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A Brief Query about the Concept of “Check-in” on Social Networks within the Context of Territoriality and Place Identity¹

Mekânsal Kimlik ve Alansallık Davranışı Bağlamında “Check-in” Kavramını Sorgulamak

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Abstract

One of the important consequences of contemporary technological developments is about the changes in our communication socialization experiences. Location and place-sourced connections are seen as the most common usage of social network in mobile platforms. Accordingly, the notion of “check-in”, which can be conceptualized as the sharing of our locations in different places and their notifications through different social networks, becomes significant to discuss varied behavioral experiences within places. Territoriality behavior is an important discussion field, which might be related to the concept of check-in. Moreover, one of the prominent concepts that might be

Öz

Günümüz teknolojik gelişmelerinin en büyük sonuçlarından biri kuşkusuz, iletişim ve sosyalleşme pratiklerimizdeki yenilikler ve değişimlerdir. Bu değişimler, gelişen sosyal paylaşım ağları yoluyla ve akıllı telefonlar aracılığıyla gündelik hayatlarımızın her alanına sızmış durumdadırlar. Konum ve mekân kaynaklı bağlantılar ve bunların paylaşımı da sosyal ağların mobil platformda en yaygın kullanım şekli olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu anlamda, mekânlarda konum paylaşımı ve bunların farklı ağlar üzerinden farklı insanlara bildirimi olarak tanımlanabilen “check-in” kavramı mekân ve mekâna dair birçok davranışsal deneyim bağlamında tartışılabilir.

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interconnected to the term territoriality is the place identity, which is defined as the relationship between an individual and a place where there is the existence of information transmission from the environment to the individual, so that the self-identity of the person is affected and influenced. Accordingly, territoriality behavior with its role in identity construction and support is determinant in formation of the place identity. Within this framework, the aim of this study is to discuss the territoriality behavior by focusing on the concept of place identity through an analysis of “check-in” location on social networks.

Keywords: Territoriality, social networks, check-in, place identity

Sabit, görünür sınırları olan yer ya da coğrafi alan ve bunlara ilişkin deneyimler olarak tanımlanan alansallık davranışının check-in kavramıyla olan ilişkisi bu tartışma mecralarından birisi olarak sunulabilir. Alansallık davranışının çok farklı kavramlarla tanımlandığı bilinmektedir. Bunlar arasında öne çıkan kavramlardan biri olan mekânsal kimlik, kişinin bir mekânla girdiği etkileşim sonucu ortaya çıkan bilgi akışının, kişinin kimliğini etkilemesi ve şekillendirmesi biçiminde tanımlanabilir. Buna göre de alansallık davranışının, kimliğin inşasına, korunmasına ve desteklemesine dönük rolüyle, mekânsal kimlik oluşumunda oldukça belirleyici olduğu söylenebilir. Bu çerçevede, bu çalışmanın amacı alansallık davranışını, mekânsal kimlik kavramına odaklanarak tartışmak ve bunu yaparken de sosyal paylaşım ağlarında “check-in yapmak” olgusunun alansallık davranışıyla olan ilişkisini tartışmaya açmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Alansallık, sosyal ağlar, check-in, mekansal kimlik

Introduction

The discussion about check-in locations about which we are mostly and newly familiar with after the adaptation of smart phones in our lives becomes significant since some of us get used to it very easily whereas the rest of us is hardly familiar with and have some difficulty to admit and also not very good at using all those check-in applications. The major starting point of this theoretical paper is to question how this concept of check-in is related to behavioral processes for individuals through its way of constructing the identity. Hence, the individuals who easily get used to check in and the ones who have some problems of making their location to be revealed can be compared and contrasted within the framework of a theoretical discussion. Accordingly, some behavioral patterns in managing spaces within the field of environmental psychology which are territoriality, place identity and place attachment are theoretically explored and explained. With this theoretical exploration and discussion,

the main goal of this study is to open up future researches to concentrate on experiences of different groups of people about the notion of “check-in”.

One of the important consequences of contemporary technological developments is about the changes in our communication socialization experiences. Those changes infiltrated to our everyday life through social networks and smart phones. Location and place-sourced connections and their sharing are seen as the most common usage of social network in mobile platforms. Accordingly, the notion of “check-in”, which can be conceptualized as the sharing of our locations in different places and their notifications through different social networks, becomes significant to discuss varied behavioral experiences within the scope of places. Technically, users of mobile phones through internet connection, getting access to GPS can share their places where the location has been determined, make comments and share the visual information through these platforms. These kinds of social media platforms are also commercially convenient. The research indicates that, for instance, Foursquare, as being one the most popular of these platforms, has more than 30 million users worldwide and these users “check-in locations” more than 3 billion times every day (Aggarwal, Almeida, Kumaraguru, 2013).

Foursquare, Swarm or some many other applications in mobile platforms but mostly Foursquare are mostly assumed as a new convenient course in globalization arguments (Canpolat, 2013). In those arguments, these applications are considered to be taking into accounts of main topics including transformation of places, global interconnectedness, non-places and deterritorialization. However, as far as it was noticed there are not many researches discussing these apps in terms of behavioral experiences in spaces except the ones revealing some data in terms of socio-demographic differences among different individual groups in using those apps. Therefore, in this paper a discussion platform is tried to be provided about using these kinds of check-in apps and behavioral experiences of individuals about places by focusing on a key behavioral pattern related to managing spaces: territoriality behavior and some connected terms such as place attachment and place identity.

The Interaction between Territoriality Behavior and ‘Check-in’

Territoriality behavior, which can be defined as a pattern of behavior and attitudes held by an individual that is based on control, defense, occupation, and personalization of a definable, visible physical space or an area is an important discussion field within the scope of environmental psychology (Gifford, 2002). Julian Edney, who has many insightful articles about territoriality, relates the term also with marking (placing an object or substance in a space to indicate one’s territorial intentions) and personalization (marking in a manner that indicates one’s identity). Of course, like many other behavioral patterns in managing places territoriality behavior also show some variations according to gender, age, personal factors, social class, culture and ethnic factors etc. For instance, researches on dormitories show that males claim larger territories than females in dormitory rooms (see Mercer and Benjamin, 1980), or males claim larger spaces at work more (Gifford, 2002). Or in terms of cultural differences territoriality is merely expressed differently in different cultures. For instance, in Britain the behavior show itself as in the form of working class reaction to middle class

who reveals territoriality in prefer to live different regions of the cities (Campbell, Munce and Galea, 1982). It is also possible to find many researches which try to understand the territoriality behavior that we experience with objects. For instance, the study indicates that marking plates by touching them about three times at least in a restaurant when the plate was served is also a kind of territoriality behavior in the form of defense and control through marking for familiarity (Truscott, Parmelee and Werner, 1977).

Accordingly, all the studies of territoriality behavior might be characterized in organizing human behavior, promoting a sense of security and order through control, reduced aggression and familiarity which gives a sense of competence that would be impossible if people moved from place to place or from object to object or even from idea to idea. In other words, a sense of identity seems to be developed by simply being spatially separate from others. Theories about genes and evolution explains the territoriality behavior with an instinctual basis and evolutionary heritage (Ardrey, 1966; Taylor, 1988)—of course a big question mark since it seems more factual to focus on habitual occupation of places and how it affects social behavior and cognition of occupants and visitors so that it might be reasonable to explain why people continuously check-in; it seems to be a self-esteem need that we have and becomes easy to satisfy through the help of technology.

According to discussion regarding territoriality it seems that check-in and territoriality behaviors are interconnected and also it seems easy to understand why we check-in locations after we have understood the motivations behind the territoriality. However, of course this is a very naïve perspective since it seems that we are not satisfied and we are continuously to be checking-in with several places. Hence, it becomes inevitable to ask *how is it possible to feel familiar with places while constantly checking-in several locations through our mobile phones in our everyday life and whether it affects the territoriality behavior in a negative manner since it prevents us to develop an attachment with places?*

John Tomlinson (2004) in his work of “Culture and Globalization” indicates the concept of deterritorialization as a significant point in the cultural aspects of globalization and describes process as places are no longer obvious determinants and supporters of our identities. At this point, it can be related to the cultural identity description of Stuart Hall. As he (1998) mentioned cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being' which means it belongs to the future as much as to the past. In other words, cultural aspects of globalization will continue to transform our identities. This might also be related to what Giddens (2012) talks about modernity and modern societies where the relationships are beyond the restrictions of face to face relationships among individuals in traditional societies and moved to a more flexible basis that is far beyond the place and time. In other words, we are moving between places without necessarily having any connections with the physical and social environments of those places but just simply leaving a mark in cyber space by pointing out our trace in it through check-in. However, what about the psychological and social processes of our check-in behavior? Of course the reasons and the preferences behind many different groups of individuals' check-in behavior might be the context of many different researches. Nevertheless, the starting point that we should keep in our minds must be that our preferences with places are directed not only by

individualistic tastes but also by our interaction with social environment (Hubbard, 1996). Even if it is talked about the disappearance and melting of boundaries and limits of time and places, it is still not possible to understand the nature of individual preferences about places independent from the social context of those places. Therefore, it is also impossible to form out a discussion without considering the relationship between the concepts of place and identity. In other words, our cognitive connection with place never disappears, it only becomes something else that we do not know with its changing social context and continuous flow of identities in it.

The Role of Place Identity and Place Attachment in Check-in Behavior

One of the prominent concepts that might be considered to be interconnected to this discussion is the place identity, which is defined as the relationship between an individual and a place where there is the existence of information transmission from the environment to the individual, so that the self-identity of the person is affected and influenced. The interaction of the individual with a place and the experiences within the place assist the construction of the identity (Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff, 1983). Even if it is a mark on a cyber-space, it tells a story about our relationship with that place and about who we are.

Place identity is closely related to the term place attachment that is the idea of developing special bonds with certain settings that have deep meaning for us (Altman and Low, 1992). As Gifford (2002) argues, “[territoriality], place identity and place attachment researches are concerned with the acquisition, interaction and loss of relationship with places that are important to the individual sense of self. [...] Sense of place, an also related concept, varies from **superficial level** (which are mostly experienced by tourists) to the **partial level** of long term visitors, the **personal level** of immigrants to the place and to **cultural level** where people experience the place as an integral part of their entire society (p. 272). In other words, to feel attached to a place is not necessarily to have an affective bond, or cognitive and emotional connection since the scale is too large. At this point, we can argue that the form of attachment that we have developed is turning to a more superficial or partial level through the usage of mobile technology—we walk around the city as if we are tourists or long terms visitors who are trying to capture every moment we experience in the spaces and it seems that check-in behavior helps to form-out this kind of sense of place; just simply another form of territoriality behavior in the form of place (identity) that tries to demonstrate being spatially separate from others through dominance and control in a quantitative manner. It is possible to explain this changed form of territoriality behavior and place identity through the process of cognition as well; even though some scholars (Gazzard, 2011; Scholte, 2008) argue that check-in behavior is processing by being independent from the cognition process since checked-in locations are so transitory and flying that they are not a part of memory to be recalled.

For instance, according to Gazzard (2011) who claim that the with usage of check-in applications physical travel among places no longer appears which result in disappearance of meaning and identity of places as well. This means that for users of check-in apps the major aim is put a mark on the location instead of being physically, cognitively and psychologically to be there. It is only a kind

of ‘listing the places’ where you have been or even just passed by. However, in the light of above mentioned arguments, I believe that this is not the case. Searching for places to be checked-in is also a search for place identity and territoriality where the cognition is at work. Moreover, using way finding properties which are linked to these check-in apps such as ‘google or apple maps’ are also important determinants of cognitive process and for sure sharing this information through social media time-lines, profiles or histories promotes the identity construction process through places.

The ‘process of cognition’, which occurs on both conscious and unconscious level of an individual is an outcome of a relationship between self and environment and with the help of cognitive processes, the experiences with the physical environment become reorganized. The characteristic and role of cognition process are related with the individual’s situation of being aware or not aware with his or her physical and social environment. Proshansky et al. (1983, p.93) discuss this subject in relation with the ‘not in awareness’ property of place identity:

“the individual is generally not aware of the variety of memories, feelings, values and preferences that subsume and influence his or her responses to the physical world. One is simply comfortable in certain kinds of physical settings, prefers particular spaces [...]. This not in awareness property of place identity insofar as its content and influence are concerned is an important and significant feature of its role in shaping the behavior and experience of the person in given physical settings”.

In other words, while realizing check-in behavior, the place identity mostly at the unawareness level is on the agenda where our identity is affected, influenced and constructed continuously. Other than the territoriality behavior that we have been experiencing in some places such as our room in the house or our office where the awareness level with the socio-physical environment is high, it is not necessarily to be that high or might even be completely missing, but still territoriality behavior and place identity can be experienced. It seems that this is what we have been experiencing in check-in behavior

Setha Low (1990) argues that territoriality, place identity and attachment are processes that occur at the individual level as well as at the level of different cultural mechanisms such as genealogy, loss and destruction, ownership, cosmological, pilgrimage and narrative. Among those cultural mechanisms, the narrative refers to stories through which place attachment and identity can develop. They explain the important issues and questions of life in terms of individual-place interactions. Actually this is what we are doing during check-in. In that case at the cultural level we tell stories about places and us. We develop place attachment and place identity at this level as well.

As a Conclusion

According to the above mentioned discussions, it is possible to describe ‘check-in’ behavior as promoting territoriality and place identity at the individual level with superficial unawareness level as well as promoting territoriality and place identity at the cultural narrative level. Therefore,

accordingly it is hard to claim that ‘places are no longer obvious determinants and supporters of our identities’.

Now, even maybe it is necessary to correct the question that was brought to the discussion previously as: whether constantly ‘check-in locations’ affects the territoriality behavior in a negative manner by preventing us to develop an attachment with places? Maybe the answer is ‘no’ since a new form of territoriality behavior and place identity seem to emerge with a reconstructed definition of place where the information transmission from the socio-physical environment to the individual and from individual to the other individuals using the mobile platforms is so intense; maybe not necessarily qualitatively but obviously quantitatively. Moreover, this argument also related to different conceptualization of place identity that give more emphasis some belongingness, distinctiveness, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Tigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996) which seems to suit well with the behavioral conceptualization of check-in. However, such a theoretical analysis inevitably necessitates a detailed field research in the near future. The technological innovation and cultural aspects of globalization will continuously affect and transform the way that we construct our identities and the way that we tell stories. As Stuart Hall (1998) discussed:

“cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.”

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