

## WHY DO PEOPLE VISIT WATER PARKS? AN IMPLICATION FROM TURKEY

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### ABSTRACT

Leisure literatures show that many factors influence people's choices to participate in various leisure activities. Gender roles were discussed with the highest overall frequency among studies. As a variable, gender has been important in helping to document differences between the social conditions of women and men. Because, the social and personal issues facing men and women are different There are many types of leisure constraints classified by authors such as internal/external, motivational/physical, intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. The purpose of this study was to identify the profile and demographic characteristics of the water park visitors, and what types of factors affected their decisions to visit water parks. Respondents were water park visitors (n= 287) in one of the water parks in a resort area (Kuşadası) in Turkey who completed a questionnaire. Two hundred and eighty-seven visitors were selected and the data was collected from a cluster random sampling of visitors in the water park. From a cross-cultural perspective, there are many factors affecting the leisure participation of water park visitors and the results showed that each of 17 variables given in this study had different levels of significance by gender.

**Keywords:** Leisure participation, water parks, factors, influence.

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## INTRODUCTION

Development of the leisure industry is as old as the history of human beings. The methods and ways of leisure participation have been changing for ages. During ancient times, the purposes of people were to meet their basic needs such as food and shelter. To meet those kind of needs, people collected foods, went hunting, and lived in caves. The most important development in the leisure industry started when people changed their life style from nomadic to settlement. Within the transition from farm society to industry society, big cities and factories were built and the term of work and leisure became more clear. Paid vacations, arrangement of working hours are all efforts of planning the leisure time.

Changes in the status of men and women in society, technological developments, changes in attitudes and behaviors of consumers have been playing an important role in the leisure industry. Especially, technological developments have been causing fundamental changes in the leisure industry. With the invention of television and radio, people have become more aware of the developments and changes in the world. Thus, different leisure opportunities have been supplied to people.

Technological advances have been lowering travel cost and time (Costa,1997). By 2015, technological and social changes will reduce time at work and at home. Increased life expectancy, coupled with earlier retirement offer many people increasing opportunities to pursue leisure interests (Molitor, 2000). The lengthening years of retirement is one of the reasons for creating a vast demand in leisure time activities (Moccia, 2000). Retirement brings time for travel and recreation (Costa, 1997).

Length of work hours and amount of vacation time are also important factors for leisure participation. For example, working hours declined from 70 hours per week in 1959 to less than 40 hours during the 1990s, and 30 hours for some European workers (Molitor, 1998). The leisure industry has been growing very fast and the demand towards water parks in this industry has increased accordingly. Each year millions of people go to water parks as part of their leisure activities. Thus, it is important for leisure companies to know the profile of water park visitors, how satisfy them, and how they spend their leisure time. Water park establishments should know the answers of all these questions to maximize their profits, satisfy their customers and continue growing.

The purpose of this study was to identify the profile and demographic characteristics of the water park visitors, and what types of factors affected their decisions to visit the water park.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The leisure industry has become an important component of the economics of many of the world's industrialized nations. The leisure industry is one of the biggest industries in the world. According to Gratton and Kokolakadis (1997), 54 of the world's top 500 companies are leisure companies. A total of 400 million leisure trips are undertaken per year and the average party size is 3.3 persons per trip and half of all parties (46%) travel with their children (Goldner,1997).

At B.C 1, leisure activities had been covering 17% of the whole life, studies show that the share of time spending for leisure activities will reach almost up to 50% of the whole life in 2010 (Molitor,98).

The current trend allows retirement at an ever-earlier age. For example in the USA, retirement age between 1950-1955 averaged 67 years, it dropped to 63 between 1985-90, and to 60 during 1994. However, by 2025 retirement age may rise to 70 as a result of longer and more productive lives (Molitor, 1999).

The length of work hours and the amount of vacation time are also important factors for leisure participation. For example, working hours declined from 70 hours per week in 1959 to less than 40 hours during the 1990s, and 30 hours for some European workers (Molitor, 1998).

People who are over 55 years old tend to have more money to spend than their younger counterparts (Kroll, 2000). This increased consumption of goods and services also affects their opportunities for leisure participation.

Social interaction is one of the most important factors affecting leisure participation. Meeting with new people is a major reason to participate in leisure activities (Auld & Case,1997). Human beings generally like to be in social environment and interacts with each

others. That is why some people go to the pubs, cinemas, concerts, water parks to meet with their old friends or new people.

Developments in technology have been reducing the chances of people to interact with each other. For example, computerized shopping systems give people the opportunity to do shopping from their homes by phone. Consequently, today, people need to be in the social environments more than ever.

Improving technologies have been changing the way of doing business, thus people can do business from their home via the phone and internet. People may attend the lectures via the net in an advanced computer system (Pearson, 2000). Thus, improving technologies create more opportunities for people to attend more and different leisure activities.

It was found that demographic characteristics of individuals (İlban & Özcan, 2003) had some degree of impacts on the preference of leisure activities. The study conducted by Demir (2003) showed that there was a strong relationship among sport participation and demographic variables such as gender, income, level of education and age groups. In a similar study, it was found that demographic characteristics of university students impacted the preference and type of recreation activities undertaken by them (Gençay, Gençay, Marangoz & Tekerer, 2003).

The growing access to recreation vehicles also increases opportunities for leisure travel (Edgel & Dalton, 1993). Coleman (1993) points out that freedom is the most important stress buffering aspects of leisure activity. In their study, Patterson and Carpenter (1994) concluded that life satisfaction was associated with leisure participation.

To sum up, many factors influence the choice and participation of leisure activities. In this study it was examined that increases in leisure time, urbanization, tradition and fashion, past experiences, having private automobiles, arrangement of work hours, increases in the education level of the public, new technologies and inventions, effective advertisement activities, family structure, life expectation and satisfaction, increases in leisure facilities, believes that attendance of leisure activities are worthwhile for health, status of man and woman in society, length of work hours and amount of vacation time, increases in revenues, easiness of transportation are all important factors effecting leisure participation such as going

to the cinema, water parks, etc...

Even if people have met some constrains, participation in leisure activities not only helps people to construct and recreate themselves for a healthy life but also contributes to a better and meaningful life.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to identify the profile and demographic characteristics of the water park visitors, and what types of factors affected their decisions to visit the water parks. 330 water park visitors were selected and the data were collected using cluster sample of visitors using the water park in the weekends in the month of August, 2003. To improve the validity and reliability of the preliminary questionnaire, 20 water park visitors were chosen randomly to pilot the survey instruments. Of 330 questionnaires, 63 questionnaires were left out of the study because of their inconsistent completion. Thus, 287 out of 330 questionnaires were evaluated by the researcher.

Even if the study was conducted in the biggest water park in the province of Aydın, Turkey but showed only limited numbers of the respondents' (n=287) perceived responses on the survey instruments. Questionnaires were completed by a select group that might not be the representative of the population.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of three sections. The first section focused on demographic questions included the participant's gender, age, marital status, education, employment and income. The second section aimed to learn the profile of the respondents. The third section aimed to learn the levels of significance of the 17 variables affecting people to go to the water park by gender.

Yes-no and multiple choice questions and five point likert-type scales (1=extremely significant, 2= significant, 3= somewhat significant, 4= insignificant, and 5= extremely insignificant) were used to measure the levels of significance of variables. Frequency analysis, cross-tabulations and t-test were included in the statistical analysis.

## RESULTS

Table 1 provides demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study. Of the 287 water park visitors, 174 (60.6%) were male, and 113 (39.4%) were female.

Five age categories were determined. 146 (50.9%) visitors were between 18-25 years of age, 51 (17.8%) were 17 years of age and under, 43 (15%) were between 26-33, 33 (11.5%) were between 34-41, 14 (4.9%) were between 42-49. Two hundred (69.7%) visitors were single, 190 (66.2%) were employed, 130 (45%) were high school graduates and 90 (31.4%) had between 250.000.001-500.000.000 Turkish Lira monthly income. It was indicated that most of the water park visitors were single, employed, high school graduates, male, between 18-25 years of age and had limited income.

Table 2 and 2x show that 199 (69.3%) visitors have never been to this water park before, 151 (52.6%) did not visit any water park before and 267 (93%) came to the water park with groups. 147 (51.2%) learned about the water park from their friends/relatives. That is why friends and relatives had an important affect on visitors in choosing water parks. Brochures (11.8%), billboards (11.5%), radios (8%) and tourism information bureaus (8%) were among other important information sources used by the visitors. Only 7 (2.4%) visitors said that they did not have any information about the water park before.

Spending enjoyable time (51.9%) and promotion tours (26.5%) were among the most important reasons for visiting the water park. 223 (77.7%) visitors came to the water park by bus. While 125 (43.6%) decided to visit the water park the day before, 86 (30%) decided to come to the water park one week before. It is said that most of the water park customers decided to come to the water park less than one week before coming to the water park. One week is very important time span for water park companies to affect their potential customers to choose their establishments.

While 101 water park visitors (35.2%) did not spend any money at the water park, 59 (20.6%) spent less than 10.000.000 Turkish Lira (TL). There were only 41 (14.3%) water park visitors spending more than 30.000.000 TL. It is said that most of the visitors spent little or no money in the water park because of the high prices in the park and the visitors' limited

budget.

Table 3, summarizes the overall significance of the 17 variables influencing leisure participation of the water park visitors, shows the mean values and levels of significance. While easiness of transportation was the most important of the 17 variables influencing water park visitations, increases in leisure time was the least important one.

Reliability analysis showed that the internal consistency of the scale used in the study was .88 (alpha level).

Gender is one of the most important variables influencing leisure participation. For male visitors, easiness of transportation was the first significant variable with the highest mean score of 1.88, on the other hand, urbanization was the least significant one with the lowest mean score of 2.68. For female visitors, easiness of transportation also was the first significant variable with the highest mean score of 1.80, and past experiences was the least significant variable with the lowest mean score of 2.79 (see Table 3).

To understand the difference between the perceptions of male and female visitors clearly, the t-test was used. Results were as seen in Table 3. It was found that there was no significant difference between the perceptions of 17 variables of male and female visitors. Mean scores and the results of t-test supported this conclusion.

## **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Most of the water park visitors were single, male, younger than 25 years old, high school graduates, employed, with a limited monthly income, attended daily promotion tours, consequently did not stay in the city of the water park. Friends and relatives had an important affect on potential visitors to choose the water park. The visitors would like to be in groups and preferred to travel by bus. The main reason of the customers to go to the water park was to have an enjoyable time. One week or less day was very important time span to choose the water park. Most of them had not been to the water park but had been to another water park before.

While easiness of transportation was the most important of the 17 variables

influencing water park visitations, increases in leisure time was the least important one. For male visitors, easiness of transportation was the first significant variable and urbanization was the least significant one. For female visitors, easiness of transportation also was the first significant variable and past experience was the least significant variable. The first significant variable was the same for both genders.

The results of the study showed that increases in leisure time, urbanization, tradition and fashion, past experiences, having private automobiles, arrangement of work hours, increases in the education level of the public, new technologies and inventions, effective advertisement activities, family structure, life expectation and satisfaction, increases in leisure facilities, believes that attendance of leisure activities are worthwhile for health, status of man and woman in society, length of work hours and amount of vacation time, increases in revenues, easiness of transportation are all important factors (average mean scores were between 1.88 to 2.64 which were close to the opinion of “significant”) effecting water park visitations.

To make good business and maximize profits, water park establishments in Turkey or in other parts of the world should; identify their customer profiles and make their marketing efforts accordingly, organize more promotion tours to increase sales, conduct survey studies to learn the levels of customer satisfaction and appreciation and weaknesses for future usage and organize animation activities for their customers to spent enjoyable time.

Friends and relatives are very important components of natural advertisement. Thus, the more the customers visiting the water parks are satisfied, the more the water park establishments make their advertisement naturally and increase their businesses and profits. Billboards, brochures, radio and other advertisement tools will help to attract more visitors to water parks if they are handled properly.

The pricing strategy of water parks also should be reasonable and should meet customers expectations. Free or discounted price bus transportation gives potential water park visitors more chances to visit the water parks. It is possible to increase occupancy rate and make more profits by attracting group customers.

As mentioned before, the leisure industry is one of the biggest industries in the world.

According to Gratton and Kokolakadis (1997), 54 of the world's top 500 companies are leisure companies. A total of 400 million leisure trips are undertaken per year and the average party size is 3.3 persons per trip and half of all parties (46%) travel with their children (Goldner,1997). For the reasons explained in the article, it must be deeply analyzed how people use their leisure time and what kind of factors influence leisure participation for them. The leisure industry is also related to the general health of a person and a community, thus, the studies conducted on leisure will assist to constitute leisure policies and strategies to enhance both individual and community well-being.

The results of the study may be used by leisure planners, policy makers, and all related scholars interested in the leisure industry to improve the leisure programs and reduce the barriers affecting the leisure participation of people. The study showed only a limited number of the respondents' perceived response on survey instruments. Through different cross-tabulations and statistical analyses, it would be possible to investigate more relationships among variables, for example, similar surveys could also be conducted on different sample groups<sup>1</sup> visiting other water parks in Turkey or in other countries for comparative purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> The researcher of this study conducted the same survey on undergraduate students. See for details: DEMİR, Cengiz. "The Impacts of Demographic Variables on the Preference of Leisure Activities Undertaken by Undergraduate Students", Active Leisure and Young People Conference organized by Leisure Studies Association at Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, UK, 13<sup>th</sup> –15<sup>th</sup> July, 2004.

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