically significant difference across the purchase intentions ($F(11, 210) = 26.029$, Wilk's Lambda = 0.423, $p < 0.05$) with a partial eta squared value of 0.577, which means large effect size. Mauchly's test of sphericity was significant (0.000), so we cannot assume that the assumption of sphericity is met; still, we report the pair wise comparisons.

Table 4

Multivariate Test for Purchase Intentions across Engagement Strategies

Multivariate Test ^a							
Effect	Wilks' Lambda	F	Df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared	Observed power ^c
Engagement Strategies	0.423	26.029 ^b	11	210	0.000	0.577	1.000

Note: a. Design: Intercept, Within Subjects Design: Engagement Strategies, b. Exact statistic, c. Computed using alpha = 0.05

Table 5 summarizes all comparisons and shows the mean purchase intention score for 12 scenarios. Based on the adjusted statistical significance level ($0.005/10=0.005$), the mean score of access to service (1) changed significantly across brand-to-consumer engagement in leisure time (6), social interaction (7) and creating a sense of community / belonging (8) in favour of access to service (1), whereas the statistical significance between access to service and support for healthcare workers (9) was in favour of nine. The mean score of promotion (2) differed significantly across all others except for the brand-to-consumer engagement in sports (5) and support for the health system (10). The mean score of free service (3) significantly differed across promotion (2), brand-to-consumer engagement in sports (5), brand-to-consumer engagement in leisure time (6), social interaction (7), creating a sense of community/belonging (8) and support for the healthcare workers (10). The mean score on discount

(4) significantly differed across promotion (2) brand-to-consumer engagement in sports (5), brand-to-consumer engagement in leisure time (6), social interaction (7) and creating a sense of community/ belonging (8). The rest can be inferred from Table 5.

Table 5

Pair-Wise Comparisons of Purchase Intentions across 12 Engagement Strategies

Engagement Strategies	Mean Scores	Significant Difference	No Significant Difference	
Economic	1: access to service	3,723	6,7,8	2,3,4,5,9,10,11,12
	2: promotion	3,457	1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,11,12	5,10
	3: free service	3,910	2,5,6,7,8,10	1,4,9,11,12
	4: discount	3,804	2,5,6,7,8	1,3,9,10,11,12
	5: brand-to-consumer engagement in sports	3,523	3,6,7,8,9,12	1,2,4,10,11
Social-cultural	6: brand-to-consumer engagement in leisure time	3,091	1,2,3,4,5,9,10,11,12	7,8
	7: social interaction	2,821	1,2,3,4,5,9,10,11,12	6,8
	8: creating a sense of community/ belonging	2,913	1,2,3,4,5,9,10,11,12	6,7
Existential	9: support for healthcare workers	4,095	1,2,5,6,7,8,10,11	3,4,12
	10: support for healthcare system	3,502	3,6,7,8,9,11,12	1,2,4,5
	11: support for society	3,781	6,7,8,9	1,2,3,4,5,10,12
	12: support for employees	3,975	2,5,6,7,8,10	1,3,4,9,11

Purchase Intentions on Engagement Strategies across Gender and Income

The second and third hypotheses address whether purchase intentions of adult consumers change across gender and income concerning the economic, socio-cultural, and existential engagement strategies. Table 6 depicts the MANOVA results.

Table 6

MANOVA Results Based on Gender and Income

Effect	Wilks' Lambda	F	Df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared	Observed power ^a
Gender	0.926	5.702	3	215	0.001	0.074	0.945
Income	0.975	1.851	3	215	0.139	0.025	0.476

a: Computed using alpha = 0.05

For gender, Wilks' Lambda = 0.926; $F(3,215) = 5.702$, $p = 0.001$; partial eta squared = 0.074, implying that the purchase intention for different engagement strategies changes across gender. For income, Wilks' Lambda = 0.975; $F(3,215) = 1.851$, $p = 0.139$; partial eta squared = .025, implying no significant difference on dependent variables across income level. For further details on dependent variables, follow-up ANOVAs were computed. Table 7 indicates results for each dependent variable.

Table 7

Follow-up Anovas for Pair-wise Comparisons

Source	Dependent variable	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared	Observed power
Gender	Economic	10.412	0.001	0.046	0.895
	Sociocultural	0.184	0.668	0.001	0.071
	Existential	6.918	0.009	0.031	0.745
Income	Economic	2.174	0.142	0.010	0.312
	Sociocultural	0.263	0.608	0.001	0.080
	Existential	0.052	0.819	0.000	0.056

Based on follow-up ANOVA results, the mean score difference based on gender achieves statistical significance, using Bonferroni adjusted alpha level 0.017, for purchase intention on economic engagement strategies, $F(3,217) = 10.412$, $p = 0.001$, partial eta squared = 0.046, $M_{\text{Female}} = 15.685$, $M_{\text{Male}} = 14.076$ in favour of females. There was no statistically significant difference across genders on sociocultural engagement strategies $F(3,217) = 0.184$, $p = 0.668$, partial eta squared = 0.001, $M_{\text{Female}} = 12.381$, $M_{\text{Male}} = 12.115$. On existential

engagement strategies ($M_{\text{Female}} = 15.962$, $M_{\text{Male}} = 14.460$) again there was a statistically significant difference $F(3,217) = 6.918$, $p = 0.009$, partial eta squared = 0.031.

Subjects' incomes were categorized as above average or below average. The purchase intentions did not differ across economic ($F(3,217) = 2.174$, $p = 0.142$, partial eta squared = 0.010), socio-cultural ($F(3,217) = .263$, $p = 0.608$, partial eta squared = 0.001), and existential ($F(3,217) = 0.052$, $p = 0.819$, partial eta squared = 0.000) engagement strategies. The mean scores across categories are seen in Table 8. That result is interpreted as family income of students, but it does not have an effect on their purchase intention for different engagement strategies. The partial eta squared for economic was .046 and .31 for existential. According to Cohen (1988), these magnitudes point out medium and large levels of difference between males and females, suggesting that gender leads to a meaningful effect on economic and existential strategies.

Table 8

Mean Scores Based on Independent and Dependent Variables

Estimates		95% Confidence Interval			
Dependent Variable	Gender	Mean	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Economic	Female	15.685	0.312	15.071	16.300
	Male	14.076	0.389	13.308	14.843
Sociocultural	Female	12.381	0.386	11.619	13.143
	Male	12.115	0.483	11.164	13.067
Existential	Female	15.962	0.357	15.259	16.665
	Male	14.460	0.446	13.582	15.339
Economic	Below	14.513	0.274	13.973	15.053
	Above	15.248	0.417	14.427	16.070
Sociocultural	Below	12.407	0.340	11.737	13.076
	Above	12.089	0.517	11.071	13.108
Existential	Below	15.146	0.314	14.528	15.764
	Above	15.276	0.477	14.336	16.217

Note: Below average: 0-6999 TL, above average: 7000- and higher (\$1000 USD Dollar is average.)

DISCUSSIONS

Based on the first hypothesis of how purchase intentions of consumers vary according to the engagement strategies during Covid-19 pandemic, the findings revealed the highest mean score was observed among existential engagement strategies (15.35), the second was among economic engagement strategies (14.89), and the lowest score (12.4) was found among socio-cultural engagement strategies. While socio-cultural engagement strategies differ significantly from both economic and existential strategies, there is no significant difference between economic and existential strategies.

In other words, the purchase intentions rise when brands develop engagement strategies that respond to economic and existential pressure. It is not surprising that economic strategy score is high, since Covid-19 affected the economy of many countries. To prevent the spread of Covid-19, many countries implemented social distancing protocols, self-isolation policies, and travel restrictions. Those measures have eliminated jobs in both primary (agriculture, petroleum and oil), secondary (manufacture) and tertiary (education, finance) economic sectors. Unfortunately, economic recovery will take a long time due to a long period of economic inactivity (Nicola et al., 2020). For this reason, the economic pressures of Covid-19 substantial, affecting purchase decisions (Nielsen Report, 2021; Kohli et al., 2020; Statista, 2020). What makes this research different from the others is that it shows that engagement strategies developed for existential pressures have become as important as economic pressures. The results of this research confirm Karpen and Conduit's (2020, p. 1170) assertion that "spiritual engagement might become much more overt with altered preferences for brand experiences".

To answer the sub-hypothesis, which seeks to discover the differences among the sub-categories of engagement strategies, ANOVA was conducted to compare purchase intention on 12 different engagement strategies embodied in the economic, socio-cultural, and existential activities. The highest mean score was found in the sub-category-supporting healthcare workers (9) of existential engagement strategies. In this scenario, "a food brand provides free hot drinks and a sandwich to healthcare workers, who are the most important actors

in combating the pandemic.” The 10th scenario also involves support for healthcare: “a clothing brand has donated 1,000 TL to hospitals and 1 million TL to the State to combat covid-19”. However, there is a significant difference in responses to these two scenarios. The ninth scenario’s score is significantly lower than that of the 10th scenario. Therefore, one can say that respondents are more sensitive about healthcare workers. Healthcare professionals are the group most physically affected by the pandemic (Sant’Ana et al., 2020; Ehrlich et al., 2020) and psychologically (Heath et al., 2020).

Scenario 12 (“During the Covid-19 pandemics, a beverage brand provided 14 days of paid leave to its employees who were infected or symptomatic with the motto ‘You should never have to choose between work and yourself’) received the second highest score in purchase intention. “The Rise of Employee” (Arslan, 2020, p. 50) research showed that during the Covid-19 crisis, how brands behaved towards their employees and what kind of support they provided to them were closely followed, criticized, and praised. The results of our research showed it also has an effect on purchase intention.

Scenarios 3 and 4, which fall under the category of economic strategy, yield the third and fourth highest scores. In the third scenario, a brand offers free delivery to its customers and in the fourth scenario, offers a 50 percent discount. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that “free delivery” and “discount” engagement strategies have a greater effect on purchase behaviour than access to service or promotion.

The scenarios which received the lowest scores all belong to same main category: socio-cultural strategies. In scenario 6, a company created a “DIY” platform for its customers to spend enjoyable time during lock-downs. In scenario 7, a company created a campaign to create a social interaction among its customers. And in scenario 8, a brand carries out a campaign to strengthen the sense of belonging. The highest-scoring scenario in this category is scenario 5, wherein “a sportswear brand created a free digital platform by making an agreement with athletes during the Covid-19 process. On this platform, athletes encouraged customers to stay healthy and stay at home by showing them their fitness routines”. In other words, socio-cultural strategies that encourage a healthy lifestyle have a greater effect on

purchase intention. The results support the argument that existential engagement strategies are as effective as economic engagement strategies on participants' purchase intentions.

Consistent with the literature (Chaganti, 1986; Hinz et al., 1996; Chang, 2007, Xue et al., 2020, Dodd & Supa, 2011) and based on the second hypothesis (whether purchase intentions of adult consumers change across gender based on the economic, socio-cultural, and existential engagement strategies), the findings showed the purchase intentions on different engagement strategies change across gender.

For further details on dependent variables, follow-up ANOVAs were computed. According to the results, while the mean score of female participants was higher than that of male participants (for the effect of economic engagement strategies on purchasing intention), no significant difference was recorded for socio-cultural engagement strategies. In fact, the scores were comparable. On the other hand, the mean score of female participants was also higher in existential engagement strategies. Those results show that female participants were more interested than male participants in economic and existential economic strategies; the effects of socio-cultural strategy were equal for both genders. As for the third hypothesis, dissimilarly with the literature (Danahy & Schwer, 2000; Walsh and Mitchell, 2005; Casper, 2007; Tiruwa et al., 2018) the findings showed no significant result in terms of effect of different engagement strategies on participants' purchase intentions.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature as it focused on engagement strategies during Covid period. The purpose of this study to find out the impacts of the different engagement strategies responding to economic, socio-cultural and existential pressures on purchase intentions of adult consumers. In doing so, we used scenario-based within-group experimental design to investigate purchase intentions in response to a variety of engagement strategies were compared based on variables of gender and income. A convenience sampling strategy was used with 221 university students enrolled in

the elective course on public relations in Turkey. Unlike similarly-themed studies (Karpen & Conduit, 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2021; Zeren, 2021; Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021), which were based on case study analysis and literature review, this study employed the quantitative analytical approach.

There are several limitations to the study, Firstly, the convenience sampling cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, the findings are felt to be valid for the study context. Inspired by the theoretical work of Karpen and Conduit (2020), the main motive of selecting a sample from Turkey was to find out how the engagement strategies affected the purchase intentions under the existing economic conditions of the country.

Secondly, this study contributes the knowledge indicating the rising importance of existential engagement strategies (Karpen & Conduit, 2020). The research findings revealed engagement strategies that respond to existential pressures became at least as influential on purchase intentions as strategies that respond to economic pressures. This study showed that, the positive effects on purchase intention of engagement strategies that address existential pressures are greater than engagement strategies responding economic responses.

The crisis and chaos will continue in the future (Greenspan, 2008; Drucker, 2003; Kotler & Caslione, 2009). Crisis and uncertainty are now the “new normal” of the economic, social, political, and cultural systems, which is why “existential pressures” will continue to be an important social problem. Practically, the study can help organisations to design effective consumer engagement strategies during crisis times such as Covid19. Additionally, if organisations understand the impact of the existential engagement strategies on the purchase intention, it also paves the way for the creation of “social good” for the society.

In the future, more comprehensive studies can be conducted by reaching more participants and by comparing different country cases. This research was carried out in a country with a high level of economic pressure. Conducting the same research in countries with different socio-economic conditions will reveal whether economic pressure will change the effect of different engagement strategies on

the purchase intention. Additionally, it will be beneficial to repeat this study in the post-Covid period to understand whether the engagement strategies responding for existential pressures are effective on the purchase intention only in times of crisis.

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