Özgün Araştırma / Original Article

Twitter in the Context of Oldenburg's Third Place Theory

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ABSTRACT

Third Places are spaces where people can participate in a social network by discussing everyday events with the community, apart from home or work, as Oldenburg (1989) defined. Coffee shops, libraries, parks, and open spaces are the third classically defined places by Ray Oldenburg. According to Oldenburg's definition, third places have the features which are objective, inclusive, communicative, accessible, having a regular visitor, prominent in social ties, providing fun, psychological comfort and emotional support. Along with developing internet technologies, virtual environments have emerged that match Oldenburg's definition. By creating profiles on social networking sites, people can follow or share topics of interest to them. Twitter, a social networking site (SNS), provides users with a virtual environment that allows them to talk and discuss with other users. This study aims to consider Twitter in the context of Oldenburg's Third Place Theory. In this context, firstly, the concept of third place is defined in the literature. Then, the usage areas of virtual media and social networking sites and the opportunities they offer to the people are revealed. As a case study, the extent to which the virtual environment provided by Twitter provides the opportunity for the Third-Place concept, and it conforms to the parameters defined by Oldenburg, was discussed. Twitter meets the eight features of Oldenburg's third place. In the context of long distances, economic crises, limited time and the opportunities offered by technology; it has been demonstrated that interest in the virtual environments for the third place and socialization needs of the people will increase gradually.

Keywords: Third Place, Cyberspace, Social Network Sites, Twitter

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Oldenburg'un Üçüncü Yer Teorisi Bağlamında Twitter

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This article was checked by *Plagium Premium.* Similarity Index 0,6%

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* Sorumlu yazar

ÖZ

Oldenburg'a (1989) göre *üçüncü yer* olarak tanımlanan mekanlar; ev ya da iş haricinde, kişilerin gündelik olayları toplum ile tartışarak bir sosyal ağa dahil olabilecekleri mekanlardır. Kahve dükkanları, kütüphaneler, parklar ve açık alanlar Ray Oldenburg'un tanımladığı klasik anlamdaki üçüncü yerlerdir. Oldenburg'un tanımına göre üçüncü yerler; tarafsız, kapsayıcı, iletişime müsait, erişilebilir, müdavimleri olan, sosyal bağlarla öne çıkan, eğlenceli, psikolojik rahatlık ve duygusal destek sağlaması özelliklerini taşımaktadır. Gelişen internet teknolojileri ile birlikte Oldenburg'un tanımına uyan sanal ortamlar ortaya çıkmıştır. Kişiler, sosyal ağ sitelerinde profiller oluşturarak, ilgilerini çeken konuları takip edebilir ya da bu konular hakkında paylaşımda bulunabilirler. Sosyal ağ sitelerinden Twitter, kullanıcılarına diğer kullanıcılarla konuşma ve tartışma fırsatı sunan sanal bir ortam sağlamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Twitter'ın Oldenburg'un Üçüncü Yer Teorisi bağlamında ele alınmasıdır. Bu bağlamda öncelikle üçüncü yer teorik olarak tanımlanmıştır. Daha sonra sanal ortam ve sosyal ağ sitelerinin günümüzde kullanım alanları ve kişilere sundukları fırsatlar ortaya konulmuştur. Vaka çalışması olarak Twitter'ın sağladığı sanal ortamın, üçüncü yer kavramına ne ölçüde fırsat sunduğu ve Oldenburg'un tanımladığı parametrelere ne ölçüde uygunluk gösterdiğinin tartışması yapılmıştır. Twitter'ın Oldenburg'un tanımladığı üçüncü yerlerin sekiz özelliğini fazlasıyla karşıladığı; uzak mesafeler, ekonomik krizler, sınırlı zaman ve teknolojinin sunduğu olanaklar bağlamında kişilerin üçüncü yer ve sosyalleşme ihtiyaçları için sanal ortama duyulan ilginin giderek artacağı bu çalışmanın sonuçlarıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Üçüncü Yer, Sanal Ortam, Sosyal Ağ Siteleri, Twitter

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INTRODUCTION

George Simmel first introduced the concept of *sociability* in 1949, and then it was discussed in the literature (Simmel, 1949). Communication, which is the primary tool of socialization, is one of the low social level needs of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which enables us to relate to others (Dessler, 2008). It can be said that the social sharing of people with other people is a human need. Many researchers have studied the physical space necessary for interpersonal communication, socialization, and sharing. Ray Oldenburg introduced the *Third Place Theory* in his 1989 book The Great Good Place. Developing Internet technologies have changed the way we socialize like many of our habits in our daily lives. In the context of the technological opportunities offered, the use of virtual media, and the practice of socializing in virtual media have increased considerably in recent years. In addition to the fact that all different age groups enter the virtual environment with different densities, young adults aged 18-30 are most active in the virtual environment (Markoc & Sari Haksever, 2019). The main reasons why people are present online are (1) communicating with existing social networks, (2) expanding their social networks (Gastelum & Whattam, 2013), (3) getting news on the agenda (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Phua et al. ., 2011; Rathnayake & Winter, 2017), (4) to learn about subjects they have not yet experienced (Borja, 2005; Cox & McLeod, 2014), (5) to have a pleasant time, (6) to feed in personal interests (Papic & Noonan) (2001), (7) to develop their creativity (Lau et al., 2016) (Tuan & Tu, 2013; Wood et al., 2014).

The concept of Third Place, which was put forward in the literature research part of this study, started to find its place in a virtual environment with the developing Internet technologies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Even during their traditional face-to-face third-place experiences, they also connect to social networking sites and maintain parallel social networking (Kleinman, 2007; Karababa & Ger, 2011; Rosenbaum et al., 2007). Also, some people come together with their social networks rather than physical space in a virtual environment. This situation is achieved through the favorable environment offered by social networking sites in the virtual environment. Ease of access is the primary reason for people who prefer virtual environments to physical space for socializing (Markoc & Sari Haksever, 2019). According to the characteristics of the environments offered by the social networking sites in the virtual environment, people prefer the social networking site that suits them.

In this study, firstly, the Third Place concept in the literature has been revealed in the context of previous discussions. Afterward, information about the opportunities and usage areas of virtual media and social networking sites is presented. One of the most widely used social networking sites around the world is Twitter. Twitter provides users with the opportunity to set up an account, create a profile, track other accounts through this profile, or allow other accounts to follow them. Twitter allows users to share microblogs with a maximum of 140 characters, and these are called tweets. The most talked-about topics are called trending topics that are presenting the agenda, and a pound (#hashtag) sign is added to the beginning of the word or phrase to enter it as a keyword. The case study discusses the extent to which the virtual environment provided by Twitter serves opportunities for the Third Place concept and how well it complies with the parameters defined by Ray Oldenburg in 1989. And as a result, the potential of Twitter to become the Third Place has been demonstrated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Third Place Theory

The idea of public space outside of home and work has attracted many researchers from different disciplines for many years. Wechsberg (1966) described coffee shops as offering peace to a person. Goffman (1971) mentioned the benefits of public spaces for individuals and societies. However, for the first time in his work *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg (1989) introduced the definition of *Third Place* outside of home and work. According to Ray Oldenburg's theory the first significant place in one's life is home, the second is work, and the third is the public spaces where they provide social interaction (Oldenburg, 1999).

A person's background and experiences can affect how he or she defines a third place (Rosebaum, 2007). The Third Place is (1) a neutral place that no one owns it, (2) it is inclusive for all people, (3) it enables

socialization, communicating is the main activity (4) it is accessible, (5) it stands out with its regulars, (6) it lives with the social bonds (7) it provides fun (8) it provides psychological comfort and emotional support (Oldenburg, 1999; Mehta & Bosson, 2010). The community center, cafes, bars, restaurants, shopping centers, markets, hairdressing salons, shops, recreation areas, sports facilities, art centers, places of worship, libraries, open spaces, the coastline are the third places identified in previous studies (Jeffres et al. 2009; Rosenbaum et al., 2007; Crick, 2011).

Cheang (2002) emphasized that coffee shops are the third most commonly used place. According to Rosenbaum et al. (2007), some third places have the potential to provide more psychological support to some people from their homes. People who cannot afford to meet the cost of the office or use the coffee shop as a remote office, spend the whole day and workdays regularly in the coffee shops. Corporate companies' remote working opportunities on certain days of the week also contributed to the use of coffee shops as working places.

Fornier and Lee (2009) stated that the third space could only be successful if it develops a sense of belonging with the consumer. Slater and Koo (2010) defined art galleries, museums, and exhibitions as new third places. Hawkins and Ryan (2013) showed that festivals could be defined as the Third Place.

Mikunda and Blomen (2006) stated that third places are generally commercial enterprises and attract young people's interest more than other age groups. Lee and Ma (2012) found that habits such as working remotely from the office increased the use of coffee shops, restaurants, and hotel lobbies. DeCava (2006) stated that with the support of wireless networks and electrical power, these places became very frequently used sites for people.

While Oldenburg's definitions are still valid, the concept of Third Place has started to take place in virtual environments together with the developing Internet technologies. In this sense, besides the traditional Third Place concept, a new Third Place concept has come up (Crick, 2011).

Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) consider online gaming and social networking sites as alternative third places. These environments can be described as the Third Places of today because they provide personalization, permeability, accessibility, and comfort.

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Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

In his proposition in 1993, Batty stated that "virtual environment is an area within the traditional physical space that can become more important than the physical space itself Bat (Batty, 1993). With developing technologies, the virtual environment is becoming more realistic (Golub, 2010). Although symbolic representations such as various maps, photographs, and videotapes also contribute to acquiring knowledge about physical space (Witmer, Bailey, Knerr & Parsons, 1996), the only way to experience a physical space is to be there. The virtual environment has features such as real-time operation, allowing feedback to the user, interacting with the users, and having three-dimensional spatial modeling (Whyte, 2002). The virtual environment is a space that is produced by computer instead of an experienced physical environment, although it is different from the physical world. (Plunkett, 2011). Because digital technologies make accessing the virtual environment more comfortable, people communicate with each other in a virtual environment more than ever (Pittman & Reich, 2016; Windahl et al., 2008). Therefore, it can be said that the new place concept will take place in a virtual world in the future, in which everyone can participate easily and the benefit / cost ratio is high (Guttentag, 2010).

Among all age groups, young adults are mostly online and have the highest virtual experience (Markoc & Sari Haksever, 2019). Today, young adults spend more of their time in a virtual environment with friends of their age (Ling & Yttri, 2005).

Young people feel more comfortable in the virtual environment due to the lack of real-life limitations and norms. Therefore, in a virtual environment, people are more comfortable in presenting their real ideas than they are in real life (Postmes & Spears, 2002; Chan, 2014). On social networking sites, users create personal profiles, present their personalities in the social profiles they define and meet with other people through this profile. Another reason why people are present in the virtual environment is to have experiences they have not yet experienced and to obtain new information. It is possible to follow the agenda by following various news sources or profiles (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Phua et al., 2011).

One of the most widely used areas of the virtual environments is the Social Networking Sites (SNSs). Young people frequently visit SNSs, and SNSs provide the opportunity for the people they follow to intervene in their daily lives. Social Networking Sites (SAS) are a variety of virtual environments where users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content. In other words, Social Networking Sites are web sites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share via the Internet (Schlosser, 2009).

The use of social networking sites (microblogs, blogs, chat platforms, various forms such as photo and video sharing) is increasing all over the world (Gastelum & Whattam, 2013). SNSs are economical and easily accessible tools that enable people to share and access information. They provide support cooperation for a common goal and provide opportunities for establishing new friendships or relationships (Jue et al., 2010). With developing mobile technology, Social Networking Sites have become an indispensable part of daily life as they bring satisfaction to their users in the context of socialization (Elhai et al., 2017). Social Networking Sites provide an environment for people to meet and share with other people. Users share the content they create on the social network they define in the environments provided by the social networking sites. Facebook is the world's most widely used Social Networking Site, established in 2004, which receives around 700:55 visits daily, lasting approximately 10:52 pm (Jin & Phua, 2014).

SNSs not only provide environments to users to express themselves in their social network but also provide opportunities to organize political activism (Rathnayake & Winter, 2017), transfer public opinion to large firms, increase participation, reduce training costs (Gallego et al., 2016; Papic & Noonan, 2001). SNSs enable young adults to develop themselves in subjects that they have not yet experienced yet (Borja, 2005), conduct research in areas of interest (Cox & McLeod, 2014), increase their creativity (Lau et al., 2016), and develop their language and reading skills (Tuan, 2013; Wood et al., 2014). The person, who actively shares in a group on Social Networking Sites (Cappello, 2019) and follows the lives of others, develops a sense of belonging to that community (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013; O'Leary, Wilson & Metiu, 2014).

The main difference between real-life and virtual communication is the option of being anonymous. Anonymity encourages people to reveal their marginal aspects and to provide satisfaction by communicating with other marginal groups in which they share common ideas. In this context, on Social Networking Sites, some people create profiles with real names, while others prefer to be anonymous (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013; McKenna & Bargh, 1998). This anonymity not only allows people to be more free on their social networks but also enable them to improve their marginal aspects.

With developing information technologies (IT), the virtual environment has become related to all our daily habits, and this has brought some changes in the places offered for our socialization needs.

The Changing Meaning of Third Place with IT

After Ray Oldenburg introduced the concept of the third place in 1989, many researchers worked on the third place. In the context of Putnam's social capital theory, the third place is significant for the sustainability of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Since 1989, along with technological developments, our daily habits have changed as well as the places we need to socialize, follow the agenda, learn, and share. Nowadays, access to the virtual environment has become quite comfortable with widely used smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, and computers (Anacleto et al., 2013).

In line with the opportunities offered by Internet technologies, the meaning of the physical space has changed; the virtual environment has been used as an alternative to physical space for many functions. Physical space, which was an absolute necessity for meeting with other people before, has begun to leave its place to the virtual environment (Turkle 2011).

Young adults think that even the places they prefer as a third place should provide wireless Internet. This situation is an expression of the fact that young people are in a virtual environment in parallel with the use of physical space (Caki & Kızıltepe, 2017).

Behind the presentation of the virtual environments as an alternative to the physical space, there are superior features of the virtual environments. These features can be listed as; (1) access to the virtual

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environments is quite easy, (2) people can present themselves with profiles, which they designed in virtual environments, (3) they can live their marginal aspects with anonymous profiles, (4) the rules of real-life do not exist in the virtual environment; (6) the low price / benefit ratio provided by the fact that there is no charge for entering the virtual environment and presenting themselves here (Markoc & Sari Haksever, 2019). Twitter is a widely used social networking site, although not all over the world. The hypothesis that Twitter meets the requirements of Oldenburg's third place theory has been tested in the case study. Because it provides the opportunity to express opinions, allow other people to participate in the conversation, and is the social networking site that people follow most for up-to-date and unbiased news.

CASE STUDY

Method

Twitter was taken as the case study. The possibility of Oldenburg's Third Place Theory on SNSs, which has moved to a new dimension with the opportunities offered by developing Internet technologies was investigated. Our existing case studies' results about why people use Twitter, showed similarity with Oldenburg and the Third Place features defined by subsequent researchers. The questionnaire was implemented in May-June 2019 with a sampling of 18-30 age group (n = 285) in Besiktas district of Istanbul. The results are as listed below (1) how much time they spend per day on social networking sites, (2) which social networking site they use most and (3) were asked why they prefer this social networking site. In line with respondents' answers, how much Twitter fulfilled Third Place features were discussed.

Twitter

Twitter (2012) is a popular social networking site where users can share 140-character "tweets" that can be linked to other websites or photo and video files. Twitter is one of the sources that offer users the satisfaction of receiving unbiased and up-to-date news as well as sharing shortly defined as microblogging (Bollen et al., 2011; Hull & Lewis, 2014; Sakaki et al., 2010; Tumasian et al., 2010; Ausserhofer & Maireder) Watson, 2015). Twitter also guides the user's thoughts (Lee & Jang, 2011) and provides varying levels of social satisfaction based on approved accounts that people follow (Frederick et al., 2012). Twitter receives 131M visits daily, which lasts approximately 9:14 (www.similarweb.com). The most popular social networking site among adults in the US is YouTube, with a usage rate of 73%. Following Youtube, Facebook is used in 69%, Instagram 37%, Pinterest 28%, Twitter 22%, Whatsapp 22%. Again in the USA, the most widely used social networking site for young adults aged 18-24 is Youtube, with a 94% usage rate. Following Youtube, Facebook is used in 80%, Snapchat 78%, Instagram 71%, and Twitter 45%.

Data

According to the results of the survey conducted with young adults (*n* = 285) in Istanbul, the most used social networking sites were Instagram with 55%, Twitter with 26%, Whatsapp with 6%, Youtube with 6%, and Facebook with 1%. When users are asked about their use of social networking sites; I have content that interests me to get news, I feed on visuality, I find it fun, I have a good time, I offer the opportunity to follow the agenda, I communicate, I find it charming, I find it free, I provide easy access, I help myself in developing, I socialize, I find it popular, I find it pleasant, I find it up to date, I find it funny, I share, I feel addictive, I feed on diversity, it offers opportunities for discoveries, arouses curiosity, I find it enjoyable, I find it educational. Young adults (1) spend more time in the virtual environments than in any physical space; (2) maintain their virtual friendship in real life; (3) enter the virtual environment when they feel lonely; (4) they are more open and transparent in virtual environments than they are in real life; (5) behave as they come from within the virtual environment; (6) also come together with their real-life friends in a virtual environment. The relationships of young people (7) with social networking sites affect their daily lives and (8) these sites are an indispensable part of their lives. Young adults (9) had a more comprehensive social network in real life through social networking sites; (10) frequently control the flow of information and content on social networking sites;

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(11) regularly share their accounts on social networking sites; (12) dominate the agenda on social networking sites.

TWITTER AS A THIRD PLACE

When the data obtained from literature and empirical are evaluated in the context of Putnam's social capital theory, the third place is significant for the sustainability of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Third places, where people come together with other people and maintain their social relations, add new connections to their social networks and make everyday life enjoyable, provide positive outcomes both psychologically on a personal scale and sociologically on a sociological level. Virtual social networking sites are also offered as an easy, affordable, and inclusive alternative to the need for people to be in Third Places.

Third places in the virtual environment are online spaces that enable communication even in long distances and offer you the opportunity to get together with your existing social network in seconds (Boyd, 2006). It has become a necessity as well as being a preference in social networking sites that allow people to maintain close ties with the broader audience. Especially young adults (18-30) maintain their almost all daily habits in relation to the virtual environment (Markoc & Sari Haksever, 2019).

The social networking site Twitter, chosen as a case study, is considered in the context of eight features Ray Oldenburg defines for the Third Place concept. These features are: they (1) are neutral places that no one owns, (2) are inclusive for all people, (3) allow for socialization, and communication is the main activity (4)are accessible, (5) have regulars, (6) stand out with social bonds, (7) are funny (8) provide psychological comfort and emotional support (Oldenburg, 1999; Mehta & Bosson, 2010).

In this context, Twitter is neutral and inclusive because it provides a virtual environment to millions of people from different geographies, socio-economic structures, cultures, and disciplines. On Twitter, people express their opinions with tweets, and others can respond to them. This form of communication provides an environment conducive to socialization. Access to Twitter is easy with electronic devices such as computers, mobile phones, and tablets, both from the browser page and applications designed for different operating systems. The person can follow the agenda by communicating with his social network in seconds. To access Twitter, people do not need to leave their homes, do not need to go any distance, and do not pay any fees. Twitter has an environment and has generated phenomena within it. They have an agenda-setting role and are influential in the environment because millions follow them. This situation has led to the fact that Twitter has its community and regulars. Because it is a virtual environment, Twitter is becoming more attractive and attractive with social networks instead of offering real opportunities. The content produced on Twitter is very creative and fun. The reason why many people spend time entering Twitter is to increase their emotional state with entertaining content. It can be said that Twitter provides users psychological comfort and emotional support.

CONCLUSION

In terms of the eight characteristics of Ray Oldenburg's Third Place Theory, it can be said that Twitter meets the Third Place requirement. In the context of these eight features, it is seen that Twitter has a higher potential than a third place in the classical sense. In this study, it has been demonstrated that virtual environments will become more widespread in the future for the third place and socialization needs of people, especially considering the long distances, economic crises, limited time, and the opportunities offered by technology.

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