

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 made on social media and leisure 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, interviews are conducted with individuals who participated in the outdoor recreational activities 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 advantage of social media platforms in their free times. The individuals have said that they use these websites in order to follow leisure activities, to plan these activities and to announce leisure activities. The time that the individuals spend on social media in order to evaluate time has been evaluated in four groups. These 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.

Keywords: social media, leisure, tourism, recreation

Conference Topic: Tourism, Recreation and Leisure

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. According to the writer, 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 both directly and indirectly. Especially the studies carried out have shown that the Internet is quite important in leisure activities (Ardahan and Lapa, 2011; Aşan, 2013). According to researchers, even though the Internet is mainly used for communication, it is used for different purposes as well. The Internet has been also used for the purposes such as for doing research (Bostancı, 2010), for information exchange (Toruk, 2008), for access to the social networks (Vural and Bat, 2010; Bostancı, 2010), for improving the social relations (Hamburger ve Hayat, 2011) and for evaluating the free times (Beutel, Brähler, Glaesmer, Kuss, Wölfling and Müller, 2011; Tel and Köksalan, 2009; Bryce, 2001; Toruk, 2008; Lu and 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 and 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 and 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 and Bat, 2010; Alikılıç, Gülay and Binbir, 2013; Özgüven and 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 and Tang, 2014). According to the study of Kuo and 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 and 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. The research made in the literature has indicated that studies are limited regarding how the social media influences the leisure activity preferences. Therefore, it has been considered to be necessary to do a research in this respect. So, the main objective of this research has been to uncover whether the social media is used to treat time or not and to reveal how the social media affects leisure preferences. In line with the main objective, the other sub-goals are to discover which social media means are used more often and what kind of activities are made on social media in free times. In addition to these goals, the role of social media on recreation and tourism is tried to be determined.

Research Method

In this research, the purpose has been 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, twelve people have been interviewed individually for 17 minutes in average in the May of 2014 and these 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 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 and Şimşek, 2011).

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 researcher 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 and Huberman (1994:64) was utilized. This formula has been expressed as “*Consensus / Consensus + Dissidence*”. When the value of the research is analyzed it can be seen that the lowest code reliability coefficient is 0,50, the lowest theme reliability coefficient is 0,60 and the other themes and codes reliability coefficient have higher value compared those.

Findings

The study, considering research questions aims to answer these questions respectively. Firstly, When we analyzed the findings research question of “How the participants evaluate their free times?” it can be seen that evaluation of participants free times comprise of within seven theme and twenty seven code. 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 this part, reliability coefficient of Miles and Huberman (MH) have also been analyzed. 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.

Second research question of the of the study is “How the participants use social media?”. Findings through this question specified as fallow. 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 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.

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 this part, 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:

“*For example, when the images taken abroad shared by one of us make me feel desired to go that place*” (K14).

In this part of the study the findings regarding the research question “*Which social media means are used within the scope of evaluating leisure?*”. When these findings are evaluated, 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 themes. The reliability coefficient of data have emphasised. 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. Considering these statements evaluation of all participants have shown resemblance and codes and themes reliability coefficient have dedicated as 1,0.

In this part of the study 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*”.

Conclusion

In this research where the influences of social media on leisure activity preferences are researched, seven interview questions are prepared regarding five research questions and data has been collected from the participants with recorder. Data collected has been decoded and transcribed by the researcher and put to content analysis. 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.

Biography

Bülent Aydın¹ is a research assistant at Anadolu University. He has graduate from Tourism and Hotel administration in 2009 at Erciyes University. He has written his master thesis in 2013 on about Corporate social responsibility of restaurants. Now he is a PhD student at the same time research assistant at Anadolu University.

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