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Research Article

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON THE RESTAURANT PREFERENCES OF STUDENTS

Mehmet UMUR[1*] (orcid.org/0000-0001-8996-3687)

[1]Erciyes University, Tourism Faculty, Department of Tourism Guidance, Kayseri, Turkey

Abstract

The incorporation of social media into our lives in recent years has triggered modifications that extend to all realms of life. An important one of these changes is consumers' use of social media as a source of information about their product and service preferences. This study aims to determine whether social media plays a role in the restaurant preferences of university students. In this quantitative study, a convenience sampling method was used. The participants of the study consisted of 405 students enrolled at Erciyes University. A survey was used as a data collection tool, and descriptive statistics, such as basic statistical analyses, arithmetic means, and correlation analysis, were used in analyzing the data. The results revealed that Instagram, among social media tools, had a positive relationship with all items related to restaurant preference.

Keywords: Social media, Consumer Behavior, Restaurants. Students

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, which is considered the age of information and technology, developments in information technologies are reshaping interpersonal interactions and social, economic, and cultural life (Ersöz and Özmen, 2020). New communication technologies offer a media opportunity that presents opportunities for people to share their feelings and thoughts. This environment, called social media, has a rapidly increasing influence today (Kayumovich, 2020). In this aspect, it is rapidly taking its place among the rising values in society. Social media shows itself as the most ideal interaction environment in terms of being constantly updated and easily accessible. People can share their thoughts and post various photos and videos on social media. With its wide range of tools, social media is also used effectively to enrich learning and teaching experiences.

Today, consumers have started to prioritize the experiences of those who have tried a product or service before when doing research. Undoubtedly, the most effective way to learn about the experiences shared by people, whether known or unknown, is through applications such as the internet and the social media that come with it. Restaurant businesses have also started to engage in these environments, where they can directly communicate with their current or potential customers and keep them under control (Umur, 2022). From this point of view, the research question of the study is to determine whether social media plays a role in the restaurant business choices of university students.

Conceptual Framework

Social media, in its simplest definition, is a communication environment where Web 2.0 technologies are used. Social media, which is also defined as Web 2.0 stops, communication tools, sites, and online publications resulting from speeches, links, and participation, is a type of media that people use to socialize (Gunelius, 2011: 10). Although the concepts of social media and Web 2.0 are interrelated, they are different concepts. These two concepts, which are used interchangeably and thus can be confused with each other, differ fundamentally. While Web 2.0 is an application platform, social media is the name given to all communication tools that use these infrastructures. Web 2.0 stands out as the technical dimension of social media and is a

concept that includes online services and technologies but does not need to include social activity and a media approach (Lietsala and Sirkkunan, 2008: 18).

The development of social media, which has become a necessary part of people's lives, is described as unprecedented. Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), photo sharing sites (Flickr and Photobucket, etc.), online communities and microblogging tools (Twitter, etc.), social tagging (Digg), sites created by news providers (NetVibes and Google Reader), video uploading and sharing sites (YouTube, Oic, Seesmic, and Ustream), business networking sites (LinkedIn), informational sites which people can contribute (Wikipedia), virtual worlds (Second Life), commercial communities (eBay, Amazon.com), open-to-use software sites (Mozilla's spreadfirefox.com, Linux.org), sites where consumer opinions are shared and polls are conducted (TripAdvisor) can be listed as examples of social media environments (Fotis, Buhalis, and Rossides, 2012: 14; Mangold and Faulds, 2009: 358; Tess, 2013: 60).

With the potential of social media, the latest communication and sharing medium of the internet, almost all countries, individuals, businesses, and brands in the world are trying to promote themselves in this field and present their values to people's attention (Aghaei, Nematbakhsh, and Farsani, 2012). People spend time in these networks within the framework of their interests and share their knowledge, opinions, and privacy in these environments. New social media environments emerge in this area every day, and they create new communication channels by influencing communities in a short time (Corea, Hinsley and Zuniga, 2010; Kuss and Griffiths, 2011; Solmaz, Tekin, Herzem and Demir, 2013; Tutgun-Ünal and Deniz, 2020). For example, *Youtube* has turned into a television network where the user decides what to broadcast, blogs into personal newspapers, and *Twitter* into news agencies where latest news is followed (Bostancı, 2010: 51).

Web technology has introduced new terms to literature along with many innovations. The concept of "social consumer" has emerged as a result of consumers becoming more active. People who gather information about brands and products from social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, communicate in real time with the business they are a customer of, give feedback quickly, are open to new products, services, and information, and want to see brands and businesses in their social networks are defined as "social consumers." The concept of 'social consumer' emerged spontaneously due to the influence of social media in our lives (Neti, 2011). Social consumers access a lot of information through the social networks of which they are members. They can both examine products, services, and user experiences and contribute to the shared information with their comments, questions, suggestions, or criticisms through social networks (Eryılmaz, 2014: 52).

Consumer purchasing behavior can be influenced by various factors. These factors include personal, social, cultural, psychological, and marketing factors. Social factors encompass individuals' small groups such as family, friends, and coworkers (Solomon, Dahl, White, Zaichkowsky and Polegato, 2014; Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2017). Nowadays, social media, which covers a broader scope, strongly influences purchasing behavior (Pandey, Sahu and Dash, 2018). In parallel, social media also plays a significant role in restaurant selection (Okumus, 2021; Yarış and Aykol, 2022).

Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to determine whether social media plays a role in the restaurant business choices of university students. After calculating the sample size based on the number of students at Erciyes University, the study was conducted. The population of the study consists of students using social media. The data were collected using the survey created by Eryılmaz (2014). "Ethics Committee Permission" was obtained from Erciyes University Social Sciences Institute for the survey. The data were collected online between April 15 and May 16, 2022, using the convenience sampling method. The survey was prepared online using the *Google Forms* program and delivered to the students via social media tools, and 405 surveys were found suitable for analysis.

In addition to the demographic questions, the 5-point Likert-scale survey included 7 statements to obtain data on how often participants use social media programs, 7 statements to determine the purpose of participants for using social media, 12 statements to determine the elements of restaurant selection, and 14 statements to measure the effect level of social media on the restaurant selection of the participants.

A reliability analysis was performed to test the reliability of the scale. The analysis results revealed a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.945, which indicates that the scale is highly reliable. Descriptive statistics such as basic statistical analysis, arithmetic means, and correlation analysis were used in the analysis of the data.

Results

Information on the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study is presented in Table 1. Of the participants, 50.9% are women and 49.1% are men. In terms of the distribution of the participants by age range, it is seen that the majority of the participants are between the ages of 21-30, with 71.1%, followed by the participants aged 20 and under with 17.8%, while 11.1% of the participants were between the ages of 31-40.

In terms of the participant distribution by region, it is seen that 57.5% of the participants are from the Central Anatolia Region, 15.1% from the Mediterranean Region, 7.7% from the Black Sea Region, and 5.9% from the Southeastern Anatolia Region.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants by Demographic Characteristics

	F	%
Gender		
Female	206	50.9
Male	199	49.1
Total	405	100,0
Age range		
20 and younger	72	17.8
21-30	288	71.1
31-40	45	11.1
41-50	0	0
Total	405	100.0
Which region are you from?		
Mediterranean	61	15.1
Black sea	31	7.7
Central Anatolia	233	57.5
Marmara	14	3.5
Aegean	19	4.7
Eastern Anatolia	23	5.7
Southeastern Anatolia	24	5.9
Total	405	100.0

The values showing how often the participants use social media tools are given in Table 2. According to the table, the most frequently used social media tools are WhatsApp (4.71), YouTube (4.34), Instagram (4.22), Twitter (3.05), and Telegram (2.32). It is seen that the least preferred social media tools by the participants compared to other social media tools are TikTok (1.73) and LinkedIn (1.74).

Table 2. Participant Distribution by the Frequency of Using Social Media Tools

Social Media Type	Mean	Always(5)		Frequently(4)		Moderately(3)		Sometimes(2)		Never(1)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Instagram	4.22	243	60.0	63	15.6	44	10.9	17	4.2	26	6.4
Facebook	2.09	43	10.6	18	4.4	53	13.1	84	20.7	185	45.7
Twitter	3.05	97	24.0	63	15.6	73	18.0	68	16.8	85	21.0
TikTok	1.73	29	7.2	21	5.2	27	6.7	44	10.9	257	63.5
Pinterest	1.79	19	4.7	15	3.7	51	12.6	71	17.5	215	53.1
LinkedIn	1.74	19	4.7	19	4.7	45	11.1	55	13.6	239	59.0
WhatsApp	4.71	318	78.5	46	11.4	26	6.4	0	0.0	4	1.0
YouTube	4.34	224	55.3	98	24.2	48	11.9	15	3.7	5	1.2
Telegram	2.32	37	9.1	29	7.2	79	19.5	108	26.7	126	31.1
Snap Chat	2.19	48	11.9	28	6.9	50	12.3	75	18.5	177	43.7

The responses given by the students participating in the study to the statements to determine their purpose of using social media are shown in Table 3. According to the data obtained, most of the participants use social media to communicate with their environment (4.18). It can be said that other purposes for using social media are sharing photos, videos, and opinions (3.62), getting information about products and services (3.55), and entertainment. On the other hand, it is seen that they do not use social media for gaming or prestige purposes.

Table 3. The Purpose of Using Social Media

Purpose of Use	Mean	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
I use social media to communicate with my environment	4.18	187	46.2	123	30.4	64	15.8	13	3.2	9	2.2
I use social media for the purpose of sharing photos, videos, and opinions.	3.62	133	32.8	96	23.7	77	19.0	61	15.1	28	6.9
I use social media to gather information about products and services	3.55	109	26.9	105	25.9	102	25.2	51	12.6	28	6.9
I use social media for entertainment	3.88	154	38.0	116	28.6	65	16.0	29	7.2	26	6.4
I use social media to find and join individuals with common interests and needs.	3.08	86	21.2	77	19.0	87	21.5	70	17.3	73	18.0
I use social media for gaming	2.48	56	13.8	55	13.6	63	15.6	67	16.5	151	37.3
I use social media for prestige	2.74	58	14.3	69	17.0	88	21.7	71	17.5	108	26.7

Table 4 presents information about the factors that are effective in choosing a restaurant. The participants stated that the photos, videos, and satisfaction/complaints shared by the people they know or follow on social media are important in choosing a restaurant. The most important factor affecting the preference and frequency of choosing restaurants was the price. Other important elements are food variety and reputation, respectively. It can be said that the factor that is relatively less important than other factors in the frequency of choosing restaurants is the location.

Table 4. Factors Affecting the Restaurant Selection

Which posts of people you know or follow on social media are important in your restaurant selection?											
Factors	Mean	Very important		Important		Neutral		Not Important		Not Important At All	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Photograph/Video	4.09	165	**40.7**	152	37.5	38	9.4	21	5.2	16	4.0
Dialogues in the Satisfaction and Complaint Forums	4.27	209	**51.6**	118	29.1	46	11.4	11	2.7	12	3.0
Select the Factors that Influence Restaurant Selection in Order of Importance.											
Factors	Mean	Very important		Important		Neutral		Not Important		Not Important At All	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Price	4.54	242	**59.8**	134	33.1	13	3.2	5	1.2	2	0.5
Location	4.13	142	35.1	179	**44.2**	53	13.1	15	3.7	3	0.7
Food Variety	4.30	176	43.5	177	**43.7**	23	5.7	15	3.7	2	0.5
Reputation	4.28	186	**45.9**	152	37.5	34	8.4	16	4.0	4	1.0
Select the Factors that Influence Restaurant Selection In Order of Frequency of Preference.											
Factors	Mean	Very important		Important		Neutral		Not Important		Not Important At All	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Price	4.47	257	**63.5**	93	23.0	26	6.4	21	5.2	1	0.2
Location	3.85	143	**35.3**	142	35.1	26	6.4	86	21.2	4	1.0
Food Variety	4.12	170	**42.0**	144	35.6	42	10.4	35	8.6	6	1.4
Reputation	4.09	169	**41.7**	135	33.3	56	13.8	33	8.1	8	2.0

Information on the factors affecting the restaurant selection of the students participating in the study is given in Table 5. According to the table, social media posts of restaurants aiming for students affect the students' selection. Other statements that are effective in the restaurant selection of the participants are "positive comments about restaurants on social media" and "information obtained from social media before going to the restaurant." Another conclusion that can be drawn is that the participants do not share positive comments on social media about the restaurant they go to.

Table 5. **Distribution of Participants by the Effects of Posts of Restaurant Businesses on Social Media on Restaurant Preferences**

Statements	Arithmetic Mean	Std. Dev.
Before I go to a restaurant, I gather information about the restaurant on social media	**3.85**	1.082
I believe that I will find reliable information about restaurants on social media.	3.61	1.065
Using social media is the best way to decide on a restaurant	3.61	1.112
I am influenced by positive posts on social media about restaurants.	**3.99**	.879
I prefer restaurants that people share positive comments about on social media.	**3.99**	.905
When I am at the restaurant, I share photos/videos/comments on social media.	3.07	1.371
I usually share my satisfaction with the restaurant on social media.	2.89	1.413
I share my positive experiences because I think businesses that provide good service should be supported.	3.38	1.315
The presence of restaurants on social media positively affects my choice	3.78	1.076
Social media is a good opportunity for restaurants to influence students	**4.07**	.967
I find the posts shared by restaurants on social media reliable	3.46	1.094
I'm influenced by the photos that restaurants post on social media	3.69	1.104
I'm influenced by the videos that restaurants post on social media	3.70	1.104
I am influenced by the information that restaurants share on social media	3.71	1.075

1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree

Table 6 shows the results of the correlation analysis completed to determine whether there is a relationship between the reasons why the participants prefer restaurants that are on social media and the frequency of their use of social media. The most frequently used social media platforms are included in the analysis.

According to the results of the analysis, there is a positive relationship between the reasons for restaurant preference and the frequency of use of social media platforms. It is found that the social media platform that all restaurant preferences have a positive relationship with is Instagram. It can be said that the social media platforms that are positively associated with the statements "the presence of restaurants on social media influences my choice positively" and "social media is a good opportunity for restaurants to influence students" are Instagram and Snapchat. The only statement that has a positive relationship with all social media outlets is "I gather information about a restaurant on social media before I go."

Table 6. Correlation Analysis

Statements	WhatsApp	YouTube	Instagram	Twitter	SnapChat	Telegram
I gather information about the restaurant on social media before I go	**.173****	**.126***	**.253****	**.119***	**.163****	**.102***
I believe that I will find reliable information about restaurants on social media.	**.122***	.089	**.291****	**.133****	**.185****	**.132***
Using social media is the best way to decide on a restaurant	.054	.077	**.241****	**.139****	**.159****	**.120***
I am influenced by positive posts on social media about restaurants	**.141****	.047	**.263****	.074	**.176****	**.111***
I prefer restaurants that people post positive comments about on social media over other restaurants	.085	.023	**.241****	.065	**.158****	**.103***
When I'm at the restaurant, I post photos/videos/comments on social media.	.028	.100	**.274****	**.147****	**.223****	**.138***
I usually share my satisfaction with the restaurant on social media	.088	**.111***	**.274****	**.163****	**.228****	**.128***
I share my positive experiences because I think businesses that provide good service should be supported.	.088	**.120***	**.185****	**.137****	**.178****	.071
The presence of restaurants on social media positively affects my choice	.092	.058	**.203****	.040	**.159****	.101

Social media is a good opportunity for restaurants to influence students	.049	.002	**.137****	.046	**.137****	.055
I find the posts shared by restaurants on social media reliable	.054	.008	**.234****	.092	**.196****	**.124***
I'm influenced by the photos that restaurants post on social media	.082	.061	**.262****	.057	**.199****	**.108***
I'm influenced by the videos that restaurants post on social media	**.107***	.069	**.269****	.062	**.208****	**.117***
I'm influenced by the information that restaurants post on social media	**.152****	.100	**.246****	.062	**.198****	.086

*Significant correlation at the level of 0.05 - **Significant correlation at the level of 0.01

It is determined that the statements "using social media is the best method to decide on a restaurant" and "I share photos/videos/comments on social media when I'm at the restaurant" have a positive relationship with **Instagram**, **Twitter**, **Snapchat**, and **Telegram**.

Discussion and Conclusion

The acceleration of technological developments, the widespread use of the internet, and the increase in the frequency of use of technological communication devices have led to the differentiation of daily preferences in human life. Today, social media tools that people of all ages use frequently are not only a means of socialization but are becoming information centers that respond to the needs of people in many areas.

In this study examining the effects of social media use on students' restaurant preferences, it can be concluded that the businesses on social media and the comments shared about them on social media are important for the students in their restaurant selection. It was concluded that the most frequently used social media tool by the students was **WhatsApp**, and the other most frequently used social media tools were **YouTube**, **Instagram,** and **Twitter**, respectively.

In the study conducted with students, the purposes of using social media were found to be communicating with their environment (4,18), sharing photos, videos, and opinions (3,62), and gathering information about products and services, in order of importance.

It was found that among the social media tools, *Instagram* had a positive relationship with all the statements related to restaurant preference. The statement "I collect information about the restaurant business on social media before I go to the restaurant" regarding restaurant preference has a positive relationship with all five of most frequently used social media tools.

In conclusion, social media tools are effective in influencing restaurant preferences and are frequently used by students. It can be said that both positive and negative comments about restaurants shared on social media affect the participants, and seeing the photos and videos shared of restaurants affects the decision to select a restaurant. On the other hand, it was also concluded that the posts shared by restaurants on their social media accounts are among the factors that influence restaurant selection.

The limitations of the study include having a limited number of participants due to cost and time and being limited to only students at Erciyes University. It is thought that conducting future studies with different samples using different data collection methods and analyses will be supportive and complementary.

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