

**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY**

**SOCIAL MEDIA'S POWER ON CUSTOMER
DECISION MAKING PROCESS: A QUALITATIVE
STUDY ON HOTEL SELECTION AMONGST LOCAL
TRAVELERS**

Master's Thesis

ECE MELISA DINDAR

ISTANBUL, 2019

THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL MEDIA'S POWER ON CUSTOMER DECISION MAKING PROCESS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON HOTEL SELECTION AMONGST LOCAL TRAVELERS

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Master of Business Administration

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Developed technologies, increased internet penetration rate and mobile technologies became a part of our lives, the information received and shared channels changed shape. This process, which has been experienced as word-of-mouth marketing in the past, has evolved to electronic word of mouth and enabled people to share their opinions wherever the internet can access. Potential customers examine customer reviews prior to the purchase of products and services. Photos and comments about the product and service can be shared with other users in post-purchase process. In tourism sector and accommodation industry, where information is most needed, information flow is provided through these channels. Companies intend to increase awareness and sales revenue by reaching their customers through digital channels instead of traditional channels. In recent years, with the increase in social media usage rates on the basis of individuals and companies, the effects on hotel selection have started to be observed. This study investigates the influence of social media on customers' hotel decision-making process. The question of how social media affects the decision making process within Turkish travelers is emphasized. Qualitative methods were used to answer the question. In depth interviews were conducted to answer how social media influence Turkish travelers in hotel selection.

Keywords: Traditional Marketing, Digital Marketing, Social Media, Word Of Mouth, Customer Decision Journey, Hotel Selection

ÖZET

SOSYAL MEDYA'NIN MÜŞTERİ KARAR SÜRECİNDEKİ GÜCÜ: YEREL SEYAHATÇİLERİN OTEL SEÇİMİ ÜZERİNE KALİTATİF ÇALIŞMA

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Gelişen teknolojiler, internet penetrasyon oranının artması, mobil teknolojilerin hayatımızın parçası haline gelmesiyle birlikte bilgi alınan, paylaşılan mecralar şekil değiştirmiştir. Geçmişte kulaktan kulağa pazarlama olarak tecrübe edilen bu süreç, internetin erişebildiği her noktada elektronik olarak kişilerin görüşlerini paylaşmasına olanak sağlamıştır. Potansiyel müşteriler ürün ve hizmetlerin satın alımı öncesinde müşterilerin yorumlarını incelemek için başvururken, satın alma işlemi tamamlandıktan sonra ürün ve hizmet ile ilgili görseller ve yorumlar diğer kullanıcılarla paylaşılabilir. Bilgiye en çok ihtiyaç duyulan turizm sektörü ve konaklama endüstrisinde de yine bu kanallardan bilgi akışı sağlanmaktadır. Firmalar geleneksel kanallar yerine dijital kanallar üzerinden müşterilerine ulaşarak bilinirliğini arttırmak ve satış gelirlerini arttırmak istemektedir. Son yıllarda sosyal medya kullanım oranlarının kişiler ve firmalar bazında artması ile birlikte otel seçimi üzerindeki etkileri de gözlemlenmeye başlamıştır.

Bu çalışma, sosyal medyanın müşterilerin otel karar verme sürecindeki etkisini araştırmaktadır. Sosyal medyanın Türk seyahatçileri otel karar verme sürecini nasıl etkilediği sorusu üzerinde durulmuştur. Soruyu cevaplandırmak adına kalitatif yöntemler kullanılmıştır. Derinlemesine görüşme yöntemi ile sosyal medyanın Türk seyahatçileri otel seçiminde nasıl etkilediği yanıtlanmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Pazarlama, Sosyal Medya, Ağızdan Ağıza Pazarlama, Tüketici Karar Verme Süreci, Otel Seçimi

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ABBREVIATIONS

CDJ	:	Customer Decision Journey
DMP	:	Decision Making Process
EKB	:	Engel Kollat Blackwell Model
E-WOM	:	Electronic Word of Mouth
N-WOM	:	Negative Word of Mouth
UGC	:	User Generated Content
WOM	:	Word of Mouth



1. INTRODUCTION

Internet was firstly entered our lives for military purposes in U.S. It was only able to make an interconnection links between particular devices. Tim Bernes-Lee's invention in 1990's as called World Wide Web allows internet access worldwide.

In early stages of Internet, which is called Web 1.0, only allows handful of people to create content because of inadequate information. Thanks to user friendly interface of Web 2.0, everyone can create and access user generated content on Internet. Web pages have become dynamic according with user generated content in every possible way. The rise of Web 2.0 lead the creation of user generated digital platforms called social media and geographical, social, political or demographical boundaries are disappeared. Also, it changed the quality of our lives, our communication style and revolutioned the computer and communications world unprecedentedly.

These technological improvements are not just effecting retail, manufacturing, finance industry, also hospitality industry is string along with social media as many other sectors. Travelers and service providers are collecting and spreading information through social media channels.

In this changing world, decision making and buying habits have changed also according to customers preferences. Hotel selection journey has changed completely with the introduction of user generated content. Previous customers began to impress potential customers with comments, pictures, and videos sharing. Social media has become a part of our lives in today's world. It affects all our products and services selection journey.

Social media's effect on customer decision journey has already answered. Undoubtly, social media is effecting customer decisions. This study aims to discover how social media influence on the hotel decision-making process of consumers.

In this context, a qualitative study has been conducted and the effect of social media on the hotel selection of Turkish travelers has been tried to be measured.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 THE OCCURENCE OF WEB 2.0 AND SOCIAL MEDIA

2.1.1 Existence of Internet

The Internet is a free collection of interconnecting commercial and non commercial computer networks that use standard protocols to exchange information (Dobrow, 2019). The first prototype of Internet was called ARPANET used in US Department of Defence communication system in 1960's as an electronic messaging and research tool. There is a link between ARPANET and the computers in universities and research facilities which were responsible in military research. This link helps to share information and protocols between the research group but there is no possible connection with other devices. In 1990's, computer scientist Tim Bernes-Lee invented World Wide Web, which provides to access data online in the form of hyperlinks and websites (Andrews, 2013). Thanks to his invention, access to the internet did become as simple as opening a browser and typing in an address. It has enabled us to access more information than at any other time period in history and changes the quality of our lives, our communication style (Lamphere,2019).

2.1.2 The Proliferation of Web

At the first stages of internet, only handful of people had information to create content on internet because of the technical difficulties and most of the users only allowed to read information. But today, we don't need any additional information to add content on internet and billions of people are creating uncountable numbers of content on internet in daily basis.

To describe the static and dynamic stages of Internet, Dale Dougherty was the first person who used the term Web 2.0 in 2004 and this term led people to believe there must be a Web 1.0 stage (Mazzei,2019).

Web 1.0 was accepted as the first stage of internet and only searching information and reading tools were accessible. It has low capacity at user interaction or content adding (Naik & Shivalingaiah, 2008).

At second stage of internet, Web 2.0, was begun in the beginning of the twenty first century. Internet has evolved from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and this improvements lead the growth of social media.

The main difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is, Web 1.0 could only allow content creators was limited and majority of internet users were only consuming these contents. Today, web experience tremendous growth and diversification, becoming a library, marketplace, funhouse, and stage (Dobrow, 2019).

Web 2.0 can allow to anyone to create any content and get technological guidances to maximize the potential of content creation (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). Users who were only allowed to be a watcher, has started to show existence on internet, to create content and be a participant with the arise of Web 2.0 and started to see social media as a tool.

2.1.3 Evolution of Social Media

Social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue without any geographical, social, political or demographical boundaries. . Social media differ from so-called mainstream media in that anyone can create, comment on, and add to social media content and user generated content is the key element of social media. It can take the form of text, audio, video, images, communities (Scott,2011) and provides the way people share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Users are not only using social media as a free time occupation, it is using as a search engine, get an inspiration and for many more.

The wide variety of social media applications are divided into five main types namely; social networks, blogs, content communities, forums/bulletin boards and content aggregators. Most popular social networking sites/apps which runs globally are

respectively Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest. As shown in Table 2.1, four of social media network sites as youtube, facebook, twitter and instagram are included in the most visited twenty websites rankings in January 2019 (Kemp,2019).

Table 2.1: World’s most visited websites (Alexa)

#	WEBSITE	TIME / DAY	PAGES / VISIT	#	WEBSITE	TIME / DAY	PAGES / VISIT
01	GOOGLE.COM	07M 42S	9.54	11	TWITTER.COM	06M 23S	3.21
02	YOUTUBE.COM	08M 47S	5.02	12	SOHU.COM	04M 03S	4.09
03	FACEBOOK.COM	09M 43S	4.03	13	JD.COM	04M 57S	5.44
04	BAIDU.COM	07M 21 S	5.60	14	LIVE.COM	03M 53S	3.76
05	WIKIPEDIA.ORG	04M 15S	3.15	15	REDDIT.COM	11M 40S	7.54
06	QQ.COM	04M 00S	3.81	16	VK.COM	10M 04S	4.69
07	TAOBAO.COM	07M 55S	4.07	17	INSTAGRAM.COM	05M 47S	3.86
08	TMALL.COM	07M 27S	2.92	18	WEIBO.COM	05M 35S	4.31
09	AMAZON.COM	08M 09S	8.26	19	SINA.COM.CN	03M 09S	3.20
10	YAHOO.COM	04M 01 S	3.60	20	YANDEX.RU	06M 35S	3.38

Source: The Global State of Digital in 2019 Report. by Kepios Pte. Ltd, We Are Social Ltd and Hootsuite Inc.), 2019 (<https://hootsuite.com/pages/digital-in-2019#accordion-115547>). Copyright 2019 by Kepios Pte. Ltd, We Are Social Ltd and Hootsuite Inc.)

More than 4.4 billion people are using internet for 6 hours 42 seconds per day. According with Internet usage rates, social media penetration rates are increasing day by day and 3,5 billion people are actively using social media in worldwide (Kemp, 2019). The number of social media users are increased more than 280 million since 2018 which is now more than 45 percent of world population and spent 2 hours and 16 minutes on social media (Kemp, 2019).

2.1.3.1 Biggest social media sites

Most preferred social media sites according to daily and travel related use will be discussed on this chapter.

a. Facebook: 2.1 billion people in worldwide are using Facebook which is a social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. To reach potential and current customers, company's are also actively using Facebook by creating content and share organically or sponsored. It is the third most visited website in 2019 globally and people are spending nine minutes and fourty three seconds per day (Kemp, 2019). On the other hand, Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp are owned by one group company. Facebook has purchased photo&video sharing application Instagram in 2012 and online messaging application Whatsapp in 2014 and management process has started from a common framework.

b. Youtube: YouTube, which is created in 2005, is website designed for sharing video. Millions of users around the world have created billions of videos on the site that anyone can watch. It becomes the most popular video sharing platform and second largest search engine after Google. It is available all over the world with 50 different languages. Google bought Youtube in 2006 for US\$1.65 billion.

c. Instagram: Instagram is a social media platforms which built around sharing photos and videos. It launched in 2010 and 895 million people in worldwide are now using Instagram. Median age of Instagram users is between 25-34 years.

Here are the some statistics of Instagram (Royse, 2018):

- i. Instagram has more than one billion monthly active users (MAUs) or more than 13 percent of the Earth's population.
- ii. The typical user spends an average of 55 minutes per day on Instagram.
- iii. User engagement is 58 times bigger on Instagram compared to Facebook and engagement per follower is 120 times more compared to Twitter.

- iv. Instagram currently has over 25 million active business profiles.
- v. 72 percent of Instagram users have bought a product they saw advertised on the app.

d. Twitter: Twitter is a microblogging and social networking site which allows interaction between users by messages known as tweets. It is restricted to 280 characters. Launched in 2006, it has 100 million daily active users and 500 million tweets sent daily.

e. LinkedIn: LinkedIn is a professional networking site which allows to display resume, search jobs; to make business connections and to share experiences. According to Hootsuite Report, user rates are 604.4 million people by the end of 2019. 28 different languages are available (Cooper, 2019).

f. Pinterest: Pinterest is a social networking site which was launched in 2010 and has 291 million active users. It allows users to share images linked with project, goods, and services, and to visually inspired by browsing images other users have posted.

g. TripAdvisor: TripAdvisor is a social network and it is the world's largest travel site, which enables travelers to unleash the full potential of every trip. Information about airlines, hotels, restaurant and attractions and it provides travelers information to decide where to stay, how to fly, what to do and where to eat in touristic locations at 49 markets in worldwide. It has 455 million average monthly unique visitors who use TripAdvisor as a guide before traveling abroad. Businesses and travelers can both create content as text, image and video. Travelers choose because of the independency of content and diversity of customer review.

2.1.3.2 Social media in Turkey

52 million out of 82.4 million population are actively using social media. Penetration rates of social media in Turkey is higher than global averages which is 45 percent Turkish people spend 7 hours and 15 minutes on the internet and 3 hours and 43 minutes of spending is from mobile devices. Social media usage per day is higher than worldwide rates as 2 hours 46 minutes and 9.7 social accounts per person has owned (Kemp, 2019).

Because of the high penetration rate of social media among Turkish users, the use of travel related purposes is also frequent. Instagram has the highest penetration rates in Turkey as 58 percent (Kemp, 2019). However, the user rates of Facebook in Turkey decreased 2.3 percent which is more than one million user loss in last quarter of 2019 (Kemp, 2019).

2.2 MARKETING IN HOSPITALITY SECTOR AND CONSUMER DECISION

The simple definition of marketing is the activities undertaken by a company to promote the buying or selling of a product or service. The main aim of marketers to deliver marketing messages and promote product or service to current and potential customers. Marketers were focused on doing mass communication through traditional media tools and do not have a free connection with customers. Existence of Internet had changed marketing rules irrevocably.

2.2.1 Evolution of Marketing in Millennium

Every day we see the world is changing at an incredible speed. Especially as we change, the marketing that is about convincing us is changing at an incredible speed. It is possible to observe this change almost every day, but basically to understand this change it is necessary to examine the marketing in four main time periods.

Marketing 1.0: Product is at the center and the product or service produced can be easily sold in 1920's. The most important task of the factories in this period was to produce the product at the most reasonable price possible and to offer it to everyone possible with simple, mass marketing activities. The consumer had no individual value. Because in the 1920s, competitiveness was more dependent on the firm's production speed than other variables. In 1900's, in consequence of new existence of mass production and monopoly, production based marketing was implemented. Companies were only producing and selling the goods produced. Monopol markets did not need marketing tools to sell products. Marketing was started to arise with increasing number of rivals and necessity of brand recognition emerged to stand out among its rivals.

Marketing 2.0: Rapidly increasing factories and market conditions becoming more competitive, a period in which the center shifted from product to consumer and customer became valuable. We can say that this period includes the last 30-40 years of the 20th century. Now people could access information more easily. They could now make choices, and then set the price of the product. Print media, TV and radio were among the advertising channels of this period.

Marketing 3.0: Marketing practices were very much affected by the changes in consumers' behavior and attitudes, and this period was born as a result. According to Marketing 3.0, the center is no longer a consumer, but a human being. While profitability is being replaced by corporate social responsibility, brands concentrate on other needs, not directly on the needs and wishes of consumers, and keywords such as emotion, mind and spirit come to the forefront.

Marketing Today: The current purpose or definition of marketing is a function and understanding that provides products and services that meet the needs of target markets to these markets, creates customer satisfaction, creates new customers and establishes long-term relationships with existing customers.

To summarize today's marketing understanding in terms of articles;

- i. Markets and customers are constantly changing.
- ii. The world has a tendency to create a single market.
- iii. Customer focus is on the foreground.
- iv. It is important to look for the optimum market.
- v. Markets are varied, divided into sections.
- vi. The customer buys the benefit and the solution.
- vii. Marketing is the duty of all company employees, not a department.

2.2.1.1 Traditional marketing

Any form of mass communication available before the advent of digital media is defined as traditional media. The main activity in traditional marketing delivering the message to customers. The process is completed in this section, and customer feedback is not included.

Marketers are boosting advertised product/service by using traditional media tools:

- i. Print advertisement: Commercials in newspapers, newsletters, newspapers, magazines, flyers, brochures, and other printed material for distribution.
- ii. Broadcast: Radio and television commercials, movie theater commercials.
- iii. Direct mail: Fliers, postcards, brochures, letters, catalogs and other material printed and mailed communication directly to consumers.
- iv. Telemarketing: Requested calling or cold calling over the phone (Weber, 2009).

2.2.1.2 Digital marketing

Internet adoption of businesses and consumers have changed marketing communication way. Promoting and selling products and services by leveraging digital technology such as internet, mobile devices and video games have arised with Web 2.0. Therefore companies should have adapt to internet technology if they wanted to stay competitive. This is why, companies started to be in digital media and they are consistently making promotions though digital channels.

Digital marketing examples:

- i. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- ii. Content Marketing
- iii. Social Media Marketing
- iv. Pay Per Click (PPC)
- v. Affiliate Marketing
- vi. Native Advertising
- vii. Marketing Automation

- viii. Email Marketing
- ix. Online PR
- x. Inbound Marketing

2.2.1.3 Traditional marketing vs digital marketing

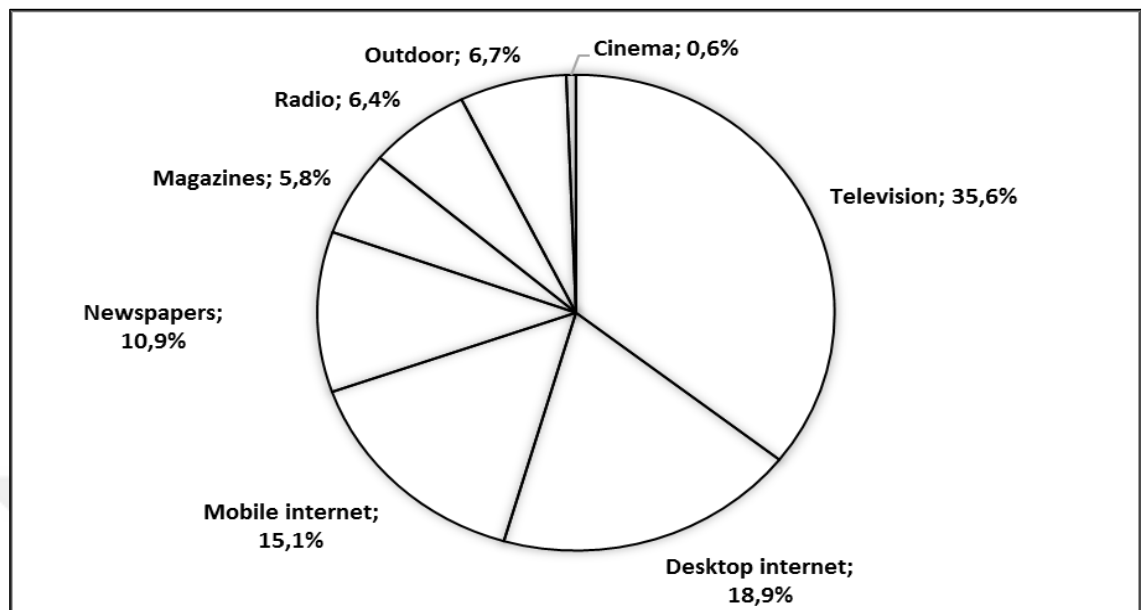
Traditional advertising is generally so wide and broad and this brings high costs, non targeted audiences and immeasurable returns which is ineffective (Scott, 2011). Marketing budgets have shifted to digital channels in order to get measurable feedbacks by communicating to the target audience with low budgets and not being subject to time and place constraints.

Table 2.2: Comparison of traditional and digital marketing

Disadvantages of traditional marketing	Advantages of digital marketing
High costs	Low costs
Non targeted audiences	Targeted audiences
Immeasurable returns	Measurable returns
Distrust to marketers/celebrities	Trust to user generated content
Time-space limit	No time and space limit

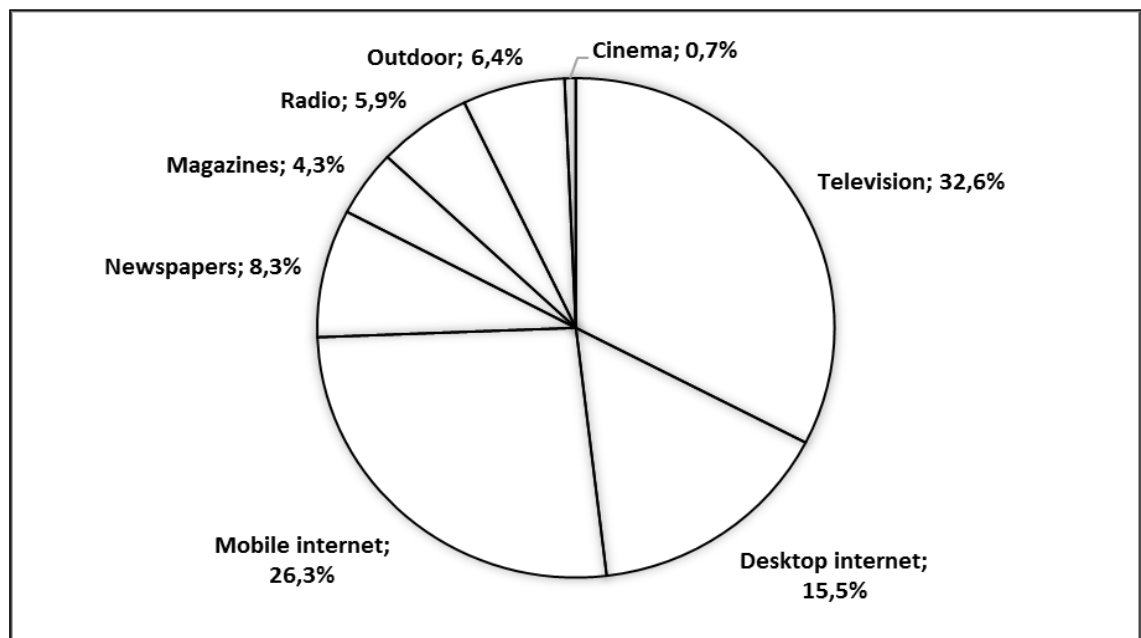
Disadvantages of traditional marketing turn into advantages of digital marketing and this could be reason of shrinking traditional marketing rates and arise of digital marketing more than before. Zenith media made a research about Global Adspend to show the difference in spending in years between 2016-2019. As we see on the charts below, share of traditional media decreases from 66 percent to 58 percent and digital media marketing share increases from 34 percent to 42 percent. To find the reason behind the change in adspend sharings and the rapid climb of digital marketing adspend, we need to analyze Figure 2.1 (Barnard, 2017).

Figure 2.1: Share of global adspend by medium 2016



Source: Advertising Expenditure Forecasts June 2017 Zenith Media, 2017 (<https://www.zenithmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Adspend-forecasts-June-2017-executive-summary.pdf>). Copyright 2017 by the Zenith Media.

Figure 2.2: Share of global adspend by medium 2019



Source: "Advertising Expenditure Forecasts June 2017" Zenith Media, 2017 (<https://www.zenithmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Adspend-forecasts-June-2017-executive-summary.pdf>). Copyright 2017 by the Zenith Media.

Today, traditional marketing and digital marketing are applied together by marketers to sell the products and goods but we can say that digital has started to overtake traditional advertising spend in big picture.

2.2.1.4 Social media marketing

Social media influence and change people's experiences deeply, (Correa et al., 2010, p. 247) and the widespread adoption of public make it become one of the biggest marketing instrument. (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011, p. 1154). Companies which noticed the social media's abilities on doing promotion, PR and market research gain strategic importance (Pentina, 2010, p. 104).

Also, social media is an powerful guide which can be used to gather information about the product, brands and service (Evans, 2012). GlobalWebIndex found 28 percent of global internet users benefit social networks for online product research. Contrary to general belief, even 20 percent of participants whose ages between 55-64 are using social media for online product research. Customers who are interested in product and service is able to reach information, read customer reviews, compare with rivals and make online shopping through social media channels. In the online product research, search engines are still leading the way. However, in certain markets as Latin America and Africa, social media product research trends are higher than search engine results.

Social media is not only used for communication purposes, it starts to be a sale tool. Booming markets spearhead according to use social media in every step of online shopping process. According to PWC research, 70 percent of Chinese consumers use social media as a source of inspiration for purchases, 41 percent use social platforms as a way to get promotional offers and 25 percent purchase directly through social networks (Birtwhistle, 2017).

Companies use social media: (Kishel, 2009):

- i. to influence tarket market
- ii. to increase brand awareness
- iii. to have higher social interaction

- iv. to analyze buyer decisions
- v. to find ideas for new marketing strategies
- vi. to express more their brand message
- vii. to increase brand credit and image
- viii. to increase sales
- ix. to reach marketing objectives with high efficiency
- x. to increase web traffic of companies web pages
- xi. help to get high rankings at search engines
- xii. to have customer loyalty

Social media equals both consumers and the marketers voice which brings trust. The lines between PR and Marketing is blurred and brands started to talk with buyers directly because people want participation, not propaganda (Scott,2011). Through social media, consumers have an opportunity to communicate with brands directly, to research them or to get a contact with other product/service users, create content or sharing opinions to influence other social media users. Brands have an opportunity to get feedbacks directly from users. 49 percent of organization said social media helped them make better business decisions and 37 percent believe social media can better understand customer preferences.

2.2.1.4.1 Key dynamics of social media marketing

The benefits of brands and advertisers in digital marketing include social platforms among them. It is ideal for finding new target audiences in social media products, staying in touch with the world and offering certain products to global people. In addition, it helps expand the usage of social media and brands in different advertising. The dynamics of social media are well understood and what the conceptions want and what they expect from brands. Although each social network has its own dynamics, when we look at social media in general, we see that the five basic elements seem important for brands and advertisers.

- i. Listening customer
- ii. Content strategy and marketing
- iii. Interaction

- iv. Promotions and advertisements
- v. Measurement and analysis

Only 16% of commercials could be remembered after watching, because they were subjected to many advertisements. Today's marketing world, companies should establish long-term relationships with existing customers.

2.2.1.4.2 Influencer marketing

Influencers in social media are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a particular topic.

It can be grouped as:

- i. Celebrities
- ii. Industry experts and thought leaders
- iii. Bloggers and content creators
- iv. Micro Influencers

Recent studies have shown that of the estimated 3.5 billion word of mouth conversations have occurring each day and two of three of these conversations are addressing brand, product or service (Evans, 2012). Evangelists, who have a significant impact on the buying process through social feedbacks are one of the volunteer brand ambassador and the strongest evangelists are the existing customers (Evans, 2012).

Influencers are applicable to any one in any thing especially in e-commerce. 60% of instore shopping decisions are made by of social media posts.

Sincerity and authenticity of influencers make their followers to believe that they are taking advices from a friend which we know from the past. If followers convinced to try the recommended product and satisfied about the results, their confidence measures has increased and more interested in new contents and product/service recommendations.

Millennials are spending 9 hours in social media in a day and they believe to see influencers as a friend because they see them more than their real life friends.

As we see on the graph, People are trusting “like me” person. They do not trust to marketers or CEO’s. The reason behind the power of influencer marketing is trust.

2.2.1.4.3 Comparison of influencer marketing and word of mouth

Word of mouth is one of the oldest ways of conveying information and social media takes its roots from word of mouth. According to Katz and Lazarsfeld (1966), who described it as the exchanging of marketing information between consumers in such a way that it plays a fundamental role in shaping their behavior and in changing attitudes toward products and services. Traditional word of mouth(WOM) and negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) effect has emerged as electronic word of mouth(EWOM). Although EWOM may be less personal than traditional WOM, it is seen as more powerful because it has significant reach and is publicly available (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

According to research of Sparks and Browning, Negative Word of Mouth(NWOM) leading people to have negative attitude towards the hotel and it decreases booking intention (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Additionally, in the buying process, 95 percent of hotel visitors base their booking decision on online feedback.

Word of mouth had a big effect on consumer decision making but word of mouth did not travel very far. Now, social media gives word of mouth wings. Recent studies have shown that of the estimated 3.5 billion word of mouth conversations have occurring each day and two of three of these conversations are addressing brand, product or service (Evans, 2012). Sharing of experiences by fellow travellers or rather ‘someone like me’ can form the overall perception of the buyer. As mentioned earlier, word of mouth effect could be from anyone on Internet and seen by thousands of people in minutes (Dewnarain, Ramkissoon, & Mavondo, 2019).

Word of mouth and influencer marketing are slightly different phenomenons. Super sharers naturally pick up a story and joyfully spread it without a value exchange.

However, influencer collaboration usually requires some value exchange such as experience, status, exclusive information, access to products, or even a paycheck. Influencers conduct marketing activities using its own creativity in line with the requests of the partner or company. Therefore, they are dependent on the person and brand concerned. However, super sharers share about desired topic without any dependence

2.2.1.5 Tourism marketing

Definition of tourism marketing was made by WTO in 1975 as 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.

After World War II, tourism become one of the fastest developing sector in the world and today it is one of the world's largest industries and one that continues to grow. Due to increasing income and working class regulations, people start to have vacations. Also, technological improvements on transportation, communication and accommodation sectors make travels accessible for the majority of population.

The number of tourists are expected to increase in near future, because the education level and welfare of individuals have been increasing, the average life of people has been increasing, the average working hours have been decreasing, and singles and families without children have been traveling more compared to the past.

It is a fast growing industry and provides income for both developing and developed countries. According to Ernst&Young data, it is expected that tourism sector will constitute 10% of the world GDP in 2024 (Ernst&Young, 2015).

2.2.1.5.1 *The hospitality industry*

One of the most defining aspects of this industry is that it focuses on customer satisfaction. Another defining aspect of this industry is its reliance on disposable income and leisure time. Hospitality industry could therefore be segmented into five main sectors (Global Hospitality Portal, 2017):

- i. Lodging Accommodation
- ii. Food & Beverage
- iii. Travel & Tourism
- iv. Timeshares
- v. Entertainment Industry

It primarily involves addressing customer satisfaction and catering the needs of guests. The hospitality industry is a multibillion-dollar industry that depends on the availability of leisure time, disposable income, and complete customer satisfaction.

On this thesis, we are mainly focused on accommodation sector to focus on customer hotel decision making process.

2.2.1.5.2 *Tourism sector in Turkey*

Turkey has a excessive tourism potential due to geographic location, different climate types, natural beauties, culture, and history. 2634 Numbered Tourism Encouragement Law was brought into force in 1982 and Turkish government give incentives to private investors for tourism investments. Today, Turkey become the top 6th destination in 2018 this industry. 46 million people visited Turkey. 3.3 percent of the travelers has come to Turkey in 2018. Turkey's tourism revenue in 2018 was 25.9 billion dollars. This revenue constitutes 1.9 percent of tourism revenues worldwide. 88 percent of travelers are international, 12 percent of travelers are domestic tourists. Tourism is the locomotive sector for Turkey and in the second quarter of 2018, 7.9 billion dollars gained from tourism (World Tourism Organization, 2019).

2.2.1.5.3 Importance of social media in tourism sector

Before the expansion of social media, source of information for travelers was limited with travel agencies and brochures. Digital revolution has changed the way travellers search, rank, evaluate, purchase and consume products and services on the web (Buhalis and Law, 2018 Hudson and Thal, 2013). Limited leisure time, lifestyles changes and pursuit of value for money products have led to a new class of tourism consumers: more independent, more informed and more individualistic. People are not willing to visit travel agencies or looking for brochures. Social media has a big role in the pre-travel stage, during which travellers use social media for planning, data search and decision-making (Cox et al., 2009; Verma et al., 2012). Comments, likes and photos of previous travelers on social media provide potential customers with a vast pool of information and influence decision-making processes. Hotel-related decision-making has fundamentally changed (Hudson and Thal, 2013), as social media are used in every stage of the consumers' decision-making process.

3.5 billion people are actively using social media in daily basis and it changed their travel planning and booking habits. According to World Travel Market 2011 Industry Report, one third of British leisure travelers choose their hotels from social media platforms as Tripadvisor and Facebook (Koumelis, 2011). Brands do not have a choice to avoid the power of social media and the brands which are not following customer buying journey are doomed to fail. A case in point to this situation could be the collapse of Thomas Cook which is the world's oldest and well known British travel agency. According to some economists, the reason under the collapse of Thomas Cook is not only having huge financial debts but also staying old fashioned, non-digitalized sale policy. Skift Europe editor Patrick Whyte explains the collapse of Thomas Cook with these words: the company was struggling under a massive debt load and had struggled with maintaining a large number of travel agencies as booking habits changed.

2.2.2 Consumer Behavior and Customer Decision Making Process

In this part of the thesis, consumer behavior and customer decision making will be discussed. Both traditional and contemporary consumer behavior models will be mentioned. Consumer behavior can be defined as a process that includes decision making on selecting products and services, purchase, use and dispose of to meet the needs of individuals or groups. The basic description of consumer behavior is the decision making and taking actions processes for selection, buying, usage and disposal of products and services to fulfill desires and needs of individual and groups. It involves the consumers to identify their needs, gather information, evaluate alternatives and then make their buying decision. The consumer behavior may be determined by economic and psychological factors and are influenced by environmental factors like social and cultural values. Consumer decision making has long been of interest to researchers.

2.2.2.1 Classic approaches in consumer behavior

A number of different approaches have been adopted in the study of decision making, drawing on differing traditions of psychology. These approaches explain that consumers act with their motives, such as physiological or psychological motives. Each of these five approaches posit alternate models of man, and emphasise the need to examine quite different variables.

2.2.2.1.1 *Economic man*

The term “economic man” was coming from Homo economicus was firstly used in 19th century. This theory accepts people make all decisions based on rational background. In order to behave rationally in the economic sense, as this approach suggests, a consumer would have to be aware of all the available consumption options, be capable of correctly rating each alternative and be available to select the optimum course of action (Schiffman&Kanuk, 2007).

2.2.2.1.2 Psychodynamic approach

This view posits that behaviour is subject to biological influence through ‘instinctive forces’ or ‘drives’ which act outside of conscious thought (Arnold, Robertson et al. 1991). The key tenet of the psychodynamic approach is that behaviour is determined by biological drives, rather than individual cognition, or environmental stimuli.

2.2.2.1.3 Behaviorist approach

According to behaviourist approach, customer behavior is is depended to external events, and importantly, a specific pattern of behaviour can be learned because of external factors (Wiedmann et al., 2007). Advocates of behaviourist approach refer to famous behavioural experiments involving famous dog experiment of Pavlov.

2.2.2.1.4 Cognitive approach

Behavioural approaches, however an influential role of the environment and social experience is acknowledged, with consumers actively seeking and receiving environmental and social stimuli as informational inputs aiding internal decision making (Stewart, 1994).

2.2.2.1.5 Humanistic approach

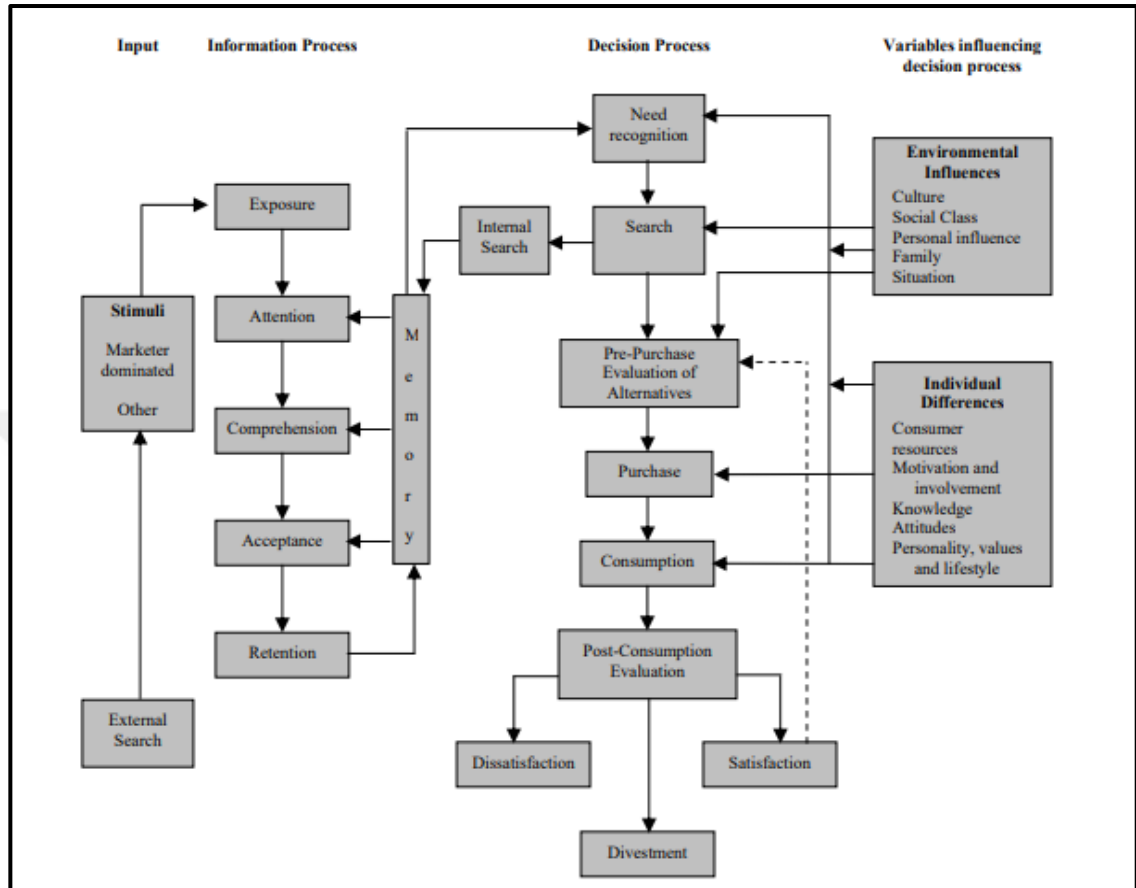
Humanistic approach focuses on addressing the gap between consumer’s stated purchase intentions and their actual final purchase behaviour by understanding the volitional stages to decision making.

2.2.2.2 Contemporary approaches in consumer behavior

This approach answers the question of how consumers make their purchasing decisions and how and in what ways these factors are affected. These models treat consumer purchasing behavior as a problem solving and see the consumer as a problem solver.

2.2.2.2.1 Engel kollat blackwell model

Figure 2.3: Consumer decision model



Source: Blackwell, R., et al., 2001. Consumer Behavior. 9th ed. Orlando: Harcourt.

Consumer decision model is also known as The Engell-Kollat-Blackwell(EKB) Model which originally developed in 1968 and latest revision of Engel-Blackwell-Miniard Model is shown in Figure 2.3. It has five stages which demonstrates customer’s journey from beginning to the end:

- i. Need recognition&problem awareness: To find a solution to their problems, the need of buying has emerged.
- ii. Information search: Involves obtaining relevant information from various sources
- iii. Evaluation of alternatives: Consumer's personel criterion in deducing the preference
- iv. Purchase: Purchasing of the selected alternative takes place
- v. Post purchase evaluation: Product match or exceed expectations

2.2.2.2.2 Nicosia model

This model, developed by Nicosia, deals with consumer reactions to a product that has never been advertised. It is assumed that the consumer will want to buy a particular brand from the business by being influenced by advertising.

After the purchase process, the information related to the talent arising from this transaction is sent to the company via feedback. Since no explanation has been made about the data and theories on which the Nicosia model is based, the authenticity and reliability of the model have not been proven by research.

2.2.2.2.3 Howard sheth model

The Howard Sheth Model is an approach for analyzing the combined impact of the social, psychological and marketing factors on the buying behaviour or preference of the consumers and the industrial buyers into a logical order of information processing. The most important feature is this theory does not consider each purchase situation equally important and is based on the difference between different purchase situations.

There are 3 types of purchasing behavior in this model:

- i. Automatic purchase behavior: the consumer will need little or no new information about the brand he will buy
- ii. Limited problem-solving behavior: the consumer needs some information about the brand to buy
- iii. Unlimited problem-solving behavior: the consumer is highly sensitive to receiving information

2.2.2.3 Customer decision making process

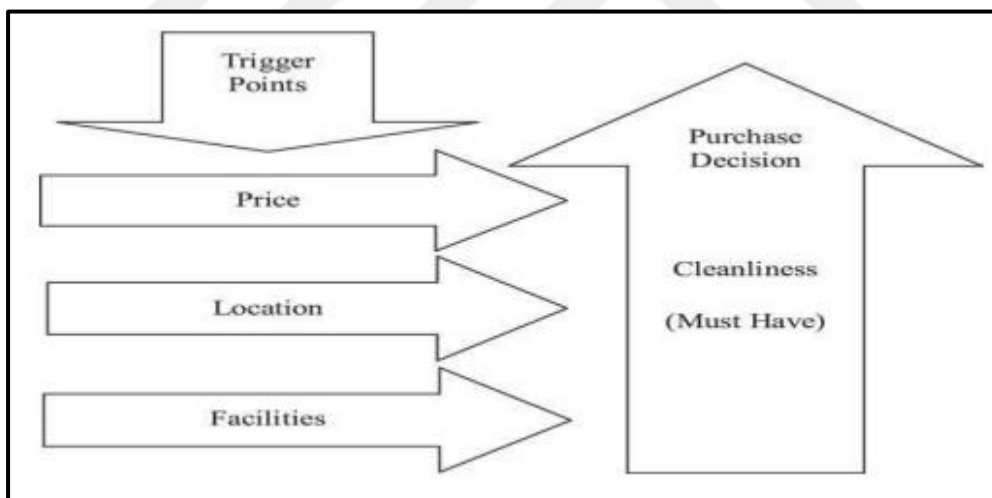
Consumer decision making process involves the consumers to identify their needs, gather information, evaluate alternatives and then make their buying decision. The consumer behavior may be determined by economic and psychological factors and are influenced

by environmental factors like social and cultural values. The consumer decision making behavior is a complex procedure and involves everything starting from problem recognition to post-purchase activities. Every consumer has different needs in their daily lives and these are those needs which make them to make different decisions. Decisions can be complex, comparing, evaluating, selecting as well as purchasing from a variety of products depending upon the opinion of a consumer over a particular product.

2.2.2.3.1 Hotel selection

As shown in Figure 2.4, guests are triggered by attributes that lead to a desire to travel major attributes identified in process were price, location, facilities and cleanliness as mandatory factor and purchase decision was made according to these factors (Lockyer, 2005).

Figure 2.4: Decision making process model



Source: Lockyer, T. (2005) Understanding the dynamics of the hotel accommodation purchase decision, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 17 (6), pp.481-492

40,000 of American, European and Asian travelers were surveyed on the factors affecting hotel selection in 2012 by Barsky and the results were shown that location, price and past experience are the most influenced criterias (Barsky, 2010). The priorities vary according to region, country and culture but related criterias come prominent.

In the study conducted by HawkPartnersLLC (2012), 1203 leisure and business travelers between the ages of 21-75 were visited and questions were asked about which channel they received information with the hotel.

- i. Hotel Websites (74%)
- ii. Online TA's (52%)
- iii. Loyalty Programs Websites (47%)
- iv. Online Review Sites (40%)
- v. Friends and family recommendation (34%)
- vi. Called hotel directly (27%)

The above mentioned rates have changed due to the changes in the usage habits of the internet, social media and the user generated content in our lives.

2.2.2.4 Purchase funnel

The purchase funnel is a consumer focused marketing model which illustrates the theoretical customer journey towards the purchase of a good or service. Funnels show that people move from becoming aware of a product or company to becoming interested to eventually making a purchase.

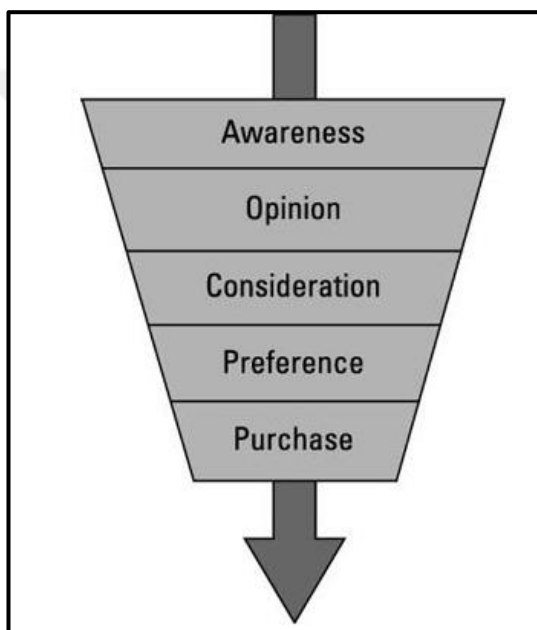
There are five steps;

- i. Awareness
- ii. Interest
- iii. Consideration
- iv. Intent
- v. Evaluation
- vi. Purchase

2.2.2.4.1 Traditional approach in purchase funnel

Web 2.0 era transformed 4P marketing mix to 4C. Also, purchasing decision making process have changed and classic purchase funnel were transformed to social feedback cycle. Purchase decision making had changed with social networks. A need of doing online researches through search engines and current customer comments about products and services had born.

Figure 2.5: The classic purchase funnel

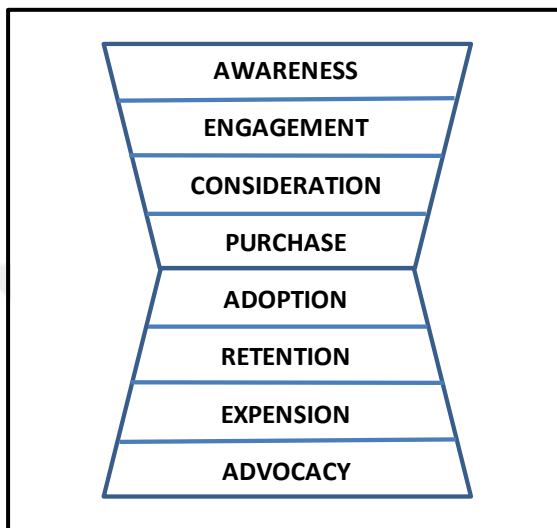


Source: Social Media Marketing: An Hour A Day (2nd Edition), by Dave Evans, 2012, Indianapolis, IN: Wiley. Copyright 2012 by Wiley.

In traditional media lifecycle, there are five stages which are respectively awareness, consideration and purchase (Evans, 2012). Brand awareness leads consideration and ends with purchasing decision. Marketers main goal is to influence consumers and persuade them to end up purchasing decision. For decades, marketers patterned and built their strategies on the linear funnel where brand awareness and conversion point throughout the purchasing journey.

With the emergence of digitalization the use of the classic purchase funnel was abolished and with the following funnel. This new marketing funnel allows to influence the behavior of new and existing customers at any stage throughout the entire buying journey.

Figure 2.6: The new marketing funnel



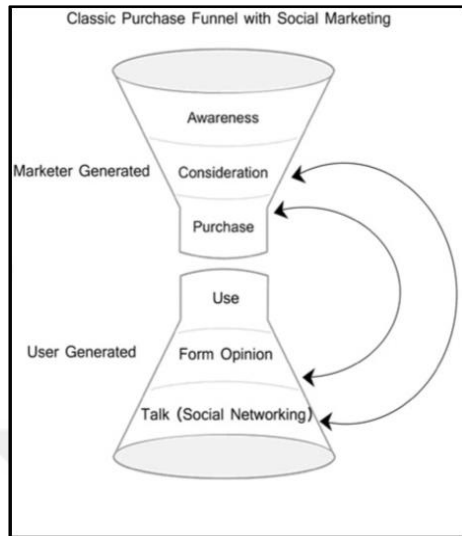
Source: The Marketing Funnel is Dead, and That's Good News for Marketers. (2019, June). Retrieved November 5, 2019, from <https://www.campaignmonitor.com/blog/email-marketing/2019/06/the-marketing-funnel-is-dead-and-thats-good-news-for-marketers/>

Unlike the old funnel, the new funnel offers the following advantages:

- i. Establish brand awareness
- ii. Understand prospects' pain points
- iii. Show what you can offer
- iv. Make purchasing easy
- v. Build the foundation of customer relationship
- vi. Keep them engaged
- vii. Expand your tactics and strategies
- viii. Build brand advocacy

2.2.2.4.2 Social feedback cycle

Figure 2.7: The social feedback cycle



Source: Social Media Marketing: An Hour A Day (2nd Edition), by Dave Evans, 2012, Indianapolis, IN: Wiley. Copyright 2012 by Wiley.

On social feedback cycle, users purchase and use the products and cycle continues right after post purchase with shared opinions in social media channels (Evans, 2012). This interactive conversation could lead another purchasing decision or bad experiences of a current customer could discourage potential customers to buy the product. As a company, no matter you are connecting with customers through online or offline. This is one of the best examples of WOM and EWOM.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The scope of this study is to better understand and define how social media effects customer's hotel decision making process.

3.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The main objective of this research to analyze and clarify the influence of social media on traveler's hotel decision journey. In this context, this thesis aims to answer how social media effects costumers.

3.3 IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

i. The academic level

Intensive effect of social media on customers decision journey had already analyzed in several researches. In order to answer this question, quantitative study methods are often focused and numerical data are given importance. However, there is a scarcity of researches that focus on answering how social media influence hotel customers. It is aimed to shed a light to following quantitative based researches on related studies.

ii. The managerial level

The results of this study will provide an idea for hotel managements about travelers decision making process on hotel bookings. It contributes to social media marketing implementations on hospitality industry and guide hotel managements to understand the efficiency through type of social network which travelers use for hotel information search.

3.4 RESEARCH MODEL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

We are mainly focused on answering how social media influence hotel decision making. The aim is not to obtain numerical results, but to understand the subject matter more deeply and to look at the events from the eyes of the target audience. Qualitative data assimilates meaning, not frequency.

Qualitative researches generate verbal and pictorial data to represent the social environment and focuses on recognizing and understanding the target group. It is possible to define qualitative research as qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis, in which a qualitative process is followed in order to present perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic manner in the natural environment. Qualitative researches are divided into three main groups.

According to Gegez (2019), qualitative research methods are divided into three types:

- i. Focus Group Meetings: Focus group studies are conducted in closed meetings with small groups and qualitative studies are conducted with the aim of determining the opinions of the participants on a particular subject.
- ii. In-Depth Interviews: in-depth interviews are one-to-one interviews with individuals in more detail.
- iii. Projective Techniques: projective techniques use verbal or visual stimuli to stimulate the subconscious feelings and thoughts of respondents. It helps them to indirectly articulate situations in which they are drawn to direct explanation.

Focus group and in-depth interviews were suitable for our study. The most important difference of the in-depth interview process from the focus group meetings is that in-depth interviews are conducted as individual interviews about the research topic related to the participants and this helps to avoid being influenced by the opinions of other people in the group and help focusing more on their own ideas.

Since this research mainly focus on discovering the reason behind the influence of social media on consumers, qualitative in depth approach has been adopted to determine the role

of social media on consumers hotel decision process. In depth interviews with participants were conducted in various times and locations in Istanbul. Research questions were translated into Turkish and interviews were also conducted in local language. Voice recording taken during the interviews and we focused mainly on determining the opinions of the participants.

In this study, Turkish travelers and social media users were determined as the population. As sampling method, purposeful sampling method was chosen as one of the non-random sampling methods due to time constraint.

The sample population of Varkasis, which signed a similar study, was taken as reference. The number of people in the sample was increased and the age range was expanded. 15 individual face-to-face semi structured, in depth interviews were conducted with social media users between the ages 18-43 years in the second half of 2019 in Turkey. Equal distribution of age range and gender were planned to determine the differences due to age and gender.

To get reasonable results, non random, purposing sampling approach were conducted and participants were selected base to three main criteria (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

- i. Be active social media users (at least 1 hour per day)
- ii. Have travelled in last two years and once stayed in a hotel during their trip
- iii. Used social media for travel related DMP

Interview themes (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017) is grouped in six stages:

- i. Perception and utilization of social media
- ii. Information search and accomodation preferences
- iii. Social media types and main purposes for accommodation
- iv. Influence of social media on hotel DMP
- v. Potential negative influence of social media
- vi. Post purchase behavior

The full outline is provided in the Appendix 1.

Twenty in depth interviews were conducted and five of interviewees are eliminated in evaluation stage of conversations because of misunderstood conception of social media. Table 3.1 shows the socio-demographic profile and social media usage habits of the participants. Eight women and seven men were participated to our in-depth interviews. Seven of participants have masters degree, six of participants have bachelor degree and two of them are university students.

Table 3.1: The socio-demographic profile and social media usage habits of the participants

Participants	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	SM use (h/d)	Education Status	SM types for daily use	SM types for hotel information search
1	Selim	18	M	2-3	student	instagram, twitter, youtube, facebook	instagram, facebook
2	Baran	20	M	3-4	student	instagram, twitter, snapchat, youtube	instagram, youtube, tripadvisor
3	Elif	22	F	1-2	bachelor	instagram, twitter, youtube, pinterest	instagram, tripadvisor, youtube
4	Fuat	25	M	1-2	bachelor	instagram, twitter, pinterest	instagram, tripadvisor
5	Alp	25	M	3-4	bachelor	instagram, youtube, linkedin, facebook	instagram, youtube, tripadvisor
6	Nehir	26	F	4-5	master	instagram, youtube, twitter, pinterest	instagram, tripadvisor
7	Canan	28	F	2-3	master	instagram, linkedin, youtube, facebook	instagram, tripadvisor
8	Buğra	29	M	1-2	master	instagram, linkedin, youtube	instagram, tripadvisor
9	Pelin	29	F	1-2	bachelor	instagram, youtube, pinterest	tripadvisor, instagram
10	Ayşe	29	F	1-2	master	instagram, twitter, linkedin	instagram, tripadvisor
11	Yeliz	30	F	2-3	master	instagram, youtube, pinterest	instagram, tripadvisor, youtube
12	Kemal	33	M	1-2	bachelor	instagram, youtube, twitter, pinterest	tripadvisor, instagram
13	Ilker	39	M	1-2	master	instagram, twitter	tripadvisor
14	Piraye	39	F	1-2	bachelor	instagram, youtube, facebook	instagram
15	Selin	43	F	1-2	bachelor	instagram, twitter, youtube, pinterest	instagram, tripadvisor

3.5 LIMITATIONS

This study included only a small sample therefore the data collected through conversation analysis was restricted. We did not take consideration the language style, instaead we concentrated on the words of participants. Because of its limitations, this master’s thesis opens the door to future research in other directions.

4. FINDINGS

We conducted in depth interviews with fifteen social media users from various ages and educational level. Participants were asked twenty-eight questions which were categorized and analyzed under these six stages: Perception and utilization of social media, Information search and accommodation preferences, Social media types and main purposes for accommodation, Influence of social media on hotel DMP, Potential negative influence of social media, Post purchase behavior (see Appendix 1 for the questionnaire).

4.1 PERCEPTION AND UTILIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Participants call social media as the new world and see as part of their lives.

In general, participants use social media to be updated, to get inspired, to share and to have fun.

Interviewee 6: “The description of social media should be a bottomless well: you can find almost anything about everything and everyone through this channel. It causes addiction and non-logic usage habits. I take my phone and start to look Instagram just for 2 minutes and after 30 minutes suddenly I found myself in some account which I do not know how I get there.”

Interviewee 9: “I think lots of people are doing many activities just for sharing on Instagram. This makes me discourage to share posts but social media is part of our lives and I need to accept these negative effects.”

On average, time spending on social media is two hours per day as parallel with global social media usage rates. They usually prefer sharing photos about location, place and themselves. Minimum frequency of sharing is 1-2 Instagram stories per month but these numbers are increasing tremendously on vacation. As we mentioned below, highest penetration rate of Instagram owned by Turkey. In parallel with high penetration rates, most popular social media application is Instagram among participants. Most preferred type shared content is Instagram stories. Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest are the following

popular social media applications among participants. Most Twitter users among participants are not posting messages as known “tweets”, they prefer to be a viewer and read other people’s tweets to have up-to-date information.

In contrary to other researches conducted in recent years, our participants do not usually spend time on Facebook. As it is mentioned earlier, Facebook penetration rates in Turkey were experienced 2.3 percent decrease according to Hootsuite Digital 2019 Reports. Corresponding with the report, except three of our participants, they are not counting Facebook as among their top five social media platforms. Two of three who use Facebook are the eldest ones in the group who remark visiting Facebook 1-2 times in two weeks. Female interviewees are following travel related accounts but some of male participants do not.

Men participants stated that they are searching the hotel name and user generated content when it is needed.

Interviewee 8: “ I am not following travel related accounts but I have a list on Instagram which I save hotel, restaurant, destination photos as a potential next stop. I plot and save these potential locations to Google Maps. When I decided to go this location, I could remember these places again. Then, I go back to Instagram to get up-to-date information about places as is it still trendy or not.”

Interviewee 13: “ I am not using Instagram to follow travel related accounts but many of my friends send me hotel photos as a message which I started to interest afterwards. If I am planning to go some destination and there is a sponsored post of an inspiring hotel on this location shows off, it encourages me to research hotel from this channel.”

4.2 INFORMATION SEARCH AND ACCOMODATION PREFERENCES

Hygiene, location, security, design, size of the room, customer service, breakfast, cancellation policies, equipment, facilities are the stated features the participants are looking for in hotel reservation. They verify these features are owned by their selected hotel from customer reviews in reservation platforms.

Booking.com is the first address to start searching hotels for international hotel booking purposes. The reason behind that is booking.com does not allowed offering services on national basis in Turkey. In domestic travels, participants have started to search destinations and hotels from Google and click to other booking sites (trivago, hotels.com) which is operated in Turkey.

If the information on reservation platforms do not satisfied them, they did a double check from social media platforms such as Instagram and Tripadvisor and reviews in Google.

Interviewee 9: “I write my desired location to Booking.com. After downsizing the hotel list to 2 or 3, I start to doublecheck customer reviews from Tripadvisor but also I looked photos of hotel on Instagram to understand customer mass of hotel and see real people sharing moments to see the big picture.”

80 percent of participants confirm the way of hotel planning and booking habits changed during the recent years with the arrival of social media.”

Interviewee 9: “I found my hotel from Instagram and give money order to make a reservation.”

Interviewee 14: “I am following credible guides and most of the time I make reservations from these hotels when I plan to visit that destination.”

Interviewee 4: “I am following many travel bloggers and if I am planning to go same destination with the blogger. The hotel which I will look for in first place will be the bloggers’ suggestion.”

4.3 SOCIAL MEDIA TYPES AND MAIN PURPOSES FOR ACCOMMODATION

The most helpful social media channel is found as Instagram among participants. It is followed by Tripadvisor and Youtube. Participants noted that familiar and easy-to-use interface of Instagram helps them to find information easily. Photos taken by current customers are showing a real and 360 degrees perspective idea about hotel. These photos are also giving information about the customer mass of the otel.

The interface of Tripadvisor allows planning vacation in one hand and credible customer reviews from all over the world are guiding to make the right decision.

Youtube is generally used for get information about destinations. Participants noted that hotels shared in these videos are taken into consideration on hotel booking process.

Interviewee 4: “The interface of Instagram is user friendly and I can easily find everthing I looking for.”

Interviewee 14: “ Using tripadvisor is not easy for me. Fastest and easiest platform for me is Instagram because I used it in daily basis. I find hotels from Instagram mostly. I looked at the photos of hotel and directly call them to make a reservation. They are not giving a share to booking sites from my payment and I can get discount over the phone.”

4.4 INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON HOTEL DMP

The advantage of getting information through social media rather than other channels is to reach up to date information, easy to use interface and credible customer reviews. On general opinion of participants, reviews, photos, videos or other information (UGC) in social media websites influence their decision making process. However, negative comments are not enough to make them renounce from the selected hotel. The comments must be consistent and comprise subjects about their hesitations. Participants are familiar with everlasting desires and malcontent customer profiles and it would lead them to feel biased against negative customer reviews.

The biggest influence of Instagram on travel related is most spending social media channel among participants.

Interviewee 13: “I am only affected by the comments of look-a-like me person. I am a solo traveler and negative comments of family travelers are irrelevant for me.”

Interviewee 15: “I am also working in hospitality sector and I know that people are not satisfied easily. The subject and the meaning of these comments are important for me.”

Interviewee 6: “People are always tend to share negative thoughts on customer reviews. That’s why, I always read details. If there is consistent number of reviews about hygiene problems, it is a irreversible point for me.”

All participants are approved that friends posts/photos on social media influence their plan to book a hotel.

Interviewee 13: “ I saw photo of a friend on social media in Vietnam. It am inspired of the photo and I planned to go there. I called her and take all the hotel and destination information from her.”

Participants are mostly affected by social media rather than traditional media. Participants see themselves as a part of social media world, that's why it makes them to feel social media is more sincere rather than traditional media channels. The time spending on social media is 2 hours for the group, they noted that social media influence them more because they spend most of their times in social media. Social media has up-to-date information compared to printed media and it is frank communication language.

Interviewee 2: “It is been a year that I never buy a newspaper or magazine. Who is buying anyway?”

4.5 POTENTIAL NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Most of participants did not experience destructive results of social media. However, they believe there is a destructive effect of social media in hotel reservations.

Interviewee 14: “When I see the luxury photos of the hotel, it makes me to imagine everything is perfect in there. I choose there for my honeymoon and hotel failed to satisfy my expectations after these photos.”

Interviewee 5: “There is desctructive effect of social media in hotel decision making journey. I act skeptic and I am lowering my expectations normally but I could be a victim of my inattentiveness any moment.”

4.6 POST PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

If they are experienced a ordinary service, they are not write down any positive or negative comments. Bad experiences encourages participants more than sharing positive ones. Extraordinary customer service or intimate relationship with hotel employees encourages participants to leave positive comments on reviews.

Instagram has seen as a happy place and people are mostly share good memories only.

When participants experience a “Instagrammable moment”, they mostly share photos and tag hotel name on Instagram stories. Tripadvisor and booking sites are used to leave positive/negative comments mostly.

Interviewee 15: “I feel too lazy to write down comments but if it is a bad experience, I can also warn my friends through Instagram.”

Interviewee 5: “I am not tagging hotel’s name on Instagram but my parents are always tagging when we are on the vacation. I am on the tagged photo so it doesn’t matter who tags hotel. It is shared and everyone can reach.”

Interviewee 14: “If I experience a good customer service and had a intimate relations with hotel employees, I could post a thank you comment on their Instagram account.”

People start hotel booking processes from booking websites and they use social media to verify information. Tripadvisor is used to access customer reviews and Instagram is used to access photos and videos which is shared by hotel and post consumers. It helps them to affirm selected hotel from different point of view and this helps potential customers to understand customer group of the hotel.”

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Consumers use a range of social media networks to share experiences, create user generated content, engage with others and having inspiration. It is also used for travel purposes besides daily use and potential tourists are influenced by other travelers opinions through review and visual sharings. Due to the increasing penetration rate of the Internet, mobile technologies and changing habits, the use of social media for travel purposes have increasing day by day. The impact of social media on customer decision making process is inevitable and people are influenced by social media on this journey.

In this study, we tried to answer the question of how social media influence hotel decision making process rather than answering the influence itself.

Qualitative study was found to be more appropriate to answer this question rather than a quantitative study. Semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen Turkish travelers using active social media who is traveling and using social media for this purposes. Participants between the ages of 18-43 were preferred and it was aimed to distribute gender evenly.

Interview themes (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017) is grouped in six stages:

- i. Perception and utilization of social media
- ii. Information search and accomodation preferences
- iii. Social media types and main purposes for accommodation
- iv. Influence of social media on hotel DMP
- v. Potential negative influence of social media
- vi. Post purchase behavior

Interviews were conducted in Turkish and audio recordings were taken during the interviews. Pre-prepared questions were directed and interviewees are allowed to express their own views without any orientation.

As a result of relevant study, social media were found to generally have a strong influence on consumers. This thesis gives information about most preferred social media channels for daily use and travel related purposes. It is found as Instagram through daily and travel related usage. Especially women participants follow travel related accounts on Instagram. Instagram should be the first address for promotion and accounts of hotels must have up to date information and share inspiring moments of hotel and destination. Information about located destination, event or weather information of the area are also make customers more interested. To encourage Instagram sharing, hotels must create «Instagrammable moments», , a corner, a spot.

Easy to use interface of social media encourage people to use more than other platforms. They believe customer reviews and commercials are in social media are more trustworthy than any other platform. The advantage of getting information through social media rather than other channels is to reach up to date information, easy to use interface and credible customer reviews. Traditional media seems to be only for reputation but these consumers are not triggered with traditional commercials. On hotel decision journey, they used social media to verify information on reservation sites. Look-alike research and 360 degrees perspective idea is taken from social media platforms especially from Instagram. They are already booking their hotels from social media channels by getting inspiration from online posts.

They are not trusting the content of negative comments. They are always analyzing the content. Most of participants did not experience destructive results of social media. However, they believe there is a destructive effect of social media in hotel reservations. They prefer to lower their expectations while examining the images on social media.

When the results are evaluated, some suggestions are provided for hotel management. Hotels should follow customer trends and in order to reach customers, they have to take part in customers preferred channels.

Hotels should focus on promoting in social media rather than traditional media. Sponsored posts on social media while searching hotels from booking sites will be a good practice to get attention. Have a collaboration with reputable guides and influencers on

Instagram and Youtube helps to increase awareness. Hotels must provide free WI-FI access to encourage customers to create content on social media and “Instagrammable moments” should be created to foster real time posting.

Information in reservation sites must sufficient and be up to date and it is important to inform about any facility changes. Hotels must avoid from sharing unrealistic images, it can create a disappointment and lead to share negative comments on related platforms. Comments on reservation sites are as important as comments in social media channels. Reviews in google are important as well especially for male customers. It is important to have a customer relations policy and make improvements according to comments on these platforms and compensate travelers are staying helps to prevent consistency in negative comments. Hotel employees should create an intimate relationship with customers and can make small gestures to encourage positive comments on digital platforms.

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APPENDIX

Perception and utilization of social media
What are the names of top 5 social media apps you used in your daily life? (sort descending)
What is your motivation to use social media?
How many hours per day do you spend on social media?
Could you define social media on your words? What is the meaning of social media for you?
What kind of content do you share on social media? How often do you share a post?
Do you follow any travel related accounts, blogs on social media?
Information search and accomodation preferences
What is most important features for you in hotel selection? From which platform do you testify these features are owned by your selected hotel?
Could you share your last accommodation planning experience? How did you start to search a hotel? Which platforms did you use? Do you follow these steps in usual?
Do you think the way of hotel planning and booking habits changed during the recent years with the arrival of social media?
Social media types and main purposes for accommodation
What is the most helpful social media channels for you in accommodation selection? Why do you think these are useful? For which content do you find helpful?
Influence of social media on hotel DMP
Why do you think you use social media in accommodation research? What are the advantages of social media usage in accommodation search compared to other platforms?
Do you think reviews, photos, videos or other information (UGC) in social media websites influence your decision making process?
Have you ever research a hotel after inspired by post on social media?
Do you think of making a reservation from a hotel, which has negative comments?
Are post of your friends on social media influencing your plans to book a hotel?
Would social media or traditional media influenced you more on commercials about hotels?
Potential negative influence of social media
Have you ever experienced any destructive effect of social media on hotel planning? Did social media leave you in a difficult situation in post purchase? Do you think are there any destructive effect of social media?
Post purchase behavior
Do you share any posts during or after your hotel stay? What do you find worthy to share? From which platform?

