

Product Positioning and Perceptual Mapping: An Empirical Study on Artvin Local Products

Ürün Konumlandırma ve Algısal Haritalama: Artvin Yerel Ürünlerine Yönelik Bir Ampirik Çalışma

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Abstract

Local products have an important place in regional development. These products are sold to tourists and thus become a source of income for the local inhabitants. In scope of this research, Artvin local products were categorized as accessories, eating and drinking, food products and clothing. The aim of this study is to make perceptual mapping of Artvin local products with multidimensional scaling method. A perceptual map is a chart used by market researchers and businesses to show and understand the views and feelings of target customers about a particular brand or product. Perceptual mapping is a technique that guides marketers in product positioning. Multidimensional scaling is a tool to visualize the similarity levels according to the distances of each data in a data set. Within the scope of the research, the perceptions of the local products of those who visited the province of Artvin were collected through an online questionnaire. The product positions obtained as a result of perceptual mapping were visualized and interpreted. The perceptions of Artvin's local products are accessory; authentic, eating and drinking; quality, clothing; souvenirs, household products; environmental, healthy, food; traditional, reliable features.

Keywords: Artvin, Local Products, Multidimensional Scaling, Perceptual Map

Özet

Yöresel ürünler bölgesel kalkınmada önemli bir yer edinmektedir. Bölgeye gelen turistlere perakende mağazalarda ve il dışındaki müşterilere internet ortamında satılmakta olan bu ürünler yerel halk için önemli bir gelir kaynağıdır. Artvin yöresel ürünleri aksesuar, yeme içme, gıda ürünleri, giyim kategorilerinde değerlendirilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı Artvin yöresel ürünlerinin çok boyutlu ölçekleme yöntemiyle algısal haritalama yapılmasıdır. Algısal harita, pazar araştırmacıları ve işletmeler tarafından hedef müşterilerin belirli bir marka veya ürün hakkındaki görüşlerini ve hislerini göstermek ve anlamak için kullanılan bir grafik türüdür. Algısal haritalama ürün konumlandırmasında pazarlamacılar için yol gösterici bir tekniktir. Çok boyutlu ölçekleme, bir veri setindeki her bir verinin uzaklıklarına göre benzerlik düzeylerini görselleştirme aracıdır. Araştırma kapsamında Artvin ilini ziyaret edenlere yöresel ürünler ile ilgili algıları çevrimiçi anket aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Algısal haritalama sonucunda elde edilen ürün konumları görselleştirilmiş ve yorumlanmıştır. Artvin'in yöresel ürünlerine ilişkin algılar; aksesuar, otantik, yeme ve içme; kalite, giyim; hediyelik eşya, ev ürünleri; çevreci, sağlıklı, gıda; geleneksel, güvenilir şeklindedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Artvin Yöresel Ürünler, Çok Boyutlu Ölçekleme, Algısal Harita

Acknowledgments

This article presented as abstract in Artvin Coruh University International Congress on Ecology, Economy, And Regional Development (Ecosus 2022)

For Citation: Kara, A. (2023). Product Positioning and Perceptual Mapping: An Empirical Study on Artvin Local Products. Journal of Academic Value Studies, 9(4), 249-257. <http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/>

Received: 05.09.2023 Accepted: 30.12.2023

This article was checked by *intihal.net*



1. Introduction

Local products are an important tourist attraction. It is a marketing element that is identified with the historical heritage and culture of the tourism region. Local products can increase the attractiveness of the tourism destination due to their authenticity, quality and uniqueness. There are many well-known examples of this in the world. For example, Napa Valley in California, Provence in France, Tuscany in Italy, etc. (Hall and Sharples, 2004).

Today, the quality and nutritional value of food products are gaining importance. Local products tend to be preferred more as they are seen as less processed and reliable. Especially in recent years, the tendency to local products has been increasing due to the substances harmful to human health in the contents of food products.

Local products also have an important place in regional development. It can be an important source of livelihood for the local people. For example, products such as Italian Parmesan cheese, French champagne contribute to the local economy. These products have specific content from a certain geographical location, unlike the standardized and fabricated content in mass-produced products in urban markets. Generally, it has a traditional raw material, certain processing methods and a unique feature obtained only from that location. For this reason, it attracts the attention of consumers not only for its quality and reliability, but also for reviving its known historical heritage.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that studies on the positioning of local products are concentrated in tourism research. One of the important product positioning properties is the product credibility. The locality of the product as increases as its credibility. For this reason, there was a need for research on the positioning of local products. The distinguishing point of this study is the evaluation and interpretation of local product features. The main problem of this study is to determine the positioning typology of local products.

The aim of this study is to determine the perceptions of local products by consumers' perspectives. For this purpose, perceptual mapping and its usage areas are explained first. Then, the positioning of local products and the use of perceptual mapping are explained. The multidimensional scaling method used in the research was briefly mentioned and the findings were explained with graphics. Finally, by interpreting the findings, it is explained that the consumers' perceptions of local products for marketing purposes.

2. Positioning Local Products

Positioning has an important place in tourism research. Because it has an important role in determining the perceptions and choices of visitors about the destination (Crompton, Fakeye, & Lue, 1992). Aora (2006) listed the strengths as the reasons for using perceptual maps in product positioning as follows:

- 1- It helps to understand how buyers perceive the strengths and weaknesses of products.
- 2- It gives information about the similarities and differences between competing products.
- 3- It helps positioning new products and repositioning existing products.
- 4- It is a technique that will help in measuring the effectiveness of marketing actions and communication programs aimed at changing buyers' perceptions, and in monitoring the perceptions of buyers with a particular product.
- 5- Perceptual map is an important tool in the development and monitoring of the promotion strategy.

According to Ries and Trout (1986), positioning is not something done to the product, but something that is done to the minds of potential customers. It is the acquisition of a distinctive place in the mind of the customer with an advertisement, product, person, institution or service. Etzel, Walker, and Stanton (1997) define positioning as a positive differentiation from similar products and the ability of managers to draw attention to a product. Kotler and Keller (2006) refer to positioning as the act of designing a business's presentations to achieve a distinctive and valuable position in the minds of target consumers. Positioning, market segmentation, and target market selection are processes that follow each other (Fill, 2006). Modern marketing management is a combination of these three strategies.

Figure 1: Steps of Product Positioning



Groucutt, Leadley, Forsyth (2004)

The product positioning as local is vary to situations. The local product is an environmentally friendly local specialty made from locally produced raw materials processed with a region-specific technology or procedure using the collective traditional knowledge passed on to future generations by the leader of the activity (Gonda, Angler and Csoka, 2021). Local products are often highly associated with quality (Loureiro and Umberger, 2003), produced by small-scale producers, and the producer can be identified by the label showing the name of the local product - the place of business (Gonda, Angler and Csoka, 2021). Local products are perceived to be of higher quality, as they are considered more reliable than global brands. In some cases, it is associated with ethnocentrism (Lusk and Anderson 2004). A local product is not a geographical or physical place where the consumer lives, but a place where social ties exist (Yildiz et al., 2018). Therefore, the contribution of local products to the economic system is directly proportional to the strength of local ties. In addition, neighborhood relations, the guidance of family elders, and the encouragement of those in the neighborhood or friend groups lead to buying behavior from local stores (Lee et al., 2008). In fact, individuals who live in a particular region and are strongly committed to this region tend to buy more local products than individuals with high ethnocentrism (Yildiz et al., 2018).

3. Perceptual Mapping for Product Image

A perceptual map is a chart used by market researchers and businesses to show and understand the views and feelings of target customers about a particular brand or product. Perceptual mapping guides marketers in product positioning. In addition, perceptual maps are frequently used in image and positioning research. The use of perceptual mapping in image and positioning has been examined with examples in the literature. Marcoz, Melewar, and Dennis (2016) performed perceptual mapping using discriminant analysis to measure the perceived value of Italian cheese Fontina. According to the results of the research, factors such as Fontina cheese being perceived as originating from the Aosta Valley region, having a PDO certificate and reinvigorating childhood memories are among the reasons for preference. Uysal, Chen, and Williams (2000) used perceptual mapping to understand the image and position of the state of Virginia relative to its competitors. According to the research findings, Virginia differs from its competitors with its natural urban structure and historical heritage. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) examined the destination image of Japan, Switzerland, Kenya, and Jamaica. Destination image is grouped into functional (physical, measurable) and psychological (abstract) features. Jamaica scores high for relaxation, natural beauty, availability of packed holidays, beaches, nightlife and pleasant weather, while low scores for standard of living and cleanliness. Gürsoy, Baloğlu, and Chi (2009) used multidimensional scaling to determine the positions of ten Middle Eastern countries relative to their competitors. In the light of the data obtained from the United Nations Competition index, the clustering of these countries according to their location and proximity to each other has been determined. Kim (1996) perceptually mapped the food and beverage products of a hotel. It is suggested that the hotel can make alternative food positions outside of meal times.

4. Positioning of Artvin Local Products

Artvin is the richest province of Turkey in terms of plant diversity. Due to the low level of economic development, the use of fertilizers and pesticides in the soil is low. These have helped the region's production of organic agricultural products to develop considerably. Honey, tea and hazelnut production are the most produced agricultural products in the region. Especially organic hazelnuts are the most sold product of the region. In addition, more than half of the organic honey sold in Turkey comes from the province of Artvin (Investment Support and Promotion Strategy Artvin, www.doka.org.tr). In addition, products made by weaving and woodworking are also sold in the region. Especially since it is a forest region, it is a region where wood craft is very developed.

Oğan (2021) examined the determination of gastronomy products in Artvin region and their contribution to tourism. According to the research findings, corn, kale, dairy products, anchovies, pastries, red meat and fruits are the prominent gastronomic products specific to the region. Knitted gastronomic products are sold in festivals held at various times or in public markets established in districts. Jam, marmalade and molasses produced from fruits such as cranberry, rosehip, mulberry, plum and pear have an important economic value among local products. While mostly local tourists visit the region, the reasons for visiting the region are, respectively, its nature, culture and gastronomic products.

Toklu (2016) examined consumer perceptions and purchasing tendencies regarding Artvin honey. In the research carried out in Artvin, the variables are economic support, culture and tradition, quality and reliability, perception of geographically marked products and willingness to pay more for geographically marked products. As a result of the research, the quality-reliability perception of the local honey product protected with geographical indication is perceived as high by the consumers and this positively affects the extra payment. However, it has been determined that it does not contribute enough to the local economy due to its high price and insufficient production. In addition, it has been determined that the cultural and traditional perception of the local honey product is low.

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Design

The aim of the research is to investigate the positioning of local products. For this purpose, Artvin local products were positioned using perceptual mapping. Perceptions of users of Artvin local products were determined by asking questions about their experiences. These perceptions were visualized to reveal similar aspects and features of local products.

5.2. Participants

The participants were selected from people who visited Artvin and its neighboring provinces. Data were collected using an online questionnaire. The online survey link was shared in WhatsApp groups. Respondents of the online survey consisted of 14 participants who visited the province of Artvin and its surroundings.

5.3. Instruments

There are two parts of questionnaire in the survey. The first one aims to measure the similarities of Artvin's local products with the surrounding provinces, and the second one aims to measure perceptions about product features. In the first part of questionnaire, the scales related to product perceptions used in the research were adapted into Turkish from the study of Marcoz, Melewar, and Dennis (2016). In the second part of questionnaire, the participants were asked to evaluate local products on the basis of product groups. Five-point scales such as very bad (1) – very good (5) were used to determine the perceptions of product groups in the questionnaire, and very similar (5) – not at all similar (1) in the comparison of provinces.

5.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with SPSS.21 program. Participant' perceptions visualized with multidimensional scaling analysis techniques. Multidimensional scaling (MDS) is a tool to visualize the similarity levels according to the distances of each data in a data set. Two different types of MDS methods were used. First one, ALSCAL (Alternating Least squares SCALing), one of the multidimensional scaling techniques in the SPSS program, was used to determine local product preferences. Second one, neighboring provinces were also used PROXSCAL (PROXimity SCALing), other one of the multidimensional scaling techniques available in the SPSS program, was used to determine the similarities of Artvin local product with neighbors. ALSCAL, was used to visualize perceptions of local products' features; PROXSCAL was used to visualize

perceptions of Artvin's similarities with neighbors. In both methods, distances between objects were calculated with the Euclidean method. Coordinates obtained in SPSS program and EXCEL graphics were used to create perceptual maps.

6. Findings

6.1. Demographic Findings

In the table below, the income, age, education and gender information of the participants in the research are given.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Participants

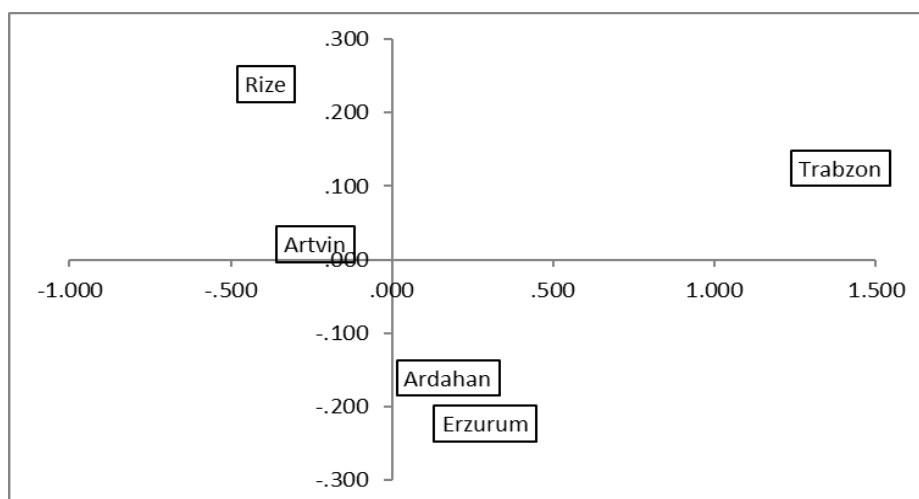
Income	Age	Education	Gender	Total
%75 Normal	3 participants, 27-32 between	%69,2 Post-graduate	%53,8 Man	14 Participant
%16,7 High	5 participants, 35-39 between	%23,1 Graduate	%46,2 Woman	
%8,3 I have no income of my own	4 participants, 56-70 between	%7,7 High-School		

As can be seen in Table 1, the majority of the participants are individuals with a normal income level with 75%. Of those who filled in the demographic data, 3 were between the ages of 27-32, 5 were between the ages of 35-39, and 4 were between the ages of 56-70. As can be understood from these data, responses were received from all individuals in the young, middle-aged and advanced age groups. With 53.8% of the participants, the majority are men.

6.2. PROXSCAL Similarity Analysis Findings

PROXSCAL, one of the multidimensional scaling techniques, was used to measure the perceptual similarities between Artvin and other provinces. The figure below shows the EXCEL graph created as a result of the coordinates obtained with the PROXSCAL technique.

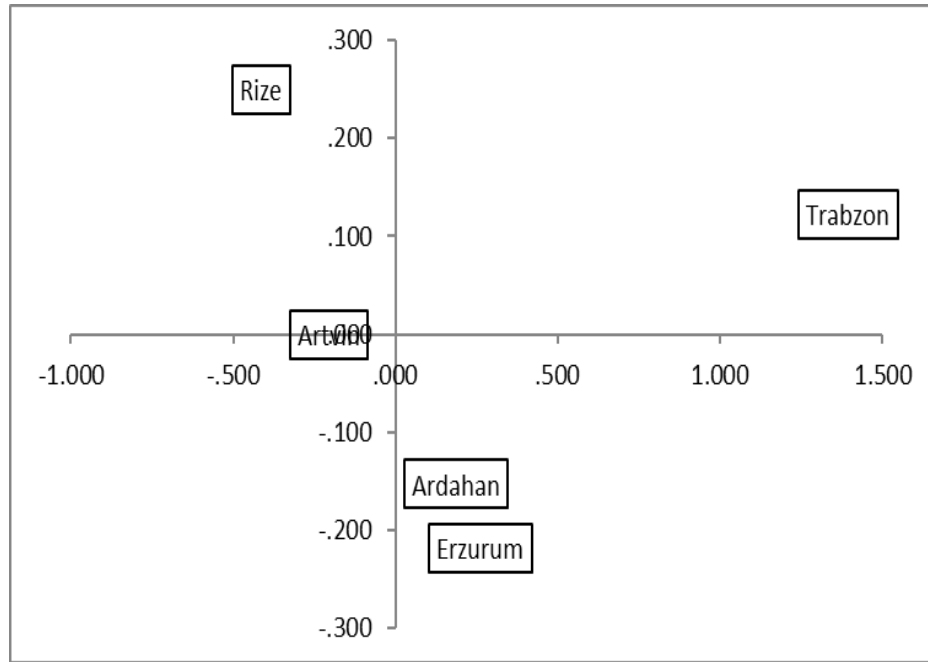
Figure 2: Artvin and Neighboring Provinces GENERAL Similarity



As can be seen in the figure, the provinces are divided into three groups. Similarities are Rize and Artvin, Ardahan and Erzurum, Trabzon. According to the figure, Ardahan and Erzurum are the provinces with the closest similarities to each other. Trabzon, on the other hand, is not similar to any of the other provinces.

The figure below shows the comparison of similarities between Artvin and neighboring provinces on the basis of food products.

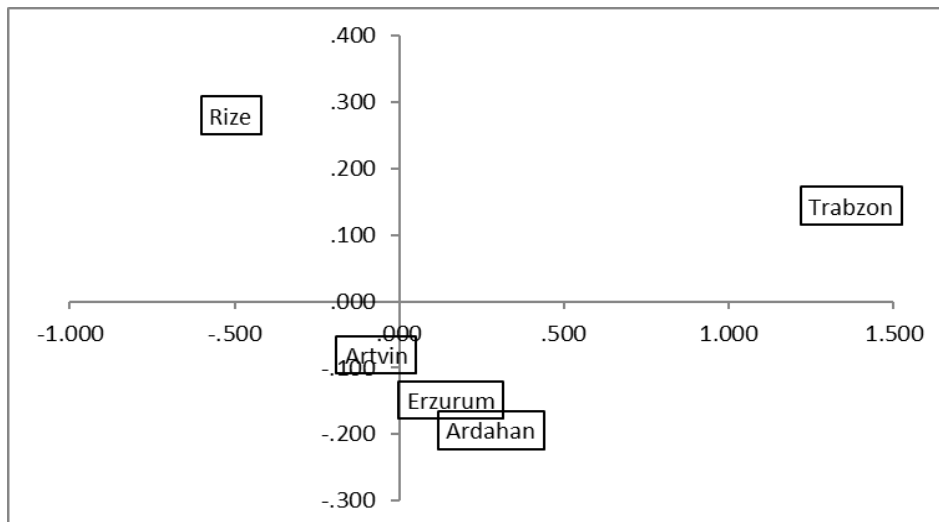
Figure 3: Food Products Similarity in Artvin and Neighboring Provinces



Again, as in general similarities, it is seen that Rize - Artvin, Ardahan - Erzurum, Trabzon are similar provinces. Unlike the other figure, there is a very small amount of Artvin similarity to Ardahan and Erzurum in food products.

The following figure shows the similarities between Artvin and neighboring provinces in terms of food and beverage.

Figure 4: Eating and Drinking Similarity in Artvin and Neighboring Provinces

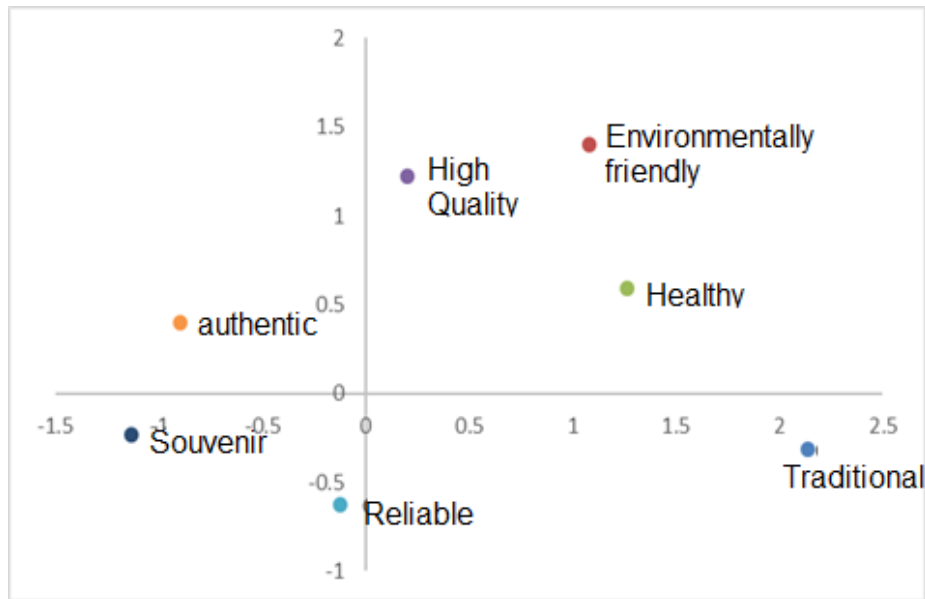


As can be seen in the figure, the similarities between Artvin-Erzurum-Ardahan provinces are close to each other in terms of food-drinking similarities. The similarities of Rize and Trabzon are far from each other and from other provinces.

6.3. ALSICAL Similarity Analysis Findings

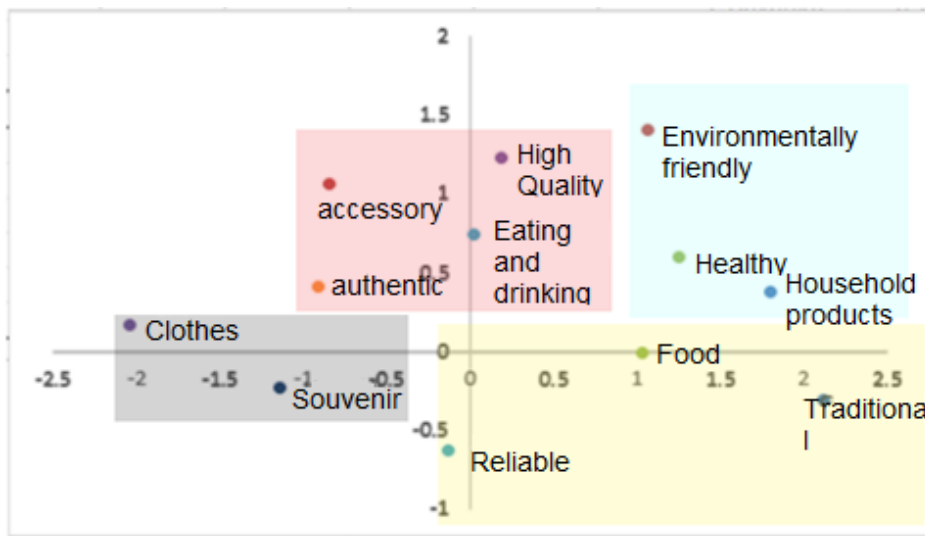
ALSICAL, one of the multidimensional scaling techniques, was used to determine the preference characteristics of the regional products of Artvin province. The figure below shows the EXCEL graph created with the coordinates obtained using the ALSICAL technique.

Figure 5: Artvin Local Products Preference Features



In the light of the data in Figure 5, the preference features of Artvin local products consist of seven variables: authentic, souvenir, safe, healthy, environmentalist, quality and traditional. These variables have been grouped according to their closeness by dyeing and including product groups as seen in the figure below.

Figure 6: Preference Features of Artvin Local Products Categories



In Figure 6, preference features according to product groups formed by combining product groups and local product preferences are seen. As can be seen from the graphics in the figure, there are four main product groups consisting of household products, food and beverage, clothing and food. Household products; environmental, healthy, food; traditional, safe, clothing; souvenir, authentic, accessory; authentic, eating and drinking; quality, close to authentic perceptual variables.

7. Discussion, Results and Recommendations

Although local products are of cultural and traditional origin, they stand out as a marketing asset with a commercial value. There are various reasons for this. First of all, consumers demand healthy, reliable and authentic products such as local products. Then, it offers a unique experience when local products are presented together with the tourism destination. In particular, products reflecting the local culture and traditions enrich the experiences of tourists. Another factor is that local products revive nostalgic memories on people. With their rhetorical structures, local products can remind people of their past, such as childhood or the lives of their families. Finally, knowing that it contributes to the local economy makes local products attractive for reasons such as bonding with the local people and supporting them by local tourists.

Artvin province has a high potential in terms of local products due to its rich nature and not being very advanced in terms of economic development. In addition, the fact that it has not been explored enough makes it stand out as an area to study in terms of marketing. The aim of this study is to investigate how the local products of Artvin are perceived by the consumers. A research was conducted to determine the perception of Artvin province according to its similarities with neighboring provinces and the level of perception of local products according to the determined criteria. It is thought that the research will contribute to future academic studies and business managers in terms of exploratory knowledge.

When the research findings are examined, it is seen that Artvin is perceived as similar to the nearest Rize according to its similarities with its neighbors. Its other neighbors, Erzurum and Ardahan, are similar among themselves, while Trabzon is perceived as a separate point from all other provinces. Being a close neighbor of the province of Rize and having common features geographically, it is considered natural that Artvin has a high similarity with this province. Likewise, the high similarity with Rize on the basis of food products can be explained by common geographical features. However, the high similarity with Erzurum and Ardahan in terms of food and beverage can be considered as an important finding in terms of tourism studies. Because eating and drinking, which is an important cultural element, is evaluated in terms of gastronomy tourism. In recent years, gastronomy has been seen as an element that brings tourism destinations to the fore. At the same time, as Ogan (2021) determined in his study, the fact that local products do not take place in restaurants and hotels is a remarkable point here. It should also be considered that local products may be included more in meals offered to tourists, which may change the situation.

Artvin regional products were found to be similar in four main groups. The similarities were evaluated in seven criteria: authentic, souvenir, reliable, healthy, environmentalist, quality and traditional. Accessory from local products of Artvin province; authentic, eating and drinking; quality, clothing; souvenirs, household products; environmental, healthy, food; traditional, reliable features were perceived by consumers. Considering the categories and local characteristics of the products, it is natural to perceive them in this way. It shows that local products have a positive image by consumers. In the light of these findings, it is assumed that local products have a high potential to highlight Artvin as a tourism destination. In addition, it has been determined that the factors of preference of local products are closer to which product categories. In addition, the features that local product manufacturers can bring to the fore in their products have been determined.

As a result of this study, the perceptions of the local products of Artvin province by the consumers were determined. The limitations of the research are that it is carried out in a small sample and there is no qualitative study in determining the product characteristics. In the literature, it is recommended that future studies be carried out by expanding the evaluation criteria of local products. Based on the research findings, managers should include more local products in tourism studies.

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