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DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM MANAGEMENT
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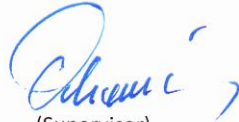
**SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN TOURISM INDUSTRY AND
ROLE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES:
A SURVEY ON THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES ON THE
BUYING DECISION MAKING PROCESS**

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ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

TURİZMDE SOSYAL MEDYA PAZARLAMASI VE SOSYAL MEDYANIN TÜKETİCİ TERCİHLERİNDEKİ ROLÜ: SOSYAL MEDYA SİTELERİNİN SATIN ALMA KARAR ALIM SÜRECİNE ETKİSİ ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

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Teknolojinin başlangıcı ve gelişiminden bu yana, internet ve sosyal medya özellikle son zamanlarda hayatımızın önemli bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Birçok insan çeşitli şekillerde internette yararlanır. Artan küreselleşme zaman kavramının algısını değiştirdi ve bu da kayda değer uluslararası rekabet ortamı yarattı. Bu rekabet ortamında, internet ve sosyal medya araçlarının kullanımı her geçen gün farklı pazarlar genelinde yayılmaktadır. Sosyal medya kapsadığı geniş ağlarla her kültürden ve bölgeden büyük grupların sosyal ihtiyaçlarına karşılık verir. Sosyal medya platformları sayesinde kullanıcılar çeşitli konular hakkında, bilgi, fotoğraflar, videolar ve yorumlarını geniş bir yelpazede paylaşabilir. Turizm, internet ve sosyal medya ağları ile en ilgili çalışma alanlarından biridir. Son zamanlarda uluslararası ve yerel turizm işletmeleri mal ve hizmetlerini pazarlamak için tüm bu sosyal platformları kullanmaktadır. Tüketici açısından, sosyal medya ağ siteleri karar verme aşamasında oldukça önemlidir. Bu nedenle, turizmde sosyal medya araçlarının önemi Turizm İşletmeleri ve turistler için artmaktadır. Turizm İşletmeleri (Örneğin, Otel zincirleri ve Seyahat acenteleri gibi) kısa sürede düşük maliyet ile sosyal medyanın etkin kullanımı sayesinde daha fazla potansiyel tüketiciye ulaşabilirler. Bu tüketiciler seyahat tercihleri hakkında karar verebilir veya sosyal platformlarında tüm yorumları inceledikten sonra kararlarını değiştirebilirler. Bu çalışmada, sosyal medyanın karar vermedeki rolü ve turizm tüketicileri ve katılımcılarının demografik bilgileri ve sosyal medyada tatil deneyimlerini paylaşmaları, sosyal medya kullanımı, satın alma

eylemi, etkisi ve niyeti, bilgi alma gibi bazı yapılar arasındaki potansiyel ilişkiler incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Turizm Pazarlaması, Sosyal Medya, Tüketici Tercihleri, Satınalma Karar Süreci*



ABSTRACT

Master Thesis

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN TOURISM INDUSTRY AND ROLE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES: A SURVEY ON THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES ON THE BUYING DECISION MAKING PROCESS

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Since the introduction and development of technology, internet and social media has become a significant part of our life particularly recently. Many people benefit the internet in various ways. This has manipulated the notion of time through the increasing globalization, which has created considerable internationally competitive environment. In this competitive environment, the use of internet and social media tools are spreading day by day across a variety of markets. Social media responds to the social needs of large groups from all cultures and regions because of the large networks it covers. Through the social media platforms, users can share a wide range of information, photos, videos and textual comments about various issues. Tourism is one of the most related disciplines with internet and social media networks. Currently, international and local tourism businesses utilize all of these social platforms in order to market their goods and services. On the consumer side, social media networking websites are quite important for their decision-making process. Therefore, the importance of social media tools in tourism is increasing especially for each Tourism Company and tourist. Tourism businesses (such as *Hotel Chains and Travel Agencies*) can reach more potential consumers in a short time by lower cost through the active use of social media. Those consumers can make a decision about their travel preferences or can change their decisions after they examine the whole comments in social platforms. This study examines the role of social media on the decision-making and online buying tendencies of tourism consumers and potential relations between participants' demographic information and some constructs such as

getting information from social media, utilization of social media, act of buying, influence and intention to share holiday experiences.

Keywords: *Tourism Marketing, Social Media, Purchasing Decision Process, Consumer Preferences.*



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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------------|---|
| CVB | Convention and Visitor Bureau |
| DM | Destination Management |
| DMC | Destination Management Company |
| ICT | Information Communication Technologies |
| SEM | Structural Equation Modeling |
| UNWTO | United Nations World Tourism Organization |
| WOM | Word of Mouth Marketing |
| WWW | World Wide Web |



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INTRODUCTION

Today, information communication technologies and internet have been improving rapidly. With the development of Web 2.0 technology, internet has become a more active platform for its users. In terms of creating content, users can easily share all their life through Web 2.0 which offers a number of opportunities in order to alter all information on online systems. All of these opportunities offered by Web 2.0. Technologies enable people to form social media platforms. These platforms include blogs, microblogs social bookmarking websites, and textual comment websites. Most of people benefit from these websites and can build virtual communities in order to share and discuss current issues. Hence, consumers can make decisions by benefiting from different examples of travel experiences on social media platforms.

Nowadays, developing social networks are substituting for traditional media tools such as radio, television, and newspapers. Companies carry out their marketing activities with social media marketing channels; many firms can implement promotional campaigns through social media faster than the can with the traditional techniques. Hence, costs of marketing activities in tourism businesses are easily reduced to a minimum thanks to the opportunities offered by these tools.

Developing social media platforms help create a participatory culture. They also affect consumers who spend much more time on social networks and share different contents about various issues. Through the participatory culture, new communication patterns are developing among companies and consumers. This pattern consists of prosumers, those who both produce and consume at the same time. Users of social media platforms can produce and consume various content at the same time. With recent improvement of internet technologies, consumers become prosumer and they can carry out sharing of information such as: firms, products, brands and so on.

Word of mouth (WOM) marketing is one of the most preferable techniques in social media marketing systems. Firms create rumours about product and services among consumers on social media platforms. Through social media, word of mouth rumours can be more permanent than face to face marketing. These rumours can directly affect tourism consumers' decision-making process about their vacations.

Nowadays, there is a massive relationship between information communication technologies (ICT) and tourism industry. Tourism consumers and tourism companies are increasingly utilizing social media platforms. Tourism consumers generate tourism groups in order to negotiate their thoughts about tourism services and products. Consumers share experiences of travelling, photos, videos and comments on social platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Tripadvisor. Thus, other members of social media platforms can easily see and like the whole sharing about their friends. For example, Facebook users can affect travel and holiday preferences of one another by sharing travelling and holiday comments.

It is a great advantage for tourism firms to have such opportunities on social media platforms, which helps them to reach more potential customers. Tourism companies can raise awareness and can sustain their ads by monitoring and developing their social platforms.

Social networking websites are the most well-known websites among social platforms. The famous social networking websites such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn have had millions of members since they were founded. Users can easily access old and new information, changes and developments about tourism market.

Increasing number of users of social networking websites leads to establishment of different types of companies on social media as social platforms can provide lots of advertising opportunities without cost for tourism companies. Firms enjoy an advantage in marketing in this way. For instance, prestigious hotel chains can generate various profiles for their branch offices by gathering with virtual tourism groups on social networking websites such as Facebook. They can also converge with target groups by effective social media marketing strategies. Therefore, firms can have notice of expectation of consumers and can create different opportunities for them. For example, travel agents on Facebook can organize special tours by gathering team supporters before football matches from different countries.

Having discussed the general role of social media in tourism, this study mainly aims to display effects of social media marketing on tourism consumers' decision making process and on their attitudes of tourism consumers on social media platforms. Research consists of three parts. The first part of the study focuses on the concept of

tourism marketing and decision making-process of tourism consumers. The second part of the study contains the concept of social media and the role of the social media marketing on tourism consumer's decision-making process. The third part of the study reports on the findings synthesized through the implemented questionnaire about effects of social media sites on decision-making process of tourism consumers as well as potential relations between participants' demographic information and some constructs such as getting information from social media, utilization of social media, act of buying, influence and intention to share holiday experiences.



CHAPTER - I

1. TOURISM MARKETING AND CONSUMER BUYING DECISION PROCESS IN TOURISM

1.1. An Overview of Tourism Marketing

Tourism marketing activities started with travel and hospitality management in Europe in the nineteenth century. Then these activities increased in the following last five decades. Before the Second World War, tourism activities were considered to be a luxury for particular communities. After industrial revolution, tourism activities started gradually spreading in the World. Through increasing of purchasing power of consumers, tourism activities has been seen as international activities. Since 1936, companies allow paid leave right for their workers. Then workers started travel activities at weekends (Pehlivan, 2009: 34).

The number of people who travel have been increasing year by year. The average number of people going holiday amount to 60 percent of all population in Europe. At macro level, countries and at micro level tourism companies have developed marketing strategies in order to increase demand for travelling. After the 70s, countries and tourism companies started to prioritize market research in order to steer demand (Hacıoğlu, 1997: 9)

The development of tourism marketing levelled off. In other words, the idea of marketing tourism has been neglected for years (Rızaoğlu, 2004: 15). According to İçöz (1996: 22), the reasons for this neglect may include the following factors:

- increase in the individual income reflected on tourism much later that it did so on other properties and services because people prioritize covering their essential needs. The share of the tourism in the individual income started to increase only after the 1950s.
- it has become an important challenge to find staff who are qualified for marketing in tourism sector.
- the introduction of the developing technology into tourism has taken longer time compared to the other sectors, thus leading to delayed mass production.
- tourism sector being a seasonal economic one naturally led to a decreased interest by entrepreneurs.

Marketing has been defined in a number of ways in the literature. For example, Kotler has traditionally defined the marketing concept as follows: “The marketing concept holds that the key to achieving organizational goals consists in determining the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors” (Kotler, 1991: 16).

Similarly, marketing is defined as “a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they needs and want through creating, offering and freely exchanging products and services of value with others”(Cooper, et al., 2008: 514). Bennet and Strydom (2001: 2) also define marketing as “the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual needs and organizational goals”.

On the other hand, according to British Chartered Institute, “marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customers’ requirements profitably” (Cooper, et. al., 2008: 514).

In 1975, tourism marketing was first defined by WTO as “tourism marketing is a management philosophy that targets research, prediction, and selection about a particular tourism product by considering the characteristics of demands to provide a prominent place for a product in the market.” The ultimate aim in marketing is to maximize the income of a tourism company (İçöz, 1996: 21). Another definition describes tourism marketing as “a set of systematic and harmonic efforts of national tourism organizations and tourism enterprises to satisfy the needs of tourists at national and international levels” (Hacıoğlu 1997: 10).

Similarly, according to Akat (1990: 8), “tourism marketing is based on consumer satisfaction in order to ensure tourism supply and tourism demand adaptation”.

1.2. Characteristics of Tourism Marketing

Despite the similarity in the marketing of industrial enterprises, tourism marketing has some unique features. Hacıoğlu (1997: 13) lists the distinguishing features of tourism marketing as follows:

- Service can be marketed in tourism industry and there is no material property for services.
- Usual consumption is marketed unlike goods and services in two different levels: first by the official tourism organizations without sales purposes and secondly by tourism businesses, which aims to sell their own products.
- Environmental and infrastructure issues are the primary factors in tourism marketing such as the presence of a wealth of natural beauty and sea, sun, sand effects marketing.
- Consumers go to production areas in order to get services as opposed to industrial marketing where the goods are delivered from manufacturer to the consumer.
- Production and consumption occur at the same time. More specifically, services are sold then consumed, while in industrial marketing, manufactured goods are offered for sale.
- Tourism businesses can seasonally operate, which might in turn lead to increased financial risks
- The actual product is a cultural centre and a region with high attractiveness.
- Demand may differ daily, weekly, monthly and yearly for tourism services.
- Empty capacity occurs when the demand decreases. However, even if demand is high, capacity limit does not exceed.
- Tourism marketing aims to satisfy the needs of consumers, while industrial marketing aims to provide benefit to consumer with goods.
- Tourism products can generally be offered as a final service to the customers.
- Tourism product is known as complex product. Nowadays, these services are presented as a package tour.
- Tourism products cannot be stored. For this reason, its marketing is risky.
- Because of the intensive labour production, there are fewer automation possibilities on tourism products.

- Due to the diversity among tourism products, standardization or customizing is almost impossible.
- Tourism products are finished products, but some goods and products can be semi-finished in industrial enterprises.
- Destination selection is very important before investment.
- Consumers have a major impact on the quality of services. For example, a special night in a hotel can be evaluated differently by consumers. Some consumers can enjoy but some may not.
- Communication should be very polite with customers.

These characteristics make the tourism sector a very distinct one in terms of human relations, nature of services and variety. Any marketing strategy needs to consider these characteristics thoroughly.

1.3. Objectives of Tourism Marketing

There are several factors that make marketing tourism significant and necessitate its presence in terms of the international scope it has reached. These factors can be evaluated at business, national and social level (İçöz, 1996: 23).

1.3.1. Objectives at Business Level

The main goal of a company manager is to set up an optimal relation between the amount of the factors To be used and that of property and service. The marketing objectives at business level are as follows (Pehlivan, 2009: 39):

- Create demand for properties and services produced by the company
- Create an advantage in the competitive market
- Enable efficient access to properties and services by customers
- Introduce properties and services into the market effectively
- Maintain and increase market share, and create new markets
- Devising customer friendly new properties an services and make the use of the products available more efficient
- Reach maximum benefits and sales
- Increase the productive efficiency
- Developing the efficient products while abandoning the inefficient ones

- Carry out market research and development to monitor changes in customer expectations and preferences
- Devise products in line with the customer needs analysis
- Identify new customer groups
- Increase and develop the volume of sales
- Compete with the rivals in the market

Any company needs to take into account these objectives if it is to develop as a business in the sector it is actively working.

1.3.2. Objectives at National Level

There are also several objectives that could be addressed at national level. These can be listed as follows (Pehlivan, 2009: 39):

- Increase the occupancy rates of hotels
- Rationalize the tourism production system
- Establish an optimal relationship between prices and services
- Adapting supply for changing tourist demands continuously
- Follow an efficient advertisement policy
- Surveying market and find new ones
- Apply efficient marketing strategies and plans
- Create and diversify attractive tourism supply
- Advertising internationally the tourist properties and services
- Stimulating potential demands for the country
- Sustaining and increasing the international tourism market share
- Contribute to increasing tourism incomes
- Publicising the country's touristic characteristics
- Increase the international and regional competition power

Tourism companies could contribute to the development at national level if they embrace the objectives listed above.

1.3.3. Social Objectives

There are also several social objectives that could be addressed by the tourism companies in the country. These can be as follows (Pehlivan, 2009: 40):

- Developing regional handicrafts
- Sustaining social traditions
- Contributing to setting up an economic and social balance among regions
- Creating and developing alternative sectors for specific regions
- Diversify the productivity and contribute to the economic development
- Contributing to domestic tourism and creating a need for going on a holiday
- Help society develop awareness towards tourism

This society level positive contribution to the tourism development of countries is of critical importance. They need to be followed carefully to create a tourism country that grows economically.

1.4. Tourism Marketing Mix

Armstrong and Kotler (2005) indicate that the marketing mix is one of the key concepts in modern marketing theory. According to them, “ marketing mix is the set of controllable, tactical marketing tools that the firm blends to produce the response it wants in the target market”. Traditional marketing approaches consist of 4 elements of the marketing mix. These include price, product, promotion and place (distribution). All elements of the marketing mix must be carefully selected (Mill and Morrison, 1992: 438).



Figure 1. The Four Ps of Marketing Mix

Source:<http://www.mbaskool.com/business-concepts/marketing-and-strategy-terms/6778-4-ps-of-marketing.html> Retrieved May 16, 2015.

However, there are other approaches highlighting the need for development of these four. This is an interesting development because the four Ps were regarded by McCarthy (1978) as a shortened version a much wider range of what were termed “marketing ingredients”. McCarthy (1978) based the classification of his four Ps upon a whole collection of marketing ingredients.

The elements of 4Ps is the most widely used marketing mix in tourism industry. The main purpose of marketers to form a harmonious mix with the characteristics of selected target market from the four Ps. For this reason the marketing mix is considered as the main decision making area of marketing management (İçöz 2001: 18).

1.4.1. Tourism Product

A number of definitions of tourism product have been made. According to Medlik and Middleton (1973), “the tourism product consists of a variety of elements which are not integral to one another and should meet the needs of tourists from leaving his residence to the place of destination and back again to the place of origin.”

On the other hand, a tourism product can also be defined as “all of physical objects, services, organizations and places to satisfy the need and want of customers”. In this context, a tourism product may include food and beverage services, accommodation services, recreational activities, gambling, bars, saunas, sports facilities, dry-cleaning, souvenirs, transportation services, city tours and so on. It is not possible to think separate tourism products and its complementary products (Altunışık, et.al. 2004: 301).

Tourism product is basically a service. In tourism industry, products and facilities are given to the use of the tourists for a temporary period. Tourists rent and consume all these products in a given time. For example accommodation, transportation and travelling can be different in terms of nature and location, but the sum of services offered by complimentary businesses is one product and experience (Yarcan, 1998: 23). The quality of tourist services and ensuring of customer satisfaction is determined by the features of services offered. Other services such as customer’s participation, interaction among the customers and availability of service can also play an active role in determining the quality of service (Altunışık et. al., 2004: 301).

Tourism product continues ceaselessly from the starting of travel activity till the end of travel. Existence of tourism source of any country and tourism product is not sufficient for long-term success. Expectation of tourists, demand size, type of transportation, and capacity of accommodation facilities can affect the selling prices and features of tourism product (Yarcan, 1998: 25).

Tourism product has a vital importance for a tourism company because the main source of an enterprise is formed by products. Product decisions reflect a company’s management philosophy and policy. Product decisions make it possible to create and improve potential customer’s opinions about business image. Product planning and development decisions determine what price will be implemented, what kind of promotions will be benefited, what distribution channels will be utilized. Because of the specific features of tourism product, the marketing of these products requires different decisions and methods (Rızaoğlu, 1995: 97).

1.4.1.1. Elements of Tourism Product

The product represents the sum of tourist's experiences gained during the travel. A tourism product can be evaluated as the composition of tangible or intangible component by depending destination activities. This composition is perceived as an experience of buying by tourists (Rızaoğlu, 1995: 99). According to Uygur (2007: 239), elements that make up the tourism products are divided into five parts. These include attractions, events (activities), accessibility, tourism businesses and image.

- **Attractions:** The place where the tourist wants to go instead of another place. Elements of attraction include natural elements, socio cultural elements, economic factors and psychological factors.
- **Events (Activities):** Events are other elements of that form the tourism products. Events include festivals, fairs, festivity, conventions and sporting events.
- **Accessibility:** Accessibility is one of important elements of tourism product. It is defined as easy access to tourism regions and companies Accessibility also refers to the availability of infrastructure facilities.
- **Tourism Businesses:** Tourism businesses can be classified as accommodation, transportation, food and beverage, travel agents, tour operators and others. It is not possible to mention a tourism product without tourism businesses.
- **Image:** The image of touristic regions and businesses is one of the critical elements of tourism product.

1.4.1.2. Characteristics of Tourism Products

There are distinctive features of tourist products. These features are listed below (Usta 2002: 98; Olalı and Timur 1988: 421; Olalı 1990: 140).

- Tourism product is the combination of services such as transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment.
- Tourist generally combines services which create touristic product.
- Because of the combined product, it is quite difficult to create a suitable tourism product for everyone.

- Production and consumption of the tourism products takes place simultaneously. In other words, the tourism product is consumed where it is produced. Many times tourism product is sold before it is produced and consumed.
- Tourism product cannot be stored.
- Standardisation is impossible for tourism product because mechanization and automation cannot be achieved completely for the goods and services in tourism.
- Tourism product requires a strong collaboration between institutions and people who create the product
- It is possible to create a wide variety of combined product by using same goods and service with different purposes.
- The supply of tourist product is not flexible. However, diversification of touristic products must be flexible. It is necessary to follow the developments in the world.

1.4.1.3. The Life Cycle of Tourism Product

Introduction to market: Produced tourism product is not recognized yet. Sales are very low, sales growth is quite slow, production costs are high and there is no competition in this stage (Kozak, 2006: 149).

Growth: By reaching the breakeven point, new product is adopted in the market. Sales and profitability increase. In this case, other businesses are pulled to the market. In growth stage, companies try to build brand loyalty and promotional activities (Tekeli, 2001: 33).

Maturity: The rate of increase of sales reduces and the competition is more. After a while, sales and profits begin to decline. Diversification requests and plans begin to make on tourism product (Kozak, 2006: 149).

Decline: Sales of tourism product rapidly fall. Companies begin to give up their production and marketing efforts. Substantial reduction occurred in the price. In decline stage, new tourism product is formed and tourism companies begin to struggle in order to exist in the market (Kozak, 2006: 149).

1.4.2. Pricing

Price is one of the crucial marketing mix element, since affordability constitutes a significant pull factor in drawing tourists to particular destinations (Weaver and Lawton, 2006: 222).

Price denotes negotiated terms of the exchange transaction for a product between a producer aiming to achieve predetermined sales volume and revenue objectives and prospective customers seeking to maximize their perceptions of value for money in the choices they make between alternative products (Middleton and Clarke, 2001: 90).

Before pricing process, the existing market structure and competition conditions must be known. Tourism products can vary in terms of geographical locations. The structure of market provides diversity in tourism industry (Hacıoğlu, 2005: 50).

However, price is considered as an element of competition among companies. The following factors play an important role on a firm's pricing policy (İçöz, 2001: 19):

- The quality of product
- Diversity of product
- Competition
- Distribution Channels
- The structure of market
- Cost of product
- Cost of distribution
- The targeted profit margin
- The seasonal feature of the product
- Special promotional prices
- Psychological prices

1.4.2.1. Importance of Pricing

Price is an important measure on consumers' perception of tourism product. Marketers must grasp the psychological effect of the price. They also must have sufficient knowledge in terms of quality and manufacturer of a tourism product. (Kozak, 2006: 176).

Price as the element of 4Ps in the marketing mix: for leisure tourism, especially holiday choices, there are many who consider price to be the most important of all the marketing decisions because price fixes the terms of the voluntary exchange transaction between customers willing to buy and producers wishing to sell (Middleton and Clarke 2001: 138).

1.4.2.2. Factors Affecting Pricing Decision

There are many factors that have an influence on how you set the price for products or services, with some of them internal and some external, and most of them fluctuate over time (Wickford, 2015).

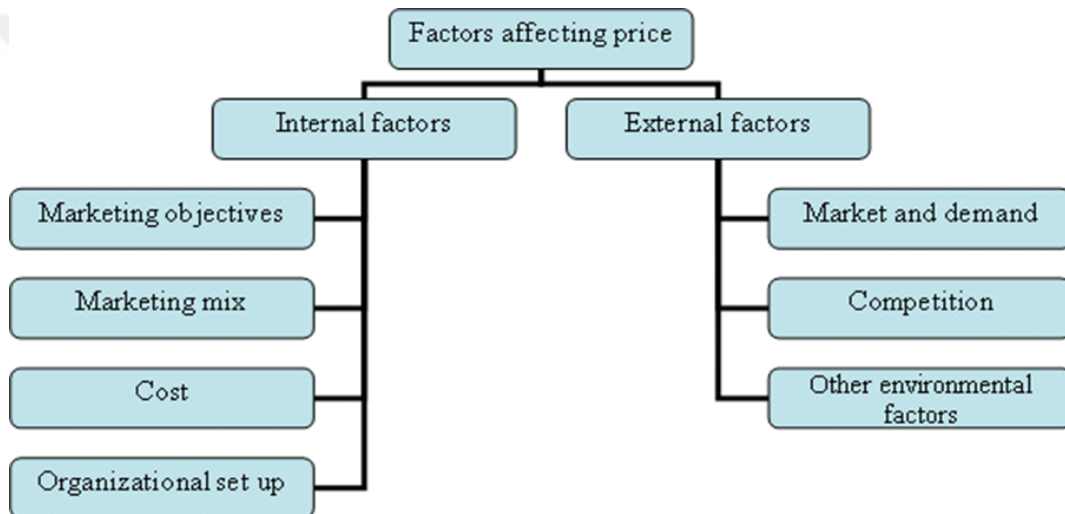


Figure 2. Factors Affecting Price

Source:<http://www.winnerscience.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/factors-affecting-price.png> Retrieved May 20,2015.

The products that tourists buy are composed of a combination of various services and there is no communication among the producers of these services. For this reason there are numerous factors that affect pricing decisions (Erol, 2003: 110). Some of these factors are listed below:

- ***The quality of tourism product:*** Tourism products usually denote labour-intensive product features. For this reason, it is difficult to standardize services. Tourist businesses are classified in term of size and shape of services. Price differences among the tourism companies in the same category are caused by presentation of the service (Akat, 2000: 174).
- ***Competition:*** Competition is one of the most important variables affecting pricing in marketing. If the competition focused on the price, it would directly impacts pricing. Marketing managers should avoid from the pricing war because this situation leads to a decrease in profit margins in sector (Ecer and Canitez, 2004: 225).
- ***Competitors:*** The prices of the same or substitute products produced by competitors must be taken into account. Where there is intense competition in the market, the price should be at a level to compete with rivals (Yükselen, 2003: 225).
- ***Costs:*** Many companies try to be low-cost producers in the sector. In this way, the company can increase sales with low price strategy (Tokol, 1996: 99).
- ***Regulations:*** State or local governments sometimes interfere to the price of some products with upper or lower limit. The aim here is to protect the producers and consumers (Ertürk, 2000: 256).
- ***Consumer behaviours:*** When determining the price, consumer perceptions should be considered. Because if the price of the product is more than the value of the product, consumers will not buy that product. Therefore, marketers should learn the reasons of purchasing of any product (Doğan, 1998: 405).
- ***Intermediaries:*** The number of intermediaries has an important effect on pricing decisions in terms of commissions paid (Kozak, 2006: 178).
- ***The capacity of production:*** The price can be detected in different ways depending on the capacity and the scale of business except the cost of production. According to the occupancy of the business, prices may fall a certain percentage in order to reduce the cost (Hacıoğlu, 2005: 52).

- ***The location and the position of the company:*** The distance of tourism company to the target market, natural and social environment of the business can affect the price of the business (Akat, 2000: 175).

1.4.3. Place (Distribution)

Place is of significance in tourism because tourists must travel to the destination area in order to consume the tourism product (Weaver and Lawton 2006: 219). The tourism product is one where no transfer of ownership takes place and service is simply rented or consumed. Nevertheless prior to consumption the tourism product has to be both suitable and accessible. This requires a distribution system or choice of a marketing channel (Cooper, et al., 2008: 601).

A distribution channel is any organized and serviced system paid for out of marketing budgets and created or utilized to provide convenient points of sale and access to consumer, away from the location of production and consumption (Middleton, 1994: 202).

A distribution system is the mix of channels used to gain access or means by which a tourism service is made suitable to the potential buyers of the tourism product. The following aspects of tourism distribution should be noted (Cooper, et al., 2008: 610):

- Tourism normally involves the episode of a purchase act related to decision over travel to a destination, the stay and return. The nature of travel distribution is related to entering into the production as well as consumption of the product.
- A considerable portion of money is allocated by the industry to the production and printing of literature as well as to its delivery direct to the travel agent or customer.
- There is no actual product being distributed. There are only clues given through persuasive communication about the product.

However, a distribution channel in tourism can be defined as the structure is created by the organizational units and non-business marketing organizations in order to ensure delivery of the product from manufacturer to consumer (Akat, 2000: 179).

1.4.3.1. The Functions of Distribution Channels

Basic operations of organizations in the distribution channel can be listed as the followings (Uygur, 2007: 295):

- **Data collection:** Potential customers can gather information about competitors and others.
- **Promotion:** In order to ensure customers' buying decisions, persuasive communication formats re-developed and implemented.
- **Contact:** Find potential customers and make communication with them.
- **Regulations relating to the product:** To prepare all products for customers' requirements.
- **Regulations relating to the product:** To decide on price received payment, terms and maturities.
- **Physical distribution:** To provide storage and taking of goods to the consumer.
- **Finance:** To perform the management of costs related to activities in distribution channels.

1.4.3.2. Intermediaries of the Distribution Channels

There are lots of intermediary company in distribution channel of tourism industry. These are includes: tour uproots, travel agents, and internet and other intermediaries.

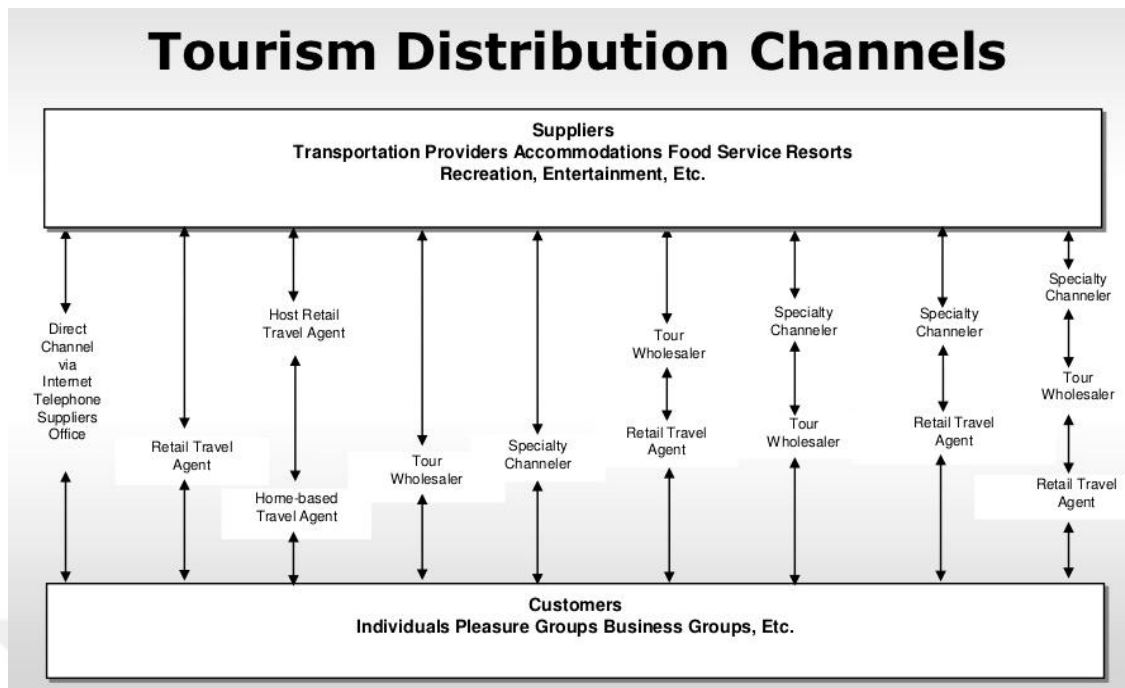


Figure 3. Distribution Channels of Tourism Product

Source: Wright, 2011: Slide: 17, Retrieved April, 10, 2015, from <http://www.slideshare.net/americanangel/tourism-distribution>

1.4.3.2.1. Tour Operators/ Wholesalers

Based internationally, tour operators are businesses that combine two or more travel services (e.g. transportation, accommodation, meals, entertainment sightseeing) and sell them through travel agencies or directly to final consumers as a single product (called a package tour) for a global price (stats.oecd.org).

Tour operators provide benefits for both tourism consumers and tourism businesses. The benefits are provided by the tour operators / wholesalers are listed below (Erol, 2003: 95):

- Tour operators help tourism companies by purchasing its products before tourists. Tour operators solve financial problems of tourism businesses.
- Tour operators create new ideas and campaigns in order to attract customers. They create new usage area for tourism companies and its products.
- Tour operators inform tourism businesses about price, quality level, and types of the product.

1.4.3.2.2. Travel Agents/ Retail Agents

Travel agent is a retail establishment in tourism distribution system. The primary task of travel agents is to supply the public by travel services. However, a travel agent can offer travel related services to the customer such as: foreign exchange or insurance (Cooper, et al., 2008: 385).

On the other hand, travel agents ensure many benefits to consumers. These are listed below (Barutçugil, 1989: 131):

- Travel agents provide and sell train ticket, plane ticket and ferry ticket. An agent makes reservations for hotels.
- Travel agents offer guidance counselling and city tours for tourism consumers.
- Travel agents fulfil travel insurance and visa processing of customers.
- A travel agent assists to tourists about how to find tourist product, and plans travel

1.4.3.2.3. Internet

Internet is one of the most important distribution channel in tourism industry. Recently, tourism companies are choosing internet and social media platforms as a distribution tool (Aymankuy, et al., 2013: 379). Internet provides that the creation of tourism product and it also provides the coordination among many of intermediaries (Gürses, 2006: 62).

Companies create a website on the internet which provides e-commerce facilities and motivating knowledge for customer (tourism consumers). Businesses ensure global communication networks among users. Global communication networks are not directly owned by any organization, and is accessible with personal computers therefore interaction between consumer and manufacturer (Middleton and Clarke, 2001: 294).

1.4.3.2.4. Others

Hotel Representatives: The main task of the representative of hotel is to accept reservations and increase sales level. Many hotels in developed countries provide employment for hotel representatives (Kozak, 2006: 167).

Global Distribution Systems: Rent a car companies, hotels, travel agents and tour operators use their own reservation systems. Nowadays, global distribution systems are the fundamental tool of international tourism marketing (Uygur, 2007: 315).

Airline Ticket Agents: Airlines companies sell their tickets through their ticket agents both domestically and abroad. Not only airplane tickets but also accommodation and tour package are sold by these agents (Hacıoğlu, 2005: 67).

1.4.4. Promotion

Promotion is one of the significant elements of marketing mix. It is the illustrative term for the mix of communication activities that tourism organizations carry out in order to influence the public on whom their sales depend (Cooper, et al., 2008: 593).

However, companies must communicate with target groups in order to facilitate in their change process. This communication is carried out by the elements of promotion mix. In this case, promotion is the process of intercommunication and persuasion in order to facilitate the sale of goods or services (Öztürk, 1998: 70).

According to Weaver and Lawton (2006: 223), promotion attempts to increase demand by conveying a positive image of the product to potential customers through appeals to the perceived demands, needs, tastes, values and attitudes of a particular target market segment. Promotion consists of the set of publicity, merchandising, advertising, presentation, and personal sales promotion.

In the tourism industry, following statements can be said about the importance of promotion (Rızaoğlu, 2004: 270):

- Promotion is needed in order to ensure brand loyalty in tourism industry.
- Because of the strong competition among tourism products, promotion is essential.

- Promotion is necessary to encourage consumers who have never seen or used the product before.
- Due to the seasonality of demand of tourism product, promotion is necessary.

1.4.4.1. Factors Affecting Promotion of Tourism Product

There are some factors that affect promotional activities of tourism product, these are listed below (Pehlivan, 2009: 71):

The Quality of Market: The number of consumers, the number of rivals and the geographical distribution of the tourism market clearly affect the formation of promotion mix.

The Budget of Promotion: The promotional mix of high-budget tourism businesses consists of several tools but that of low budget tourism businesses consists of few.

The Quality of Tourism Product: The basic products of any accommodation business, airline services, and package tours of tour operators need different promotional tools.

The level of Knowledge of Consumers: The level of knowledge of consumers about tourism product affects the elements of promotion mix and its implementation.

1.4.4.2. Elements of Promotion Mix

1.4.4.2.1. Retail Sales

Retail sales are one of the leading promotion methods for individual tourism sales firms because tourism is a human activity and requires face-to-face human relations. Therefore, the success of tourism firms heavily depends on individual sales (Rızaoğlu, 2004: 292).

Individual sale has some superiority such as targeting particular customer group, and more direct contact and feedback. When compared with advertisement and other promotional activities, individual sale costs higher and requires investment in the training of the salesperson, which could be its weaknesses (Öztürk, 1998: 80).

Individual sale is normally a 7-stage process. These are finding potential customer, preparing for sale, meeting the potential customer, presenting the product or service,

listening to complaints, addressing doubts, selling, and monitoring the customer (Doğan, 1998: 439).

1.4.4.2.2. Public Relations

Public relations are based on two-way communication. Companies have public relations to sustain their relationships with target institutions and people and to earn their respect, support and sympathy. Public relations provide publicity with little or no cost, which an advertisement scheme would cost a fortune (Hacıoğlu, 2005: 78).

Public relations are more convincing compared to the advertisements and can also contact people who do not like salespersons but are potential customers. Messages are not for direct sales but more like informing potential customers. Public relations campaign can be utilized efficiently with other promotional activities in a cost wise manner (Mucuk, 2006: 181).

1.4.4.2.3. Advertisements

Advertisement includes any paid form of non-personal communication through the media which details a product that has identified sponsors. The media may include travel guides, newspapers, web pages, direct mail, billboards television and radios (Cooper, et al., 2008: 596).

Advertisement, which is the most used method in communicating consumers, is the initial point where consumers are provided with information, reminded or convinced through effective communication. Advertisement plays a key role in educating customer about the capacity, features of products and providing them with true information about the service (Lovelock and Wright, 2001: 201).

1.4.4.2.4. Sales promotion

Sales promotion is generally composed of all attempts except for individual sale, advertisement and public. Some sales promotion campaigns can be quite creative in accessing the customer. For example, some international airlines companies give first class and business class passenger's promotional gifts such as make-up tools, pens, papers, or game cards (Lovelock and Wright, 2001: 203).

1.5. Consumer Behaviour in Tourism

Before the understanding of consumer behaviours, the word “consumer” needs to be defined properly. The term “consumer” includes all potential buyers or buyers of properties or services in the common market (Karabulut, 1989: 15). Basically, consumer behaviour researches try to understand and account for, when, why, where, and how s/he has bought what (Akturan, 2007: 238).

There are other definitions of consumer behaviours. For example, Solomon (2009: 33) describes it as “all the behaviours while s/he prefers, uses, and gives up a particular property, service or idea”. Another definition is that, “consumer behaviour includes all decision-making processes that influence physical activities such as evaluating, searching for, buying, using and returning a particular product that customers think will meet their or others’ needs” (Kavas, Katrinli and Özday, 1995: 2).

According to Doğan (2004: 31), people’s touristic behaviours can be investigated on the basis of a model that includes formation of social environment by cultural environment, the direct influence of social environment on personality and the influence of personality on touristic behaviour in relation to propaganda and advertisement. In this context, consumer behaviours are influenced by 4 basic factors, which include psychology, demographics, social-cultural and situational factors. In addition, sales attempt by the firm itself are also one of the determining factors that affect consumer buying behaviours (Odabaşı and Barış, 2002: 50). On the other hand, the factors that influence consumer behaviours can be classified as internal and external factors. The internal ones include variables such as a customer’s attitudes, personality, life style, and perceptions, whereas the external ones are variables that result from the environment such as demographic, cultural, reference groups (İslamoğlu, 2003: 54):

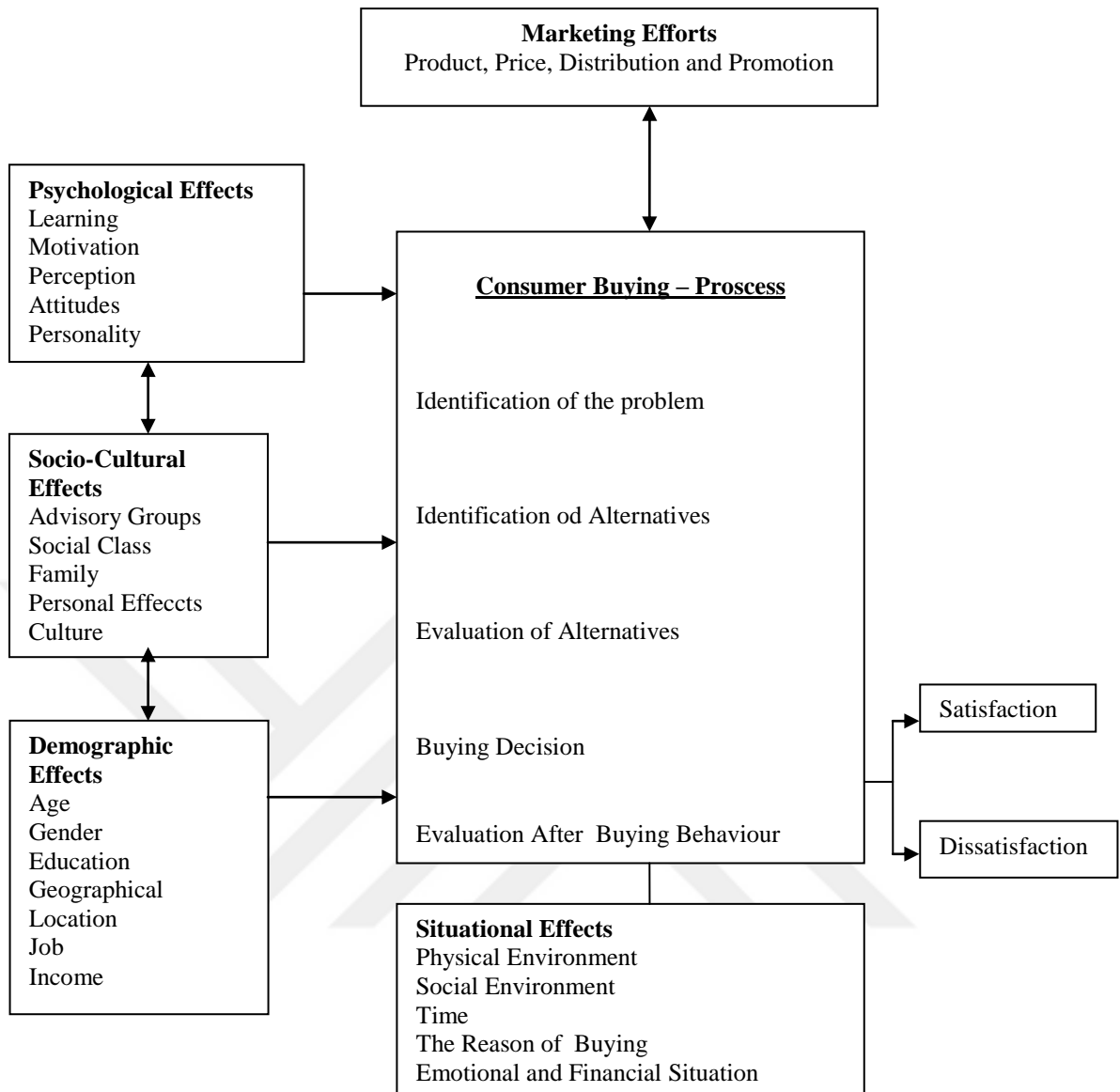


Figure 4. General Consumer Behaviour Model

Source: Odabaşı and Barış, 2002: 50.

According to Cooper et al. (2008: 56), consumer behaviour models are designed to attempt to ensure an overall representation of the consumer behaviour process and to identify the key element of the process and their interrelationships. On the other hand, the understanding of the specific reasons for which consumers prefer particular properties and service in the market also requires the understanding of the mechanisms that encourage them to purchase them. Therefore, marketing managers

of tourism companies need to monitor and find out consumer behaviours (İçöz 2001: 75).

Similarly, any tourism company has to develop mixed marketing strategies that could satisfy the consumers due to the powerful influence of consumer reaction on the success of a firm. Marketers who know the factors that influence the consumer behaviours can estimate how a consumer will react to their marketing decisions (Cemalcılar, 1995: 41).

Today it is well established that internet and social media have profound impact on the consumer behaviours. Social platforms have the power to make a change in consumers' decision-making process and this factor seems to be hard to take under control (Constantinides and Stagno, 2011: 10).

According to Durukan, Bozacı and Hamsioğlu (2012) there are three categories of consumer behaviours regarding purchase behaviours through social media. These categories include:

- Behaviours regarding consumption influenced by others (understanding friends' opinions)
- Behaviours influencing consumption (opinion leadership, positive or negative interaction through words of mouth)
- Social media as a means of expressing dissatisfaction arising from the companies especially in the stage of purchase

1.6. Consumer Buying Decision Process in Tourism

There have appeared a number of factors including rises in income, increasing spare time, developing facilities, higher educational level and facilitation in the flow of information which have begun to change the holiday conceptions. An increase in the options for holiday, diversity of destinations in the country, and increasing variety in the types of holidays have created more and more options than anticipated for potential tourists (Aydınöglü, 2009: 31). In this sense the decision-making process is going through a tough analysis of choices considering all these options according to what they want.

1.6.1. The Stages of Buying Decision Process

The realization of consumer satisfaction is interlinked to whether their expectations have been met. The level of satisfaction plays a key role in the decision-making of purchase. Consumer satisfaction commences before the actual purchase and is ensured long after it through a variety of activities. In this sense, decision making for purchase is composed of five stages (Şimşek, 1990: 48). These are needs analysis (recognition of needs), information research, evaluating alternatives, buying decision, and post- purchase behaviours.



Figure 5: Buying Decision Process

Source: Kotler, et al., 1999: 201

The model in figure 5 shows that buying decision starts much earlier than the actual buying and continues long after the act of buying. Though this process is valid each buying decision, there are also purchases that do not go through such a process. For example, in a bar, an intention to buy a bottle of beer leads one to buying it immediately without considering the stages discussed above. So a consumer does not feel the need to follow these procedures, which is called automatic response system (Kotler, et al. 1999: 201).

1.6.1.1. Need Recognition

The first stage of buying decision commences with identifying a problem and feel the need to do purchase. A buyer distinguishes his/her actual state and the state in which s/he would like to be. The need is activated by an inner stimulus. Considering his or her previous buying experiences, the buyer feels motivated to buy the property or service that s/he thinks will meet his or her needs (İçöz, 2001: 91).

If put into tourism context, this stage includes need or will for travel and evaluation of its feasibility. The emergence of a need or a will in an individual means that a stimulus came into action in that person. This stimulus is needed for an individual to act in a particular way. When stimulated, individuals focus on that stimulus, which is followed by a need to emerge (Rızaoğlu, 2003: 149).

There are a number of motives that raise a need for travel or holiday in an individual. These are extensively reviewed and discussed in traditional tourism books. These are primarily a need for travel or rest for a particular period after a long and tiring work period, for entertainment, for pilgrim, for business, and for health (İçöz, 2001: 91)

1.6.1.2. Information Search

The second stage is information search. The scope of such search depends on individual characteristics (attitudes, knowledge, experiences, and motivations), market characteristics (number of alternatives, cost, accessible information) and situational characteristics (lack of time and financial pressure) (Bovève and Thill, 1992: 177).

An individual who has a real need may sometimes search more information. If the need is around and easily accessible, s/he is likely to be tempted by this. If not, s/he starts to look for solutions from different sources (İçöz 2001: 92);

- Commercial sources: advertisements, salesperson, marketers etc.
- Personal sources: friends, family, neighbours etc.
- Institutional sources: criticisms in the media, travel pages, consumer monitoring (rating) institutions, etc.

On the other hand, a consumer needs to be properly acknowledged by marketing staff regarding features of product or service. In this scope management of marketing needs to identify consumers' sources of information and to be aware of the significance of each in order to prepare an efficient interaction on the basis of this set of information (Uygur, 2007: 191).

1.6.1.3. Evaluation of Alternatives

Following the identification of alternatives and collection of relevant information, each is evaluated accordingly. A consumer is highly likely to opt for the alternative that has the least risk. It is the selection criteria that determine the core of the evaluation. Selection criteria vary from one consumer to another and from one individual context to another (Arıkan ve Odabası, 1995: 108).

At this stage, marketing management needs to develop appropriate strategies of creating positive attitudes and images, maintaining the available positive attitudes and images or modifying negative ones (Uygur. 2007: 192).

1.6.1.4. Purchasing (Buying) Decision

Following the evaluation of various alternatives, a consumer starts the act of buying. If the decision is positive, s/he prefers the product or service according to the constraints in the region. Making such decisions is not straightforward, but marketers acknowledge consumers about their decisions making via effective ads campaigns (İçöz, 2001: 93).

According to Rızaoğlu (2003: 155), this stage requires getting into the action of buying an asset and benefit. However, the buying decision has not yet been finalized because consumers may consult family members and close friends for their opinions. If consulted people oppose to the decision, this may lead consumers to re-evaluating the decisions or postponing the act of buying. However, if a consumer is convinced that the destination is worth visiting, it is then time and money that can hinder him or her. What a marketer needs to do in this case is to try to recognize potential obstacles and remove them. For example, cheaper destinations may be selected or shorter holidays may be recommended.

1.6.1.5. Post-Purchase Behaviour

Buying the product or service does not mean the process is finalized. The post-evaluations of consumers play a key role. Consumers need to feel satisfied. If satisfaction is provided, a consumer will be likely to buy the same product or service. If not, s/he will neither buy it herself or himself again nor recommend others buying

it. Companies struggle to win their customers by trying to overcome the potential problems that may arise in the post-purchase stage (Uygur, 2007: 193).

1.6.2. The Role of Consumer on Buying Decision Process

A marketer would like to know who is interested in buying and what other people play a key role in the decision making process particularly to convince customers. It is sometimes easy to identify the decision-maker. For example, businessmen or bosses stay at particular hotels during their travel and their secretaries make reservations for them or in a family decision for holidays are made collectively. According to Kotler et al. (1999: 200), people play one of the following roles in the decision making process:

- **Leader:** introduces the idea of buying a particular property or service for the first time such as a friend suggesting a plan of holiday that has not been experienced by any member of a group before.
- **Influencer:** has the power to influence the final decisions such as a person impacting the choice of destination in a group after all research information.
- **Decision-maker:** makes part or all of a decision on whether to buy, what to buy, where and how to buy. For example, a couple makes a joint decision to go out but it is a decision-maker who decides which one.
- **Buyer:** gets the action of buying such as parents who pay for the purchase.
- **User:** consumes service or product. For example, all members of a family should feel satisfied about the decided restaurant for another dinner there.

CHAPTER - II

2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN TOURISM

2.1. What is Social Media?

Today there is no agreed definition of social media. Simply put, social media are platforms where Web 2.0 technologies are utilized (Gunelius, 2011: 10). It is a natural product of the user content of Web 2.0 technologies. As opposed to Web 1.0 which has a static, program-based and one-user productivity, Web 2.0 offers dynamism, self-creating opportunities of content and social-based characteristics, which are the factors in the introduction of social media in our life (Bozarth, 2010: 11).

Web 2.0 internet including much faster services such as Wikis, content sharing sites blogs and social networks have influenced not only technology and design but also all walks of life (Kahraman, 2010: 13).

Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010: 61) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content. This content includes videos photos and textual comments”.

According to Evans (2008: 31) “social media involves a natural, genuine conversation between people about something of mutual interest, a conversation built on the thoughts and experiences of participants. It is about sharing and arriving at a collective point, often for the purpose of making a better or more informed choice”.

Another definition (Blossom, 2009: 30) is that “social media is a tool that creates opportunities for interaction with others ranging from individual to group”. Similarly, Gülsoy (2009: 245) defines it as “an autonomously developed practice by which people share their own content independently with others”. Abrahams et al. (2012, 88) also makes a similar definition by saying that is “online services that allows for social interaction, creating personal contents, non-centralized applications with free membership”.

2.1.1. Forms of Social Media

Many different forms and types of social media exist in the World of internet. Users have varying reasons to use these social media sites ranging from promoting a business to keeping up with friends.

Nowadays, there are basically six kinds of social media these are listed below (Doğan, 2013: 3):

- **Wiki's:** This kind of social media websites enable to add content to or edit the information on them, acting as a communal database. The online encyclopaedia of Wikipedia is the most know example of wiki's.
- **Blogs:** This is the most famous form of social media among others. Blogs include online journals with the appearing entries.
- **Social Networks:** These sites allow people to build personal web pages and then connect with friends to share content and communication. The biggest social networks are MySpace, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. These kinds of sites allow people to connect with their friends and associates.
- **Content Communities (Social Book markings):** In these kind of social media websites: communities share specific kinds of content. The other name of content communities is social bookmarking which is about tagging webpages to for later use. After tagged you can easily find and share them with your connections. The most popular examples of social bookmarking consist of delicious, Instagram and YouTube.
- **Forums:** This kind of social media websites are online discussion platforms and generally affairs are specific.
- **Podcasts:** This type of social media websites include video and audio files

Table 1: Examples of Social Media Platforms

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Social networking sites | Myspace, Facebook, Face party |
| 2. Creativity sharing sites: 2.1. Video sharing sites 2.2. Photograph sharing sites 2.3. Music sharing sites 2.4. Assistance sharing sites 2.5. General idea and real-estate sharing sites | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YouTube • Flickr • Jamendo.com • Piczo.com • Creative Commons |
| 3. User supported blogs | Informal Apple Weblog, Cnet.com |
| 4. Company supported web site/blogs | Apple.com, P&G's Vocal point |
| 5. Company supported assistance site | Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty, click2quit.com |
| 6. Social networks accepting members upon invitation | ASmallWorld.net |
| 7. Business sharing sites | LinkedIn |
| 8. Collaborative web sites | Wikipedia |
| 9. Cyber worlds | Second Life |
| 10. Business communities | eBay, Amazon.com, Craig's List, iStockphoto, Threadless.com |
| 11. Video player subscriptions (Podcasts) | Forimmediaterelease.biz (The Hobson and Holtz Report) |
| 12. News sharing sites | Current TV |
| 13. Educational material sharing | MIT Open Courseware, MERLOT |
| 14. Public domain software communities | Mozilla's spreadfirefox.com, Linux.org |
| 15. Social check-in sites recommending users online news, music, videos and similar ones | Digg, del.icio.us, News vine, Mixx it, Reddit |

Source: Mangold and Faulds, 2009: 358

2.1.2. Characteristics of Social Media

Social media has the following unique characteristics (İşlek, 2012: 19):

Participation: Social media encourages everyone who is willing to contribute and give feedback, which make the line between the media and the public become indistinct. That is, the clear-cut distinction between the follower and content creator has become indistinct.

Publicity: Most of social media services is open to participation and feedback giving. Voting, commenting, and information sharing are encouraged. There is seldom limitation to access and use contents. The content that are protected via passwords are seldom preferred by the users.

Dialogue: The conventional media concerns itself with publication (the content is disseminated from a particular source), social media offers opportunities for bidirectional interaction and communication.

Community: Social media allows for quick formation of groups and an effective interaction among them. These communities share common interests, information and knowledge.

Connectivity: Social media sites are developing ways for being connected to one another and allow for multi-access to other sites, sources and persons.

According to Adams (2011), the characteristics of social media are divided to five parts. These are approachable, accessible, timely, usable and eternal (yet changing).

2.2. History of Social Media

Today emerging communication sectors have considerably become supportive of particularly internet and modern communication technologies. Internet use which began in the 1970s has been developing tremendously since the 1990s through the increasing number of users of Websites and web portals. In the 2000s social media applications have given it another dimension where people from different social groups gather (Doğan, 2013: 4).

History of social media reveals that it all started in 1978 with an intention of two friends, called Ward Christensen and Randy Suess, fan of technology and

communication, to stay connected with each other through a software called BBS. This is acknowledged as the birth of social media. When technological facilities particularly in 1978 are considered, the initial attempts of these friends are praiseworthy. This primitive social media means developed then led to the establishment of the first social media 11 years after BBS and developed rapidly till today. MIRC was introduced to establish communication among people in 1995. People were given opportunities to meet others whom they have not met before using nicknames. The users did not have to give private information about themselves, so no one was receiving true information from one another. Following this, ICQ program allowed us to gather with people we already knew with user numbers, which were the identities of each user. Social media was completely cyber then because people did not need and want to publicize themselves (Çile, 2012).

History has seen a wide range of technologies that have facilitated conversation, and in just the last 40 years there have been a startling number of innovations in this sector. People have recently begun using digital media for networking, socializing and gathering information. There are websites for every individual and specialized interest. There are websites for sharing photos, sharing videos, telling friends about activities, meeting new people and connecting with old friends. Celebrities regularly update their statuses and interact with fans on Twitter, Facebook and other social networks. Social media has come a long way since the days of the telegraph and even the more recent days of Internet-relay chats (IRC), and it continues to evolve. In the last few years, social media has become a convention of the online landscape. Major social networks and social media websites make changes and improvements on a fairly regular basis, so it's sure to keep evolving in coming years (Adams, 2011).

2.3. Social Networking Platforms

History of social networks is those that are as old as that of human (Akyüz, 2009: 31). The concept of social networking was first used in the studies of group dynamics in sociological research in the 1930s (Vural and Bat, 2010: 3355). Social networking theory concerns itself with the relation among the network members (Keenan and Shiri, 2009: 439).

According to Zarella (2010: 53), social network is a website where people connect with friends, both those they know offline and those who are online-only buddies. Social networking sites are a hot topic for marketers, as they present a number of opportunities for interacting with customers, including via plug-in applications, groups, and fan pages. Each social network presents its own possibilities and challenges. Users of individual sites have different expectations of commercial behaviour.

In broader terms, social networks are online communities in which people having the same interest share different activities (*cited in Redbridge, 2008 by İşlek, 2012: 50*).

The introduction of social network sites allows consumers to share and exchange ideas far more easily with others particularly about companies and products (Mangold and Faulds, 2009: 357).

According to Boyd and Ellison (2008: 211), social networks are web-based sites which allow users to:

- develop an open or semi-open profile in a confined system,
- be identified explicitly in the list of other users who they share with,
- see others' contact list, be seen by others, refine own contact lists

Mazman (2009: 4), on the other hand, list the general characteristic of social media as follows:

- Most social networks facilitate interaction and communication between users by providing them with opportunities of e-mailing, instant messaging, chatting, video and photograph sharing, and blogging,
- Social networks keep record of its users' data base and users find their friends easily, form groups and share with others who have similar interests.
- Most of the social networks are free of charge.
- Most of the social networks add new features on the basis of the feedback by users and develop them. Some open versions of networks allow users to develop applications and integrate them to the site.

- Most of the social networks focus of individual-based online communities rather than on those based on interest, theme or content.

2.3.1. Facebook

Nowadays Facebook is the dominant social networking site and it has the most features useful to the social media marketer (Zarella, 2010: 67). Facebook was originally designed as social network particularly for Harvard University students in February, 2004 (Hew, 2011: 663). Though the founder of Facebook, Marc Zuckerberg designed it exclusively for Harvard students, the site later allowed other colleges to join initially only Ivy League schools, and then other colleges, and then, eventually, high schools. Finally, in 2006, anyone with an email address could sign up (Zarella, 2010: 55).

Facebook describes itself as a social means that provides opportunities for people to communicate with friends, family and colleagues. It has also produced technologies that facilitate relevant posts through a social diagram as a digital map of actual social links of members. Everyone can sign in and communicate with others in a secure zone (Akar, 2010: 130). A Facebook user cannot show his or her profile to all the registered users as opposed to other social sharing sites. What distinguishes Facebook from other similar networks is that it allows users to develop new applications. Thanks to this, users can add them to their profile and make personal interest tables and schedules (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). It also allows for forming individual pages and groups as part of sponsorships (*cited in* Enders et al., 2008 by Atadil 2011: 46).

According to Wikipedia, Facebook has more than 1 billion user (recorded in October, 2012). The increase in the user number is continuing. The number of users by countries (March, 2015) is shown in Table 2:

Table 2: The Top 10 Countries for Facebook Users

| Countries | Number of Members |
|----------------|-------------------|
| 1. US | 188.000.000 |
| 2. India | 122.000.000 |
| 3. Brazil | 98.000.000 |
| 4. Indonesia | 72.000.000 |
| 5. Mexico | 58.000.000 |
| 6. Philippines | 42.000.000 |
| 7. Turkey | 40.000.000 |
| 8. UK | 38.000.000 |
| 9. Thailand | 34.000.000 |
| 10. France | 30.000.000 |

Source: <http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook> Retrieved May 18, 2015.

2.3.2. Twitter

Founded in 2006, Twitter, a popular social sharing site, was first used to do instant messaging for domestic uses in a company (Comm, 2009: 19). But later it was introduced for use by other users as well (Zarella, 2010: 33). Twitter offers microblog for its users (Wikipedia Encyclopaedia, 2015). Twitter users send one another messages called tweet (Fischer and Reuber, 2011: 3). Users can describe what they do with maximum of 140 characters in length (Weinberg, 2009: 125).

Twitter is one of the social media means that has the most popular microblog terminology which etiquettes each application with a different name. These terms are as follows : (Gunelius, 2011: 82):

- ***Tweet:*** the name of the post in the profile written with fewer than 140 characters
- ***Time flow:*** an archive that contains all the tweets shared by the user in an chronological order
- ***Follow:*** used to follow someone in your newsfeed.
- ***Retweet:*** sharing tweets shared by other friends in your list.

- **@user:** used to mention somebody related to the tweet shared
- **Messages:** sending instant messages to those who you follow or who follows you.
- **#Hashtag:** using # symbol users can help others find relevant words or themes easily

As of May 2015, Twitter has more than 500 million users, out of which more than 332 million are active users (Wikipedia Encyclopaedia 2015).

2.3.3. Instagram

Instagram is a free online photo - video sharing and social network service. Instagram allows members users to upload, edit and share photos and videos with other members through the Instagram website, email, and social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and etc. (searchcio.techtarget, 2015).

Instagram was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, and launched in October 2010. The service rapidly gained popularity, with over 100 million active users as of April 2012 and over 300 million as of December 2014 (Wikipedia Encyclopaedia 2015).

Instagram is increasingly used across the world. The number of active users is 150 million. 55 millions of photographs are shared via Instagram with a tag of location. Sharing visuals of hotels indicates the popularity of the hotel. For example, you can see the mostly shared hotel names in İstanbul according to Pointro Hotel League (www.turizmdunyasi.com.tr 2015):

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Swissôtel the Bosporus | • Divan İstanbul |
| • Four Seasons Hotel Bosporus | • Marriott Hotel Asia |
| • Hilton İstanbul | • The Marmara Taksim Hotel |
| • Shangri-La Bosporus | • Le Meridien |
| • Point Hotel Barbaros | • Sheraton İstanbul Maslak Hotel |
| • W Istanbul | • InterContinental Istanbul |
| • Pera Palace Hotel Jumeirah | • The Marmara Pera Hotel |
| • WOW Istanbul Hotels | • DoubleTree by Hilton Istanbul |
| • Four Seasons Hotel | • Conrad Istanbul |

- Çırağan Palace Kempinski
İstanbul
- the Sofa Hotel

2.3.4. LinkedIn

LinkedIn, is a professional network developing site that allows professionals to share information for business relations (Akar, 2010: 129). LinkedIn describes itself as a digital network of more than 24 million experienced professionals from around the world, representing 150 industries. LinkedIn can be used to maintain professional relationships (as opposed to 'just exchanging business cards'), search for jobs as well as recruit candidates, exchange solutions for problems, and find high-quality passive (employed) candidates (Safko, 2010: 458).

LinkedIn is the most restrictive social network in terms of customization and integration. It does not include any photo-sharing features, and was the last major social networking site to allow users to post photos of themselves to their profiles. The core function of LinkedIn is professional networking, so it is used heavily by job seekers and recruiters. LinkedIn restricts contact between members so that only individuals who are directly contacted can message each other. The LinkedIn features most useful to marketers (Zarella, 2010: 71).

2.3.4. Google+ (Google plus)

Google Plus, run by Google is an identity confirmation service that allows for use of a variety of social networks such as Gmail, Blogspot, Google Contact, Picasa, Gtalk and Google Connect. Its symbol is Google+ or G+, which offers additional facilities such as hangouts for multiple-video conferencing, which enables people to have online conferences with people across the world (Ateş, 2014).

2.3.5. YouTube

YouTube is an internet platform where subscribers can upload videos and comment on the videos shared by others. Among others, YouTube is by far the most popular one (Akar, 2010: 96). Founded by three internet investors in 2005, YouTube became very successful and was bought by Google which paid 1.65 billion dollars (Meriç, 2010: 40). This platform is also an important means for marketing, promotion and

advertisements. The videos to this end can reach millions of people and make a difference in the gains it could bring to the companies (Weinberg, 2009: 287).

2.3.6. Myspace

Myspace is an international site that offers a space for weblog, video, email, and forum (Hall and Rosenberg, 2009: 71). It has more than 100 million registered users and is gaining 300.000 new users daily. It is a free service for members who can also develop profile pages for themselves and activates them easily (Akar, 2010: 128).

MySpace was the first social networking site to allow users to customize their profiles. It maintains popularity with teens, musicians, and other artists. It still gives the user more freedom to customize than any of the other networks, and many users have abused this ability with heaps of blinking graphics and music that plays automatically. For marketers interested in reaching urban, nightlife, or music communities, MySpace is a good choice (Zarella, 2010: 73).

2.3.7. Others

Trip Advisor is important website for users who are dealing with tourism and travel. TripAdvisor was found in 2000 by Stephen Kaufer. TripAdvisor.com is a travel website that assists customers in gathering travel information, posting reviews and opinions of travel-related content and engaging in interactive travel forums (*cited in* Huotari and Nyberg 2012 by Doğan, 2013: 8).

2.4. Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Media

Today social media has been one of the vast sources of information for its users. It provides a number of benefits for the world of business ranging from evaluation of bought products to getting feedback on them, but there are also disadvantages.

2.4.1. Advantages of Social Media

Social media is becoming an indispensable part of the marketing mix for many businesses and one of the best ways to reach customers and clients. For this reason Social media and social network sites provide a number of advantages for its user. Some of them are listed below (Salcido, 2015):

- **Low cost:** Traditional media can be extremely expensive, especially for small businesses. In contrast, most social media platforms are completely free to use, the only cost to businesses being the time spent on updating profiles and interacting with contacts. This is one of the initial benefits of social media, in that it is accessible to more business owners because of the low cost barrier of entry. The low cost of entry to social media makes it particularly useful to small businesses who often find the costs associated with traditional media prohibitive. Businesses can use social media to create and distribute promotional material, such as articles, videos and audio for a fraction of the money it would cost for this content to appear in the press, on the radio or on TV.
- **Unlimited access:** In many ways, social media levels the playing field for businesses as it is accessible to anyone, regardless of company size, turnover and contacts. Social media tools are open to anyone, whereas reaching the traditional media often requires a lot of money and a good network of media industry contacts.
- **Simplicity:** A high level of skill, training and specialist equipment is involved in traditional media production. In comparison, social media channels are extremely simple to use, even for people with basic IT experience: all that is required is a computer and an internet connection.
- **Global reach:** Traditional media can reach a global audience but this is usually very costly and time-consuming. Through social media, businesses can communicate information in a flash, regardless of geographical location. Social media platforms also allow you to tailor your content for each market segment and give businesses the opportunity to get their messages across more widely than ever before. Indeed, once a piece of content goes viral, there is no limit to the amount of people it could potentially reach, all at no extra cost for the business.
- **Contact building:** Social media channels offer unparalleled opportunities to interact with customers and build relationships, largely due to their real-time, interactive nature. Companies can source feedback, test ideas and manage

customer services quickly and directly online in a way traditional media could not. Whereas traditional media only allow for one-way communication, Facebook, Twitter and the likes give customers the chance to select the type and frequency of messages to receive and send out. The business – customer proximity characteristic of the social media outlets also allows for a more open communication process, as opposed to simply pushing out sales messages.

- ***Flexibility:*** Social media's adaptability makes content management generally more flexible. Information can be updated, altered, supplemented and discussed in a way completely unknown to a printed advertisement, a newspaper article or magazine feature. What is more, information can be published in seconds, making it possible for businesses to ensure that their content is always up to date – a condition to a more prominent spot in the search engine rankings.
- ***Measurability:*** Social media stats are immediately measurable, whereas traditional media figures often need to be monitored over a long period of time. With social media, businesses can test marketing messages and approaches, gauge user responses and tweak the message accordingly. This is done through the ever-growing number of free, easy-to-use social media measurement tools.

Although many businesses are getting on board with social media, others are still a bit cautious of completely breaking away from traditional media and embracing the social media.

According to Jackson (2015) social network sites can offer some advantages for it participants and users these are:

- ***Guaranteed Meeting Places:*** When attempting to plan meetings with colleagues or friends, having access to social networking sites expands the available times and places in which meetings can occur. Individuals can meet each other and chat over Facebook, or open a video chat through Google+. Rather than having to travel to specific locations, or try to work times out in which everyone is near a central location, people can plan to meet at times that work for all of their schedules.

- ***Keep in Touch with Family:*** Keeping in contact with family through the phone or even over email presents a challenge. Instead, social networking sites allow the individual to share their day to day life in a secure but public forum, which family can watch and experience. Facebook, for example, allows people to share events, images, and thoughts in real time, during the course of any day. Family and friends can then experience all the things that someone does, and comment on them. Then, they share in the experience, rather than just being "informed" about them during weekly phone calls.
- ***Professional Networking:*** For professionals and academics, social networking sites allow users to create networks of like-minded people. Academics find other scholars to share research or ideas, or simply to talk to and "get their name out there." Professionals find mutual friends and possible clients, employers, or business partners. Social networking expands the horizons of what sort of contacts people can make in their professional lives.
- ***Staying Informed About the World:*** People on social networking sites share what interests them, such as news on current events. People who share those interests, or who just want to stay informed, can read these stories and share them as well. Eventually, these stories benefit users who may have never read them. Since stories are shared through "word of mouth," smaller news outlets such as blogs can get exposure, and social network users are overall connected to a larger pool of new information and opinion.

2.4.2. Disadvantages of Social Media

In addition to the advantages of social media for people, it still brings with it a number of disadvantages for companies and firms. Some of these are listed below (www.theresearchpedia.com, 2015):

- The one potential risk of social networking cited most often is that of hacking. Incidents of profiles and accounts being hacked into are commonplace. While this could be restricted to simply playing a practical joke on a friend, it sometimes leads to the more serious misdemeanour of identity theft. This requires a low level of technical skill and is referred to as social engineering. This technique banks upon the psychological aspect of a 'friend' connection: the

hacker uses common interests, background and professional information (all of which are posted on profiles) to extract sensitive information, like passwords and other details from the targeted individual and use them to create an alternate identity. Just using simple data like date of birth, name and location allows hackers to create fake social security cards, driver's licenses and ID cards. Almost 15 million Americans are victims, either directly or indirectly, of identity theft. The surprising part is that even though people are adequately aware of the risks, only 40% of them manage their privacy settings (according to a survey conducted by PCWorld). Thus investing some time on securing your account against fraudsters and unknown individuals would prove to be beneficial in the long run.

- While social media can help people / companies create good image, it can also be used to tarnish an image with false claims. A viral social media post talking how a product can cause problems can lead to huge losses to a firm. Till the time the company realises most of the damage is done.
- Social networking at workplace can also cause confidentiality issues. An angry employee can use these sites to leak sensitive information. Sensitive information may also be leaked unintentionally to public causing financial and credibility loss for a company.
- Another potential disadvantage of social networking at workplace is that it can easily be cause strain between employees. For example employees of one group may comment about low level work of another group leading to tensions between them. Employees can also show dissent against their bosses or management on a public forum of social media which tarnishes image of the company. Immature employees can actually get into "social-media" fight which can spoil whole environment of a company.
- Company's image may also get compromised if employees post bad comments about the company. Today prospective employees to prospective clients everyone is on one or another social media. A negative image (even if false) can hurt business prospects.

- Social networking websites have, at times, been used for the purpose of furthering political agendas. This has proved to be significant disadvantage of social networking at many places. China's blocking of Twitter and YouTube a few months before the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, or the use of Facebook as a medium for instigating and spreading the message that led to riots in London, have been questioned. However these are subjective in nature and could be interpreted in a positive light as well.

2.5. Social Media in Turkey

Recently internet particularly social media has become one of the most indispensable means of modern social life thanks to the rapid development of knowledge and technologies and its introduction into all walks of life.

2.5.1. The Use of Internet in Turkey

From a historical point of view, internet originated with ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency) army project by America after the launch of Sputnik Satellite by Soviet Russia in 1958 (Deniz, 2001: 1). People have started to rapidly access any knowledge and information they need thanks to the internet which offers an interactive communication (Balci and Ayhan, 2007: 175). Internet also offers a free, rapid and relatively effortless access to information and knowledge can provide service anywhere in the world (Erturhan, 2010: 1). Therefore it is inevitable that since its introduction into our life it has been used more and more not only in Turkey but also in the world (Cengiz and Şekerkaya, 2010: 33).

Turkey ranks the fifth as one of the top five European countries with its 35 million users of internet. There is an increase in the number of users of computers and internet. Three-fifth of the population connect the internet and the percentage of the households that have internet access is 41.6 % (Atadil, 2011: 51).

Table 3: Use of Internet in Turkey

| | <i>Population</i> | <i>Number of internet users based on recent data</i> | <i>Penetration (% population)</i> | <i>Increase rate in users 2000-2011</i> |
|--|-------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| | 78,785,548 | 35.000.000 | %44.4 | %1,650.0 |

Source: Eröz and Doğdubay 2012: 139.

According to February report published by IAB Turkey, the number of internet users increased 1.3 million and is now 26.6 million in the country. The report highlights the increase in this number and changing habits of internet use. The number of people who access internet every day is 56.7 percent, whereas the percentage of those who use internet once in a month dropped by 67.7 %. The demographic information of people shows that the gender distribution of those who use internet in the last year is male (56 %) and female 44%. This new group contains 628.000 primary school graduates or lower level of schooling. A striking finding is that the most noticeable increase was among the people over 55 with 20 % amounting to 1.2 million people in total. The percentage of access to internet by 12 + has increased by 4% and become 44.3 by February 2012 (www.eticaretmag.com, 2013).

2.5.2 The Use of Social Networking Platforms in Turkey

Social media sites such as Facebook and twitter have a large number of users in Turkey who actively use it for a variety of purposes. The country has become one of those which use it most actively in its neighbourhood. What follows is some descriptive statistics for use of social media from 2014 (Kaytmaz, 2014):

- Between June 2013 and December 2013, the number of users increased by 3% - from 33 million to 34 million.
- Between June 2013 and December 2013, the number of daily users increased by 5% - from 20 million to 21 million.
- Between June 2013 and December 2013 the number of active users in mobile phones rose from 21 million 23 million with an increase of %9.

- Between June 2013 and December 2013 the number of active daily users in mobile phones rose from 9.5 million 12 million with an increase of %26.
- The 94% of the online population of Turkey use Facebook.

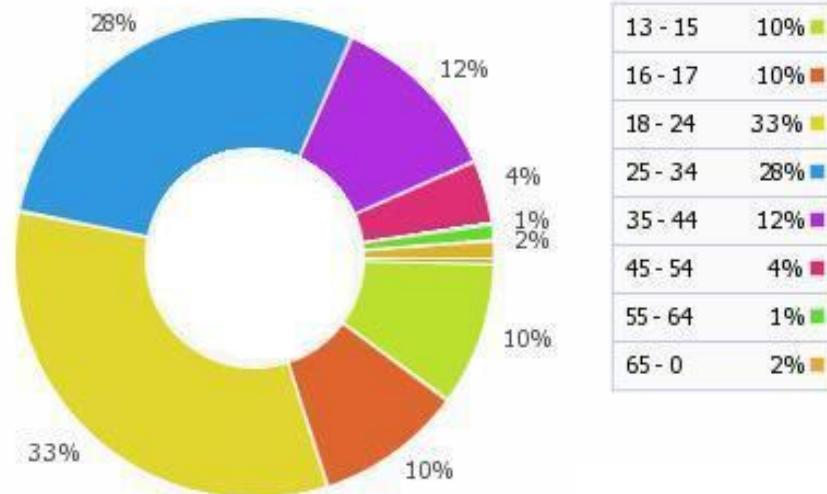


Figure 6. Distribution of Facebook Users by Age Turkey

Source: Atadil, 2011:48.

Figure 6 shows that more than 11 millions of users are between 18 and 24 years old, whereas the number of users above 55 is quite low.

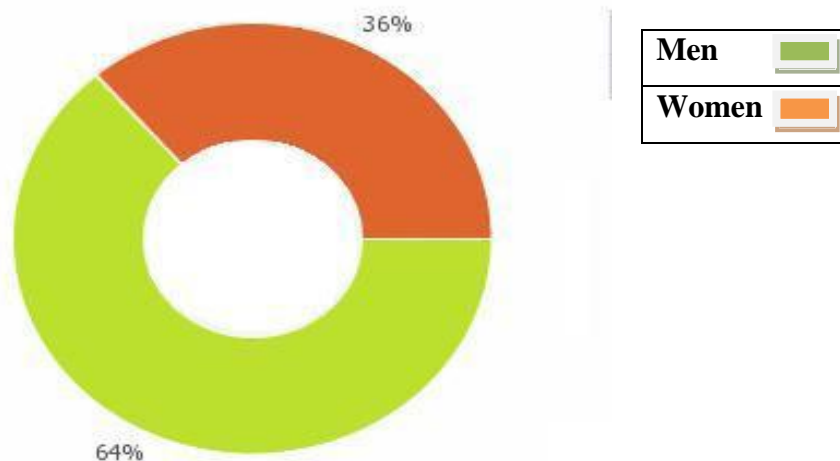


Figure 7. Distribution of Facebook Users by Gender Turkey

Source: Atadil, 2011: 49.

Figure 7 shows that a majority of Facebook users are males. More specifically, out of more than 30 millions of users in the country 21.5 million are males and 10.5 are females.

The most used social media is Facebook (%94) and Twitter (%72) (www.dijitalajanslar.com , 2014). What follows is the descriptive statistics of Twitter published by SOMERA by the end of 2014: (www.digitalage.com.tr , 2014):

- The total number of Twitter users is 11, 5 millions, whereas active number of users is 5, 6 million.
- The number of posted tweets per second is 152.
- The most active days on twitter are weekends (31 % of all tweets). Daily posted tweet average is 13, 1 million.

On the other hand, some social media platforms are used and loved by many people, they are confronted with some legal issues. For example, video sharing site, YouTube, has officially been denied access five times (Wikipedia, Encyclopaedia, 2015).

2.6. The Relationship between Social Media and Tourism

Tourism sector is influenced by two major factors which continuously change and increase in significance: human and technology (Uygur, 2007: 411). Internet used in tourism today serve travellers, potential consumers, and providers of products and service as an alternative communication and distribution channel (Law, et al., 2004: 100).

As is known, there is not only national but also international competition in tourism. As a result of global competition, as firms and customers travel overseas to buy, sell or to do other types of commerce, the boundaries of markets disappear. New global vision foresees that so that firms will have to work worldwide rather than nationwide they need to use their core knowledge and skills efficiently (Demirci and Aydemir, 2008: 9). Social media appears to become one of the significant means particularly for tourism firms in the active and efficient use of information (Eröz and Doğdubay, 2012: 138).

Social media is a concept which is in a considerably rapid development. For this reason when creating a marketing strategy it is inconceivable to not consider the use of social media. Social media tools facilitate the communication with the target audience. Especially in the tourism industry, social media forms a considerable influence at the point where potential tourists begin on location research (Doğan, 2013: 16)

Buying behaviours among tourism customers show that people utilize internet and social media in particular when they deal with information research, evolution of alternatives, selection/buying and post-buying behaviours. Regarding which products or services are most sold online, Mediascope Europe reports, in an online shopping research in Europe with the participation of 7008 people, that the most popular product is flight tickets as ticked by 54% of the total research participants. This is followed by holiday (42%). When the participants also reported that they could change the brand of the electrical devices (%59) and holiday services (43%) after online information research (Odabaşı and Odabaşı, 2010: 38).

Research over the last ten years shows that there has been a skyrocketing increase in travel and tourism sector (Sigala, et al., 2012: 2). During this period, tourism customers have become more active and have seriously considered comments, pictures, and videos shared in social media when they are making some buying decisions, which also shortened the process of decision making (Bayram and Şahbaz, 2012: 354). It is now clear that the comments made in social media influence tourists' perceptions to a significant extent (Lopez, et al., 2011: 642).

The increasing number of tourism customers who use internet adds to the popularity of internet. Tourists share the experiences, the comments, photographs, and videos with their families, friends, tourism firms and others in social media platforms (*cited in Xiang and Gretzel, 2010 by Atadil, 2011: 32*).

Thanks to social media and interaction through internet, tourism firms reduces their communication expenses to a minimum (Williams and Hobson, 1995: 424). In this sense, internet and social media have become a platform where they sell and market their services and products anytime and anywhere (Llach, et al., 2013: 23).

Milano et.al. (2011: 4) indicate that the formation of travel experiences of tourism customers in social platforms are composed of three stages:

- Previous experiences: includes others' travel stories and offers information to the customers before they make travel decisions.
- Experience during travel and stay: parallel to the developments in the information and communication experiences, tourism customers share their real time experiences in the social media using mobile applications.
- Experience after travel and stay: this includes the comments and expressed feelings after the holiday experience in social media platforms.

Today this is no different in Turkey. Before buying holiday services, tourism customers make use of social media, ask questions about the destinations they will stay and visit, read and consider the previous customers' comments and understand the online life of the tourism company. %93 of those who made holiday decisions go online and read through evaluations of the destinations in Facebook and twitter pages (Hos, 2015).

2.7. Social Media Marketing or Marketing via Social Media

The marketing world is rapidly changing, and so are the methods being used to reach out to and interact with customers. While traditional print media are still dominant, new media channels such as Twitter and Facebook are grabbing the marketing world by storm. Examine interactive marketing opportunities beyond websites, including blogs, vlogs (video blogs), forums, e-mail campaigns, social networking, communities, podcasts, mobile computing, and even virtual reality. In addition, study the implications of this "social media" marketing on customer loyalty and engagement. These new media allow consumers a greater public voice and role, creating numerous opportunities and ramifications for marketers as groups share, sell, and swap goods and information via the digital worlds (extension.ucsd.edu, 2015).

The number of social media users has been increasing remarkably. This led Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and many others to using these platforms for marketing and advertisements and develop them innovatively. Originally used for information, these sites have become an important means of interaction, which in turn helped

remove the communications obstacles between firms and customers (Atadil, 2011: 11).

Social media marketing has been argued in different ways. For example, Akar (2010: 33) sees it as “a means to increase publicity, promotion of products and services”. Weinberg (2009: 3), on the other hand, argues that “social media marketing is a process that empowers individuals to promote their websites, products, or services through online social channels and to communicate with and tap into a much larger community that may not have been available via traditional advertising channels”.

Social media marketing is an advertising platform where social media means are used to enable communication and brand in the relevant sector (Tuten, 2008: 19). Gunelius (2011: 10) also argues that “social media marketing is any kind of direct or indirect marketing practiced through social web tools such as social check-in and content sharing sites, social networks, microblogs, and blogs, which are used to create publicity, promotion and awareness in people towards products and services”. Köksal (2012: 28) indicates that “social media marketing is the whole process of online activities that are directly carried out to increase publicity, promotion, image of products and services”. Wigmo and Wikström (2012: 20) describes social media marketing as “an emerging way of product promotion aiming for marketing as words of mouth, establishing relations through discussion with customers as opposed to one-way communication”.

Weber (2007: 32) stresses that the role of social media marketing has not changed with the social media, which is still practised in the same ways: targeting a market, establishing interaction with customers, creating trust with the same marketing strategies. Weber (2007) advocates the idea of abandoning the type of conventional marketing strategies where a firm talks about its own story in a one-way mode and instead giving the customers the right to talk in the social web for a better promotion and publicity. In the same way, social media can realize this function in that it allows for discovering the content, establishing robust relations and increasing bidirectional interactions as opposed to conventional marketing (İşlek, 2012: 71).

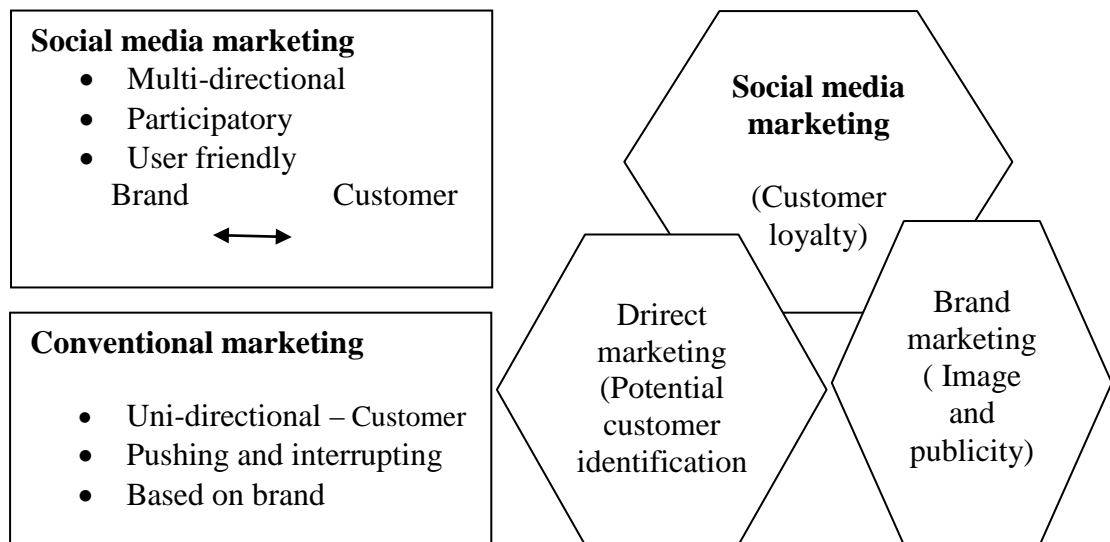


Figure 8. Social Media Marketing and Conventional Marketing

Source: Akar, 2010: 36.

There are several distinctions between social media marketing and conventional ones. According to Weinberg (2009: 6), these are:

- Social media marketing allows for discovery of new content through the increasing sharing of information, articles, posts, video, pictures and sounds, which could draw the attention of consumers. This also increases their degree of participation and sharing as well.
- Social media marketing promotes the exchanges in Web, through which firms can identify how they are engaged in search engines and in social media pages and how often and much the brand is being monitored and followed by customers.
- Social media marketing establishes robust relations. Firms which invest in social media may develop relations and sustaining communication through giving feedback. This is expected to increase positive perceptions and attitudes as well as consumer loyalty.

Eley and Tilley (2009: 85) identify four important steps to be followed by firms particularly in social media:

- ***Listening:*** Listening is one of the most important steps. People gathering in social media talk about firms, products and brands. Instead of giving costly surveys, forming focus groups and doing similar research activities, firms can find out much more with relatively less cost by listening to their customers
- ***Subscription:*** once firms have listened to the customers adequately, they can decide on which social media platforms they can subscribe to. They can promote trust by using their original names in such platforms.
- ***Participation:*** Firms can engage in a number of online activities by participating in the discussion topics in the forums and blogs and commenting on the videos shared.
- ***Creation:*** Firms can create their own content on the basis of the feedback from their customers, which will lead online groups to share them with one another. Then people will want to know more about these shared products and services.

One of the best examples of social media marketing is Morga Hotel, which started to use Foursquare in order to win Facebook and Twitter users, keep the existing customer in their profile, and increase their sales rates. It sends last minutes opportunities to users who do check-in at airports where their hotels exist and invite them to stay at the hotel (Curkan, 2013: 91).

In addition to the discussion above, there is a need to mention the role of social media as developing “participatory culture”. The facilities of sharing and giving and getting feedback online contributed to the development of participatory culture as a direct result of internet and social media. A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, members care about others’ opinions of what they have created (Jenkins, et al., 2006: VI).

Thanks to the participatory culture, instead of the “firms-to-consumer” communication model, a “consumer-to-consumer” model started to emerge. This new model can be termed as “prosumer-to-prosumer” communication model (*cited in Hearn, et al., 2009 by Atadil, 2011: 17*). The prosumers are described as those who produce part of the product for their own consumption (*cited in Toffler 1980, by Kotler, 2010: 51*).

In this sense, the prosumers who produce and consume the content in social platforms actively participate other online groups today (Atadil, 2011: 17).

2.7.1. Forms of Social Media Marketing

There emerged different marketing strategies in social media nowadays, which can be categorized in three groups. These are public relations, marketing the production of the content, and viral marketing, which are also the purposes of online activities (Miletsky, 2010: 81):

- ***Public relations:*** Staff in public relation have been made obliged to communicate the target groups of customers as a result of the rapid spread of conventional media news reposted and shared by people. Without public relations active in the social media, news that could be perceived positively by users could turn into trouble or disappear without being noticed.
- ***Marketing content production:*** in this category, there are blogs, websites, and other contents that are marketed to users of internet. They are designed in a way to draw the attention of online users.
- ***Viral Marketing:*** the contents produced by firms engaging in social media marketing need to be characterized by its virality. They should be designed in a way to make users feel like sharing them such as interesting, fun, enthusiastic and sensitive. So-designed content spreads much faster and disseminates awareness in the services and products in the right way that firms planned.

The most used techniques in social media marketing are viral marketing and buzz marketing. Viral marketing describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message’s exposure and influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of

rapid multiplication to send the message to thousands, to millions (Kirby and Marsden, 2006: 87)

Eley and Tilley (2009: 21) define viral marketing as “a marketing message spreading rapidly and exponentially like a virus and a ‘words of mouth’ influence created with a video, campaign or advertisement”. Evans (2008: 69) likens viral marketing to a room full of children (so-called customers) who have just learnt to walk.

Karakuş (2015) on the other hand describes viral marketing as “a method of spread through words of mouth without any need for extensive advertisement. It is a marketing technique of transmitting a marketing news to another. It can reach a number of people rapidly, which makes it an efficient method”.

Dobele, Toleman and Beverland (2005: 144) argue that there are three major benefits of viral marketing to the firms:

- The cost of message-containing brand is covered by consumers since it is transmitted by them directly.
- This messaging and transmission is voluntarily done by the senders, which characterizes it with a different identity and provokes more interest.
- Consumers share them with friends, family members or work mates who have similar interests, which enables these messages to be sent to the target mass automatically.

Buzz marketing, on the other hand, is defined as attempts to create rumours about the brand of the service or products (Gardner, 2005: 27). According to Mohr (2007:397), buzz marketing is an attempt to legally employ the voluntary people who can transmit their experiences to others and reach a wider audience. It is also defined in Wikipedia as follows: “Marketing buzz or simply buzz a term used in viral marketing, is the interaction of consumers and users of a product or service which amplifies or alters the original marketing message” (Wikipedia Encyclopaedia, 2015). A successful buzz marketing has been practiced by Nokia, which sent 8 popular blog users a Nokia 3650 with a camera just introduced in the market. The selected users are under 18 and could take creative pictures and upload them in their blogs, which were the major common characteristics of these young people. Nokia

did not explicitly request them to mention these devices in their blogs but just to try these devices for photography. The users uploaded the photographs they took with this mobile phone camera and publish their comments in their own blogs. Some of them even created separate mobile phone blogs (Gardner, 2007).

In addition, another marketing strategy, words of mouth (WOM) developed into eWOM a new version of WOM through the impact of technology, which allowed the users to express their feelings and opinions without any limitation.

eWOM is now used by potential travel customers as a strategy to get information and search for destination (Litvin, et al., 2006: 466). eWOM is particularly being used in the tourism sector. Customers who had a pleasant holiday inform people around them through eWOM, which influences others positively, whereas the negative ones may also need to negative impact on the consumers of tourism (Kutluk, 2012: 59).

2.7.2. The Use of Social Media Marketing In Tourism Industry

Recently internet has started to be used in many sectors for marketing and interaction (Köroğlu, et al., 2011: 101). Use of internet has been more and more common in tourism industry (Korkmaz, 2000: 31). Intermediary travel agencies of major tourism firms have been able to establish relations with potential customers and masses, which facilitates their process of access to service buying. This increases the use of internet more and more efficiently for particular purposes (Ekinici, 2004: 24). Internet-based technologies are utilized at every stages of tourism marketing, which are extensively influencing the sector. The most used applications are e-mail, web page, news groups, discussion (social media discussion groups), chat rooms, link-providing pages, webcasting, online broadcast, and online advertisements (Kozak, 2010).

There are many benefits in using social sharing sites as a marketing means. These are discussed as follows (Marketing Leadership Council, 2008):

- ***Promoting products and services:*** Firms spread their services and product to wider audience through using social media. For example, hotels want to be part of social networks more and more, which could lead them to sharing more and

more information with users. Hotels upload photographs, videos, and activity updates in the social networks and draw more and more attention.

- **Recognizing customers:** Firms put their advertisements in social media and stay in touch with the member of the sites, which could help them recognize their customers. According to one research.
- **Increasing brand recognition:** The social media marketing campaigns run through social media can reach a number of different consumer groups. While this increases brand recognition, it can also influence the consumers' perceptions of the firm positively.
- **Promoting social responsibility:** firms can also share with their customers their attitudes and behaviours towards environmental and social issues. Hotel Las Vegas Hilton has a page titled as Las Vegas Hilton Green Team Project in Facebook. Hotel Las Vegas Hilton has 14.367 followers in Facebook. With this page they aim to show their attitudes toward the environment to their customers.
- **In-house information sharing:** Firms support the idea of their staff being members of social network platforms. Therefore, the staff can share their knowledge and experiences about their business and firms. If a firm supports these people adequately, they can function as a representative of their own firms in the social network and provide updated knowledge to the customers.

Firms in tourism industry see social media as an emerging alternative distribution channel. Its use is accepted to be an important factor in the increasing competition (Aymankuy, et al., 2013: 379).The tourism companies in Turkey (travel agencies, hotels and airlines) have the following reasons for using internet in their promotion and marketing activities (Avcıkurt and K orođlu, 2000: 112):

- Providing everyone with equal access,
- Low cost of communication and information sharing,
- Easy access to customers,
- Giving prestige to the agency,
- Creating a rich and catchy contents in marketing strategies for users

Bozatlı (2011) argues that hotels use social media for the following purposes: creating interest in the hotel, introducing promotions, meeting them in an intimate settings, following the factors that make them happy and unhappy, drawing the attention of the media, and creating recognition and promotion of the brand (Eröz and Doğdubay, 2012: 143).

Tourism agencies need to place greater emphasis on the development of image, maintaining the image and social media marketing activities. A proper social media marketing promotes the brand image of the firm and increases the reliability, whereas a negative experience can damage them negatively (Curkan, 2013: 95). Therefore, social media has profound impact on the dignity and brand of a firm (Kim and Ko, 2012: 1481). A slightly negative word or a tweet, post and comment shared in Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor or other social platforms can tarnish their reputation.

Some tourism agencies which are aware of the rising power and role of social media in their development hire administrators who could work on the use of internet and social media platforms. Brian Simpson, one of such administrators, is responsible for social hospitality in The Roger Smith Hotel New York. Simpson comments on the impact of social media on brand image and its dependency and adds that social networks are useful, robust, and permanent and that using diverse channels in social media will help firms ensure brand loyalty and customer participation. With reference to Simpson's remarks, it is clear that a proper use of social media for marketing purposes can have greater positive impact on the image of brand and destination image (Atadil, 2011: 58).

One of the best examples of this is American Jetblue airlines. About to go bankrupt, the company got out the crisis with an appropriate and efficient social media marketing strategy. After a plane crash, the company launched a social media campaign including Facebook, twitter, blogs and YouTube to develop positive perceptions among the customers. The speech in which the CEO of the company apologized was recorded and uploaded in YouTube, which was then watched by thousands of people. At the same time, the company answered the questions asked through twitter and shared several posts on Facebook. Ultimately, the campaign became successful and the company overcame the bankruptcy (Curkan, 2013: 98).

Social media marketing has been increasingly used by tourism agencies such as hotels, airlines, other segments of travel sectors in order to increase recognition of their brands. Airlines firms share promotion films through YouTube and offer inviting discounts in social networks such as Loopt. Tourism consumers plan all they need through using internet ranging from reservation to dining. For example, flight tickets of Delta airlines can be bought in Facebook. Similarly, Marriott chain hotels set up Marriott Courtyard Facebook pages to update customers (Eröz and Doğdubay, 2012: 145). Hotels make use of the facilities Facebook network and establish closer relationships with existing and potential consumers. It is thought that the trust, cogency and mutual participation could reflect positively on the sales (Wheeler, 2009).

Table 4 shows the international hotels that have Facebook pages and the number of users.

Table 4: The International Hotels Using Facebook Pages

| Rank | Hotel name | Number of users |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Bellagio Las Vegas (USA) | 247.480 |
| 2 | Caesars Palace (USA) | 222.022 |
| 3 | Decameron El Salvador(Mexico) | 120.021 |
| 4 | Atlantis The Palm (Dubai) | 101.797 |
| 5 | Hotel Southern(India) | 99.697 |

Source: Çiftçi and Küçükaltan, 2012: 1232

Hotels utilize twitter to strengthen their images and set up direct interaction with the customers. Except for the face to face interviews with tourists, no other facilities have created such an opportunity for them to establish closer relationships. It is of great significance for hotels to maintain close relations with their twitter followers (Callari, 2009).

For example, five-star hotels such as Hyatt and Hilton have been followed by increasingly number of followers. A chef in the kitchen of The Ritz-Carlton in Washington establish contact with the customers via twitter and ask them what they

want to see on the menu in particular seasons where he also talks about special food of the day. The hotel runs competition on the platform and grants free dinner to the winner (Eröz and Doğdubay, 2012: 146).

Business world has become aware of the potential gains enabled by social media marketing in Turkey as well. For example, Tatil.com is the first online travel agency that offers online reservations with special payment opportunities, a system initiated by Met Global Group, which has 200.000 online members (www.tatil.com, 2015). In addition, Ets agency, one of the greatest ones since 1991 offers service across Turkey with 3225 staff and 346 agencies (www.etstur.com, 2015). It also has almost 902.000 followers in Facebook and 42.300 users in twitter (Facebook, 2015, Twitter, 2015).

Another travel agency, Jolly Tur, which started in 1987, has more than 600 sales points across Turkey which are connected to one another online (www.jollytur.com, 2015). It offers service to 465.000 users in Facebook and 30.700 followers in twitter (Facebook 2015, Twitter 2015).

As can be seen, Facebook and twitter are extensively used by tourism industry for the purpose of interaction, marketing and promotion.

On the other hand, in social media marketing some unethical behaviours may be seen to provide misleading information and content. In this sense, what follows is the major unethical behaviours (Mavnacıoğlu, 2009: 64):

- Copying and spreading private information without permission,
- Falsifying personal information,
- Revealing commercial secrets,
- Misleading customers with false content,
- Publicizing manipulative content to get advertisements and sponsorships,
- Ignoring copyrights,
- Preparing unethical contents and disseminate this,
- Setting up false blogs to harm rivals companies,
- Using contents without referencing,
- Creating false profiles,
- Having someone prepare partial content,
- Creating Spam Blog.

In addition to the unethical behaviours above, some hotels make false comments in social media unethically. For example, a user pretends to have stayed at the hotel and make positive comments on the quality of service, location of the hotel and management. With such unethical behaviours, hotels direct tourists to the hotels which they would not normally prefer (Atadil, 2011: 63).

The review so far has extensively discussed the role of social media in marketing, promotion and recognition with actual examples from different sectors. It is now well-established that social media plays a critical role in the rapid and exponential development of tourism sector. In the following chapter, a detailed description of research with extensive analysis of data collected online from participants of different ages will be discussed.



CHAPTER - III

3. A SURVEY ON THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES ON THE BUYING DECISION- MAKING PROCESS OF TOURISM CONSUMERS

3.1. Literature Review and Background of the Study

Internet and social media – apart from its conventional use - is a space where most consumers find information about many sectors and firms, make comments and share experiences about the services and properties purchased. In this sense, it has become a platform where consumers make decisions about purchased properties and services. In this section, the previous research studies are discussed that constitute the basis of the current research which investigates the influence of social media, tourism marketing in social media on holiday-buying decision.

For example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) investigated the challenges and opportunities experienced in marketing through social media. The study concludes that the social media including Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter and Second Life could be used as an opportunity in understanding the decisions making process. Similarly, Parlak (2010) investigated the social media in relation to the decision making process of the consumers. This qualitative research was conducted with 21 people who had at least two social media accounts in order to reveal their decision making process in relation to the purchase. The analysis showed that the buying process through social media occur in two directions: (1) consumers directly buy the product or service online when they see and like it, and (2) they see the product or find the service online, but they buy it in the stores nearby due to the lack of trust in online shopping. Milano et.al (2011) investigated the impact of online social media on tourism websites. The study aimed to show the impact of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, on the popularity of tourism websites. Italian tourism websites were analyzed in terms of frequency of visits. The study measured the relationship between the total number of visits and the websites that have social media directed facility. The study concluded that the websites with social media connection were more effective in marketing tourism.

Atadil (2011) investigated the perceptions of social networks of tourism customers. This questionnaire-based study was conducted with 255 tourism consumers who had Twitter or Facebook accounts. The study showed that the participants accessed information about the hotels through social media. It was also found that this set of information gathered through social media plays a critical role on their selection of hotels.

Bayram (2012) investigated the social media use to reveal the advantages and disadvantages of hotels. The study aimed to find which social media tools hotels were using and at what level they were using these tools. The data set was analyzed through content analysis. It was found that the primary social media tools were Facebook, twitter and TripAdvisor. Most of the hotels did not use social media accounts effectively and those which did not use them were discovering the potentials of these tools.

Doğdubay and Eröz (2012) investigated the functions of social media in relation to marketing ethics. The research shows that social media functioned as a valuable means for the selection of touristic products. The conclusion is that the firms should use social media effectively and follow the codes of marketing ethics.

Çiftçi and Küçükaltan (2012) investigated the use of social media as a marketing means. It was revealed that hotels were active and productive in using social media. The international chain hotels which used social media effectively were shown as examples. The analysis showed how these hotels should use them to market their products or services. The results also showed that the hotels construct a well-established, strong relationship not only with their existing customer but also with the potential ones. The marketing strategies made through social media reach out the customers rapidly and the people were observed to share information about the products and services with the friends in their list.

Sigala, Christou and Gretzel (2012) investigated the case studies about social media, tourism and hosting. The study emphasized the potential ways of developing various use of social media in tourism by synthesizing information and knowledge gathered from relevant studies.

Curkan (2013) investigated the impact of social media on tourism industry. In addition, the study clearly showed which platforms the potential tourism consumers made use of. The study concluded that it is very significant for the tourism consumers to come together on online platform and share their knowledge and experiences and that tourism firms should attach importance to marketing through social media and set up a department to this end.

All the studies discussed above clearly show that social media is a powerful tool for marketing especially in the field of tourism. The consumers' decision making process for online tourism purchase is linked to the social media marketing.

3.2. Purpose (Objective of the Study)

The purpose of the study is to reveal the social media-related factors that impact the decision-making process of buying tourism service or product. More specifically, the study aimed to shed light on the possible variables that promote or reduce the chances of using online platforms to buy tourism service or product.

3.3. Limitations of the Study

This study was carried out with a group of people who were willing to participate. However, it could be better to visit touristic places and conduct the questionnaire face-to-face to ensure who the data was collected from. The online data collection did not allow for reaching all the potential people could provide data for the study.

3.4. Methodology

A survey method as a quantitative research method was used to investigate the potential impact areas of social media platforms on the decision-making process of buying tourism services or products. To this end, a 5- Likert Scale questionnaire was developed and particular dimensions were created among the items in the survey. The Likert Scale is one of the most effective tools in collecting data in survey type studies. It is an ordered, one-dimensional scale from which respondents choose one option that best aligns with their view (Akman, Misra and Altindag, 2011).

3.5. Data Collection Tool (Research Instrument)

The study aims to investigate the impact of social media platforms on the decision-making process of buying tourism service or product by customers. The data was collected through a survey questionnaire which consists of 2 major sections. In the first section, demographic information of the participants was questioned, whereas the second section involves 6 sub-sections that elicits the data regarding the impact of social media on the buying of a touristic service or product. The survey questionnaire consists of 5 Likert Scale from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). As the points to the statements increase, relevant perceptions and behaviours become more positive. The questionnaire was constructed on the basis of available literature to address several relevant issues concerning the process of decision-making and buying. In the preparation of the survey questions, was benefited from the works of; Pehlivan (2009), Atadil (2011) and İşlek (2012).

3.6. Universe and Sampling

Target population of this study consist of internet users and members of social networking platforms. Questionnaire was sent out to the respondents throughout Turkey, but especially in İzmir, Istanbul, Antalya and Ankara between the dates of the 1st of March and the 25th of June, 2015. The questionnaire was sent out to 700 people who are different professions through E-mail, WhatsApp and social platforms such as; Facebook. The questionnaire was uploaded into google docs. (docs.google.com). Of the 700 potential participants, 352 participants responded to the survey questionnaire, a return rate of % 50.3. Moreover; 150 participants responded with Facebook, 120 participants responded with E-mail and 82 participants responded with WhatsApp. Table 5 presents the distribution of all participants according to age, income, social media use, education, gender, marital status and number of holidays per year.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Participants – Demographic Profile

| Age | Frequency | Percent | Income | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 20-25 | 76 | 21,6 | Under 1500 | 51 | 14,5 |
| 26-30 | 55 | 15,6 | 1500-2000 | 96 | 27,3 |
| 31-35 | 61 | 17,3 | 2001-2500 | 100 | 28,4 |
| 36-40 | 75 | 21,3 | 2501-4000 | 71 | 20,2 |
| 41 + | 85 | 24,1 | 4001 + | 34 | 9,7 |
| Total | 352 | 100,0 | Total | 352 | 100,0 |
| Education | | | S. Media Use | | |
| Primary | 8 | 2,3 | 10-30 mins | 30 | 8,5 |
| Secondary | 16 | 4,5 | 30-45 mins | 29 | 8,2 |
| High School | 44 | 12,5 | 45-60 mins | 89 | 25,3 |
| Foundation(Vocational) | 58 | 16,5 | 60-120 mins | 117 | 33,2 |
| Undergraduate | 166 | 47,2 | 120-180 mins | 51 | 14,5 |
| Masters+ | 60 | 17,0 | 180 + | 36 | 10,2 |
| Total | 352 | 100,0 | Total | 352 | 100,0 |
| Gender | | | N of holidays | | |
| Female | 187 | 53,1 | 1 | 61 | 17,3 |
| Male | 165 | 46,9 | 2 | 163 | 46,3 |
| Total | 352 | 100,0 | 3 | 94 | 26,7 |
| | | | 4 + | 34 | 9,7 |
| | | | Total | 352 | 100,0 |
| Marital status | | | | | |
| Single | 186 | 52,8 | | | |
| Married | 166 | 47,2 | | | |
| Total | 352 | 100,0 | | | |

3.7. Data Analysis and Findings

The data were analysed through *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM), and great care was paid to whether there were outliers and multiple links among the sections. Outliers were determined according to Mahalanobis¹ distances higher than t value amounting to 30 degree of freedom (%5). It was decided that there was no link among independent variables since *Variance Inflation Factor* (VIF) values were smaller than 10 and the tolerance values were at the intended levels. The items in the questionnaire were analysed via *Confirmatory Factor Analysis*(CFA). After this process, a reliability analysis was carried out again. However, there were no items that would increase the reliability degree when removed. Hotelling T square was used to investigate whether there were average equality among all the items in the scale and no question was found whose averages are equal.

¹ Mahalanobis is a measure of distance between point P and a distribution D that shows how many standard deviations away from P is from the mean of D.

The reliability of the responses in the scale were calculated via *Cronbach's Alpha* statistics, and all the items were found reliable. The reliability degree of Cronbach's Alpha statistics was 0,924 for the 'informing' sub-section. The average of the scores in this dimension was 4,139 and the variance was calculated as 0,734. Similarly, the reliability degree of Cronbach's Alpha statistics was 0,925 for the 'utilization' sub-section. The average of the scores in this dimension was 3,995 and the variance was calculated as 0,769. Then the reliability degree of Cronbach's Alpha statistics was 0,850 for the 'interaction' sub-section. The average of the scores in this dimension was 3,730 and the variance was calculated as 0,881. In addition, the reliability degree of Cronbach's Alpha statistics was 0,936 for the 'buying' sub-section. The average of the scores in this dimension was 4,003 and the variance was calculated as 0,728. Finally, the reliability degree of Cronbach's Alpha statistics was 0,934 for the 'intention' sub-section. The average of the scores in this dimension was 4,027 and the variance was calculated as 0,724. The results of the reliability analysis and the descriptive statistics of scales are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Reliability Analysis and the Descriptive Statistics

| Items | Average | Std. Dev. | Correlation | When omitted Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha | Scale average | Scale variance |
|--|---------|-----------|-------------|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------|----------------|
| B1 Social networking sites provide information for me about hotels. | 4,27 | ,857 | ,842 | ,899 | ,924 | 4,139 | ,734 |
| B2 Social networking sites provide information for me about touristic facilities and destination while I am making decisions. | 4,18 | ,805 | ,863 | ,896 | | | |
| B3 I subscribe on the social networking sites concerning my favourite hotels and touristic destinations; and I follow their updated notifications. | 3,97 | 1,007 | ,717 | ,930 | | | |
| B5 Social networking sites are informative before trips. | 4,13 | ,810 | ,832 | ,902 | | | |
| B6 Social networking sites contribute to the promotion of touristic facilities and destinations. | 4,15 | ,785 | ,798 | ,909 | | | |
| Y1 I have the chance to access the websites of the touristic facilities easily via social networking sites. | 4,17 | ,748 | ,788 | ,912 | ,925 | 3,995 | ,769 |
| Y2 Social networking sites help me to make faster decisions about the touristic | 4,08 | ,811 | ,800 | ,910 | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|------|-------|------|------|------|-------|------|--|
| facilities or the destinations I want to visit. | | | | | | | | |
| Y3 I make use of the posts and the comments of the people on social networking sites while deciding. | 4,07 | ,883 | ,838 | ,904 | | | | |
| Y5 I check the pictures of the hotels on the pages of the social networking sites concerning touristic facilities. | 4,07 | ,857 | ,766 | ,914 | | | | |
| Y6 I carefully check and examine all of the special offers on the social networking sites concerning the destinations and the touristic facilities that I am planning to visit. | 3,96 | ,881 | ,837 | ,904 | | | | |
| Y7 I ask/post questions on social networking sites while I am deciding the touristic facility or the destination that I am planning to visit. | 3,63 | 1,052 | ,720 | ,925 | | | | |
| E1 Positive comments /posts of the users on social networking sites make me trust the touristic facilities that I am interested in. | 3,86 | ,863 | ,749 | ,787 | ,850 | 3,730 | ,881 | |
| E2 I think the posts and the comments of the tourists on social networking sites are reliable. | 3,59 | ,935 | ,774 | ,772 | | | | |
| E3 I am easily effected by the comments on touristic facilities posted on social networking sites. | 3,38 | 1,095 | ,634 | ,844 | | | | |
| E5 I can make healthier decisions about my touristic activities by the help of social networking sites. | 4,09 | ,840 | ,632 | ,833 | | | | |
| SA1 I check all of the posts on social networking sites about the touristic products that I am the stage whether to purchase or not. | 3,98 | ,842 | ,854 | ,915 | ,936 | 4,003 | ,728 | |
| SA2 I might purchase a trip for a touristic destination which is posted on a social networking sites. | 3,99 | ,835 | ,886 | ,905 | | | | |
| SA3 I might order a touristic product that is being advertised via social networking sites. | 3,96 | ,905 | ,879 | ,907 | | | | |
| SA5 I might make preferences between locations / districts according to the comments posted on social media concerning such touristic locations. | 4,09 | ,829 | ,781 | ,938 | | | | |
| N1 I like sharing the pictures of the places I have visited during my trips on social networking sites; and I like posting comments about them. | 4,08 | ,902 | ,826 | ,920 | ,934 | 4,027 | ,724 | |
| N2 I share my holiday experiences on social platforms and consequently I encourage my friends for such trips. | 4,03 | ,872 | ,849 | ,915 | | | | |
| N3 I can share my opinions regarding to both positive and negative experiences I had with a hotel on social platforms. | 3,98 | ,867 | ,845 | ,916 | | | | |
| N4 I think, day by day ,many people are going to arrange trips by making use of social platforms; and then they are going the share their opinions via comments. | 4,08 | ,811 | ,798 | ,925 | | | | |
| N7 I am going to encourage my friends in the future for using social media for such purposes. | 3,97 | ,798 | ,814 | ,922 | | | | |

The research investigate directly observed or measured variables as well as those that are not. These invisible variables cannot be measured as they are not measured directly, which are called latent variables or factors. SEM is a statistical technique which is used to test the causal relationship between observed and unobserved (latent) variables. SEM assumes that there is a causal relationship among the set of latent variables, which are measured via the observed ones (Yılmaz, 2004). SEM is also a technique that considers the measuring errors of the relationship into the dependent and independent ones in a given model. It, on the other hand, gives an opportunity to determine the direct and indirect effects among the variables. As the multiple normal distribution was not found in testing the research models, weighted predictors were used. The model to be tested in the research is given in the Figure 9.

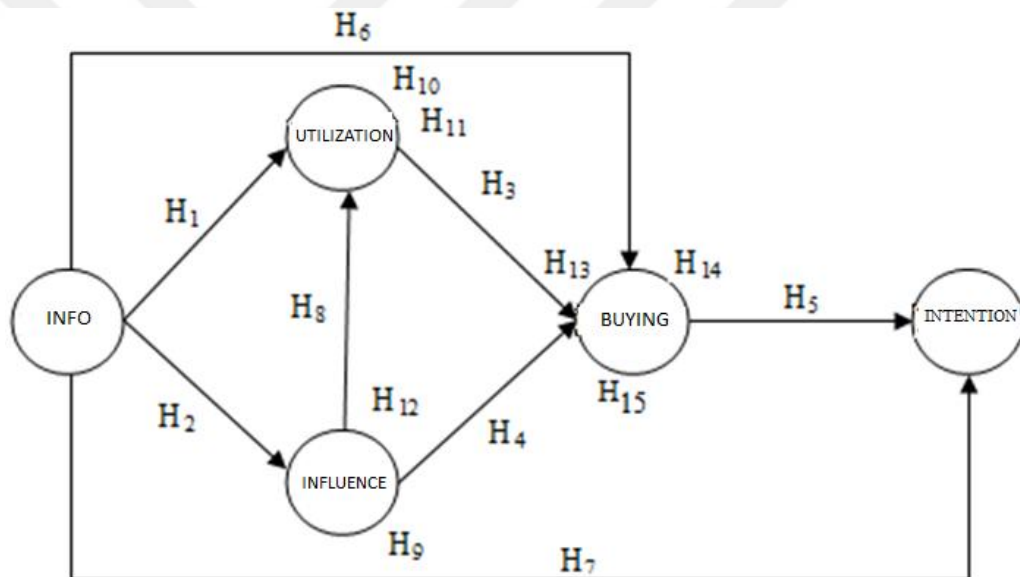


Figure 9. Research Model

The hypotheses that were suggested based on the Figure 9 are as follows:

H₁: As individuals' knowledge about touristic service or product increases through social media, their perceptions of utilizing them increase too.

H₂: As individuals' knowledge about touristic service or product increases through social media, they will be more and more influenced by them too.

- H₃:** As individuals utilize touristic service or product increasingly in social media, as the chance of buying them also increases.
- H₄:** As individuals are influenced more by the touristic service or product in social media, as the chance of buying them also increases.
- H₅:** As individuals buy more and more touristic service or product increasingly in social media, as the chance of sharing these experiences also increases.
- H₆:** As individuals' knowledge about touristic service or product increases through social media, their acts of buying them increases too.
- H₇:** As individuals' knowledge about touristic service or product increases through social media, their intention to share these experiences increases too.
- H₈:** As individuals are influenced more by the touristic service or product in social media, as the chance of utilizing them also increases.
- H₉:** Individuals' perceptions of being influenced by the touristic service or product in social media plays a mediatory role between being informed by social media and buying them.
- H₁₀:** Individuals' perceptions of utilizing the touristic service or product in social media plays a mediatory role between being informed by social media and buying them.
- H₁₁:** Individuals' perceptions of being influenced by the touristic service or product in social media plays a mediatory role between being influenced by social media and buying them.
- H₁₂:** Individuals' perceptions of being influenced by the touristic service or product in social media plays a mediatory role between being informed by social media and utilizing them.
- H₁₃:** Individuals' acts of buying the touristic service or product in social media plays a mediatory role between utilizing social media and intention to share experiences.
- H₁₄:** Individuals' acts of buying the touristic service or product in social media plays a mediatory role between being informed by social media and buying them.
- H₁₅:** Individuals' acts of buying the touristic service or product in social media plays a mediatory role between being influenced by social media and intention to share experiences.

The consistence scaling was calculated for *the structural equation model* developed to find out the relationships between the effect of social media on buying a service or product and the intention to share the experiences. Two models were initiated to test Figure 10. The scores are as follows for model 1: $\chi^2=762, 02$ DF. =243: $\chi^2/df=3, 13$, RMSEA=0,078, NFI=0.98, NNFI=0.98, PNFI=0, 86, CFI=0.98, IFI=0.98, RFI=0.97, GFI=0.85, RMR=0.038, SRMR=0.047 AGFI=0.81. The scales obtained shows that the model is at the lowest acceptable level. Figure 10 displays this with the relations clarified.

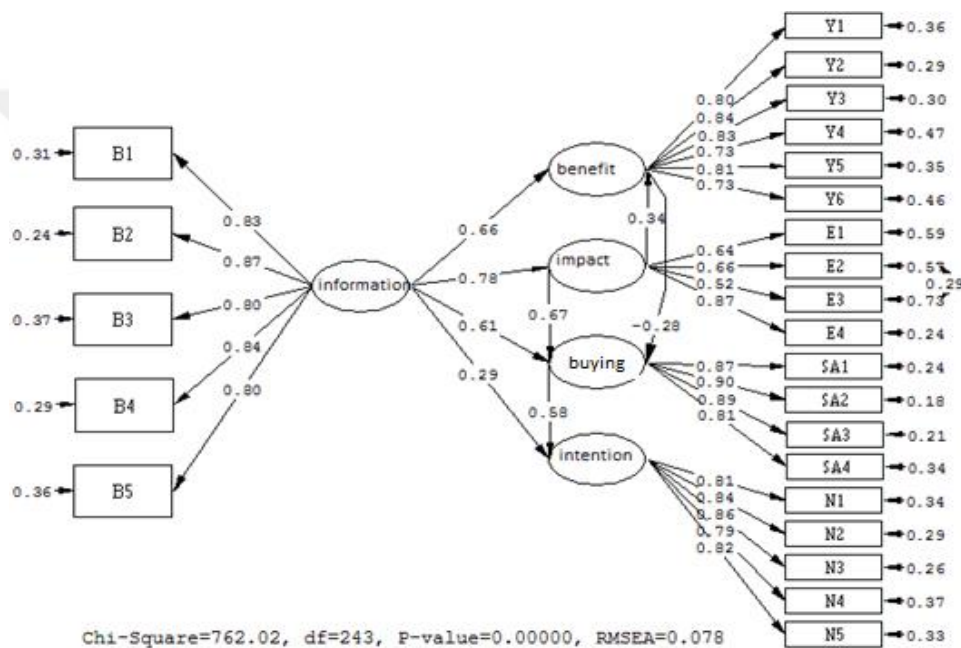


Figure 10. Methods and Correlations towards Structural Model I

According to figure 10;

- A statistically significant relation (0,66) was found between knowledge about touristic products and services in the social media and their perceptions of utilizing them. An increase of one unit in that knowledge led to a 0, 66-unit increase in the perceptions of utilization. Knowledge about such services and

products is found to be related to the latent variable of utilization (0, 44 units) ($t=10,33$ $p<0,01$). Therefore H_1 is retained.

- A significant relation (0,78) in the same direction between their knowledge about touristic products and services in the social media and their being influenced by them was found. An increase of 0, 78 emerged in the degree of being influenced by touristic products and services in the media with a one-unit increase about their knowledge about them. Participants' knowledge touristic products and services in the media is found linked with the degree of the latent variable (being influenced by them) with a variance of 0, 61 unit ($t=10,83$ $p<0,01$). Therefore H_2 is retained.
- Participants' utilization of touristic products and services in the social media is found insignificantly linked (0, 28 unit) with the act of buying in the opposite direction ($t=-1,59$ $p>0,05$). Therefore H_3 is rejected.
- A significant relation (0,67) in the same direction between the act of buying touristic products and services in the social media and their being influenced by them was found. An increase of 0, 67 emerged in the degree of being influenced by touristic products and services in the media with a one-unit increase about the act of buying. Participants' degree of being influenced by touristic products and services in the media is found linked with the degree of the latent variable (act of buying) with a variance of 0, 45 unit ($t=5,97$ $p<0,01$). Therefore H_4 is retained.
- A statistically significant relation (0, 67) in the same direction between the act of buying touristic products and services in the social media and their intention to share their experience with others was found. A one-unit increase in the act of buying touristic products and services in the social media led to a 0, 58 unit increase in the degree of intention to share their experiences. Participants' act of buying touristic products and services in the media is found linked with the latent variable (degree of intention to share their experiences) with a variance of 0, 34 unit ($t=6,88$ $p<0,01$). Therefore H_5 is retained.
- A statistically significant relation (0, 61) in the same direction between the act of buying touristic products and services in the social media and their knowledge about them was found. A one-unit increase in the knowledge about touristic

products and services in the social media led to a 0, 67 unit increase in the act of buying them. Participants' knowledge about touristic products and services in the media is found linked with the latent variable (the act of buying) with a variance of 0, 37 unit ($t=4, 66$ $p<0, 01$). Therefore H_6 is found to be retained.

- A statistically significant relation (0, 61) in the same direction between the knowledge about touristic products and services in the social media and the degree of intention to share their experiences about them was found. A one-unit increase in knowledge about touristic products and services in the social media led to a 0, 29 unit increase in the degree of intention to share their experiences about them. Participants' knowledge about touristic products and services in the media is found linked with the latent variable (degree of intention to share their experiences about them) with a variance of 0, 08 unit ($t=3, 60$ $p<0, 01$). Therefore H_7 is found to be retained.
- A statistically significant relation (0, 34) in the same direction between being influenced by touristic products and services in the social media and the degree of utilization of them was found. A one-unit increase in being influenced by touristic products and services led to a 0, 34 unit increase in the utilization of them. Participants' degree of being influenced by touristic products and services is found linked with the latent variable (utilization) with a variance of 0, 12 unit ($t=5, 48$ $p<0, 01$). Therefore H_8 is found to be retained.
- Participants' perception of the degree of being influenced by touristic products and services in the social media was found to function as mediator between getting information from the social media and the act of buying. Therefore H_9 is found to be retained.
- Participants' perception of utilization of touristic products and services in the social media was not found to function as mediator between getting information from social media and the act of buying them. This seems to be because a relation (0, 28 unit) in the opposite direction between the latent variable (utilization) and the act of buying was found statistically significant. Therefore H_{10} is rejected.

- Participants' perception of utilization of touristic products and services in the social media was not found to function as mediator between being influenced by social media and the act of buying them. This seems to be because a relation (0, 28 unit) in the opposite direction between the latent variable (utilization) and the act of buying was found statistically significant. Therefore H_{11} is rejected.
- Participants' perception of the degree of being influenced by touristic products and services in the social media was found to function as mediator between getting information from the social media and utilization. Therefore H_{12} is found to be retained.
- Participants' act of buying touristic products and services in the social media was not found to function as mediator between utilization of social media and the intention to share their experiences. This seems to be because a relation (0, 28 unit) in the opposite direction between the latent variable (the act of buying) and the utilization was found statistically significant. Therefore H_{13} is rejected.
- Participants' act of buying the touristic products and services in the social media was found to function as mediator between getting information from the social media and intention to share their experiences. Therefore H_{14} is found to be retained.
- Participants' act of buying the touristic products and services in the social media was found to function as mediator between being influenced by the social media and intention to share their experiences. Therefore H_{15} is found to be retained.

In a structural equation model, the relations between the latent variables or those among variables observed through latent variables are investigated through t statistics. If t statistics is higher than 1,96, so the correlation emerges as significant. The t statistics are given in figure 11.

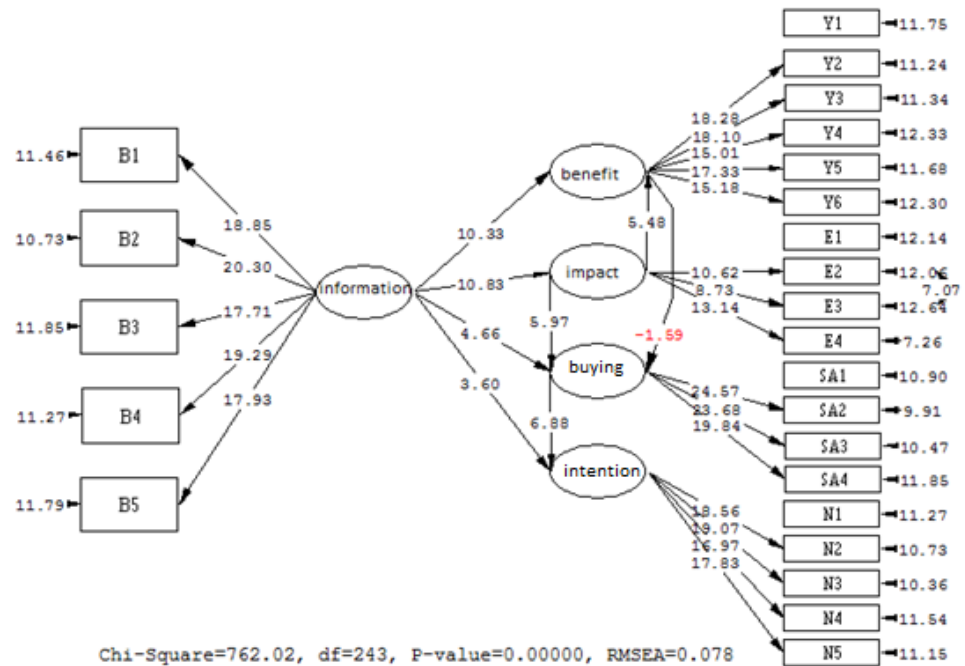


Figure 11. t - Values

The structural equation regressions that could be established to determine the impact of social media platforms in the decision-making process while buying products or services from social media are displayed as follows. R^2 values in the structural equations are referred to as R^2 in the regression analysis.

Structural equations,

$$\text{UTILIZATION} = 0.34 * \text{INFLUENCE} + 0.66 * \text{INFORMATION}, R^2 = 0.90$$

$$\text{INFLUENCE} = 0.78 * \text{INFORMATION}, R^2 = 0.60$$

$$\text{BUYING} = -0.28 * \text{UTILIZATION} + 0.67 * \text{INFLUENCE} + 0.61 * \text{INFORMATION}, R^2 = 0.87$$

$$\text{INTENTION} = 0.58 * \text{BUYING} + 0.29 * \text{INFORMATION}, R^2 = 0.72$$

Reduced structural equations,

$$\text{UTILIZATION} = 0.93 * \text{INFORMATION}, R^2 = 0.86$$

$$\text{INFLUENCE} = 0.78 * \text{INFORMATION}, R^2 = 0.60$$

$$\text{BUYING} = 0.86 * \text{INFORMATION}, R^2 = 0.74$$

$$\text{INTENTION} = 0.79 * \text{INFORMATION}, R^2 = 0.63$$

Structural equation model provides the researchers with the degree of contribution of each observed variable to the latent variables. In other words, it accounts for the variance in the latent variable. This variance is calculated in two ways. The square of the relation between the observed and latent variables reveals the variance where the observed variable is connected to the latent variable. The other method is extracting from 1 the error value of each observation value.

The amount of information received from social media about products and services was found to be obtained most from B2 variable with a 0,87 unit value whereas the least contribution to the amount of knowledge was provided by B3 and B5 observed variables with a 0,80 unit value. B2 observed variable is related to the latent variable (information) with $0,87^2 = 0,76$ or $1 - 0,24 = 0,76$, whereas B3 or B5 variables are related to the same latent variable with 0,64. The other relations in the figure can be accounted for in the same way.

The research also analysed whether there is a relationship between participants' demographic information and their responses in order to find differences. First, the responses were added and the averages were calculated to obtain an average value for each scale of units. Parametric statistical analysis was carried out to identify the possible differences.

Participants' average scores for utilizing information from social media were analysed according to the age groups. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=4,706$ $p=0,001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test:

- Participants who are 41+ years old were found to get information from social media more than those who are 20-25 years old ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants who are 36-40 years old were found to get information from social media more than those who are 20-25 years old ($p=0,0046$).

No statistically significant difference was found between the services and products from social media and participants' ages according to the one-way ANOVA statistics ($F = 1,816$ $p = 0,125$).

Participants' average scores for being influenced by services and products in social media were analysed according to the age groups. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=2,490$ $p=0,043$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test:

- Participants who are 36-40 years old were found to be influenced by social media more than those who are 41+ years old ($p=0,0021$).

Participants' average scores for the act of buying services and products in social media were analysed according to the age groups. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=4,572$ $p=0,001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test:

- Participants who are 36-40 years old were found to have higher scores for the act of buying from social media than those who are 20-25 years old ($p=0,0001$).

Participants' average scores for the intention to share their holiday experiences with others services and products in social media were analysed according to the age groups. A statistically significant difference was not found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=1,338$ $p=0,225$). The findings are provided in table 7.

Table 7. Anova Test for Participants' Age Distributions

| Dimensions | Age | N | Average | Std. Dev. | Differences | p |
|-------------|-------|-----|---------|-----------|-----------------|--------|
| Information | 20-25 | 76 | 3,8289 | ,77267 | 20-25 and 36-40 | 0,0001 |
| | 26-30 | 55 | 4,1818 | ,66919 | 20-25 and 41+ | 0,046 |
| | 31-35 | 61 | 4,1639 | ,77847 | | |
| | 36-40 | 75 | 4,3600 | ,58448 | | |
| | 41 + | 85 | 4,1765 | ,95340 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 4,1392 | ,78841 | | |
| Utilization | 20-25 | 76 | 3,9474 | ,67121 | | |
| | 26-30 | 55 | 4,1273 | ,61024 | | |
| | 31-35 | 61 | 4,0328 | ,75205 | | |
| | 36-40 | 75 | 4,2267 | ,64877 | | |
| | 41 + | 85 | 3,9529 | 1,01073 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0511 | ,77180 | | |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------|-----|--------|---------|-----------------|--------|
| Influence | 20-25 | 76 | 3,7895 | ,71770 | 36-40 and 41+ | 0,021 |
| | 26-30 | 55 | 3,8545 | ,70496 | | |
| | 31-35 | 61 | 3,8033 | ,65370 | | |
| | 36-40 | 75 | 4,0533 | ,75146 | | |
| | 41 + | 85 | 3,6588 | 1,04144 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 3,8267 | ,81024 | | |
| Buying | 20-25 | 76 | 3,7763 | ,80992 | 20-25 and 36-40 | 0,0001 |
| | 26-30 | 55 | 3,9818 | ,70687 | | |
| | 31-35 | 61 | 4,0820 | ,75928 | | |
| | 36-40 | 75 | 4,3333 | ,66441 | | |
| | 41 + | 85 | 4,0824 | 1,01432 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0540 | ,83029 | | |
| Intention | 20-25 | 76 | 3,8947 | ,68467 | | |
| | 26-30 | 55 | 4,0545 | ,70496 | | |
| | 31-35 | 61 | 4,0000 | ,68313 | | |
| | 36-40 | 75 | 4,1733 | ,64459 | | |
| | 41 + | 85 | 3,9529 | 1,09006 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0114 | ,79878 | | |

Participants' average scores for utilizing information from social media were analysed according to their gender. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of independent two sample t test statistics ($P > 0,05$). No statistical difference was found. The findings are given in table 8.

Table 8. t -Test Results for Participants' Gender Distributions

| Dimensions | Gender | N | averages | Std. Dev. | t | p |
|-------------|--------|-----|----------|-----------|--------|-------|
| Information | female | 187 | 4,1551 | ,68196 | 0,402 | 0,688 |
| | male | 165 | 4,1212 | ,89571 | | |
| Utilization | female | 187 | 4,0749 | ,63480 | 0,614 | 0,540 |
| | male | 165 | 4,0242 | ,90359 | | |
| Influence | female | 187 | 3,8663 | ,73198 | 0,976 | 0,330 |
| | male | 165 | 3,7818 | ,89083 | | |
| Buying | female | 187 | 4,0428 | ,74653 | -0,269 | 0,788 |
| | male | 165 | 4,0667 | ,91820 | | |
| Intention | female | 187 | 4,0374 | ,73594 | 0,651 | 0,515 |
| | male | 165 | 3,9818 | ,86583 | | |

Participants' average scores for getting information by services and products in social media were analysed according to the education status. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=9,81$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with a primary school degree have lower degree of getting information from social media than all other groups of different education groups ($p<0,05$).
- Participants with a foundation (Vocational) school degree have higher degree of getting information from social media than those with a secondary school degree ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with a graduate degree have higher degree of getting information from social media than those with a secondary school degree ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with a MA degree have higher degree of getting information from social media than those with a secondary school degree ($p=0,0001$).

Participants' average scores for utilizing services and products in social media were analysed according to the education status. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=21,813$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with a primary school degree have lower degree of utilization of social media than those with all other education status groups ($p<0,001$).
- Participants with a secondary school degree have lower degree of utilization of social media than those with all other education status groups ($p<0,001$).
- Participants with a high school degree have lower degree of utilization of social media than those with graduate level groups ($p<0,001$).

Participants' average scores for being influenced by services and products in social media were analysed according to the education status. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=16,028$ $p=0,$

0001). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with a primary school degree have lower degree of being influenced by social media than all other groups ($p < 0,001$).
- Participants with a secondary school degree have lower degree of being influenced by social media than all other groups ($p < 0,001$).

Participants' average scores for the act of buying by services and products in social media were analysed according to the education status. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=10,998$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with a primary school degree have lower degree of buying from social media than all other groups ($p < 0,001$).
- Participants with a secondary school degree have lower degree of buying from social media than at least high school graduates ($p < 0,001$).

Participants' average scores for the intention to share holiday experiences about services and products in social media were analysed according to the education status. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=16,293$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with a primary school degree have lower degree of intention to share experiences in social media than all other groups ($p < 0,001$).
- Participants with a secondary school degree have lower degree of intention to share experiences in social media than at least high school graduates ($p < 0,001$).

All the findings are displayed in table 9.

Table 9. Anova Test for the Distribution of Educational Status

| Dimension | Education | N | Average | Std. Dev. | Differences | p |
|-------------|---------------|-----|---------|-----------|--------------------------------|---------|
| Information | Primary | 8 | 3,0000 | 1,19523 | Primary and others | P<0,018 |
| | Secondary | 16 | 3,3125 | ,94648 | Secondary and foundation | 0,0001 |
| | High school | 44 | 3,9318 | ,69542 | Secondary and Undergraduate | 0,0001 |
| | Foundation | 58 | 4,2586 | ,54805 | Secondary and Masters+ | 0,0001 |
| | Undergraduate | 166 | 4,2229 | ,70819 | | |
| | Masters+ | 60 | 4,3167 | ,89237 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 4,1392 | ,78841 | | |
| Utilization | Primary | 8 | 2,5000 | ,92582 | Primary and others | 0,0001 |
| | Secondary | 16 | 2,8750 | 1,02470 | Secondary and High school | 0,0001 |
| | High school | 44 | 3,8409 | ,64495 | Secondary and foundation | 0,0001 |
| | Foundation | 58 | 4,1207 | ,42209 | Secondary and undergraduate | 0,0001 |
| | Undergraduate | 166 | 4,1807 | ,66323 | Secondary and masters+ | 0,0001 |
| | Masters+ | 60 | 4,3000 | ,78762 | High school and undergraduates | 0,0001 |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0511 | ,77180 | High school and masters+ | 0,0001 |
| Influence | Primary | 8 | 2,3750 | 1,06066 | Primary and others | 0,0001 |
| | Secondary | 16 | 2,6875 | 1,01448 | Secondary and High school | 0,0001 |
| | High school | 44 | 3,6818 | ,85651 | Secondary and foundation | 0,0001 |
| | Foundation | 58 | 3,9828 | ,60673 | Secondary and undergraduate | 0,0001 |
| | Undergraduate | 166 | 3,9337 | ,67092 | High school and masters+ | 0,0001 |
| | Masters+ | 60 | 3,9833 | ,79173 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 3,8267 | ,81024 | | |
| Buying | Primary | 8 | 2,8750 | 1,12599 | Primary and others | 0,0001 |
| | Secondary | 16 | 3,0625 | 1,18145 | Secondary and High school | 0,0001 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------|-----|--------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|
| Intention | High school | 44 | 3,8636 | ,66790 | Secondary and foundation | 0,0001 |
| | Foundation | 58 | 4,1724 | ,59642 | Secondary and undergraduate | 0,0001 |
| | Undergraduate | 166 | 4,1386 | ,74595 | Secondary and undergraduate | 0,0001 |
| | Masters+ | 60 | 4,2667 | ,89947 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0540 | ,83029 | | |
| | Primary | 8 | 2,6250 | 1,06066 | Primary and others | 0,0001 |
| | Secondary | 16 | 2,8750 | 1,36015 | Secondary and High school | 0,0001 |
| | High school | 44 | 3,8636 | ,76526 | Secondary and foundation | 0,0001 |
| | Foundation | 58 | 4,1897 | ,43757 | Secondary and undergraduate | 0,0001 |
| | Undergraduate | 166 | 4,0843 | ,67339 | Secondary and masters+ | 0,0001 |
| | Masters+ | 60 | 4,2333 | ,76727 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0114 | ,79878 | | |

Participants' average scores were analysed to find whether there is a significant difference according to their marital status. A statistically significant difference was not found as a result of independent two sample t test statistics ($P > 0,05$). The findings are given in table 10.

Table 10. t -Test for Marital Status

| Dimensions | Marital status | N | Average | Std. Dev. | t | p |
|-------------|----------------|-----|---------|-----------|-------|------|
| Information | Single | 186 | 4,1129 | ,75204 | -,662 | ,508 |
| | Married | 166 | 4,1687 | ,82857 | | |
| Utilization | Single | 186 | 4,0968 | ,69849 | 1,175 | ,241 |
| | Married | 166 | 4,0000 | ,84567 | | |
| Influence | Single | 186 | 3,8656 | ,71145 | ,953 | ,341 |
| | Married | 166 | 3,7831 | ,90852 | | |
| Buying | Single | 186 | 4,0484 | ,77308 | -,134 | ,894 |
| | Married | 166 | 4,0602 | ,89238 | | |
| Intention | Single | 186 | 4,0591 | ,67524 | 1,189 | ,235 |
| | Married | 166 | 3,9578 | ,91686 | | |

Participants' average scores for getting information about services and products from social media were analysed according to the income distribution. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=11,683$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with income under 1500 TL have lower degree of getting information from social media than all other groups ($p<0,01$).
- Participants with income between 1500 and 2000 TL have lower degree of getting information from social media those with 4001 TL ($p<0,002$).

Participants' average scores for utilizing services and products from social media were analysed according to the income distribution. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=8,616$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with income under 1500 TL have lower degree of utilizing social media than those with 2001 TL income ($p<0,001$).
- Participants with income between 1500 and 2000 TL have lower degree of utilizing social media those with 2501 - 4001 TL ($p<0,018$).
- Participants with income between 1500 and 2000 TL have lower degree of utilizing social media those with 4001 TL income ($p<0,001$).

Participants' average scores for being influenced by services and products from social media were analysed according to the income distribution. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=3,197$ $p=0,013$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with income under 1500 TL have lower degree of being influenced by social media than those with 2001 - 2500 TL income ($p<0,024$).

Participants' average scores for the act of buying by services and products from social media were analysed according to the income distribution. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=11,837$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with income under 1500 TL have lower degree of buying from social media than those with 1500+ TL income ($p<0,001$).
- Participants with income between 1500 and 2000 TL have lower degree of buying from social media those with 4001 TL ($p=0,028$).

Participants' average scores for the intention to share their experiences about services and products in social media were analysed according to the income distribution. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=9,167$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with income under 1500 TL have lower degree of intention to share their holiday experiences in social media than those with 1500+ TL income ($p<0,001$).
- Participants with income between 1500 and 2000 TL have lower degree of intention to share their holiday experiences in social media those with 4001 TL ($p=0,048$). The findings are presented in table 11.

Table 11. Anova Test for Income Distribution

| Dimension | Income | N | Average | Std. Dev. | Differences | p |
|-------------|------------|-----|---------|-----------|-----------------------|-------|
| Information | Under 1500 | 51 | 3,6078 | ,98140 | Under 1500 and others | 0,01 |
| | 1500-2000 | 96 | 4,0208 | ,76749 | 1500-2000 and 4001 + | 0,002 |
| | 2001-2500 | 100 | 4,2500 | ,55732 | | |
| | 2501-4000 | 71 | 4,3099 | ,80341 | | |
| | 4001 + | 34 | 4,5882 | ,60891 | | |
| | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|------------|-----|--------|---------|--------------------------|--------|
| Utilization | Total | 352 | 4,1392 | ,78841 | | |
| | Under 1500 | 51 | 3,6863 | ,96933 | Under 1500 and 2001+ | 0,001 |
| | 1500-2000 | 96 | 3,8750 | ,78472 | 1500-2000 and 2501-4000 | 0,018 |
| | 2001-2500 | 100 | 4,1300 | ,54411 | 1500-2000 and 4001+ | 0,001 |
| | 2501-4000 | 71 | 4,2394 | ,74575 | | |
| | 4001 + | 34 | 4,4706 | ,70648 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0511 | ,77180 | | |
| | Under 1500 | 51 | 3,5686 | 1,00509 | Under 1500 and 2001-2500 | 0,024 |
| Influence | 1500-2000 | 96 | 3,7188 | ,84234 | | |
| | 2001-2500 | 100 | 3,9900 | ,67412 | | |
| | 2501-4000 | 71 | 3,9437 | ,67374 | | |
| | 4001 + | 34 | 3,7941 | ,91385 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 3,8267 | ,81024 | | |
| | Under 1500 | 51 | 3,4314 | ,90011 | Under 1500 and others | 0,0001 |
| | 1500-2000 | 96 | 4,0000 | ,85840 | 1500-2000 and 4001+ | 0,028 |
| | 2001-2500 | 100 | 4,1700 | ,55149 | | |
| Buying | 2501-4000 | 71 | 4,2113 | ,87693 | | |
| | 4001 + | 34 | 4,4706 | ,74814 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0540 | ,83029 | | |
| | Under 1500 | 51 | 3,4902 | ,90272 | Under 1500 and others | 0,001 |
| | 1500-2000 | 96 | 3,9792 | ,90588 | 1500-2000 and 4001+ | 0,048 |
| | 2001-2500 | 100 | 4,0600 | ,61661 | | |
| | 2501-4000 | 71 | 4,1690 | ,71686 | | |
| | 4001 + | 34 | 4,4118 | ,55692 | | |
| Intention | Total | 352 | 4,0114 | ,79878 | | |

Participants' average scores for getting information about services and products in social media were analysed according to the number of holidays per year. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=23,356$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with 2 holidays per year have higher degree of getting information from social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 3 holidays per year have higher degree of getting information from social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 4 holidays per year have higher degree of getting information from social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 3 holidays per year have higher degree of getting information from social media than those with 2 holidays per year ($p=0,0001$).

Participants' average scores for utilizing services and products in social media were analysed according to the number of holidays per year. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=21,456$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with 2 holidays per year have higher degree of utilization of social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 3 holidays per year have higher degree of utilization of social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 4 holidays per year have higher degree of utilization of social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 3 holidays per year have higher degree of utilization of social media than those with 2 holiday per year ($p=0,0018$).

- Participants with 4 holidays per year have higher degree of utilization of social media than those with 2 holiday per year ($p=0,0038$).

Participants' average scores for being influenced by services and products in social media were analysed according to the number of holidays per year. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=13,30$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with 2 holidays per year have higher degree of being influenced by social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 3 holidays per year have higher degree of being influenced by social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 4 holidays per year have higher degree of being influenced by social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,028$).

Participants' average scores for the act of buying from services and products in social media were analysed according to the number of holidays per year. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=24,145$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with 2 holidays per year have higher degree of buying from social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 3 holidays per year have higher degree of buying from social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 4 holidays per year have higher degree of buying from social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,028$).
- Participants with 3 holidays per year have higher degree of buying from social media than those with 2 holidays per year ($p=0,0001$).

Participants' average scores for the intention to share experiences about services and products in social media were analysed according to the number of holidays per year. A statistically significant difference was found as a result of one-way ANOVA statistics ($F=22,214$ $p=0,0001$). To identify the differences a Bonferroni test (a multiple comparison test) was used. According to the Bonferroni test, the following significant differences were found.

- Participants with 2 holidays per year have higher degree of intention to share experiences in social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 3 holidays per year have higher degree of intention to share experiences in social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).
- Participants with 4 holidays per year have higher degree of intention to share experiences in social media than those with 1 holiday per year ($p=0,0001$).

The findings are presented in table 12.

Table 12. Anova Test for the Number of Holiday per Year

| Dimension | N of Holiday | N | Average | Std. Dev. | Differences | p |
|-------------|--------------|-----|---------|-----------|-------------|--------|
| Information | 1 | 61 | 3,4754 | 1,02643 | 1 and 2 | 0,0001 |
| | 2 | 163 | 4,1779 | ,62776 | 1 and 3 | 0,0001 |
| | 3 | 94 | 4,4362 | ,59674 | 1 and 4 | 0,0001 |
| | 4 + | 34 | 4,3235 | ,80606 | 2 and 3 | 0,036 |
| | Total | 352 | 4,1392 | ,78841 | | |
| Utilization | 1 | 61 | 3,4590 | 1,08894 | 1 and 2 | 0,0001 |
| | 2 | 163 | 4,0429 | ,59160 | 1 and 3 | 0,0001 |
| | 3 | 94 | 4,3191 | ,59048 | 1 and 4 | 0,0001 |
| | 4 + | 34 | 4,4118 | ,70141 | 2 and 3 | 0,018 |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0511 | ,77180 | 2 and 4 | 0,038 |
| Influence | 1 | 61 | 3,2951 | 1,02216 | 1 and 2 | 0,0001 |
| | 2 | 163 | 3,9080 | ,73543 | 1 and 3 | 0,0001 |
| | 3 | 94 | 4,0532 | ,66182 | 1 and 4 | 0,028 |
| | 4 + | 34 | 3,7647 | ,69887 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 3,8267 | ,81024 | | |
| Buying | 1 | 61 | 3,3443 | 1,04698 | 1 and 2 | 0,0001 |
| | 2 | 163 | 4,0982 | ,68687 | 1 and 3 | 0,0001 |
| | 3 | 94 | 4,3723 | ,63895 | 1 and 4 | 0,0001 |
| | 4 + | 34 | 4,2353 | ,78079 | 2 and 3 | 0,033 |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0540 | ,83029 | | |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------|-----|--------|---------|---------|--------|
| Intention | 1 | 61 | 3,3443 | 1,12376 | 1 and 2 | 0,0001 |
| | 2 | 163 | 4,0613 | ,60546 | 1 and 3 | 0,0001 |
| | 3 | 94 | 4,2872 | ,59789 | 1 and 4 | 0,0001 |
| | 4 + | 34 | 4,2059 | ,76986 | | |
| | Total | 352 | 4,0114 | ,79878 | | |

3.8. Tests of Hypotheses

The hypotheses made according to Figure 9 were retained or rejected as follows:

H₁: There is a significant relation between the degree of knowledge about touristic service or product in social media and the possibility of utilizing them. This covers a clear need for developing the quality of information and knowledge introduced in the social media. H₁ was retained.

H₂: Those who have more knowledge tend to be influenced by touristic service or product through social media, which also addresses the issues of providing clear and hassle-free information. This is shown to have great impact on the marketing quality. H₂ was retained.

H₃: The degree of utilization of touristic service or product in social media is directly related to the act of buying. However, in the findings, this relationship was found to be insignificant. Therefore, social media needs to be used efficiently, thus leading consumers to buying. Accordingly, H₃ was rejected.

H₄: The degree of creating influence of consumers could lead them to buying the products and services in social media. This also reveals a need for more effective strategies. H₄ was retained.

H₅: Different from the previous 4 hypotheses, this one is about the post-service and product utilization. Those who use touristic services or products increasingly in social media also tend to share these experiences in social media. This could have great impact on the potential would-be consumers. H₅ was retained.

H₆: As individuals' knowledge about touristic service or product increases through social media, their acts of buying them increase too. H₆ was retained.

- H₇: Knowledge about touristic service or product is also a determining factor in buying services and products through social media as it increases the intention to share these experiences. More knowledgeable people tend to share their experiences. The positive comments and negative complaints by this group could create positive or negative perceptions among others. H₇ was retained.
- H₈: The degree of being influenced by the touristic services or products in social media is linked to utilizing them. It is then clear that companies should work on developing ways to attract consumers in social media. H₈ was retained.
- H₉: Being able to influence social media users on the touristic services or products facilitates the process of providing information through social media and contributes to that of selling them. It seems that creating impact is a critical stage that leads people to buying the products or services. H₉ was retained.
- H₁₀: In the findings, the tendency to utilize the touristic service or product in social media does not play a mediatory role between being informed by social media and buying them. H₁₀ was rejected.
- H₁₁: Similarly, the influence experienced by people on the touristic service or product in social media does not play a mediatory role between being influenced by social media and buying them. H₁₁ was rejected.
- H₁₂: Individuals' perceptions of being influenced by the touristic service or product in social media play a mediatory role between being informed by social media and utilizing them. H₁₂ was retained.
- H₁₃: In the findings, individuals' acts of buying the touristic service or product in social media does not play a mediatory role between utilizing social media and intention to share experiences. H₁₃ was rejected.
- H₁₄: Individuals' acts of buying the touristic service or product in social media plays a mediatory role between being informed by social media and buying them. H₁₄ was retained.
- H₁₅: Individuals' acts of buying the touristic service or product in social media play a mediatory role between being influenced by social media and intention to share experiences. H₁₅ was retained.

CONCLUSION AND COMMENTS

Social media has been developing its impact on the societies since internet technologies were introduced into different realms of the society including marketing in different sectors. This thesis focused particularly on decision-making process in tourism. More specifically the investigation examined how people use social media for their tourism purposes such as buying products and services online, and how their behaviours are influenced by social media. These critical points were also investigated in relation to their set of demographic information such as gender, age, income range, number of holidays per year, etc.

Several significant differences and relationships were found regarding the decision-making process and act of buying in relation to the demographic information. The results are important in that they highlight how people change their habit of planning and buying tourism products and services from social media tools.

Social media is an increasingly used platform for tourism marketing, which all tourism companies should be paying attention to and do research and development projects about. This is becoming a necessity rather than an exception. Those companies which utilize social media effectively can provide efficient services for the growing population.

One important finding is that university students aged 19-28 and do not buy tourism products and services though they use social media more and more. Any company that aims for this group can have an opportunity to develop further with strategic decisions and practices. Another critical finding was that, as the level of education decreases, the degree of planning and buying tourism services and products through using social media is decreasing too. Any marketing practice that could address this issue can also fill a gap in this specific area.

Information, utilization, influence, buying and intention to share are interlinked stages in consumers' decision-making process. This cyclical process forms the basis of any tourism marketing through social media. This also shows how fragile this marketing process is in that when one stage fails, another will also be influenced.

Tourism companies need to develop effective strategies to address consumer needs and expectations considering age, gender, marital status and the frequency of social

media use. They need to be aware that the service and product buying process relating to tourism is not straight forward but a flexible process that involves the interaction among consumers before, during and after the utilization of product and service particularly using social media. Such interaction is found to be influential on the decision-making and buying process.

Customer satisfaction and interaction among customer through social media has a powerful impact on decision making and future product and service buying. This requires the whole tourism system, hotel management and staff need to intrat the available customers with such awareness to ensure continuation of effective marketing.

Findings of the study offer several implications for tourism companies, sales managers, marketers, and academicians:

1. Quality of service through social media should be enhanced because there is a growing population who use it to survey or to buy tourism services and products.
2. People who go on a holiday and who use social media are becoming a social community rapidly, which has a great impact on potential similar consumers.
3. Innovative social media strategies including consumer-friendly interaction for satisfaction and complaints should be developed for before, while and after holidays because there is always instant access to this community.
4. In relation to implication 3, the services and products sold by tourism companies should be checked for quality, which is a potential factor to facilitate or inhibit sales and marketing.
5. Therefore, easier and more accessible ways of buying through social media could increase the number of people who survey and buy tourism services and products in social media.
6. One of the recommendations is to integrate tourism products and services into the individual social media accounts by establishing an alert system that is personally consumer-tailored.

7. Companies need to inform the potential consumers about the new developments and innovation relating to the products and services.
8. A marginal suggestion could be to ask potential consumer for opinions about the product and service variety.
9. From academic perspective, the scale and methods used in this thesis, can be used as a guiding example by academicians in further researches.
10. In terms of the future studies, this thesis offers a detailed analysis not only for social media, and its history but also for the effects of social media on decision making process of consumer behaviors in the field of tourism marketing.



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APPENDIX – 1 SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE IN TURKISH

“Sosyal Medya Sitelerinin Turizm Tüketicilerinin Karar Verme Sürecine Etkisi” Konusunda Araştırma

Sayın Katılımcı,

Günümüzde, hayatımızda oldukça önem verdiğimiz sosyal medya platformlarının, tüketicilerin turizm ürününü satın alırken karar verme sürecine etkisini görmeye yönelik yürütmekte olduğum araştırmanın anketini yanıtlamanızı rica ederim. Araştırma sonuçları bilimsel amaçlı kullanılacaktır ve kişisel bilgileri içermemektedir. Katılımınız için teşekkür ederim.

Anıl Kütük
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Yaşınız

- 20-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 40 +

Cinsiyetiniz

- Erkek
- Kadın

Medeni durumunuz

- evli
- bekar

Eđitim durumunuz

- ilkokul
- ortaokul
- lise
- önlisans
- lisans
- yüksek lisans ve üstü

Gelir düzeyiniz (Aylık/TL)

- 1500 TL altı
- 1500-2000 TL
- 2001-2500 TL
- 2501-4000 TL
- 4001 TL +

Bir yılda kaç kez tatile gidersiniz

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 ve üstü

Bir Günde Sosyal medya kullanma sıklığınız

- 10-30 dk
- 30-45 dk
- 45-60 dk
- 60-120 dk
- 120-180 dk
- 180 dk +

| | | Tamamen Katılıyorum | Katılıyorum | Kararsızım | Katılmıyorum | Tamamen Katılmıyorum |
|------------|--|---------------------|-------------|------------|--------------|----------------------|
| I | BİLGİLENDİRME | | | | | |
| 1 | Sosyal paylaşım siteleri, otel işletmeleri hakkında bilgi almamı sağlar. | | | | | |
| 2 | Sosyal paylaşım siteleri, karar verme sürecimde turizm tesisleri ve destinasyonlarla ilgili bilgi almamı sağlar. | | | | | |
| 3 | Beğendiğim otel veya turistik destinasyonların sosyal paylaşım sitelerine abone olur güncel bildirimleri izlerim | | | | | |
| 4 | Sosyal paylaşım sitelerinde otel işletmeleriyle ve destinasyonla ilgili tüm yenilikleri öğrenirim | | | | | |
| 5 | Sosyal medya platformları seyahat öncesinde bilgilendirir. | | | | | |
| 6 | Sosyal medya platformları turistik tesis ve destinasyonların tanınmasına katkı sağlar | | | | | |
| II | YARARLANMA | | | | | |
| 1 | Sosyal medya vasıtasıyla turizm işletmelerinin web sitelerine daha kolay ulaşırım. | | | | | |
| 2 | Sosyal paylaşım siteleri gitmek istediğim turistik tesis ve destinasyonla ilgili daha hızlı karar vermeme sağlar. | | | | | |
| 3 | Karar vermede, kişilerin sosyal medya platformlarında tatilleriyle ilgili paylaşımlarından ve yorumlarından yararlanırım. | | | | | |
| 4 | Sosyal paylaşım sitelerinde gitmeyi planladığım turistik tesisin sayfasında tesisle videoları incelerim. | | | | | |
| 5 | Sosyal paylaşım sitelerinde otel işletmelerinin sayfasında otel işletmesinin fotoğraflarını incelerim. | | | | | |
| 6 | Sosyal paylaşım sitelerinde gitmeyi planladığım destinasyon ve turistik tesis hakkındaki tüm kampanyaları dikkatle inceler takip ederim. | | | | | |
| 7 | Karar verme sürecinde sosyal platform sayfalarında gitmeyi planladığım tesis veya destinasyonun la ilgili sorular sorarım. | | | | | |
| III | ETKİLEŞİM/ETKİ | | | | | |
| 1 | Sosyal paylaşım sitelerindeki olumlu kullanıcı yorumları söz konusu işletmeye güven duymamı sağlar. | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 2 | Turistlerin sosyal paylaşım sitelerindeki paylaşımlarını ve yorumlarını güvenilir bulurum. | | | | | |
| 3 | Sosyal paylaşım sitelerinde turistik işletmeler hakkında yapılan yorumlardan kolayca etkilenirim. | | | | | |
| 4 | Sosyal paylaşım sitelerinde seyahat acenteleri veya seyahatler hakkındaki deneyim ve yorumları inandırıcı bulurum. | | | | | |
| 5 | Sosyal paylaşım siteleri sayesinde turistik aktivitelerimle ilgili daha bilinçli kararlar alıyorum | | | | | |
| 6 | Sosyal medya sitelerinde bir turistik ürünle ilgili paylaşımlar ve yorumlar satın alım kararımı etkiler. | | | | | |
| IV | SATIN ALMA | | | | | |
| 1 | Turistik ürün satın alım kararı sürecinde, tüm sosyal medya paylaşımlarını dikkatle takip ederim. | | | | | |
| 2 | Sosyal medya sitelerinde paylaşılan bir destinasyona katılmayı düşünerek satın alabilirim | | | | | |
| 3 | Sosyal paylaşım sitelerinde tanıtılan bir turistik ürünü sipariş verebilirim. | | | | | |
| 4 | Tatilimi nerede geçireceğime sosyal medya üzerinden karar verebilirim. | | | | | |
| 5 | Sosyal medyada tatil yerleri hakkında yapılan yorumlara göre yer/bölge seçimi yapabiliyorum. | | | | | |
| 6 | Sosyal medyada yer alan bilgilerine göre bir seyahat acentesinin destinasyonunu satın alabilirim. | | | | | |
| V | NİYET | | | | | |
| 1 | Sosyal paylaşım sitelerinde seyahatlerim esnasında gezip gördüğüm yerlerle ilgili görselleri ve yorumlarımı paylaşmak hoşuma gider. | | | | | |
| 2 | Sosyal platformlarda tatil tecrübelerimi paylaşır arkadaşlarımı teşvik ederim. | | | | | |
| 3 | Sosyal platformlarda bir otel işletmesiyle ilgi yaşadığım olumlu veya olumsuz durumları paylaşabilirim | | | | | |
| 4 | Gittikçe daha çok insanın sosyal medya araçlarını kullanarak ve seyahat yorumu yapacağını düşünüyorum. | | | | | |
| 5 | Gittikçe daha çok insanın sosyal medya araçlarını kullanarak video be resim yükleyeceğini ve bilgi ve deneyimlerini paylaşacağını düşünüyorum. | | | | | |
| 6 | Bundan sonraki seyahatlerimi organize edip geliştirmede sosyal medya araçlarını kullanacağımdan eminim. | | | | | |
| 7 | Gelecekte arkadaşlarımı sosyal medyayı bu amaçla kullanmaya konusunda da teşvik edeceğim. | | | | | |

APPENDIX – 2 SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH

A SURVEY ON “THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES ON THE DECISION - MAKING PROCESS OF TOURISM CONSUMERS”

Dear Participant,

I hereby request you to fill the survey questionnaire which is being executed by me in order to determine the effects of social media platforms, which are nowadays significant parts of our lives, while tourism-related products are being purchased by the consumers via internet. The results of this survey shall be used for scientific purposes and this questionnaire hereby shall not include your personal information. Thank you in advance for your contributions.

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Tourism Management
Master Degree Student
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Age

- 20-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 40 +

Gender

- Male
- Female

Marital Status

- Married
- Single

Educational Status

- Primary
- Secondary
- High School
- Foundation Degree (Vocational School)
- Undergraduated Degree
- Masters+

Income Level (Per Month - TL)

- less than 1500 TL.
- 1500-2000 TL.
- 2001-2500 TL.
- 2501-4000 TL.
- more than 4001 TL.

How many times do you go on holidays per year

- 1
- 2
- 3
- more than 4

Frequency of social media use

- 10-30 min
- 30-45 min
- 45-60 min
- 60-120 min
- 120-180 min
- more than 180 min

| I | INFORMATION | I Strongly Agree | I Agree | Neutral | I Disagree | I Strongly Disagree |
|-----------|--|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | Social networking sites provide information for me about hotels. | | | | | |
| 2 | Social networking sites provide information for me about touristic facilities and destination while I am making decisions. | | | | | |
| 3 | I subscribe on the social networking sites concerning my favourite hotels and touristic destinations; and I follow their updated notifications. | | | | | |
| 4 | I learn every kind of innovations regarding to the hotels and touristic destinations by means of such social networking sites. | | | | | |
| 5 | Social networking sites are informative before trips. | | | | | |
| 6 | Social networking sites contribute to the promotion of touristic facilities and destinations. | | | | | |
| II | UTILIZATION | | | | | |
| 1 | I have the chance to access the websites of the touristic facilities easily via social networking sites. | | | | | |
| 2 | Social networking sites help me to make faster decisions about the touristic facilities or the destinations I want to visit. | | | | | |
| 3 | I make use of the posts and the comments of the people on social networking sites while deciding. | | | | | |
| 4 | I watch the videos on the pages of the social networking sites concerning for touristic facilities that I am planning to visit. | | | | | |
| 5 | I check the pictures of the hotels on the pages of the social networking sites concerning touristic facilities. | | | | | |
| 6 | I carefully check and examine all of the special offers on the social networking sites concerning the destinations and the touristic facilities that I am planning to visit. | | | | | |
| 7 | I ask/post questions on social networking sites while I am deciding the touristic facility or the destination that I am planning to visit. | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| III | INTERACTION / INFLUENCE | | | | | |
| 1 | Positive comments /posts of the users on social networking sites make me trust the touristic facilities that I am interested in. | | | | | |
| 2 | I think the posts and the comments of the tourists on social networking sites are reliable. | | | | | |
| 3 | I am easily effected by the comments on touristic facilities posted on social networking sites. | | | | | |
| 4 | I think the experiences and comments that are posted on social networking sites concerning the travel agencies or the trips are convincing. | | | | | |
| 5 | I can make healthier decisions about my touristic activities by the help of social networking sites. | | | | | |
| 6 | The posts and comments on social networking sites effects my decisions about a touristic product. | | | | | |
| IV | BUYING/ PURCHASE | | | | | |
| 1 | I check all of the posts on social networking sites about the touristic products that I am the stage whether to purchase or not. | | | | | |
| 2 | I might purchase a trip for a touristic destination which is posted on a social networking sites. | | | | | |
| 3 | I might order a touristic product that is being advertised via social networking sites. | | | | | |
| 4 | I might decide where to spend my holiday by social media. | | | | | |
| 5 | I might make preferences between locations / districts according to the comments posted on social media concerning such touristic locations. | | | | | |
| 6 | I might purchase a trip of a travel agency to a destination according to the information that are provided by means of social media. | | | | | |
| V | INTENTION | | | | | |
| 1 | I like sharing the pictures of the places I have visited during my trips on social networking sites; and I like posting comments about them. | | | | | |
| 2 | I share my holiday experiences on social platforms and consequently I encourage my friends for such trips. | | | | | |
| 3 | I can share my opinions regarding to both positive and negative experiences I had with a hotel on social platforms. | | | | | |
| 4 | I think, day by day ,many people are going to arrange trips by making use of social platforms; and then they are going the share their opinions via comments. | | | | | |
| 5 | I think, day by day , many people are going to upload videos and pictures on social platforms; and | | | | | |

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| | they are going to share their information and experiences. | | | | | |
| 6 | I am sure that from now on I am going to use social media means while organizing and improving my future trips. | | | | | |
| 7 | I am going to encourage my friends in the future for using social media for such purposes. | | | | | |

