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The Role of Social Media on Leisure Preferences: A Research on the Participants of Outdoor Recreation Activities

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Abstract

Main objective of this research is to uncover whether the social media is used to treat time or not, and to reveal how the social media affects leisure preferences. In this scope, semi-structured interview is conducted and content analysis is carried out in line with these interviews. When the findings are analyzed, it has been found out that social media encourages travel, creates intercultural interactions and alternative leisure, incents leisure activities and facilitates making use of leisure. According to findings, the individuals take advantages of social media platforms in their free times.

Keywords: Social Media, Content Analysis, Leisure, Tourism, Recreation.

JEL CODE: L830

INTRODUCTION

Technological advances have provided people with more free time as well as increasing the range of leisure for people. According to Gershuney (2002), the technological changes affected the leisure phenomenon both directly and indirectly. In this review, these changes have facilitated the obligatory tasks of people and get them save more time for leisure activities. He also states that especially the technological advances change the nature of leisure activities, ensure new activities to emerge, facilitate the access to activities, and most importantly they change the social class which realizes the leisure activities.

The Internet is the primary one among the technological advances in terms of affecting the leisure activities directly or indirectly (Zhang et al, 2015). A number of study have shown that the Internet is quite important in leisure activities (Ardahan & Lapa, 2011; Aşan, 2013; Zach & Lissitsa, 2016). According to researchers, while the Internet is mainly used for communication, it is also used for different purposes such as for conduct a research (Bostancı, 2010), information exchange (Toruk, 2008), access to the social networks (Vural & Bat, 2010; Bostancı, 2010), improving the social relations (Hamburger & Hayat, 2011) and evaluating the free times (Beutel, Brähler, Glaesmer, Kuss, Wölfling & Müller, 2011; Tel & Köksalan, 2009; Bryce, 2001; Toruk, 2008; Lu & Chen, 2009).

Developments in the Internet technology have ensured new platforms to emerge called social media as well. These platforms are definitely separated from the areas called traditional media such as television, newspaper and radio. The users in the social network websites comprising the social media participate actively in the activities such as producing content, doing sharing, commenting on the sharing of others, chatting, playing games, organizing events and having access to news. As the websites described as the social media are user-based, they bring masses and people together and increase the interaction among them (Vural & Bat, 2010). It has been stated that people are prone to spend more time in this virtual reality, they try to meet their needs concerning the real life in their virtual reality space and create a new world in this realm (Vural & Bat, 2010).

Social media websites (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs etc.) are also used as a tool of evaluating the free time because of the characteristics that they have. While the social media is an objective for evaluating free time, it also functions as the best means of evaluate free time as well. There are plenty of social media websites

devoted to use in the free times. However, all of these web sites are not preferred at the same degree. In this context, it has been stated that Facebook (Vural & Bat, 2010; Alikılıç, Gülay & Binbir, 2013; Özgüven & Mucan, 2013) is most preferred website and it is followed by Twitter (Karal, 2013) and other social media websites. It has been stated that there has been a close correlation between Facebook users and leisure preferences (Kuo & Tang, 2014). According to the study of Kuo & Tang (2014), there has been a close relation between leisure activities (team sports, fitness, recreational activities and intellectual activities) and Facebook (experience, daily and weekly spent time on Facebook, number of friends and photos). According to the findings, the people (who spend more time, have more friends, share more photos) who want to socialize on Facebook have been socializing in their real lives as well (the spend more time on team sports and recreative activities); however, it has been emphasized the people who spend less time on Facebook spend more time on intellectual activities such as reading and thinking (Kuo & Tang, 2014: 18).

In literature, generally two kinds of leisure activities (Köktaş, 2004) come into prominence and these are recreation and tourism. Social media comes into prominence as a passive means of leisure along with these two leisure activities but having important roles on both of these activities. During the literature review it has been dedicated that there are limited study conducted on the influences of the social media on leisure activities preferences. Therefore, it has been considered to be necessary to do a research in this respect and dedicate the main objective in this context. Hence, current study mainly focused on to uncover whether the social media is used to treat time or not and also to reveal how the social media affects leisure preferences of the participants. In line with the main objective, the other sub-goals are to discover which social media tools are used more often and what kind of activities are made on social media in free times. In addition, the role of social media on recreation and tourism is tried to be determined.

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to reveal how the social media affects the individual who has participated in the outdoor recreation activities. As it is required to obtain in-depth knowledge from the research, use of qualitative research approach has been deemed appropriate. In this scope, semi-structured interviews are carried out with the group members who have been participating outdoor recreation activities. Firstly the groups are determined who have participated in

the outdoor activities in Eskisehir. 21 groups which have participated in the outdoor recreation activities in the aforementioned city have been identified. As the research is limited in terms of time and it is not possible to interview with all the groups, sampling has been used. In this context, it has been determined to interview with the individuals who have groups in the social media. Seven groups have been determined who have group in the social media (Facebook). Among these group members, 12 people have been interviewed individually for 17 minutes in average and the interviews have been recorded with the tape recorder. The data recorded in the interviews was transcribed into texts by giving a code to every participant (like K1, K2...). Content analysis has been made from these data transcribed.

In this context, the data in the text have been read over and over again and the codes in them have been determined. The codes identified have been brought together considering and themes are tried to be found. Afterwards, explanations have been made considering the connections among themes themselves. In this research, analyses have been realized taking account of data analysis steps in the qualitative research of Cresswell (2014:197). Confirmation analysis of participant and on the other researchers (two researchers) has been made for the validity and reliability of research. These two approaches are among the methods offered for validity and reliability in one of the researches (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011: 255-264).

The questions prepared for interview are reinforced by offering to the opinions of two experts. Moreover, the proceedings have been made for the validity and reliability for the research. After the interviews had been transcribed to the texts, they were sent to each participant and they were asked to analyze the text and if it was necessary to do any additions and omissions, to realize these and send it back to the researchers through e-mail. After the analyses in the study had been completed, the data were examined by two researchers, and the reliability was assessed in terms of code and themes. In this scope, in order to ensure the reliability of analysis of qualitative data, consensus and dissidence formula of Miles & Huberman (1994:64) was utilized. This formula has been expressed as "*Consensus / Consensus + Dissidence*". In order to ensure the reliability in this research, this formula has been used. For the reliability of the research, code and themes of the first researcher has been proposed to the second researcher. Comparing the code and themes of the second researcher to the code and themes of the first researcher, the reliability coefficient has been determined and until the consensus has been reached, discussions and assessments have been conducted. The

data taking form with the mutual opinion of the first and the second researcher were assessed by a third researcher, and as a result of this assessment, their reliability coefficients were determined and moreover, assessments were made until a consensus on the common ground was reached in the divisive issues. When a middle ground was found, the latest form was given to the codes and themes.

In the research, the findings acquired as a result of analysis and the Miles and Huberman reliability coefficients indicating the reliability degrees of these findings have been offered in the tables of findings part in the shape of code and theme reliability coefficient. When all these values are analyzed, it can be seen that the lowest code reliability coefficient is 0.50; the lowest theme reliability coefficient is 0,60 and the others have higher coefficients compared to those.

FINDINGS

The data of the research was analyzed and their validities and reliabilities were tested and offered in the way of tables below. The data obtained with research questions are presented in the tables. In these tables, there are codes obtained as a result of analysis, themes, coded participants (K1, K2 etc.), code reliability coefficients and theme reliability coefficients (according to the first and the third researchers) of Miles and Huberman (MH). When the research questions are considered, the findings in the Table 1 consist of the findings of the research question like "*How the participants evaluate their free times?*". When the Table 1 is examined, it is clearly shown that the types of leisure activities of participants come under seven themes consisting of 27 codes. It was determined that the individuals evaluate their free times by "*carrying out activities in the nature*", "*doing voluntary service activities*", "*spending time with immediate circle*", "*traveling*", "*realizing intellectual activities*", "*doing artistic/cultural activities*" and "*fulfilling other individual activities*".

In the analysis, it can be seen that the theme of the voluntary service activities consist of one code. This code has been drawn from the participant opinion: "*In my spare times, I take care of the kids of seasonal workers. I try to raise awareness on behalf of improving their life conditions*" (K1). Reliability coefficients of Miles and Huberman (MH) have also been shown in the Table 1. While it is clear that the reliability coefficients of themes and codes are high, only the reliability coefficient of codes belonging to the theme of spending time with immediate circle is quite low compared to the others. The reason of this lowness arises from the discrepancy of some coding of the second and third researchers

from the first researcher. However, as all the three researchers reached a consensus on the available codes and themes at the last stage, it can be said that the latest version of the data is correct.

In the Table 2 below, there are findings regarding the research question of “How the individuals use the

social media”. These findings obtained as the result of analysis consist of eight theme and 38 codes. It has been identified that the individual use the social media for “*communication purpose*”, “*planning purpose*”, “*sharing purpose*”, “*dating purpose*”, “*following purpose*”, “*shopping purpose*”, “*promotion purpose*” and “*social*

Table 1. Leisure Activities of the Participants

MH theme Its Reliability		Themes	Codes	Participants	MH Code Reliability	
Second Researcher	Third Researcher				Second Researcher	Third Researcher
6/6+1=0,85	7/7+0=1	Realizing Activities in the Nature	Taking photos in the nature	K1,K10	7/7+1=0,8 7	8/8+0=1
			Riding bicycle	K1, K2,K9,K11,K12		
			Participating in the mountain climbing activities	K1,K12		
			Camping	K2		
			Trekking	K2,K5,K6,K7,K8, K11		
			Doing nature activities	K3,K4,K5,K6		
			Mountain climbing	K5		
			Rock climbing	K5		
		Voluntary Service Activities	Taking care of kids	K1,	1/1+0=1	1/1+0=1
		Spending time with the immediate circle	Spending time with friends	K2, K3,K4, K7, K5,K11	3/3+2=0.6	2/2+2=0,5
			Spending time with the family	K4		
		Travelling	Going shopping	K2,K11	4/4+0=1	4/4+0=1
			Wandering around	K11		
			motorcycle trips	K6		
			Travelling abroad	K10		
		Intellectual Activities	Reading	K3, K7	2/2+0=1	2/2+0=1
			Watching movies	K10,K11		
		Artistic/ Cultural Activities	Participating in the exhibition openings	K3	4/4+1=0.8	5/5+0=1
			Going to cinema	K5,K7		
			Going to theatre	k7		
			Going to festivals	K6		
			Participation in the artistic activities	K11		
		Other individual activities	Planning event	K4	5/5+0=1	5/5+0=1
			Taking care of animals	K9		
			Doing paper works	K11		
			Working equilibrium wall	K12		
			Doing sports	K12		

MH= Consensus/ consensus + dissidence

influence purpose". When the main reasons for using social media of individuals, it is clear that a large majority of them use social media with respect to evaluate the free time, do planning, to announce or to give feedback about the leisure activities that are done in the free times. The views of the participants support this.

"I do bicycle tours and nature activities and I use social media to follow these and the people who perform these activities. We have the opportunity to meet with the people who have the same interests on the social media and we communicate these people and organize events" (K2) "Actually we use the social media as a means of getting feedback about the activities that we do" (K3)

Table 2. Utilization Way from Social Media

MH theme Its Reliability		Themes	Codes	Participants	MH Code Reliability	
Second Researcher	Third Researcher				Second Researcher	Third Researcher
8/8+2=0,8	7/7+1=0,87	Communic ation Purpose	Reading news	K1,	5/5+5=0,5	5/5+0=1
			Communicating	K1,K2,K3,K4,K5,K6, K9,K11,K12		
			Getting information	K6, K9,K10,K11,K12		
			Providing feedback	K3		
			Making announcements	K1,K4,K9		
		Planning Purpose	Doing planning	K1	3/3+0=1	3/3+0=1
			Planning activities	K2,		
			Reviving the dynamics of tourism	K9		
		Sharing Purpose	Sharing photos	K1,K8,K10, K11	7/7+0=1	7/7+0=1
			Sharing information	K1,K5, K7,K11		
			Sharing links	K1		
			Sharing music	K1		
			Sharing video	k7		
			Sharing regarding groups	K12		
			Sharing impressions	K4		
		Dating Purpose	Knowing foreign people	K2	3/3+0=1	3/3+0=1
			Chatting	K1,K3		
			Meeting new people	K2,K9		
		Following Purpose	Following activities	K2,K11	9/9+0=1	9/9+0=1
			Following the participants of the activity	K2,K11		
			Reading comments	K2		
			Following important people	K7		
			Following group activities	K8		
			Following professional groups	K8		
			Following professional people	K8		
			Seeing sharing	K11		
			Following festivals	K12		
		Shopping	Selling materials	K2,K10	3/3+0=1	3/3+0=1
			Buying materials	K2,K10		
			Shopping for recreative activities	K8		
		Promotion Purpose	Doing promotions	K4,K9	4/4+0=1	4/4+0=1
			Forming groups	K9		
			Introducing city	K9		
			Attracting tourists	K9		
		Social Influence Purpose	Encouraging people	K9	4/4+0=1	4/4+0=1
			Raising awareness	K9		
			Guidance	K9		
			Exemplifying	K12		

Table 3. The Role of Social Media As a Means of Leisure Activity

MH Theme Its Reliability		Themes	Codes	Participants	MH Code Reliability	
Second Researcher	Third Researcher				Second Researcher	Third Researcher
3/3+2=0,6	5/5+0=1	Encouraging Travel	It has been affecting to go other cities	K1,K2	5/5+1=0,8 3	6/6+0=1
			It has been encouraging to go other places	K6,K7,K10		
			Creating the desire for travelling	K6		
			Creating the desire for going abroad	K4		
			It has been proving small-scaled change of location	K11		
			It has been increasing participation in travel activities	K1		
		It has been creating intercultural interaction	Knowing other regions	K10	3/3+0=1	3/3+0=1
			Knowing other cultures	K10		
			It informs about the different regions	K8		
		Creating Alternative	It has been increasing leisure alternatives	K1,K11	5/5+0=1	5/5+0=1
			It has been enhancing the scope of leisure activities	K8		
			It teaches different regions	K2,K8		
			It makes route to be drawn	K9		
			It has been creating participation for education activities	K1,K4		
		Encouraging	Being influenced by the sharing	K11	8/8+0=1	8/8+0=1
			Learning new activities	K5		
			It has been encouraging participation in activities	K2,K4,K9,K11,K12		
			It makes us think like others	K11		
			It encourages participation in different interests	K12		
			It has been stimulating participation in activities	K11,K12		
			It has been ensuring the realization of activities	K1		
			It has been encouraging to do festivals	K9		
		Facilitating	It facilitates to follow the event that has been realized	K12	8/8+0=1	8/8+0=1
			It has been facilitating to spend free time with others	K3,K5		
			It facilitates communication	K3,K5		
			It offers financial facilities	K3		
			It ensures time saving	K3		
			It facilitates group and activity announcements	K4		
			It has been facilitating work	K10		
			It facilitates participation decisions of people in events	K4		

Reliability analysis of the data was also conducted and the reliability coefficients were stated regarding the second and the third researchers. While theme reliability coefficients regarding the second and the third researchers are high, code reliability coefficient is low in the second researcher is low (0,5) but it is high in the third researcher.

In the Table 3 below, findings have been given regarding the research question “How do the social media shape people’s choice of evaluating their leisure”. When these findings are examined, it is seen that the role of social media on evaluating leisure activities consists of five themes and 31 codes. According to these themes, social media “encourages travelling”, “creates

intercultural interactions”, “*creates leisure alternative*”, “*encourages leisure activities*” and “*facilitates evaluating the free times*”. In this regard, participants opinions exemplified are given below:

“*Social media encourages me to various locations. Especially when we talk about photography, I am really impressed by the underwater photos taken in different countries. It facilitates my work. It makes me know other regions. It makes me meet new cultures*” (K10). “*For example, when the images taken abroad shared by one of us make me feel desired to go that place*” (K14).

themes. The opinions of participants regarding the social media means are given below:

“*I use Facebook. I use twitter in order to read news. I use Facebook in order to do my leisure activities because it is more appropriate in terms of creating alternative of leisure activity and because of the functions that it has*” (K1). “*I follow Facebook because it is a little bit easier. As it is the first thing that we get used to, I spend a little more time on Facebook*” (K8). “*I use Facebook, Tripadvisor, foursquare and Pinterest. I use these means in my spare times for different reasons*” (K12).

Table 4. Means of Social Media that are Used by the Individuals

MH Theme Its Reliability		Themes	Codes	Participants	MH Code Reliability	
Second Researcher	Third Researcher				Second Researcher	Third Researcher
4/4+0=1	4/4+0=1	Websites which are used to follow leisure activities	Facebook	K1, K2, K5, K6, K8, K11	3/3+0=1	3/3+0=1
			YouTube	K8		
			Instagram	K2		
		Websites which are used to plan leisure activities	Facebook	K4, K9	2/2+0=1	2/2+0=1
			Twitter	K9		
		Websites which are used to evaluate leisure activities	YouTube	K4,	7/7+0=1	7/7+0=1
			Facebook	K7, K10, K12		
			Trip advisor	K12		
			Foursquare	K12		
			Pinterest	K12		
			Twitter	K11		
			Wikipedia	K7		
		Websites which are used to announce leisure activities	Facebook	K9	3/3+0=1	3/3+0=1
			YouTube	K9		
			Twitter	K9		

In Table 4 below, the findings regarding the research question “Which social media means are used within the scope of evaluating leisure?”. When these findings in the table are assessed, it has been determined that the social media means have come under four themes consisting of eight different websites. The websites used within the scope of leisure come together under the following themes: “Websites which are used to follow leisure activities”, “websites which are used to plan leisure activities”, “Websites which are used to do leisure activities” and “websites which are used to announce leisure activities”. Another important finding obtained from the research is that the coded websites are in different themes. Namely, it can be clearly seen that same websites have been used for different purposes. For example, Facebook falls under all of the four

The reliability coefficients of data are specified in Table 4. When these coefficients are examined, it can be seen that both reliability of themes and reliability of codes are high in both of the researchers.

In the Table 5 below, there are findings regarding the research question of “How much time is spent in terms of evaluating leisure”. When these findings are assessed, it is seen that the time spent by the individuals has come under four themes and twelve codes. These themes are “the total time spent daily on social media”, “the time used daily to follow leisure activities”, “the time spent daily for planning leisure activities” and “the time used daily to evaluate free time”. The direct opinions of participants with regard to the time that they spend on social media are given below:

"I spend two or three hours on Facebook. Especially in winter I follow social media a lot more in the rest of the time from my job. I use social media for work as well but when we evaluate it only in terms of leisure, I can say that I spend two hours daily on social media for leisure" (K10). "I can say thirty minutes in a day. 70% of time that I spend on social media is about following the activities, during the rest 30%, I follow the news, things about work and academy" (K11).

and groups according to their pursuits¹. According to Aşan (2013), formations such as social media groups influences the leisure behaviors of the individual and it has increased to participate in outdoor recreation activities like nature activities additionally Sharaievska and Stodolska (2016) state that social networking sites influences family leisure and family satisfaction.

Table 5. Total Time and Free Time that the Individuals Spend on Social Media

MH Theme Its Reliability		Themes	Codes	Participants	MH Code Reliability	
Second Researcher	Third Researcher				Second Researcher	Third Researcher
4/4+0=1	4/4+0=1	Total time spent daily on social media	4 hours	K1,K10,K12	6/6+0=1	6/6+0=1
			1 hour	K3,K9,K11		
			1,5 hour	K7		
			3,5 hours	K4		
			2 hours	K8		
			30 minutes	K2,K5,K6		
		Time spent daily to follow leisure activities	1 hour	K1	2/2+0=1	2/2+0=1
			30 minutes	K2,K5,K6, K8,K11		
		Time spent daily to plan leisure activities	2 hours	K4	2/2+0=1	2/2+0=1
			1 hour	K9		
		Time spent daily to evaluate leisure activities	2 hours	K10	2/2+0=1	2/2+0=1
			1,5 hour	K7,K12		

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It has been known that the individuals use social media for different reasons. However, this research points out that all the ways of using social media are devoted to leisure activities. Especially in this research, even though the individuals' use purposes of social media is similar with the use purposes in the literature, the purpose here is rather than consuming social media its instrumental usage in the way going to consuming social media. So, actually the regard social media as a purpose rather than as a means. Hence, individuals consider social media as a channel taking them to real leisure activities. In this context the point is to follow the groups that are interested in real leisure activities and the people who perform activities in this respect. According to Rojek (2005), individuals get affected from the people that they are in the same place and their behaviours may shape accordingly. According to personal community theory, the leisure behaviours of individuals get influenced by subgroups such as friends, family and neighbours. As these groups often offer leisure types to the individual. Moreover, because human is a social entity, they are interested in friends

When the findings are also considered, it has been concluded that the individuals have friends and groups according to their interests and the sharing that are done by these people have important impacts on the leisure behaviour and preferences of the individual. According to literature, Facebook is the most used social media website by individuals in their free times. In this research, it has been also revealed that Facebook is the most preferred one. This is because it is the first website used as the participants also stated, and it has become a habit, it is easy to use and has a function regarding forming groups, so, it attracts more individuals. A scale can be developed in this area with the findings as a proposal to future studies, and social media and leisure behaviours of all the individuals participating in recreative activities can be measured.

CONCLUSION

Current study, investigates the influences of social media on leisure activity preferences. In this context, seven semi-structured interview questions are

¹ <http://www.grin.com/en/e-book/106712/the-meanings-of-leisure>

prepared regarding five research questions. Data has been collected from the participants with recorder and decoded by the researchers, eventually content analysis has been performed. As a result of content analysis, data regarding every research question have been coded and these codes have been brought together meaningfully and themes have been created. Along with the data, themes and codes obtained are also offered to a second and a third researcher so that the reliability of the research can be ensured and ultimate findings are offered.

According the findings obtained, even though the participants evaluate their free times differently, they spend their free time generally with nature activities. It has been seen that the individuals evaluate their free times by “carrying out activities in the nature”, “doing voluntary service activities”, “spending time with immediate circle”, “traveling”, “realizing intellectual activities”, “doing artistic/cultural activities” and “fulfilling other individual activities”. It has been identified that the individual use the social media for “communication purpose”, “planning purpose”, “sharing purpose”, “dating purpose”, “following purpose”, “shopping purpose”, “promotion purpose” and “social influence purpose”.

According to the findings which are obtained with respect to the role of social media in terms of individuals’ evaluations of leisure; it can be said that social media encourages travel, creates intercultural interactions and alternative leisure, incents leisure activities and facilitates making use of leisure. Therefore, this finding points out the role of social media on tourism and recreation. So, according to this finding, in terms of directing individuals to tourism and recreation activities, social media has a positive function on the individuals participating outdoor and recreation activities. According to findings obtained in the research, the individuals use social media websites differently. The individuals have said that they use these websites in order to follow leisure activities, to plan these activities and to announce leisure activities. Therefore, it has been seen that individuals use the same websites for different purposes. For instance, as it can be clearly seen from the findings that the individuals take advantage of Facebook in order to both follow leisure activities, and plan these activities and announce leisure activities. A similar situation is also valid for YouTube and Twitter. However, it was concluded that the most preferred website is Facebook and this is because it is more functional compared to the other websites.

Within the scope of free time, according to the findings regarding how and how much spent by the individuals on social media, the individuals spend

time on social media in four different ways. These are like the total time spent daily on social media, the time used daily to follow leisure activities, the time spent daily for planning leisure activities and the time used daily to evaluate free time. According to findings, the participants spend time on social media in order to follow leisure activities and plan social activities; on the other hand, just a few participants (four people) use social media to evaluate their whole free time. According to these findings, the participants use social media as a means rather than as a purpose.

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