

RELATIONSHIP AMONG DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND THE PREFERENCES OF WATER PARK VISITATORS: AN IMPLICATION FROM TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

Many scientific studies show that there is a significant relationship among demographic characteristics of individuals and leisure activities undertaken by them. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship among demographic variables and the preference of leisure activities undertaken by visitors at one of the water parks in Turkey. Twenty-six different types of leisure activities were selected by the researcher from various literatures. "Others" option also was given to the respondents to identify other leisure activities which were not given on the questionnaire. The results obtained from this study showed that demographic characteristics of individuals had some degree of impacts on the preference of leisure activities undertaken by water park visitors.

Keywords: Leisure participation, demographic characteristics, impact, water parks.

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.

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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.

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).

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.

Throughout time, the concepts of work and leisure have changed. Tied to many social, political, religious and economic variables, they will continue to change as people and societies define and redefine their philosophies (Weston, 1996, p.17). The concepts of leisure and work are opposite terms (Adler & Adler, 1999).

It is difficult to define the term of leisure because of its subjective, attitudinal nature. The problem starts by distinguishing between work and leisure which may overlap (Mieczkowski, 1990, p.10). Because of this, a universally accepted definition of leisure is not possible. Definition will change according to its purpose and context (Hall & Page, 1999, p.3).

Steaward (1998) identified "the term of leisure as a widely used concept covering a wide-range of mentalistic states." Leisure is a desired change that results in the feeling of joy (Freysinger, 1995; Kelly & Kelly, 1994). Samdahl (1991) identified leisure as a kind of freedom. Western thought considers leisure as freedom to choose particular activities that

create meaning in life (Russell & Frances, 1996). Leisure means different things to different people. It refers to experiences that are freely chosen and intrinsically motivated (James, 2000). To sum up, the concept of leisure covers free and independent time (Khan, 1997).

People participate in many different leisure activities during their leisure time. Going to the cinema/theatre, listening to radio/type recorder, reading books/newspapers/magazines, watching TV, attending sport activities, and travelling are among the leisure activities people frequently participate in. In the following section, the impacts of some of demographic variables influencing leisure participation are discussed.

SOME OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES INFLUENCING LEISURE PARTICIPATION

Many researches show that there is a strong relationship among the participation of leisure activities and demographic variables. For example, Alexandris and Carrol (1997) determined some relationships among recreational sport participation and demographic variables such as gender, age, education, and marital status.

Thompson (2001) examined demographic variables (gender, age, educational level) associated with internet usage activities (defined in terms of messaging, browsing, downloading and purchasing). Results showed that males were more likely to engage in downloading and purchasing activities while females were more likely to engage in messaging activities. Younger users engage in messaging and downloading activities to a greater extent than older users.

In the following below, some of demographic variables influencing leisure participation are discussed.

Gender

Gender roles were discussed with the highest overall frequency among cases. Gender roles were found to be a highly important form of social influence and correspondingly, a meaningful source of constraints (Culp, 1998). As a variable, gender has been important in helping to document differences between the social conditions of women and men

(Henderson, 1996).

Leisure participation is different by gender. Because, the issues facing men and women are different (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Jackson & Henderson, 1995). According to Moccia (2000), gender plays an important role in shaping the spatial allocation of time. Altergoot and McCreedy (1993) found that gender-marital status influenced leisure participation.

In a study conducted by Hudson (2000), significant differences between men and women were discovered. It was indicated that women were more constraint than men in their leisure behavior (Henderson & Bialeschki, 93; Shaw, 94). Specifically, women perceived significantly higher levels of intrapersonal constraints. Alexandris and Carrol (1997) identified that women perceived more intensively intrapersonal constraints, such as shyness, lack of skills to participate in leisure activities.

It is generally believed that men feel relatively free in engaging in desired leisure activities (Larson & Richards, 1994). Studies showed that males had more leisure opportunities than females (Bolla & Harrington,1991; Carrington, Chivers, & Williams, 1987). Many women believed that enough chances were not given to attend leisure activities (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991). Henderson (1995) revealed that women did not have enough family support and freedom to participate in leisure activities.

Education

The type and length of education influence the type and frequency of leisure participation. Education, especially leisure education, helps individuals to organize their leisure time efficiently. Educated people are more interested in their physical and mental health than non- or less educated people. For example, Sağcan (1986,85) pointed out that the desire to see new places and new things are influenced according to the level of education.

Marital Status

Marital status of individuals also influences leisure participation. In general, married people have more responsibilities than single people. It is believed that women have less

opportunity to participate in leisure activities than men because of the role of women at home such as taking care of children and the household (Henderson, 1990). Social, political, economic, sexual, and religious discrimination filters into all realms of women's lives personally, interpersonally, and systemically (Pohl, Borrie, & Patterson, 2000).

Women with children do indeed work a full “second shift” (Hochschild, 1989). Having baby, general health conditions of individuals and their spouses, family structure, status of men and women in society and at home are among the factors constraining married people to participate in leisure activities.

Occupation

Work and leisure time are opposite terms influencing leisure participation. Some of the factors such as adjustment of working hours, flex time at work, reduction of time spent at home and work caused by technological development (Molitor, 2000) have some degree of impacts on the preference of leisure participation. While working at a job reduces the time to spent for leisure activities, on the other hand, the money generated from a job makes some expensive leisure activities such as golfing, skiing, and hunting more affordable for individuals.

Income

Income level of individuals is closely related to the type and participation of leisure activities (Kroll, 2000). For example, some types of leisure activities not requiring high expenditures such as watching TV, listening to the radio, reading books, magazines, and going to the cinema are preferred more among individuals, but some leisure activities such as travelling, driving a car require spending some a larger amount of money are preferred less by most people. The amount of money that people can spend for leisure activities generally depends on the disposable income of people. Lower-income people mostly prefer to attend the basic leisure activities which do not exceed their budget.

Age

The age of a person has a very important impact on leisure participation, but its impact may vary depending on the people, and the activity preferred. For example, while young people prefer to attend more energetic leisure activities such as energetic sport activities, older people prefer relatively more secure activities requiring less risk such as walking.

METHODOLOGY

The water park where this study was conducted is located in the province of Aydın, Turkey. It is the biggest water park in the province of Aydın.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of two sections. The first section focused on demographic questions which included the participant's gender, age, marital status, education, occupation, employment and income. The second section aimed to learn the impacts of demographic variables on the preference of leisure activities undertaken by the water park visitors.

The study attempted to identify the research question: "What types of leisure activities do the water park visitors participate in during their leisure time. Is there any relationship among demographic characteristics and the preference of leisure activities undertaken by the water park visitors?"

Twenty-six different types of leisure activities were selected by the researcher from various literatures. "Others" option also was given to the respondents to identify other leisure activities which were not given on the questionnaire.

Three hundred and thirty visitors were selected and the data was collected using cluster sample of visitors using the water park on 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.

FINDINGS

Demographic Variables

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 26-23, 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.

Determination of Relationships Among Demographic Variables and Leisure Participation

In this part of the study, relationships among demographic variables and leisure participation were discussed. Tables 2 to 8x were prepared in rank order by frequencies. Water park visitors were asked; “what types of leisure activities do you participate in your leisure time?”

Table 2 shows that some types of leisure activities such as listening to radio/type recorder, watching TV, shopping, going to the disco/bar, traveling, going to the cinema/theatre, and reading books/newspapers/magazines were undertaken by many water park visitors, other leisure activities such as gardening, visiting museums/ruins, individual repairing jobs, preying, playing musical instruments, non-governmental activities, and attending conferences were preferred less by water park visitors.

In the following, the relationships among demographic variables and leisure participation were analyzed by using cross-tabulations.

Gender-Leisure Participation

Gender roles were discussed with the highest overall frequency among cases. Gender is one of the most important factors influencing leisure participation. Table 3 shows the type and the number of leisure activities undertaken by gender.

Listening to the radio/type recorder was the first leisure activity for male visitors, female visitors preferred to go shopping first. The last preferred leisure activity for male visitors was gardening, and the last preferred leisure activity for female visitors was individual repairing jobs.

Some leisure preferences of water park visitors showed significant differences in rank order undertaken by gender. For example: “Reading books/newspapers/magazines placed as the 3rd activity for females and placed as the 17th activity for males. “Driving car” placed as the 10th activity for males and placed as the 19th activity for females. “Attending sport activities” placed as the 6th activity by males, and placed as the 18th activity by females. “Visiting friends/relatives” placed as the 5th activity by females and placed as the 11th activity by males.

It is possible to extend the given examples for comparative usage. These results evidence the strong relationships among gender and the type and number of leisure activities undertaken by water park visitors.

Marital Status-Leisure Participation

Marital status is one of the most important factors influencing leisure participation. Table 4 shows the type and the number of leisure activities undertaken by marital status.

Watching TV was the first leisure activity for married visitors, single visitors preferred to listen to the radio/type recorder first. The last preferred leisure activity for married visitors was playing musical instruments, and the last preferred leisure activity for single visitors was gardening.

Some leisure preferences of water park visitors showed significant differences in rank order undertaken by marital status. For example: “Visiting friend/relatives placed as the 2nd

activity by married visitors and placed as the 12th activity by single visitors. “Listening to the radio/type recorder” placed as the 1st activity by single visitors and placed as the 7th activity by married visitors. “Attending music concerts/festivals/fairs” placed as the 6th activity by single visitors, and placed as the 13th activity by married visitors. “Going to the disco/bars” placed as the 3rd activity by single visitors and placed as the 11th activity by married visitors. “Staying alone in the environment” placed as the 18th activity by single visitors and placed as the 5th activity by married visitors. “Reading books/newspapers/magazines” placed as the 3rd activity by married visitors and placed as the 9th activity by single visitors.

It is possible to extend the given examples for comparative usage. These results evidence the strong relationships among marital status and the type and number of leisure activities undertaken by water park visitors.

Income- Leisure Participation

Income is one of the most important factors influencing leisure participation. In general, lower-income people prefer to attend the leisure activities which do not exceed their budget. Table 5 and 5x show the type and the number of leisure activities undertaken by income group. The first preferred leisure activity of income groups was; listening to the radio/type recorder for I1, listening to the radio/type recorder for I2, shopping for I3, watching TV for I4, going to the disco/bar for I5. The last preferred leisure activity of income groups was; gardening for I1, individual repairing jobs for I2, visiting museums/ruins for I3, attending conferences for I4, and gardening for I5.

Listening to the radio/type recorder, watching TV, and shopping placed as the preferred leisure activities by water park visitors; gardening, individual repairing jobs, and attending conferences placed as the least preferred activities.

Some leisure preferences of water park visitors showed significant differences in rank order undertaken by income groups. For example: “Going to the disco/bar” placed as the 1st activity by I5, and placed as the 6th activity by I1, placed as the 5th activity by I2, placed as the 3rd activity by I3 and placed as the 21st activity by I4. “Listening to the radio/type recorder placed as the 1st activity by I1 and I2, placed as the 2nd activity by I3, placed as the 5th

activity by I4, and placed as the 13th activity by I5.

It is possible to extend the given examples for comparative usage. In summary, These results evidence the strong relationships among the income of water park visitors and the preference, type and number of leisure activities undertaken by them.

Employment-Leisure Participation

Having a job gives people opportunity to attend the leisure activities requiring money to spend. That is why having an occupation affects the preference, type and number of leisure activities undertaken by people.

Employment is one of the most important factors affecting leisure participation. Table 6 shows the type and the number of leisure activities undertaken by employment. Shopping was the first leisure activity for employed water park visitors, unemployed visitors preferred to watch TV first. The last preferred leisure activity for employed visitors was gardening, and the last preferred leisure activity for unemployed visitors was individual repairing jobs.

Some leisure preferences of water park visitors showed significant differences in rank order undertaken by employment. For example: “Attending sport activities” placed as the 9th activity by unemployed visitors, and placed as the 15th activity by employed visitors. “Playing musical instruments” placed as the 25th activity by employed visitors, and placed as the 17th activity by unemployed visitors. “Staying alone in the environment” placed as the 10th activity by employed visitors and placed as the 21st activity by unemployed visitors. “Attending music concerts/festivals/fairs” placed as the 12th activity by employed visitors and placed as the 5th activity by unemployed visitors.

It is possible to extend the given examples for comparative usage. In summary, These results evidence the strong relationships among the employment status of water park visitors and the preference, type and number of leisure activities undertaken by them.

Education- Leisure Participation

Education is among the most important factors affecting leisure participation. Table 7 shows the relationships between the education level of water park visitors and the type and

number of leisure activities undertaken by them.

The first preferred leisure activity by education level was; listening to the radio/type recorder for E1, shopping for E2, listening to the radio/type recorder for E3, and shopping for E4. The last preferred leisure activity by education level was; attending conferences for E1, visiting the museums/ruins for E2, non-governmental activities for E3, hobby activities for E4.

Some leisure preferences of water park visitors showed significant differences in rank order undertaken by education level. For example: “Attending sport activities” placed as the 5th activity by E1, placed as the 15th activity by E2, placed as the 18th activity by E3 and placed as the 15th activity by E4. “Going to watch sport activities” placed as the 12th activity by E1, placed as the 19th activity by E2, placed as the 20th activity by E3 and placed as the 21st activity by E4. “Playing musical instruments” placed as the 14th activity by E1, placed as the 22nd activity by E2, placed as the 23rd activity by E3 and placed as the 19th activity by E4. “Praying” placed as the 15th activity by E1, placed as the 23rd activity by E2, placed as the 21st activity by E3 and placed as the 24th activity by E4. “Attending cultural events” placed as the 22nd activity by E1, placed as the 23rd activity by E2, placed as the 12th activity by E3 and placed as the 13th activity by E4.

It is possible to extend the given examples for comparative usage. These results evidence the strong relationships among the education level of water park visitors and the preference, type and number of leisure activities undertaken by them.

Age- Leisure Participation

Age also has some degree of impacts on leisure preferences. Table 8 and 8x show the relationships among age groups and the type and number of leisure activities undertaken by water park visitors.

The first preferred leisure activity by age groups was; watching TV for A1, listening to the radio/type recorder for A2, going to the disco/bar for A3, visiting friends/relatives for A4, and going to the cinema/theatre for A5.

The last preferred leisure activity by age groups was; attending conferences for A1, gardening for A2, gardening for A3, playing musical instruments for A4 and attending conferences for A5.

Some leisure preferences of water park visitors showed significant differences in rank order undertaken by age groups. For example: "Attending sport activities" placed as the 4th activity by A1, placed as the 13th activity by A2, placed as the 15th activity by A3 and placed as the 15th activity by A4, and placed as the 7th activity by A5. "Playing musical instruments" placed as the 5th activity by A1, placed as the 23rd activity by A2, placed as the 21st activity by A3, placed as the 26th activity by A4 and placed as the 22nd activity by A5. "Going to the disco/bar placed as the 11th activity by A1, placed as the 4th activity by A2, placed as the 1st activity by A3, placed as the 23rd activity by A4, and placed as the 14th activity by A5.

It is possible to extend the given examples for comparative usage. These results evidence the strong relationships among the age group of water park visitors and the preference, type and number of leisure activities undertaken by them.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to a study, as female graduate's incomes increase, the hours women spend on household tasks decreases somewhat. This suggests either an inverse relationship between the time available for household tasks and income or a direct relationship between women's income and the use of purchase services. This suggests at least that household tasks are still considered to be women's work, since only if women's income increases are fewer than household task hours performed (Merridee, Bujaki & Carol, 1998).

Harrison and Rainer (1992) found some relationship between gender and level of computer skills with males more likely to have better computer skills. It was found that males are more likely to be interested in learning about computers (and by extension, the internet) compared to females (Qureshi & Hoppel, 1995). Zeffane and Cheek's (1993) also found that age is negatively correlated with computer usage. Studies have shown that internet users tend to be young adults (Straits Times, 1996).

Individual sports and outdoor activities are undertaken more by men in both early and

late middle age, whereas fitness activities are more prevalent amongst women. Of the popular specific activities, swimming, social dancing, and walking show relatively little differentiation by gender but all (except social dancing) are more prevalent amongst those in more favorable socio-economic circumstances (Hunt, Ford & Mutrie, 2001). Young women were less likely to engage in active pursuits in and out of school, and were more critical of physical education (Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000).

As seen from the literature cited in this study and the results of this research, there are many factors influencing leisure participation of individuals at different significance levels. The study examined only 6 different demographic variables at once (gender, income, education, marital status, employment, and age) influencing leisure participation.

It was determined that while listening to the radio/type recorder, watching TV, shopping, going to the disco/bar, and travelling were among the most preferred leisure activities by water park visitors; some leisure activities such as gardening, visiting museums/ruins, individual repairing jobs, preying and playing musical instruments were placed among the least preferred leisure activities. The results from the research indicated that demographic variables had some degree of impacts on the type and number of leisure activities undertaken by water park visitors.

The preference and enjoyment of people are changing every day. Leisure industries such as the tourism and recreation industries are very big industries and are growing rapidly day by day. That is why it is necessary to know how people spend their leisure time and what kind of factors influence their preferences. These results highlights the entrepreneurs working in the leisure industry to take necessary actions for their customers about how they spend their leisure time efficiently to make their life happy, meaningful and healthy.

These results are also consistent with the results of the studies conducted by (Merridee, Bujaki & Carol, 1998; Qureshi & Hoppel, 1995; Zeffane & Cheek's, 1993; Hunt, Ford & Mutrie, 2001; Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000; Thompson, 2001; Alexandris & Carrol, 1997; Demir, 2004). The results showed only a limited number of respondents' perceived response on the survey instruments. By making different analyses, it is possible to find more relationships among variables, and will be more helpful to understand the impacts of demographic variables on leisure participation. Similar surveys also should be conducted

on different sample groups¹ in other leisure establishments in Turkey or in other countries for comparative usage.

¹ The researcher of this study conducted the same survey on undergraduate students. It was indicated that demographic variables had some degree of impacts on the type and number of leisure activities undertaken by 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, 13th –15th July, 2004.

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