Generation Z Attitudes and Preferences about Eco-Friendly Furniture and Furnishings

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ABSTRACT
Shaping the purchase and consumption habits of the younger generation are important for ensuring we leave a sustainable environment to future generations. This study explores the preferences and attitudes of adolescents and young individuals aged 14–25 years (Generation Z) who live in Kayseri province of Turkey regarding eco-friendly furniture and furnishings. A survey was designed and implemented, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA. The results of the study indicate young individuals obtain knowledge about eco-friendly design and products mostly through the internet and social media. They want furniture such as a bedstead or bed base that direct contact with their bodies and furnishing such as mattresses, home textile products to be eco-friendly. Also, it is determined that young boys have more information about eco-friendly products than young girls. However, individuals, who are prone to buying eco-friendly products, furniture, and furnishings in the future, it is determined that more than half are young girls. Also in the study, although youth have a positive attitude towards eco-friendly furniture and furnishings, it is determined that they consider them expensive products.

Keywords: Eco-friendly; furniture and furnishing; adolescents and young adults; generation Z; preference; attitude

1. INTRODUCTION

Individuals consume several goods and services to satisfy a variety of needs throughout their lives. The use of goods and services to satisfy such needs is called as consumption and the people who buy and use goods and services for consumption are called consumers (Arıkan and Odabası 1996). Therefore, consumer habits are affected by one's thoughts and feelings and are shown by the actions performed during the consumption process. Meanwhile, environmental influences also affect these thoughts, feelings, and actions, thus impacting consumer habits (Peter and Jerry, 2010).

People furnish and decorate the spaces where they live according to their needs, which direct them to buy and use certain furniture and furnishings. Furniture refers to goods such as tables, desks, and chairs that are used to make a room or building suitable for living (Postell, 2012). Furniture are designed and produced with a specific function in mind, such as sitting, resting, studying, playing games, tidying and displaying goods, or a partition of spaces. However, furnishings is a general concept that refers to decorative items such as furniture, curtains, and carpets as well as complementary parts that are used to decorate a house or room (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). The selection and spatial arrangement of furniture and furnishings, especially in personal areas (bedroom, office etc.), express the identities and self-construction processes of the user. The self-construction process is frequently observed in the middle (ages 14–17 years) and late adolescence (ages 17–21 years) periods as well as in the young adult period (ages 20–early 30s). In these periods, individuals experience substantial physical, biological, psychological, emotional, and social changes (Salkind, 2006).

Notably, the cognitive and emotional self-construction of adolescents and young adults is reflected in purchase and consumption processes, which in turn influence their future purchase and consumption habits. According to Peter and Jerry (2010), self-construction activity is especially intensive during the adolescent and young adult periods, as the youth experiment with different social roles and self-identities and often buy products to be integrated with such roles.

However, there are differences between generations in the consumption behavior in the self-construction process. Each generation shows its own needs and preferences with different behaviors and attitudes. Nowadays, adolescents and young adults in the process of self-construction are defined as Generation Z (Gen-Z). According to Rajagopal (2019), consumer behavior has changed rapidly with generation changes in the 21st century. Today, Gen-Z is rising in consumer markets. Gen-Z represents the largest consumer base up to 2030. This generation is the first generation born into the digital world and therefore has digital capabilities. Gen-Z expects brands to create an uninterrupted experience on digital and mobile platforms. This generation tends to purchase products that offer value and empower them in real life and help them express their individuality. Gen-Z individuals are a spending priority for families. It also has significant impacts on their family purchase decisions (Rajagopal, 2019).

As the population of people in the world grows, needs are diversified and consumption is increasing. However, increased consumption ultimately impacts the environment through the depletion of resources. According to Fiksel (2009), human well-being is closely linked to environmental coherence since the satisfaction of basic human needs (e.g., food, clothing, materials, energy) is based on the availability of natural resources. Throughout the previous 50 years, ecosystems have rapidly changed in response to the growing food, fresh water, timber, fibre, and oil demands of modern society (Fiksel, 2009). Consequently, such deformation in natural resources has led to the deterioration of human health and environmental quality (Zbicinski, 2006).

The term eco-design consists of the combination of the words ecology and design (Vezzoli and Manzini, 2008). Eco-design is also used interchangeably with design for the environment (DfE; Zbicinski 2006), both of which refer to the process of human designs engaging with the comprehensive patterns, flows, procedures, and physical conditions in nature in a meticulous and compatible way (Yeang, 2012). Eco-design offers new approaches in product design and presents a new framework and definitions for developing eco-friendly products (Machado, 2018). The objective of eco-design is to minimize the environmental impact of a product throughout the lifecycle of that product. Eco-design has many potential advantages such as cost reduction, stimulation of innovation, and reduction in environmental costs and liabilities in the future (Belmane, 2003).

According to Zbicinski (2006), eco-design starts with the development of the environmental aspects of the products and expands to include several practices in environmental issues, such as waste treatment, recycling, and cleaner production, and financial issues, such as eco-efficiency and socio-economics, throughout product development (Zbicinski, 2006). Eco-design aims to create a profitable balance between the ecologic and economic requirements of society and proper product design that is compatible with such requirements. Thus, eco-design combines the production targets in environmental (ecological), social (fairness), and business (financial) areas (Zbicinski, 2006).

Shaping the purchase and consumption habits of adolescents and young adults is important in terms of protecting natural resources, ensuring the maintenance of the same, and leaving a more livable and natural environment to future generations. One way to achieve this is to increase the environmental awareness of adolescents and young

adults and encourage them to make use of eco-friendly designed products. This study analyses the viewpoints, preferences, and attitudes of youth aged 14–25 years (Generation Z), living in Kayseri province in Turkey regarding eco-friendly design and environmentally friendly furniture and furnishings.

1.1. Literature Review

The literature included in this review focuses on eco-friendly products and consumer attitudes and preferences about these products. For instance, Gilg et al. (2005) analyzed the connection of green consumption with the sustainable lifestyles in Devon, England and found that the environmentally sensitive individuals consisted of high-income, well-educated individuals with a high age average. In contrast, non-environmentally sensitive individuals consisted of mainly working-class male individuals with a low age average and lower income who live in a rented house. Anderson and Hansen (2004) discovered that consumers were more likely to buy eco-labelled plywood products than similar unlabeled plywood products when price did not differ (Anderson and Hansen, 2004).

In their study concerning consumer behavior in Finland, Holopainen et al. (2014) inquired about the factors that affect consumer assessment on sustainability of wood products. Their results indicated that older individuals and female consumers give greater attention to product information, product origin, and consumer activity, whereas younger and middle-aged consumers give greater attention to product image and quality (Holopainen et al. 2014). Andac and Guzel (2017) analyzed how parents in Turkey select furniture and furnishings for their children. Their results indicated that wood is the most popular and preferred material for children's furniture and other accessories (70%) and that unlike other groups, well-educated and high-income parents prefer to choose furniture they believe is not harmful to their children's health or the environment (Andac and Guzel, 2017). In their study on middle-class consumers, who would like to have a higher quality of life in China, Wan et al. (2018) specified that the consumers were increasingly interested in eco-friendly products, which include eco-friendly child furniture. Furthermore, they found that consumers are willing to pay higher prices for products and furniture with eco-friendly characteristics (Wan et al. 2018).

There are also some academic studies on Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards environmental issues and environmentally friendly or green products. However, there was no study in the literature about Gen-Z consumers' attitudes in eco-friendly furniture and furnishing. Shwetha (2019) studied the attitude of generation Z towards green behavior. Shwetha discovered that Gen-Z exhibited Green Behaviors and was worried about environmental issues. Notably, he found that this generation is concerned with environmental issues such as clean technology, renewable energy, sustainability, and green initiatives. The author also emphasized that it is important to learn green behaviors at home before school for new generations. Priporas et al. (2017) studied how smart technologies can affect generation Z consumer shopping experiences. They stated that members of Generation Z behave differently from consumers and focus more on innovation. Furthermore, they found that intelligent technologies have a significant impact on the buying experience of this generation. This generation believes that they would make more informed shopping decisions with the help of technology.

Yadav and Pathak (2016), studied on the intention of Hindi young individuals to buy green products. As a result, they found that young Indian consumers are concerned about current environmental problems. They also found that young people have a positive attitude about buying green products for future use. Nguyen et al. (2018) studied the buying behavior of young consumers in the Vietnam green market. They concluded that their families, government and marketers did not help young people in environmental matters. The authors stated that the government should produce effective communication strategies and policies to raise awareness of young people on environmental issues. Also, it is emphasized that marketers should create shopping

environments that will facilitate the access of young people to products. Deniz Cakiroglu et al. (2019) studied on young consumers' attitudes towards green products in Turkey. Their results indicated that young individuals are sensitive to environmental issues, but they do not reflect this on their behavior. Furthermore, young individuals show a similar attitude to green products. Young individuals are more inclined to purchase green products for food, cleaning, and cosmetics, but they do not want to overpay for such purchases.

2. METHODS

2.1. Data Collection

Turkey is a transcontinental country located between Asia and Europe. Kayseri province is located at the center of Turkey and is an important production and export city for furniture, textile, metal fabrication, and electrical equipment products (Kayseri Governorship, 2019). According to the Central Anatolia Exporters' Association (OAIB, 2016), Kayseri is one of five cities in which the furniture sector is centered in Turkey. Thanks to new investments and technological developments, Kayseri has become a production hub for a variety of furniture products (OAIB, 2016). Based on the data of the Kayseri Chamber of Industry (KSO) and the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) for 2018, Kayseri is ranked 11th in overall exportation, 4th in furniture export, and 7th in textile exportation among major Turkish cities (KSO, 2019).

This capacity and product range means Kayseri offers product alternatives for adolescent and young adult consumers, including furniture, furnishings and decorative items, and eco-friendly products. Consequently, adolescents and young adult consumers have a choice in terms of design, price, quality, and features leading to a dynamic consumption experience. It is planned that the studies intended for the following periods would be conducted in other major Turkish cities that are also centers of furniture production.

The sample for this study was comprised of young individuals living in Kayseri province of Turkey. According to the data of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), the population of Kayseri province in 2018 was 1,389,680. Also, the population aged 15-24 according to the data of TUIK in Kayseri is 221.041 (TUIK, 2018). According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), and Cohen et al. (2002), it is sufficient to conduct a survey with 384 individuals for such a population. The number of target samples required for the survey was calculated as 384 according to Kayseri population.

The data collection ten sites were ten business enterprises operating in Turkey that offer sport and social activities for the young. Essential authorizations and approvals for the survey were received from the authorities of the spaces. Individuals were approached as they entered the facilities to ask if they would be willing to complete a short survey. The participants were informed about the survey, and their verbal consent was obtained prior to beginning the survey. From the ten sites, 384 individuals agreed to take part in the study, and the survey was conducted on these individuals. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

2.2. Analysis of Procedures

To obtain quality, objective, and comprehensive data in this study, a face-to-face interview survey method was chosen. This type of interviewing is one of the traditional data collection methods and is still widely used. The benefits of using face-to-face interviewing are the interviewer is able to keep the attention of the respondents and provide clarifying information when required and the respondents are able to ask questions as they complete the survey. However, this method is expensive as it incorporates extra costs, such as meals or travel, and is more difficult logistically to organize (Hague et al. 2004).

The survey form used for this study consisted of four sections. In the first section, demographic characteristics of the individuals, such as age, gender, and educational status, were collected. In the second section, the knowledge, attitudes, and purchase behavior of adolescents and young adults (Generation Z), concerning eco-friendly design and eco-friendly product concepts were measured. In the third section, the knowledge, attitudes, and approaches of these individuals and their families on eco-friendly furniture and furnishings were measured and they were asked to evaluate the status of their current furniture and furnishings. In the last section, these individuals were presented with statements that include judgments about eco-friendly design and eco-friendly furniture and furnishings and asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). These judgment statements were reviewed by making use of the quinary Likert Scale. Likert Scale was first developed in 1932 by psychologist Rensis Likert. The technique presents respondents with a series of attitude dimensions (a battery), for each of which they are asked whether, and how strongly, they agree or disagree, using one of number of positions on a five-point scale (Brace, 2008). The data were analyzed using the WEKA 3.9 statistical software. Waikato Environment for Knowledge Analysis (WEKA) has a general public license and was developed at the University of Waikato, New Zealand (WEKA, 2019). The obtained data is presented through tables.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Demographic Findings

The sample consisted of 54.2% males and 45.8% females. In terms of age, 46.9% were 14–17 years, 38.5% were 18–21 years, and 14.6% were 22–25 years. As expected, almost half (49.7%) were high school students, followed by college students (16.4%) and bachelor students (33.9%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Sex	**"N"**	**Percent (%)**
Male	208	54.2
Female	176	45.8
Age		
14-17	180	46.9
18-21	148	38.5
22-25	56	14.6
Educational Status		
High school	191	49.7
Associate Degree	63	16.4
Bachelor Degree	130	33.9

3.2. Level of knowledge about eco-friendly concepts

In this section, the knowledge, attitudes, and approaches of adolescents and young adults (Generation Z), about eco-friendly design and product concepts were measured. Participants were first asked if they had any knowledge about eco-friendly concepts (Figure 1). In response, 50.8% of the individuals stated they have knowledge about eco-friendly products, 25.8% stated that they have knowledge about eco-friendly product design, and 21.9% stated they are fully informed about eco-friendly furniture. The knowledge levels of individuals about environmentally friendly products and concepts were examined by gender factors. According to the findings, young males (52.8%) had more information than young females (47.2%). When asked about the source of their knowledge, 50.1% stated they obtained their knowledge from the internet and social networks, 19.1% stated that received information from school, and 10.7% stated they obtained their knowledge from books, magazines, and printed publications.

Participants were then asked to rate the importance of specific characteristics of eco-friendly products using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *very low importance* to 5 = *very high*

importance). Based on the responses given by the individuals, the most important characteristics of an eco-friendly product were that it is produced so as not to be harmful to human health and the environment (68.8%), it has a package that will not be harmful to human health and the environment (65.4%), and it is recyclable (66.1%). The majority of respondents stated that all the above sentences were of high importance. According to these findings, the majority of young people care about the environmental and health effects of the products and are sensitive to related issues. In addition, Karaca (2013) reported that consumers are turning towards less polluting products and more recycling products. Similarly, according to Cabuk et al. (2008), young people have concerns about environmental issues and are more sensitive to solutions to these issues. Shwetha (2019) reported that young people (Gen-Z) exhibit Green Behaviors and are interested in environmental issues.

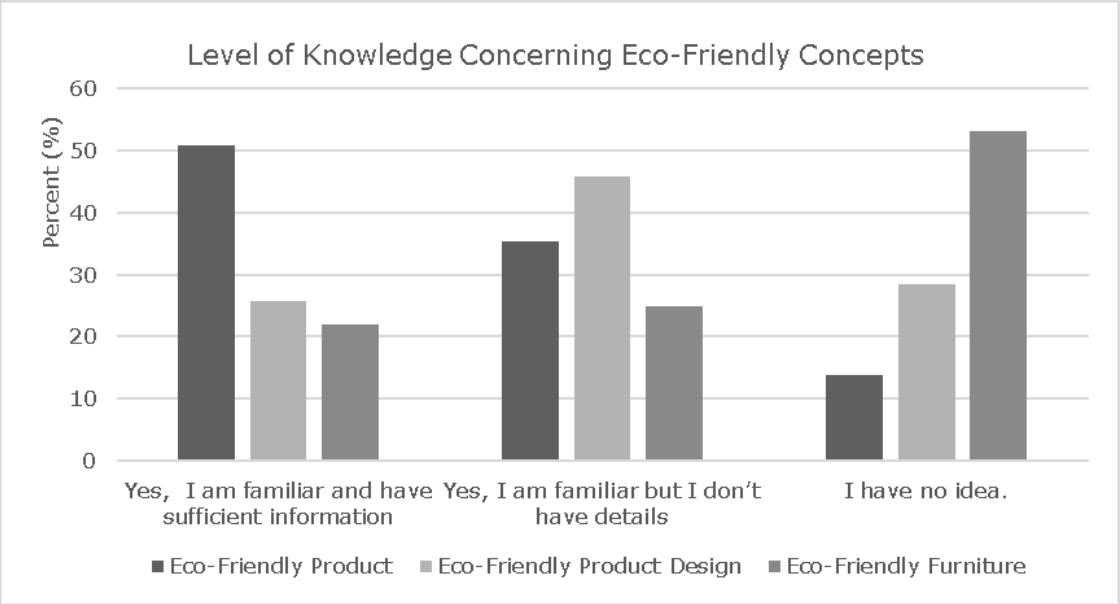

Figure 1. Level of Knowledge Concerning Eco-Friendly Concepts

3.3. User preferences regarding eco-friendly products

In this section, knowledge, attitudes, and approaches of the individuals regarding eco-friendly furniture and furnishings were measured and they were asked to evaluate their current furniture and furnishings. Participants were further asked about the attitudes of their families regarding eco-friendly products. Initially, the young individuals were asked when they last bought eco-friendly furniture or furnishings for their living spaces. Approximately one-third (32%) of the individuals stated that they bought this kind of product within the last 1–3 years for their living spaces.

Next, participants were asked which product they would like most to be eco-friendly among the products they generally purchase. The top three responses were food (27.3%), electronics (18.5%), and clothing (16.9%), followed by furniture (8.6%). When the young individuals were asked about which material gives them confidence and which material they consider eco-friendly in domestic use (other than furniture), they stated that the three materials on which they rely on most are wood (35.7%), glass (18.2%), and metal (15.1%).

When asked which furniture should be eco-friendly when used in their rooms, 25.8% stated that the bedstead or bed base should have eco-friendly characteristics. Other furniture pieces they indicated should be eco-friendly included cabinets and bookcases (23.6%), table or worktables (17.2%), armchair and sofa groups (12.5%), wardrobes (11.5%), and chairs (9.4%). When asked which furnishings should be eco-friendly when used in their own rooms, the respondents indicated that mattresses (27.9%), home

textile products (quilt cover set, blanket, etc.; 26.6%), and several decorative items (pillow, shawl, etc.; 18.8%) were the furnishings they would most like to be eco-friendly. Participants also indicated lighting elements (17.3%), carpet (6%), and curtains (3.4%) as other items that should be eco-friendly (Figure 2). According to these findings, individuals want furniture and other furnishings that come into contact with the human body to be more environment-friendly. Similarly, Andac and Guzel (2017) reported that individuals believe that furniture and furnishings that come into contact with me should be environmentally friendly.

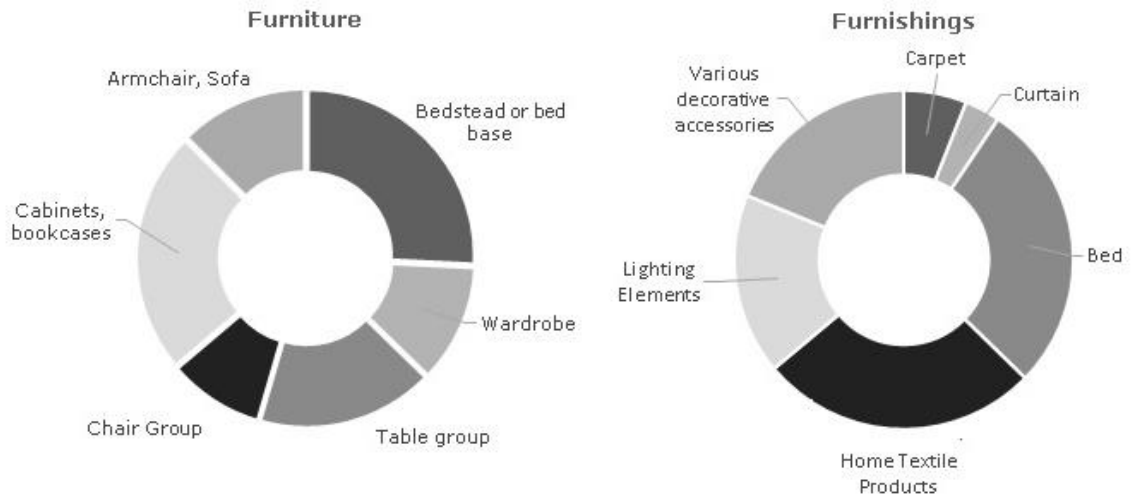

Figure 2. Furniture and furnishing types that young people want to be eco-friendly

Concerning which material give them confidence the most and which material they consider eco-friendly among the materials that are used in furniture manufacturing, the participants stated that wooden materials (45.1%) give them the most confidence. Similarly, Andac and Guzel (2017) and Andac Guzel (2020) reported that wood is the most environmentally friendly material that gives individuals the most confidence. Surprisingly, 26.5% of the young individuals stated that wooden composite (particleboard, MDF, etc.) products give them confidence and that they consider these products as eco-friendly. With this proof, it is understood that these individuals do not have sufficient information about the production and content of the wooden and composite materials because most of the adhesives, polishers, and paints used in furniture manufacturing contain chemicals whose toxicity is unknown. Indeed, furniture can act as chemical material diffusers within the home over a period of many years (Aksakal, 2005). Similarly, Andac Guzel (2020) found that individuals do not know much about the contents of wood composites.

The other materials that participants felt were eco-friendly were metal (13%), glass (11.2%), and plastics (4.2%). These individuals were asked which materials they thought were most harmful to human health and the environment. Most respondents indicated that surface finishing materials that have direct contact with skin, such as paint (27.9%), polishers (21.1%), and petrol-origin plastic parts (20.1%), have the highest likelihood of causing harm.

In the survey, the adolescents and young adults (Generation Z), were also asked about their attitudes regarding whether their families tended towards eco-friendly products when buying furniture or furnishings for their homes. The individuals stated that their families would buy the eco-friendly products if the price were acceptable (41.9%), with 20.3% indicating their families would be dissuaded from purchasing an eco-friendly item if they felt the price was too high. Further, 14.6% of the individuals stated that their

families did not have any intention to buy eco-friendly products, as there are very few on the market.

The participants were also asked about their attitudes regarding whether they will buy furniture or furnishings and home products that are manufactured based on eco-design logic for their own houses in the future when they are adults. A small percentage (6.8%) of the individuals stated they are unlikely to buy eco-friendly products in the future, whereas more than one-third (38.3%) stated that they will definitely think about buying this kind of product and they will choose and buy these products based on their needs and place of use (34.1%). Lastly, 20.8% stated that they would buy eco-friendly products if the price were suitable. More than half of the individuals who think to buy environmentally friendly products for themselves and their homes in the future are young girls (54.4%).

3.4 Findings on judgments about eco-friendly products

In this section, participants were presented with statements containing judgments about eco-friendly design and eco-friendly furniture and furnishings and were asked to indicate their agreement with each statement based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*; Figure 3).

Based on the analysis of such judgments, respondents think that environmental awareness should be the first priority under current conditions in the manufacturing and design of furniture (39.8%). Respondents further stated that they believe that the use of the term "eco-friendly" in promotions for the products will make positive contributions to purchasing activity in terms of consumers in the purchasing process of furniture and furnishings (42.7%). It was determined that the majority of the individuals who supported the production of products with an environmental sensitivity philosophy were young girls (63.4%). Andac Guzel (2020) has found that products have a negative impact on the environment and health and have an eco-friendly label that has a positive impact on their purchase.

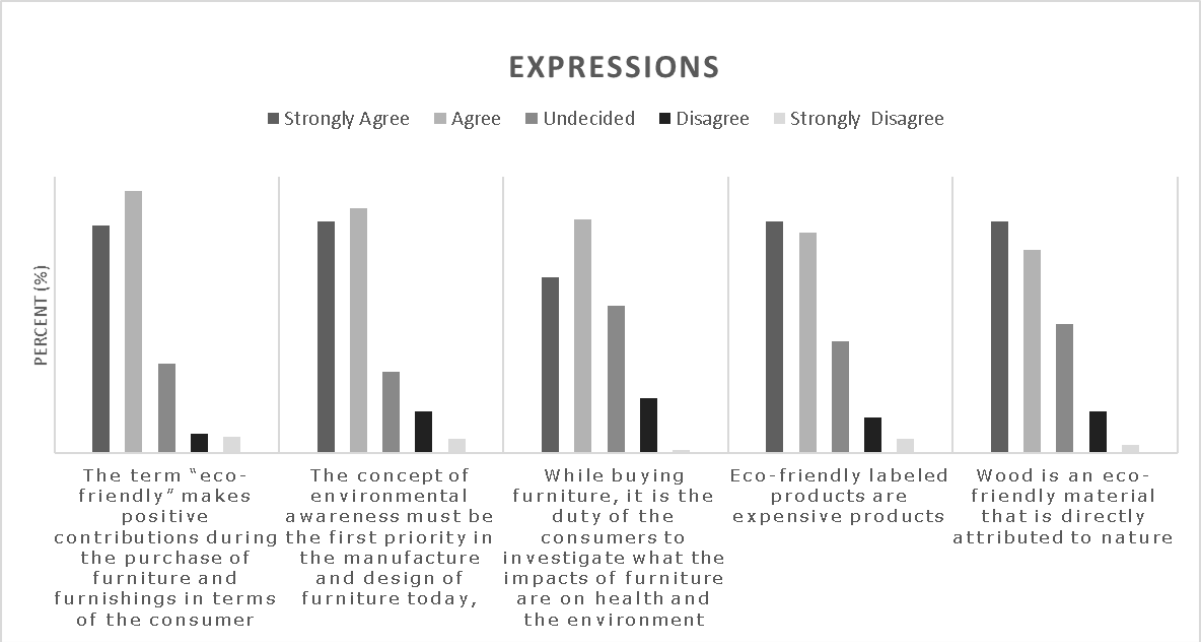

Figure 3. Some eco-friendly topics and their answers

Next, concerning the impacts of eco-friendly products on human health and the environment, more than one-third agreed that it is the duty of the consumer while buying furniture to investigate the potential impacts of the furniture on health and the environment (38%). Furthermore, 37.5% indicated they would view a product more

positively if they knew the manufacturer was not harming the environment with industrial waste. In addition, many have a strong belief that eco-friendly products should be made from recyclable materials (41.7%). Despite all of these positive opinions of the participants about eco-friendly design, they describe eco-friendly labeled products as expensive products (37.8%) and 34.9% believed the term eco-friendly is misused by some of the companies to increase the sales of furniture and furnishings. Wan and Toppinen (2016) reported that consumers consider environmentally friendly products as expensive. However, Andac and Guzel (2017) and Wan et al. (2018) report that parents are willing to pay high prices for eco-friendly products for their children. In the last section, the opinions of the respondents about the materials that are used in furniture production were analyzed once again. The individuals stated that wood is an eco-friendly material that is directly attributed to nature (37.8%). Andac Guzel (2020) reported that individuals see wood as a material reminiscent of nature.

The individuals find wood more healthy when surface finishing processes are not applied. They do not consider the furniture natural and sanitary when it is exposed to surface finishing processes, such as painting or polishing (36.7%). The individuals further think that the consumers who buy furniture made of wooden composite materials (particleboard, MDF, etc.) are aware of the risks and that these materials are not natural. In their opinion, consumers buy such furniture made of these materials despite the risks (32.6%). Andac and Guzel (2017) and Andac Guzel (2020) reported that individuals mostly think that wood is an expensive material. The author determined that these individuals tend to wood composites because of the wood is an expensive material. The author also states that these individuals are aware of the fact that wood composites are not natural and that they are taking possible risks.

4. CONCLUSION

The results obtained with this study are as follows:

1. Wooden materials are considered eco-friendly and the most reliable material for manufacturing eco-friendly furniture by the youths in this study. However, it was also clear they are not aware of the fact that wooden composites are not natural materials in terms of production and content.
2. Adolescents and young individuals (Gen-Z) have become aware of the eco-friendly concept mostly through the internet and social media. Although it was understood that these individuals are familiar with the issue in general terms, they do not have full knowledge of the details.
3. Adolescents and young individuals (Gen-Z) want the furniture and furnishings that come into direct contact with their bodies to be eco-friendly. However, it was evident they were unaware of the fact that the materials that do not come into contact with their bodies could still be harmful to their health. It was concluded that the current level of information obtained through the internet is not sufficient to raise awareness of the younger generation. Therefore, since the internet is the most used source by adolescents and young adults, for obtaining information, it is important to concentrate education efforts in this respect.
4. Adolescents and young individuals (Gen-Z) have a positive attitude towards eco-friendly design and eco-friendly products (regarding furniture and furnishings) and they think that they should be conscious in this regard. They think that especially the content and package of the products should be healthy and eco-friendly. However, despite these positive aspects, they consider eco-friendly labeled products to be expensive.
5. Adolescents and young individuals (Gen-Z), who prefer to buy products that will benefit them in real life, are willing to purchase eco-friendly furniture and furnishings. But the price is a factor that limits them.
6. In this study, it is determined that young boys have more information about eco-friendly products, furniture, and furnishings than young girls. However,

individuals, who are prone to buying eco-friendly products, furniture, and furnishings in the future, it is determined that more than half are young girls.

7. Finally, it was determined that price is a significant determinant in eco-friendly furniture and furnishing purchases. Just as the parents of the individuals tend to purchase eco-friendly products if their prices are acceptable, the youth indicated that they would also consider price as a determining factor for buying eco-friendly products in the future. It was concluded that they would like to achieve a balance between purchasing eco-friendly products and their needs or budget. These data (results 5 and 6) support the price data of Deniz Cakiroglu et al. (2019).

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