

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54663/2182-9306.2023.v11.n20.195-225>

Research Paper

How Did Young Consumers Feel about Being a Consumer During the COVID-19 Quarantines? An Assessment with the Collage Technique

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how young people's feelings and thoughts about being a consumer are reflected in their behaviors during the COVID-19 quarantine in terms of the Behavioral Immune System (BIS). BIS refers to individuals being psychologically or behaviorally defensive against contagion. Due to the multidimensional effects of COVID-19 on the world, such as economic, physical, and psychological, this study aimed to address the behavioral and psychological impact of COVID-19 on young people's consumerism. The study was conducted by interviewing 22 (13 women and nine men) young consumers aged between 19-23, who are university students in Turkey, and the collage technique was used to collect data from the participants. Content analysis and Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) were used to analyze the data. According to the results, the participants experienced both positive and negative emotions, with negative emotions being more intense during the closure period. Participants' negative emotions during the pandemic were determined as anxiety, fear, captivity, loneliness, uncertainty, and laziness, and positive emotions as awakening, hope, and simplification. During the quarantine period, there have been radical changes in the consumption behaviors of young consumers, especially in terms of content and quantity. It was also determined that four deep metaphors (container, transformation/change, resource, and control) were effective in young consumer behavior in this period. In this respect, the study shed light on young consumers' unconscious and hidden feelings, desires, and needs during the pandemic and tried to explain their deep metaphors. The study contributes to the literature by revealing unknown insights into the minds of these young consumers, who will have income and spending authority after the pandemic. It also offers scope for professionals who want to connect with their consumers deeply.

Keywords: Consumer behavior; projective techniques; collage technique; ZMET; BIS; COVID-19

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Received on: 2022/09/02

Approved on: 2023/01/08

Evaluated by a double-blind review system

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started in China in 2019, has spread rapidly worldwide. With the rapid spread of the pandemic, an atmosphere of panic has prevailed worldwide. Although the uncertainty and fear experienced exceptionally impacted the alarm at the beginning of the epidemic, this situation deeply affected the sectors and the state of a consumer worldwide. Health concerns, the active, visible dimension of COVID-19, made itself felt in much more complex sizes with reflections not only on physical health but also on psychological, economic, and social life. It is thought that this transformational effect of the pandemic process will lead to some permanent economic, social, psychological, political, and cultural impact in the long run, even when the pandemic is over (He and Harris, 2020). This pandemic, one of the most profound events in recent history, has caused distrust and anxiety in consumers due to the emerging crisis and uncertainty, creating a profound and needing understanding effect on consumption intentions (del Rio-Chanona et al., 2020). In times of crisis and tension, such as the pandemic, understanding consumer psychology and revealing the consumer's underlying emotions, desires, and needs is very important for marketing professionals and academics. Significantly to predict the behavior of consumers that may be permanent after the crisis, to predict possible changes, and to take action accordingly, the essential issue is to analyze and detect the deep-seated situations of the consumer systematically.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, many studies have conducted research on the current state of consumer behavior and tried to reveal how spending has transformed (such as the explosion of online sales, the increase in the need for necessities, the decrease in the demand for luxury and fashion products) (Deloitte, 2020; Ruiz Estrada et al., 2020; KPMG, 2020). Although all these studies provide important information about the reflections of COVID-19 on consumption expenditures, the literature has yet to be limited in determining what traces are formed in the depths of consumer psychology. Especially during the curfew and mandatory isolation period due to health concerns, many experts on psychological well-being warned individuals that they should get support, and it was deeply felt that mental well-being is at least as necessary as

physical well-being (Accenture, 2020; Eneizan et al., 2020; Kodoya et al., 2020). Because both physical and spiritual well-being is essential for the future of humanity. Just as the human body's immune systems defend against physical diseases, humans can protect themselves psychologically, and this is called the "Behavioral Immune System (BIS)" in the literature. Protecting and avoiding communicable diseases is one of the critical problems that people need to find solutions to throughout their evolutionary history (Ackerman et al., 2018). However, studies reveal that people try to motivationally evolve their cognitions, moods, and behaviors to help minimize risk to protect themselves from potential disease threats and avoid the risk of infection (Huang et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2019; Schaller et al., 2019; Schaller and Park, 2011). BIS is expressed as the person who tries to escape and protect himself from any contamination. Psychologically and behaviorally, individuals become defensive (Costa et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2020). On the other hand, young people faced difficulties and opportunities in many aspects during this process. Understanding the behavioral immunity of young people, physically and psychologically, especially during restriction periods, and interpreting their lasting effects on consumption psychology has become essential for many brands. Understanding the feelings, thoughts, and behavioral changes of today's young people that will establish tomorrow's societies through this process, which changes many habits in our lives from education to consumption, participation in economic life to social life, will be influential in determining behavioral assumptions about consumption structures and the new everyday consumption habits to be found after these periods, especially in uncertain, risky and out-of-control crisis moments such as pandemics. This study was conducted to see the impact COVID-19 has had on people's inner worlds and to find out how young consumers who are physically and psychologically protected within the scope of BIS are in the process. It aims to have information about young consumers' minds functioning during COVID-19 by learning what they experience and feel as "consumers" during quarantine. For this purpose, the collage technique, one of the qualitative methods considered effective in reaching the consumer's mind, was used in the study. The collage technique is a visual and verbal evaluation system used in psychiatric treatments, revealing people's deep thoughts and feelings. Collage is more successful than many methods in reflecting the inner world of the consumer with its verbal and visual forms (Havlena and Holak, 1996; Cody, 2015). In this study, firstly, theoretical information about the BIS and collage method was given. In the second part, the findings obtained from collages reflecting the feelings

of young consumers during the quarantine period were included, and the study was concluded with evaluations and recommendations regarding the research findings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Behavioral Immune System (BIS) and Consumer Behaviors

All physical systems can deal with pathogens; this is a natural organism. Although the body's immune system is often thought of as a biological context, a psychological dimension also prevents the initial transmission of pathogens to humans. The protection system (BIS) works with the same logic as the psychological immune system. BIS is thought to promote early detection and behavioral avoidance of individuals exhibiting cues of the disease (Mortensen et al., 2010; Schaller and Park, 2011). The behavioral immune system consists of psychological mechanisms that promote disease avoidance and works like the biological immune system, defending the organism against contamination and supporting prophylactic behavior (Schaller, 2011).

BIS activates if a person is exposed to stimuli that signal potential contamination, such as a disturbing scent or scene. Its' self-protection system is similar to the "smoke detector principle," trying to minimize the likelihood of errors that might be potentially fatal. So, BIS strengthens people to avoid situations that could drive contamination. In the signal detection phase, many false alarms can be seen due to the sensitivity of the BIS. Reacting to these stimuli brings out effective (disgusting, fear), cognitive (consider contamination), and behavioral (restrain) responses. Whereas disgust is informed as to the primary mechanism of the BIS, it is just a function of protection against a potential threat. BIS is an adaptive disease-avoidance mechanism, though there is significant variability in BIS sense and reactivity. It is a system, so everyone's perception and reaction might differ. Based on this, it can be said that BIS is a constant personality trait. People with a robust BIS with overprotected tendencies consider anything a threat. It is not, while people with a weak BIS are more likely to be exposed to deadly contagions (Terrizzi et al., 2013).

BIS theory mentioned that people could develop adverse effects and negative cognition to protect themselves from potential contamination. Facing the potential threat, people establish prevention behaviors and obey the in-group's norms. According to Schaller and Duncan (2007), BIS supports people to stay with in-group members more than the out-group members. BIS increases

negative attitudes toward out-groups. Improving public health emergencies induces more negative emotions and cognitive assessments. On the other hand, in the long term, this favorable protection system might dismantle the balance of psychological mechanisms, resulting in overreacting to any disease or excessively avoidant behaviors (Li et al., 2020). Since any illness or crisis caused by public health emergencies can be reflected directly in emotions and cognition, it is essential to monitor psychological changes during pandemic time within emotional and cognitive signals.

Although studies examining behavioral immune system theory are relatively limited in the consumer behavior literature, publications are produced, especially on physical transmission studies. In this respect, marketing professionals must understand the consumer mind in predicting the factors affecting consumer reactions to products and services during epidemic periods when transmission is standard. In particular, studies showing that second-hand products or products with contact are worse perceived by consumers in the consumer behavior literature (O'Reilly et al., 1984; Rozin et al., 1994; Argo et al., 2006; Morales and Fitzsimons, 2007; Castro et al., 2013; Qian and Yamada, 2020). Studies investigating consumer behavior's direction and underlying intention mainly explain the functions influencing consumer preferences to explain people's consumption of certain products. This study has tried to explain the behavioral choice and the tasks of deep metaphors against the consumer behavior of the behavioral immune system during the pandemic. In this context, the psychological mechanism of the consumer, who accepts the existence of COVID-19 as the cause of pathogenic transmission, and accordingly acts in preventive or coping behaviors, has been defined. Many studies have predicted that COVID-19 will push consumer behavior and industries in different directions (Hesham et al., 2021; Laato et al., 2020; Mehta et al., 2020). Based on these studies, which predict that this period, called the new normal, will give birth to a new consumer mass, it creates a researchable area in various dimensions where especially the young generation will be positioned according to these new life principles. It is essential to reveal the insights that shape the consumption, savings, and spending practices of this young consumer group, who are experiencing the pandemic and total closure, in terms of developing new products and responding to the needs of this new consumer segment of the future.

2.2 Young consumers and deep metaphors

Young people are valuable prospective future customers, so many brands invest early to create a loyal customer group. The main reason for this is that young people are generally called “early adopters” (Spero and Stone, 2004). Young people are more capable than adults to align their position in the market by accepting any new situation more quickly and easily. This causes them to be seen as a profitable and lucrative consumer group in the market at all times. For this reason, understanding the choices, attitudes, and behavioral intentions of young consumers and trying to explain the way they perceive the world they live in is always seen as a popular research area in consumer behavior (Jariah et al., 2004; Delafrooz et al., 2009; Shroff et al., 2011; Jadhav and Khanna, 2016; Croes and Bertels, 2021; Sumi and Ahmed, 2022). In this context, the study focuses on the young consumer group because young people are essential to the new normal that this world crisis will bring. Therefore, for this vital segment of society, understanding the state of being a consumer during COVID-19 will help predict future consumers' lifestyles and understand their needs.

Youth, as a strong spending group, is classified based on age, with the youth market being 14-16 (young people) and 16+ (young adults) (Spero and Stone, 2004). The study targets the group called young adults within this classification. However, it should be stated that there needs to be more than age to classify the young consumer group. Factors such as lifestyle, interests, consumption habits, gender, and educational status that distinguish young people from other groups other than age should not be ignored. In this case, it is essential for brands targeting young adults to understand who this audience is, their values, attitudes, concerns about the state of the world, and the subliminal drives that shape all of this, to approach them and build trustworthy and sincere relationships with them. Through metaphor theory, Zaltman (1997) explains that consumers reveal cognitive and emotional meanings through connections and states that metaphors are “representations of a thought or emotion according to another thought or emotion.”

There are many marketing and consumer behavior studies in which conceptual knowledge is revealed by explaining the intentions underlying people's behavior through metaphors (Coulter et al., 2001; Covington, 2012; Wilson and Elliot, 2016; Jung, 2022). Although it is stated that the metaphors put forward in these studies are connections hidden in the subconscious, Zaltman (1997) has adopted that metaphors are not only latent representations of emotions and thoughts

but are in the structure that creates and shapes them. The metaphor technique suggested by Zaltman has an exploratory design in trying to understand the profound connotations of the emotions and thoughts created by the crisis to obtain the consumer's insight in moments of crisis where consumer information cannot be penetrated. Especially in new situations where concepts are difficult to define clearly, methods such as the collage technique can be used to obtain these insights. Several methods are used to measure consumers' emotions and thoughts, from qualitative to quantitative. But the most appropriate way to measure emotions is qualitative methods, especially in times of crisis, if it is desired to reveal the deep understanding of the consumer. To understand consumers' minds, we need deep information that shows their subconscious. Projective techniques like collage-making give researchers latent feelings and thoughts (Costa et al., 2003). In this context, it was tried to obtain data using the collage technique in the study. Since the collage method is not frequently preferred in consumer behavior, it is necessary to reveal its theoretical framework.

2.3 Collage method

All social research methods aim to measure individuals' or societies' attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and motives correctly. Significantly rising tendencies toward visual research owing to visualization is an essential and indispensable part of today's digital world (Costa et al., 2003). Then, it is accepted that projective methods are more appropriate to measure some aspects of consumer behaviors, especially psychographic attributes like personality, self-consciousness, and motives. According to researchers, nonverbal techniques and visual methods reveal consumers' creativity and encourage them to reflect on their hidden thoughts (Costa et al., 2003; Chamberlain et al., 2011; Mannay, 2016). Zaltman (1997) pointed out in his paper that human thoughts' are image-based, not word-based. Expanding neuroscience techniques into market research also has reinforced these views. Most projective techniques use verbal communication, like sentence completion, word association, storytelling, and role-playing. Deacon (2000) argued that some creative projective procedures like sculpting, drawing, and photography as artistic methods. He added that art techniques can be used to learn about participants' experiences and imagination. Also, the analytical memo of a human being does not work linearly; in contrast, it is unstructured. Collage-making is a function of analytical message and pre-consciousness, where instincts are as legitimate and structured as logical thinking (Vacchelli, 2018).

Visual methods are the oldest new method (Travers, 2011). Sociologists have used some photographs techniques, but optical research has been chiefly applied for decades (Rose, 2014). Collage techniques first took place as a tool for therapy techniques and psychiatric evaluation in the 1950s. Consumer behavior researchers started to pay closer attention to visual research methods due to a special session held at the Association for Consumer Research Conference in 1985 (Heisley and Levy, 1991). Holak and Havlena (1992) used the collage method to explore consumers' nostalgia perceptions. In 2003, Belk investigated consumers' desires in a consumption context; Zaltman and Zaltman 2008 used collage techniques to investigate "deep metaphors" in consumers' minds (Saunders, 2009).

Collages have been used in research in various areas, including branding (Chaplin and John, 2005).

The collage technique contains the construction of a collage that reflects a person's opinion, view, and feeling in a non-verbal form. The saying is, "A picture is worth 1000 words" (Saunders, 2009; Hamrouni and Touzi, 2011). The collage technique inquires individuals to amplify their thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes about daily lives, relations, events, products, etc. The most powerful attribute of the collage method is reflecting metaphorical thinking and bringing out latent emotions, concerns, and ideas. Collage-making generates the most significant data per participant (Holbrook and Pourchier, 2014). Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) define collage as: "collage, taken from the French verb "coller" (to stick), is the process of using fragments of found images or materials and gluing them to a flat surface to portray phenomena." Davis and Butler-Kisber (1999) describe collages as "interior shapes of mental space" and identified followed; a collage is a flexible composition that is assembled gradually and additively; as each new part is included, the intuitive relationships among the various components are ordered and re-ordered until a convincing overall pattern or schema is achieved. It had been a discussion that the collage technique could be an alternative to the Thematic Apperception Test due to its convenience for multicultural appraisal and treatment. The collage technique was primarily used in advertising strategies, but consumer behavior was limited. Accepting experiential offerings could prove companies' distinctive competition advantages and help with neuroscience techniques collages have paid more attention to the method. The collages method has benefits, like providing visual and verbal information about consumer imagery (Havlena and Holak, 1996).

3. METHOD

In the study, it is purposed to reach the depths of the minds of young consumers to learn about the feelings and thoughts of being a consumer during COVID-19 quarantines using the collage technique and free associations. In this way, it is also aimed to learn the sentiments of young consumers regarding the epidemic and quarantine process during the period of complete closure, their perception of being a consumer during this period, and the reflections of all these on consumption. Research questions determined more precisely to achieve these objectives of the research are as follows:

- What were the feelings and thoughts of young consumers when the epidemic occurred?
- What has changed in their life as a consumer during the lockdown period?
- What are their expectations from the future as a consumer going through this process?

3.1 Measurement tool and data collection

An in-depth look at consumers' emotions, thoughts, and perceptions provides valuable marketing and consumer behavior information. One of the effective ways to provide this information is to analyze the reflections and associations of the complex consumer mind with projective techniques, as demonstrated in many studies (Haire, 1950; Hussey and Duncombe, 1999; Tıǧlı, 2003; Boddy, 2005; Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2009; Herz, 2010; van Schalkwyk, 2010; Swanson and Wald, 2013; Nunez, 2015, Erbaş, 2018). Studies show that such techniques tend to reach accurate data in obtaining deep knowledge, feelings, and thoughts, especially in in-depth interviews or focus group studies, and participants are often willing to participate in such studies. When the goal is to capture deep feelings and cognitions, especially in complex and uncertain situations, such projective techniques can serve as a basis for consumer research and facilitate understanding of consumer connections to products, services, and brands. For this reason, it aimed to use projective analysis to discover young consumers' perceptions about being a consumer, especially in an uncertain period such as an epidemic. The collage technique was used in data collection. Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), which makes use of the power of deep metaphors to explain subconscious values, attitudes, and behaviors among projective techniques, were used in this study (Zaltman and Zaltman, 2008). This metaphor approach, based on representing a situation, concept, thought, and emotion with another connotation, is based on the expression of associations with images through visual materials (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In this context, young consumers were asked to visualize their

experiences of being a consumer during the pandemic period with concepts that evoked them and turn this experience into a story in writing. Participants were encouraged to think within the framework of the specified research questions, and they were first asked to complete their collages. After the participants completed their collages, one-on-one interviews were conducted with them about the pictures, images, and figures they used in their collages. The discussions were deciphered and converted into a written format, the researchers were subjected to content analysis, and cause-effect analysis was applied to the associations. Maxqda qualitative data analysis program was used to perform these analyses.

3.2 Participant Profile, data acquisition, and analysis process

The research was conducted with 22 university students, 13 female, and nine male, between the ages of 19-23, living in Turkey. The convenience sampling method was used to select the participants and a sample that was easy to access and represented the relevant universe was chosen, especially during the pandemic process in which complete closure occurred. Information about the participants’ profiles and participant number codes is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants’ profile

Participant Number and Code	Gender	Age	Participant Number and Code	Gender	Age
P1	Female	19	P12	Female	19
P2	Female	21	P13	Male	19
P3	Female	22	P14	Female	20
P4	Female	22	P15	Female	22
P5	Male	23	P16	Male	21
P6	Male	20	P17	Male	22
P7	Female	21	P18	Female	21
P8	Female	21	P19	Female	19
P9	Male	19	P20	Female	22
P10	Male	21	P21	Male	19
P11	Male	20	P22	Female	20

The study started during the lockdown and was conducted conditionally on the online meeting platform during closures until February 2021. Participants were informed about the collage technique in the first of these meetings. The purpose of the study, expectations from the participants, concerns of the participants, information about the research process, and the responsibilities of the participants were clarified in this meeting. Afterward, the participants were expected to submit their images in digital formats such as .jpg or .ppt. Participants were given 15 days for this stage. The researchers first examined the studies of the participants, who transferred the relevant images in the specified formats. Then, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each participant through these images. Considering the pandemic process, an online method was preferred for these one-to-one interviews. With 22 participants, 1270 minutes of recording, each lasting an average of 45 minutes, was achieved. These records were deciphered by the researchers and made ready for analysis. The data obtained from the interviews, where the interviewees were asked to transfer their images to collages through narration, were subjected to content analysis and examined by performing cause-effect analysis. At this point, Zaltman’s method of revealing metaphor was used to detect deep cognitive and emotional states in the minds of young consumers. Maxqda qualitative data analysis program was used in analyzing the data and obtaining the findings. Accordingly, the data acquisition and analysis process is phased as follows:

Table 2. Research process

Stages	Time and Process	Data
Collecting Images	15 days - Complete Closure Period, April 2020	72 digital images
Conducting Online Interviews	2 months - May and June 2020 - 22 online interviews	1270 minutes one-on-one online interview recording, 22 digital collages
Analysis and Interpretation of Findings	6 months – July to December 2020	Deciphering 1270-minute online interview records, determining the cause-effect relationships with the content analysis of the deciphered interviews, and revealing the association connections with the ZMET method

A stepwise method was used to analyze the data. First, the analysis text for each participant was coded separately by both researchers. The researchers brought together the relevant and meaningful categories on the obtained code list and organized the code list by discussing the different coding elements. At this stage, an independent researcher was requested to code the transcription texts received to test their validity and reliability. The transmitted code list was harmonized by comparing the code list of the study researchers, and the final version was created. After this content analysis, a categorization regarding the cause-effect analysis and the relevant metaphors of the associations stated by the participants in the study was structured. The links between images, figurative expressions, narratives, concepts, and associations are discussed at this stage.

Some examples of the collages from the participants are given in Figure 1 when the participating young consumers were asked to depict the emotions and feelings associated with being a consumer during the complete closure of the COVID-19 pandemic process by making a collage and to explain the reasons for choosing the images they used.



Figure 1. Examples of participants' collages

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Collage studies and expressions created to understand the feelings and thoughts of young consumers as consumers during the lockdown of the pandemic, their changing consumption

habits in their lives, and their expectations as young consumers for the future were first analyzed to understand the connotations of these research questions have created on them.

The collage and narratives of the participants were first subjected to cause and effect analysis for metaphor evaluation. This method tried to understand why the participants preferred the symbols and images they used in collages. In this way, the ladder method obtained many of the reasons that make the participants think and feel the relevant photos. In this part, based on each image in the whole collage, it was tried to learn the underlying feelings and thoughts, and a shared pool of values was created for all participants. These values allow us to understand the magnitude, frequency, and rating of the feelings and ideas that the pandemic and total closure make young consumers feel and think. Accordingly, the shared key concepts that emerge in the participants' feelings and thoughts about being a consumer in the pandemic are presented in Table 3, in order of frequency of emphasis by the participants.

Table 3. Emotions and thoughts of young consumers in the pandemic

Positive Emotions and Thoughts	Negative Emotions and Thoughts
Awakening, Hope	Anxiety, Fear
Simplification	Captivity, Loneliness
	Uncertainty
	Laziness

As seen in Table 3, young consumers have had more negative feelings and thoughts during the pandemic. Concepts such as anxiety, fear, captivity, loneliness, uncertainty, and laziness represent the negative emotions that the participants felt intensely during the complete closure. In the study, the participants visualized anxiety, worry, and fear in the metaphors that emerged at the most basic level. Participants stated that they depicted their concern with figures and images such as drugs, pills, masks, viruses, thinking man/woman, sweat drops on the forehead, big sea waves, and a person looking out of the house. A participant expressing her concerns with big sea waves said, *“This situation reminds me of the scary big waves that hit us standing on the beach, and we grapple with the other before one ends.”* (P2). Another participant said, *“The thinking man expresses my tense and thoughtful waiting with curiosity and anxiety about what will*

happen in the future.” (P16). A participant used an intermittent wire mesh figure in her visuals, referring to feelings of both captivity and anxiety. She said: *“I also used a human image with a horrible face because even if we somehow get to the products, we feel anxiety and approach them with fear and suspicion.”* (P15).

Captivity and loneliness were the most intense negative emotions that followed anxiety and fears. Participants often painted these feelings with images of iron bars, prisons, islands, traps, houses, aquariums, and cages. One of the participants, who associated their feelings of laziness with hammocks, said, *“Spending time sitting in the hammock reminds me of the lazy times we spent lying at home during quarantine days.”* (P21). Participants who experienced intensive feelings of uncertainty mostly expressed this feeling by associating it with depression, fear, and fright when explaining the images they used. A participant visualized this with a scary script wearing a mask and said, *“The uncertainty of the pandemic process scares me, and I mask this feeling of uncertainty in order not to reflect it to my family and friends.”* (P10). When we examine the expressions that emphasize the feeling of captivity, one of the participants expressing the sense of confinement with iron bars said, *“This situation makes me feel as if I was in prison; I was desperate and just living as a prisoner by taking only the food I need.”* (P18). Another participant who associates the feeling of captivity with the cage said, *“Our freedom is restricted because we cannot leave the house during the quarantine days.”* (P19). Some of the participants expressed their sense of loneliness through various visuals. One of these participants benefited from the island metaphor and said: *“The island image symbolizes that I feel lonely as a result of my isolation.”* (P2).

In addition to all these negative emotions, many participants also needed to visualize positive feelings and thoughts. In this context, the participants stated that this experience, which they usually experience with negative emotions, feeds positive feelings such as hope and simplification. It is an awakening process for themselves and the world. Some participants used the sun and sunrise visuals and stated that these images made them feel awakening and hope. Many participants have drawn a very generous profile in seeing the positive aspects of the pandemic. A participant, who called the continuation of consumption in the online process an opportunity and chance, used the image of the flying bird and said: *“No matter how long we stay at home, we seem to be flying among all the information in the world or all the people in the world.”* (P11). Feeling the hope and happiness of participating in artistic activities such as

concerts as one of the online socialization tools, another participant with a similar feeling imagined it with the picture of a woman playing guitar. It narrated it with the following words: *“Being at home is not an obstacle to socializing. I can reach the same pleasure in that atmosphere with mini-concerts in various ways via social media.”* (P3). Among the positive feelings and thoughts of the participants, many expressions contain references to positive young consumer attitudes regarding the awakening of nature. A participant who emphasized awakening described it as an awakening for both their soul and her personal development. A participant stated that she used a mirror and reading glasses images by describing this awakening as an inner exploration and journey.

Although many participants define this pandemic process as complex, they hope for the post-pandemic and have positive feelings about it. A participant imagined the path to the post-pandemic with rainbow stairs and explained, *“I believe that we will climb the colorful stairs from these difficult days.”* (P2). One participant who thinks that the unconscious consumption behavior created by stockpiling at the beginning of the pandemic process has transformed positively with the development of online shopping opportunities interprets this as a need for simplification in consumption and makes the following statements: *“We have learned that when everyone gets what they need, we will lighten the burden of both the producer and the dozens of people working for us.”* (P11).

The feelings and thoughts of the participants as young consumers during the pandemic, as expressed in Table 3, show that the pandemic and the process of complete closure made the participants feel intense negative emotions. However, they also say they are full of hope, individually and socially, regarding the post-pandemic process as young consumers. It has been determined that the perceptions and happiness of nature’s recovery and individual cognition are noticeably emphasized. However, their deep thoughts about the consumption process emerged in their metaphors and the narrative approach in which cause-effect analysis was carried out. Accordingly, in deep metaphorical meanings, most participants emphasized the importance of being a conscious consumer and simplifying consumption in their post-pandemic expectations.

When the consumers' emotions are examined, it is seen that the negative emotional states that define the only consumer group are the young consumers. This supports the literature studies that only consumers will increase after the pandemic (Wang et al., 2021). However, the findings are consistent with the literature, which found that consumers feel insecure and uncertain, especially

during crisis periods caused by fear and panic, worry, anxiety, and stress (Hendrix and Brinkman, 2013; Wilkens, 2020; Di Crosta et al., 2021).

From the perspective of metaphors under these feelings and thoughts, the “container” metaphor is the most encountered. Prisons, aquariums, and homes are used mainly by participants. Containers perform two functions: keeping things in and out (Zaltman and Zaltman, 2008). Here participants referred to two meanings of containers as keeping the transmission of viruses out and keeping them in. But at the same time, the containers symbolize mandatory staying at home. Then, when participants used this metaphor, they mostly used to be in a tight spot manner. Of course, a container represents keeping away diseases.

Conversely, common thoughts focused on being in a problematic situation and reaching freedom. Related to this container metaphor, the following analogy that is met frequently is “transformation/change.” Transformation involves changing states or status emotionally (turning over a new leaf) or physically (laying low by a cold or healing from an illness) (Zaltman and Zaltman, 2008: 20). Participants implied transformation mainly used kite, sunrise, rainbow, and clover. Participants mentioned that these rough times will pass, and fresh and new beginnings will happen.

The following metaphor is “resource.” A resource is everything to survive: food, water, friends, love, information, abilities, etc. Resources are in nature or artificial creations. They imply the primary necessities to continue our life as they should be. Resources are hygiene products, masks, the Internet, and social media. Internet and social media connect people with their family and friends. Internet and social media have a gating role in reaching the outer world. And sanitizers, masks, gloves, and food stockings are the primary sources of lockdown.

But all consciousness, fear, and anxiety pointed out the “control” metaphor. The human being needs the feel control in their life. We must control our health, psychology, work, relations, and future. We use the word “out of control” to explain people who have harmful addictions. Or when we get sick, we say, “Now I think I can’t control my body and my life. It is running down like a car that has broken brake”. Or when we accomplish a daunting task, we say, “Everything is under control now.” COVID-19 suddenly has entered everyone’s life with less information. This limited experience with the virus has created colossal concern, and every people in the world has thought that they have lost control of their life and that uncertainties and unknowns are the reality of the new world.

In the study, the participants were also asked about the transformation in their consumption habits, their feelings as young consumers, and their thoughts and expectations regarding the future consumption process. The visuals and metaphors they included in their collages were analyzed by subjecting them to cause-effect analysis to understand the deep meanings underlying them, and the findings in the table below were reached:

Table 4. Associations regarding the transformation in the consumption habits of the participants

Conversion in Consumption Structure	Online Shopping
	Socializing Online
Expended Products and Services	Digital Platform Services
	Health and Wellness Products and Services
	Hygiene and Cleaning Products
	Food Products
	Clothing Products
	Hobby and Leisure Products
Transformation of Consumption Concerns	Stock and Consumption Frenzy
	Savings and Simplification

As seen from Table 4, the period of complete closure during the pandemic has been when consumers shop more due to curfew restrictions. For example, a participant said, *“I generally prefer to do my shopping or other needs over the internet.”* (P5); another participant stated that she expressed this process with computer visuals and said: *“I was doing online shopping in this period and online shopping was trendy and reliable.”* (P15).

Many participants who previously shopped from marketplaces and e-commerce websites stated that they used and preferred these online channels more than before. Some even included the names/brands of some applications and websites they frequently use in their collages. However, participants who preferred online shopping less regularly stated that they viewed and tended towards online shopping more positively in this process. A participant symbolizes this situation

with images of money and a turtle; the reasons for using these images are as follows: *“I break my prejudice against online shopping like in the tortoise in the rabbit and turtle story. It had broken all prejudices against itself by winning the race. I am trying to break my prejudice towards online shopping.”* (P19).

Many of the participants stated that they socialized online as well as shopping during this period. One of the participants included the flying bird image in her collage and said: *“Thanks to the internet and social media, we participate in concerts that we wouldn’t normally go to, and we can socialize online.”* (P12). Another finding that supports this online socialization transformation in consumption is that the participants stated that digital platforms took the most place in the expenditure items. For most participants, it was determined that the expenditures made on some products and services in consumption items increased more. Among these, the participants included images that express that they consume digital platforms the most in their collages. Among the digital media, some young consumers also stated that they consume digital games the most.

Participants expressed in their visuals that food expenditures are the main item in consumption expenditures are also exceptionally high. However, the participants who experience new learning processes for hobby and leisure activities and add a new class to their expenditure items are also at a considerable level. When one of the participants stated why she included the painted image used in her collage, she said that *“I started to color the old shoes that I did not wear by ordering paint over the internet because I was in search of many hobbies.”* (P18) and stated that this expenditure item would also take place in her consumption expenditures in the future. Some participants, who said that sports, well-being, and health expenses frequently increased during this period, indicated that they included yoga, meditation, and similar routines. These were reflected in the expenditure items in the products and services they purchased.

In addition, many participants included many product images such as masks, cologne, disinfectants, and medicines in their collages and stated that their expenditures for these products increased. One of the participants who used these images said: *“I started using products such as cologne and hygiene gel all the time. I became able to wear a mask even while walking around in our garden.”* (P13).

Many consumers stated that this process was quite instructive for the consumer, even though there were transformations and increases in the items and services on which they are spent. They

included images that visualize this situation in their collage. A participant emphasized conscious consumption and stated, *"In this period, we should abandon our unnecessary anxiety and fear and shop more calmly and as much as necessary."* (P6). One participant who is sensitive about this issue said, *"As a conscious consumer, we should always think of another person and do our shopping accordingly on these bad days. It is wrong and selfish to pretend that we will not find anything to stock up at home because we all know we all need common things."* (P7). In addition to many participants who emphasized the importance of conscious consumption and simplification in consumption, expenditures increased, which turned into a consumption frenzy for them. One of the participants reflected on this situation in her collage with discount symbols and explained: *"I already had a disease of shopping unnecessarily, and I frequently shop for clothing because I constantly see discount pages on social media during this boring period."* (P3). Another participant described this need for stocking in his collage with the following statements: *"During this quarantine period, consumers started to stockpile cleaning materials and food as if they could never reach them again."* (P9).

The findings have some similar results to the consumption behavior of consumers during the crisis. Studies measuring consumption habits in times of crisis reveal that consumers acquire new strategies and practices in times of crisis and panic (Sarmiento et al., 2019). As young consumers started to spend time at home, they turned to online shopping, which changed their shopping habits. The excessive consumption habit of consumers in times of crisis, such as natural disasters, has also shown itself in the pandemic, and it has been emphasized that there are changes and increases in the consumption levels of consumers (Kennett-Hensel et al., 2012). Similar to the findings obtained in previous studies on the change in store preferences where people shop in times of financial crisis, the change in the store format consumers prefer during the health crisis revealed by this study is parallel (Kaswengi and Diallo, 2015).

When the collages of the participants were evaluated within the scope of the ZMET analysis, which deals with the effect of deep metaphors in the marketing industry put forward by Zaltman and Zaltman (2008), it was determined that young consumers felt four primary deep metaphors in the complete closure process. The deep metaphors obtained by accessing the subconscious of young consumers participating in the research with ZMET are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Young consumers’ deep metaphors for a total shutdown

Deep Metaphors
Container
Transformation/Change
Resource
Control

According to Zaltman and Zaltman (2008), there are seven deep metaphors: balance, journey, transformation/change, container, connection, resource, and control. When the collages of the participants were analyzed through the use of ZMET, it was found that young consumers had four deep metaphors regarding the closure process, as given in Table 5. Collage comments with the content of “you are in control” or “you can control your life,” which reduce the feeling of losing control of the participants and reveal the wishes and feelings of the subject of power in the consumer’s subconscious. This metaphor is supported by the transformation/change already existing in people- the transformation into a good state. While conveying their collages, the participants often emphasized that this process expresses a social, environmental, and vital transformation and change. Participants also frequently stressed the container metaphor. Rather than the restrictive feature of being at home and in quarantine during the entire closure process, the participants expressed this process as a period of protecting themselves from external negativities. The participants, who stated that they understood the importance of having resources that will provide spiritual satisfaction and happiness and the basic things that help to survive as a source of life, often referred to the profound metaphor of resources in their collages. When evaluated based on the ZMET analysis, it can be mentioned that there is a process and completion in the metaphor theme of young consumers participating in the study. During the total closure process experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants hope to regain control and reach the desired transformation, namely the new everyday life, thanks to the protective effect of their material and moral resources and their environment and conditions. In this context, the process followed by the participants in transforming metaphors can be explained in the following order: resources, container, control, and transformation/change.

5. CONCLUSION

In negative experiences such as COVID-19, societies need to maintain physical and mental well-being. Therefore, analyzing the inner worlds of individuals and helping them is an essential step for recovery. It is beneficial to determine the reflection of the experiences of the young generations and consumers, who have high future concerns in their current and possible future well-being and the transformations in their behaviors. This study examined how young individuals' inner worlds and emotions reflected their consumer behavior during COVID-19.

According to the findings, the shared key concepts that emerged in the participants' feelings and thoughts during the pandemic are more negative emotions like anxiety, fear, captivity, loneliness, uncertainty, and laziness. In addition to all these negative emotions, many participants mentioned positive feelings and thoughts like an awakening, hope, and simplification. However, most positive emotions and expectations are related to the post-pandemic period, representing a new beginning. Simplifying life and awakening about nature reflects the awareness of the damage done to the world, which has become evident with the pandemic.

Considering the habits of consumers in this period, the most apparent behavior is online purchases in frequency and quantity. At the same time, priorities in shopping have changed, and health and hygiene products have taken an important place. In addition, social media use has increased in terms of consumption (receiving various online services, entertainment, hobbies, education, etc.) and socialization. A connection with the world has begun to be established through social media.

The deep metaphors reached as a result of ZMET analysis in the study are as follows: container, transformation/change, resource, and control. The state of closure and inability to do anything, frequently expressed and visualized by the participants, said the container metaphor. The house, commonly emphasized by the participants, was a container protecting and restricting people. On the other hand, the metaphor of transformation/change expresses the new and beautiful beginnings that the participants hope to reach after the pandemic experience, which includes the negative situations and experiences they experienced in total closure. The profound metaphor of resources expresses people's re-perceiving the help of life and discovering material and spiritual resources through the pandemic. Control, another metaphor identified in the findings, says that people have lost their balance with the complete shutdown and pandemic, creating negative feelings in young consumers.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The research results differ in terms of explaining the guiding factors underlying the change in consumer habits, as well as their emphasis in line with the studies emphasizing that the COVID-19 epidemic has a significant impact on the behavior of young consumers. In addition, the findings predict the relationship between the behavioral immune system and consumer behavior, as various behavioral immune mechanisms explain the change in consumer behavior. The state of panic and closure created by the epidemic has led to the appearance of fluctuating moods in the psychological needs of consumers. This social research area created by COVID-19 has contributed to detecting the subconscious emotions and thoughts that underlie consumers' behavioral and psychological protection from infection. It has been revealed that the methods of transforming the consumption habits of consumers to protect themselves are: adopting digital technology, acquiring responsible and conscious consumption habits, hoarding and excessive consumption in basic needs, and gaining consumption habits for leisure and well-being.

The study's findings present a unique contribution to the literature in terms of revealing the conscious or unconscious feelings and thoughts that consumers experience during the quarantine process with the ZMET technique. Thus, by bringing together the deep metaphors of young consumers on a common ground, it embodies abstract consumer insights and structures the reflections of young consumers' ways of making sense of the world and comprehending it in times of crisis, such as pandemics.

The links between the consumer habits of young consumers and the pandemic are evidenced by the four dominant metaphors that have emerged: Container, Transformation/Change, Resource, and Control.

Container: Participants emphasized that they felt they were protecting themselves against external factors in a place where they found themselves stuck, such as a bell jar or a prison. They stated that by developing a defense mechanism with anxiety and fear, they evolved into purchasing behaviors such as storage and hoarding. They stated that this situation seemed like a rehearsal for them to be prepared for any crisis after the pandemic. For young consumers, the houses where they store their feelings, products, and lives contain many things, such as a container. In this context, the state of being at home is interpreted as a field of defense and strength for young consumers, and thus they protect themselves against adverse conditions.

Transformation/Change: Personal transformation, well-being, escape, resilience, self-preservation, and hopes for the transformation of the state of the world serve as the metaphor for transformation/change and express the transformed state brought about by change. Participants expect that their quarantine period will transform their consumer habits, which will have permanent effects. Young consumers stated that they experienced two fundamental transformations in consumption in the context of this metaphor: (1) technological transformation and (2) spiritual and psychological transformation. In this period, young consumers who turned to digital consumption technologically made more online shopping and stated that they consumed more types of digital content. However, they noted that consumption expenditures have increased in the well-being field and looked at this issue from an individual and a global perspective. In this context, although the end of the epidemic will show which of these transformations experienced in young consumers will be permanent, the research findings emphasize their discourses that this transformation will be permanent.

Resource: Resource is a metaphor with powerful meanings seen as the source of life, such as knowledge, natural resources, products, and services. Young consumers emphasized the necessities that connect them to life and the digital tools that provide access to them as essential resources. The return of financial resources to digital financial transactions also indicates to young consumers that knowledge and instrumental equipment are needed. They frequently emphasized the sustainability of nature and the world, getting information about the pandemic process, accessing information, and the internet are vital resources. In addition to these, the uniqueness of activities that nourish the soul and spiritual satisfaction have often found a place in the collages of young consumers.

Control: The metaphor of power is based on the assumption that it is an indispensable need for people to have a say over their lives. Young consumers must receive messages that think they are winning the battle in a safe and survivable state. The young consumer who wants to gain self-confidence emphasizes that he prefers to consume for the feelings and thoughts that he can receive this message. In this context, young consumers state that they shift their consumption habits towards these areas to control socializing, protect their psychological and physical health, and balance their work and private life, despite all the negativities.

The fragile nature of consumers due to the crisis and the epidemic that they experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic has created a natural and convenient context for predicting metaphors that

are the determinants of the behavioral immune system (BIS). The deep metaphors obtained appear as methods of emotional and intellectual protection of people from the adverse effects of the epidemic in the sense of BIS. At this point, BIS emerges as a more sensitive and reactive response system in young consumers due to this crisis in the world situation, and this sudden change in the mood of young consumers is because some deep metaphors are more dominant in them.

5.2 Managerial Implications

The research shows that deep metaphor elements in consumer psychology and young consumer characteristics should be considered in designing marketing strategies for brands facing the COVID-19 crisis. Brands targeting especially young consumers should be accustomed to and prepared to expect short-term changes in consumption behavior in this consumer group during crisis periods. In a future where the world is predicted to encounter these and similar crises more frequently, this preparation is a necessity for brands to continue their existence. It is also necessary to calculate that this experience will lead to permanent changes in the long run, considering that the probability of adopting situations is faster in this young consumer group, who is the consumer of the future.

Within the scope of the study findings, our recommendations for the marketing of products and services primarily for young consumers will be as follows:

- (i) In case of similar crisis moments and negativities, it may be meaningful to give messages to young consumers that "you can control your life" or "you are in control." Campaigns that reduce the feeling of losing control, that is, make consumers feel that their lives are in control, can be a warning to the consumer.
- (ii) In addition to conducting marketing communication studies for the metaphor of control in the minds of young consumers, messages emphasizing transformation, that is, the transition to better and new beginnings, will also be interesting for young consumers.
- (iii) Emphasizing the container metaphor that affects young consumers at the time the pandemic is over, emphasizing this process in the presentation of products and services as a process where consumers protect themselves from external negativities rather than the restrictive feature of being at home and outside, may encourage them and lead to much more positive results, especially in times of crisis such as quarantine. I will be able to give.

(iv) In addition to essential life resources, it is seen that young consumers have deep metaphors that will support their mental and physical well-being. For this reason, the importance of having resources to provide moral satisfaction and happiness in marketing products and services can be emphasized.

Based on the analysis of the deep metaphors of young consumers, a process and completion in the form of resources - container - control - transformation/change can be suggested in the metaphor theme in marketing communication. For example, the need to retake control of the marketing of products and services developed for young consumers, with the resources at hand and the protective effect of the current process, can be emphasized by supporting the well-being of young consumers. Thus, people and the world can achieve their desired transformation: a new everyday life.

5.3 Limitations and future research

The research has limitations in several respects. Since the findings obtained from qualitative analyzes such as ZMET reveal the social and psychological realities of the participants, care should be taken when generalizing. The primary purpose of these studies is to avoid reaching generalizations. However, it is not very possible to calculate the impact of the collages obtained on the quarantine and complete closure process in the COVID-19 crisis on the habits of young consumers after the pandemic. However, this technique can compare and conceptualize gaps and meanings when research is repeated after the pandemic. To overcome the limitations of the investigation, several suggestions can be made for future studies:

a. The research targets the young adult subset of the young consumer group, which consists only of university students. More meaningful information about the transformation of consumer habits can be obtained by conducting the study with other young consumer groups or with different consumer groups in general.

b. The collages were obtained through online interviews with the participant group. In studies aiming to bring metaphors from collages, face-to-face and in-depth interviews are frequently preferred. A method in which online interviewing is not selected can be followed to get deeper insights. Thus, a more profound understanding can be obtained.

c. In the study, it has been observed that young consumers express various brands in their collages for their consumption habits. The research question can be constructed to understand the meanings of specific brands for young consumers during the crisis.

d. The research can be carried out in comparison with consumer groups from different social and cultural backgrounds, participants from other countries, or representatives from different generations. In this way, the discourses of different groups will be analyzed comparatively with the study.

e. During this global health crisis, the threat of pathogens causing a pandemic creates a kind of sensitivity and vulnerability in young consumers. This issue emerges as an area that requires new research, especially in BIS and related concepts. In this context, the functioning of the behavioral immune systems of populations and groups other than young consumers, and the identification of the underlying causes and triggers that cause this process, will provide a valuable and in-depth view of the field of consumer behavior.

In addition to all these limitations and future research suggestions, it can be said that qualitative studies in which metaphors are analyzed by collage technique provide a valuable and deep perspective in revealing consumers' insights. Deep metaphors are a beneficial tool in understanding the conscious and unconscious feelings and thoughts that guide the behavior of consumers to deeply analyze the perceptions and understandings of certain situations, products, brands, campaigns, and marketing activities. This effective communication, which is carried out with the mind and heart of the consumer, especially in marketing activities such as product development, brand creation, and marketing strategy determination, is a robust research area for marketing professionals and academics.

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How to cite this article:

Ünal, S. & Akın, N. (2023). How Did Young Consumers Feel about Being a Consumer During the COVID-19 Quarantines? An Assessment with the Collage Technique. *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media*, Vol. 11, N° 20, 195-225.