

**Dr. Muhammed Esat ÇETİN**

**Investigating The Relationship Between  
Health Product Consumption And  
Health Literacy In The Pandemic Period**



**FİLİZ KİTABEVİ  
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Filiz Kitabevi Basım Yayın Dağıtım  
Petrol Ürünleri Sanayi ve Tic. Ltd. Şti.  
Matbaacı Sertifika Numarası: 48596

**YAYINLAYAN**



Filiz Kitabevi Basım Yayın Dağıtım  
Petrol Ürünleri Sanayi ve Tic. Ltd. Şti.  
Cemal Yener Tosyalı Cad. No: 57/A (113)  
Vefa-Fatih/İSTANBUL  
Tel: (212) 527 0 718  
(850)441 0 359  
Faks: (212) 519 20 71

[www.filizkitabevi.com](http://www.filizkitabevi.com)  
[bilgi@filizkitabevi.com](mailto:bilgi@filizkitabevi.com)  
Yayıncı Sertifika Numarası: 48596

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## **PREFACE**

Health is defined in the literature not only as the absence of disease. Health is defined by the World Health Organization as a state of complete mental, physical and social well-being. All this makes healthy life the most important part of human life. In human life, health is sometimes a goal to be achieved, sometimes a process to be maintained or even protected, and sometimes an effort expressed as "at least for a healthier life". Health constitutes an important aspect of the life-related concerns that people carry throughout their lives. Understanding the medical, economic and sociological processes related to health and the search for solutions to problems by identifying the problems constitute two of the most important reasons that make scientific efforts on these issues meaningful.

Health products constitute an important part of the consumption products that individuals use throughout their lives. The main purpose of this book is to examine the effect of individuals' consumption of health products, health literacy levels, perceived economic value and perceived economic risk levels during consumption on customer satisfaction in an extraordinary process such as the COVID-19 outbreak, using structural equation modeling.

In the first part of the book, definitions on health and health products, the content of these definitions, evaluation of health services, health expenditures, health products, over-the-counter (OTC) drugs and factors affecting the consumption of health products were discussed. In the second section, the concept of health literacy, the importance of health literacy, the concept of health literacy in the world and in Turkey were discussed. In the third section, the COVID-19 outbreak, the history of outbreaks and their effects on the economy, and their impact on

consumption behaviors were discussed. In the fourth section, the conceptual examination of perceived value, perceived risk, purchase intention and customer satisfaction, literature review on the concepts and explanations about their measurement are given. In the last part of the book, the methodology of the research, discussion, conclusions and recommendations are given in order to examine the effect of individuals' health literacy level on the consumption of health products during the COVID-19 process.

I would like to express my gratitude to all my professors and colleagues who contributed to the development and completion of my thesis, which forms the basis for the content of this book. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Veysel Bozkurt for providing invaluable guidance and expertise throughout my PhD studies, setting an admirable example and contributing to the development of my thesis. I would also like to acknowledge the important contributions of Dr Dilek Demirbaş and Dr Seyfettin Erdoğan.

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## INTRODUCTION

Changing consumption habits in recent years have also had an impact on the consumption of healthcare products. Increasing applications to health service providers and increasing investments in health services in response to the need bring about a significant growth in the health sector. In Turkey, total health expenditures constitute an important economic item. According to 2019 data, total health expenditures constitute 5% of the gross domestic product (TUIK, 2020).

Individual health expenditures constitute a portion of health expenditures. Consumption of health products in health expenditures of individuals has an important place in many areas of healthy life such as treatment, protection, nutrition and exercise in daily life. Especially with the development of the concept of self-medication, individual health expenditures have been increasing recently. Individuals buy over-the-counter products especially from centers selling health products such as pharmacies as a result of their own experiences, recommendations or internet research.

The ratio of households' out-of-pocket health expenditures to total health expenditures is important as a data that will allow us to assess individuals' consumption of health products. The ratio of out-of-pocket health expenditures by households for treatment, medicines, etc. to total health expenditures was measured as 16% in 2020 (TUIK, 2020). Increasing out-of-pocket health expenditures may have an impoverishing effect especially on low- and middle-income individuals. For this reason, studies on the reasons affecting individual health expenditures are important. In Turkey, when household expenditures are broken down according to household consumption types, health consumption expenditures correspond to 2.2% of household

consumption expenditures (TUIK, 2019b). These data suggest that the consumption of health products has an important place in the lives of individuals not only in terms of their health but also economically.

In other words, self-medication, the advantages of individuals purchasing medicines directly from pharmacies for the treatment of simple diseases for which they cannot find an appointment for an examination or for which there is no need to go to a hospital, brings with it new regulations. Self-medication also carries some risks. Studies on the concept of self medication, which is increasingly on the agenda of the society with its advantages and risks, are gaining importance.

In order for the health system to be used effectively and fairly, each individual addressed by the system should be aware of the opportunities offered by the health system and should also be provided with access to these opportunities. In the same way, it is important that individuals are informed and guided correctly on issues related to their health, especially in public and private sector institutions where individual health services are provided.

People's access to health and their desire to benefit from health services is often a necessity for their lives rather than a choice. Considering this necessity, the protection of the individual as a consumer of health products in market processes such as competition and profit maximization is of particular importance. Considering these points, in order for individuals to have easy, effective and efficient access to health services, it is necessary to increase the health knowledge of individuals and to improve their capacity to understand and evaluate health issues.

Recently, states and international organizations aim to facilitate individuals' access to health services, increase their use of health services, and use the facilities and capabilities of health systems more effectively and efficiently with the concept of health literacy. In this sense, the definition of health literacy made by the World Health Organization is important:

"Health literacy is linked to literacy and refers to people's knowledge, motivation and competence to access, understand, evaluate and apply health information to make judgments and decisions in everyday life to maintain or improve quality of life throughout their lives through health care, disease prevention and health promotion (WHO, 1998)."

As the definition suggests, the goal of increasing the level of health literacy includes not only information but also active attitudinal change. Many people do not know how to access health information. They cannot distinguish the accuracy of information circulating on social media or among friends. These failures in access to accurate information not only affect the health of individuals, but also limit the effective use of the health system, increase waste in the health system as a result of unnecessary use, and make planning difficult. Moreover health information is often technical so to understand it, individuals need to be guided in different ways. Otherwise, it is difficult for individuals to comply with the right treatment, nutrition or medication.

Consumption and saving behaviors of individuals are affected during extraordinary processes. The COVID-19 pandemic also affected the demand for health products. Online purchasing behaviors have increased in consumer behavior. People tried to buy products that they could stock up, especially in the early stages of the pandemic. In this period, individuals' consumption of health products is influenced by environmental factors, advertisements, news, etc. with the increasing influence of social media.

Examining the reasons for the relationship between individuals' consumption of health products in extraordinary periods and crises and comparing the effects of this relationship in different groups is important for the production planning and market processes of health products, which have a vital place for health services, and for individuals to access these products in a healthy way.

This study aims to examine the effect of individuals' health literacy level on the consumption of health products during COVID-19. The health products analyzed in the study were limited to over-the-counter (OTC) health products, whose consumption is increasing. It is thought that evaluating these health products that individuals can purchase without a prescription will more accurately reflect individuals' health product consumption preferences. It is thought that health products prescribed by a physician and purchased through a prescription may lead to erroneous analyses in evaluating consumer behavior.

In the study, consumers' consumption behaviors were also addressed with their economic dimensions. In this sense, the statements of the perceived value and perceived risk scales were adapted to evaluate the economic dimensions of consumers' perceived risk and value. In addition, purchase intention and consumer satisfaction scales were also adapted from ready-made scales. The fear experienced by individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic was evaluated using the COVID-19 fear scale. In addition, the health literacy scale was used for health literacy.