The Gateway to Nature from the Virtual: A Netnographic Study on Camping Virtual Communities

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Abstract

Since camping is a concept that shares common features with extraordinary emotional experiences such as social interaction, self-renewal and relaxation in relation to nature, it is a very popular recreational activity today. The aim of this study is to examine the behaviors, attitudes and camping experiences of individuals who are members of camping virtual communities in Turkey. For this purpose, netnography method was used in the study. Netnography is a special approach that allows ethnographic research on the Internet. During the data collection process, the most actively used forum and Facebook pages related to camping were examined. According to the findings of this study, five main categories as "search for knowledge", "technical information", "recommendations", "dangers" and "camp diaries" and seven subcategories as "beginners", "campsite rush", "getting into a sleeping bag", "cold related issues", "fighting insects", "experience" and "pleasure" are reported. In line with the emerging categories, it is seen that individuals who are members of camping virtual communities share information and experience with each other on many camp-related issues, as well as make recommendations.
Keywords: Camping, Netnography, Virtual communities, Recreational activities

Sanaldan Doğaya Açılan Kapı: Kampçılık Sanal Toplulukları Üzerine Netnografik Bir Çalışma

Öz

Kampçılık, doğa ile ilişkili olarak sosyal etkileşim, kendini yenileme, rahatlama gibi olağanüstü duygusal deneyimlerle ortak özellikleri paylaşan bir kavram olması sebebiyle günümüzde oldukça popüler bir rekreatif aktivite olarak yer almaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'de kampçılık sanal topluluklarına üye olan bireylerin kampçılığa yönelik davranışları, tutumları ve kamp deneyimlerini incelemektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda çalışmada, netnografi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Netnografi, internet üzerinde etnografik araştırma yapmaya olanak tanıyan özel bir yaklaşımdır. Veri toplama sürecinde, kampçılık ile ilgili en aktif olarak kullanılan forum ve Facebook sayfaları incelenmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda incelenen veriler ışığında, "bilgi arayışı", "teknik bilgiler", "tavsiyeler", "tehlikeler" ve "kamp günlükleri" olarak beş ana ve "yeni başlayanlar", "kamp alanı telaşı", "uyku tulumuna giriş", "üşüme sorunsalı", "haşere ile mücadele", "deneyim" ve "haz" olarak yedi alt kategori ortaya çıkmıştır. Ortaya çıkan kategoriler doğrultusunda, kampçılık sanal topluluklarına üye olan bireylerin, birbirleri ile kamp ile ilgili birçok konuda bilgi ve deneyim paylaşımının yanı sıra tavsiyelerde de bulundukları görülmektedir.
Anahtar kelimeler: Kampçılık, Netnografi, Sanal topluluklar, Rekreasyonel aktiviteler

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INTRODUCTION

In the leisure time left over from the work that individuals do in order to maintain their lives, the activities they participate physically, emotionally and socially related to nature in open or closed areas, actively or passively, in urban or rural, individually or as a group for the purpose of relaxation, entertainment, sightseeing, health, socialization, excitement and gaining different experiences are stated as recreation (Karaküçük, 2014; Yüksek et al., 2012). Amongst the outdoor recreational activities one of the most popular applied one is camping. Camping, which is closely related to nature, shares common features with extraordinary emotional experiences such as social interaction, self-renewal and relaxation (Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2013) and is a very popular recreational activity today. It can be either exercised in connection with another activity or done discretely at camp sites, seaside or many other places (Kalkan, 2017). In this perspective, camping can be considered as a recreational activity, which can be done in open areas and in all seasons of the year, through that individuals can interact with the natural environment (Cordes & İbrahim, 1999; İslamoğlu et al., 2014). Therefore, camping activities enables to build a generous bound between people and the natural environment. Besides, camping activities provide some advantages such as physical and mental healing, reducing stress and social adaptation of an individual. To get more knowledge about the experiences gained during camping and the meanings associated with them can help to acquire wide-ranging benefits and improve the human and nature relationship potentially (Hassell et al., 2015). Camping experience is a significant recreational activity in terms of providing physical possibilities, offering proximity or access opportunity to a natural, human and cultural environment, creating specific emotional and internal values to its participants. The interaction between these three elements also forms a camping experience (Heerden, 2010). As in many other recreational sports, camping activity has its own unique rules. Camping which is a kind of sports that teaches to live in nature without giving any harm, is also the first step for other outdoor sports. It is necessary to learn the basics such as how to live in nature, how to eat, how to maintain the heath, how to meet sanitary needs and etc., how to protect oneself against various problems that may come from nature (Çetinkaya, 2008).

In this perspective, virtual communities related to camping are unique platforms that provide extensive information on many topics related to individuals' camping experiences, potential dangers they may encounter, camping equipment, etc. Rheingold (1993) defines virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the internet when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient, human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace".

With the rapid growth of virtual communities on the internet, the question of what encourages members to participate in virtual communities, interact with each other and what makes virtual communities more vibrant by sharing has attracted the attention of many researchers for a long time (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Betzing et al., 2020; Grabher & Ibert, 2017; Hagel & Armstrong 1997; Huang et al., 2019; Koh et al., 2007; Parks, 2011; Rolls et al., 2016; Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Just like in the camping virtual communities, the common points that people have allowed them to come together in a virtual environment, as well. The facts that people have special interests and tastes, exist as social beings that associate with others and the necessity of similar performing the transactions based on change, carried out in the physical

environment, in a virtual environment too play a significant role in the emergence of virtual communities (Uzkurt & Özmen, 2006). Furthermore, Hagel and Armstrong (1997) classify communities, mostly according to the purposes for which they are organized, as well. According to this classification, it is stated that there are four types of communities namely common interest communities, experience sharing affair communities, fantasy communities and exchange communities that business exchanges take place. Besides, Uzkurt and Özmen (2006) as well define virtual communities in six types as function/information sharing communities, interest communities, fantasy communities, relationship communities and discussion communities based on the classification made by Hagel and Armstrong (1997).

Thanks to the developing internet technologies, people having similar interests can exchange and discuss information about any subject and interact with each other through visual and audio posts through social networking sites. These people can share information by creating different types of virtual communities on the internet, as well as meet in the common consumption area. These groups known as consuming producers move to a position of conveying and producing knowledge beyond being conscious consumers (Doğaner, 2017).

Campers are in interaction by sharing their experiences, knowledge and curiosities about camping through virtual platforms. Thus, it can be inferred that they feel the need to socialize and share knowledge with other people of similar interests by moving an activity that is essentially intertwined with nature such as camping to the virtual environment as well. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to determine the behaviour, attitudes and experiences of individuals who are members of virtual camping communities in Turkey through camping by netnography method through their sharing in the sites they are members of. Once the relevant literature is examined, although there are national and international studies on camping, the absence of research that approaches the experiences of campers by netnography method makes this study an important contribution to the literature.

METHODS

Research Model
To better understand the camping experience, we adopt a qualitative research approach, when there is a need for a deeper description and explanation of a multi-faceted phenomenon. A qualitative design can improve our understanding and provide a more meaningful analysis of all components of the camping experience. In this study, netnography method is used in order to determine the behaviour, attitude and experiences of the campers.

Netnography is a special approach that enables ethnographic research on the internet and based on the collection of individuals' reviews containing detailed information about their experiences published on the Internet. This particular approach emerges as a qualitative and interpretive research methodology by adapting ethnographic techniques that are known to be traditional, in studies if social media and especially in virtual communities (Kozinets, 2015). This qualitative method is designed specially to investigate the consumer behaviour of cultures and virtual communities present on the internet (Kozinets, 1998). Compared to other qualitative research techniques, the distinctive value of netnography is that it excels at telling the subject,

and understanding complex social phenomena, and assists the researcher in developing themes from the consumers' points of view (Rageh et al., 2013). Another distinguishing value of netnography is faster, simpler, and less expensive than traditional ethnography and more naturalistic, objective, and unobtrusive than focus groups or interviews (Kozinets, 2002; Wu & Pearce, 2014).

Netnography refers to the online research method that enables the study of virtual communities and cultures that are created through computer mediated social interaction (Bowler, 2010). It enables the researcher to collect data without attracting attention, to access consumer discussions by examining processes and behaviour patterns through observing their interaction or participating in public online forums (Nelson & Otnes, 2005). By means of netnography, it becomes possible to analyse the customer needs, tendencies, behaviours and effects by using open source available in the virtual communities (Kozinets, 2002).

Data Collection and Sample
In accordance with the purpose of the research, virtual communities where campers can comfortably express their behaviours and attitudes are reached through Google, a popular search engine on the internet. Access to virtual communities is achieved by searching keywords for virtual camping communities on Google search engine. During the data collection phase of the research, five basic criteria proposed by Kozinets (2002) for data collection on the internet are used: (1) matching the community with the research question, (2) having high sharing traffic, (3) having a bulky number of messages, (4) having affluent data content, (5) having rich interaction amongst virtual community members. In this study, by becoming a member of five forum pages and five Facebook groups with the richest content and where users interact with each other the most are surveyed regarding these five basic criteria put forward by Kozinets (2002). The data has been collected between September 2021 and January 2022.

Ethical Approval
The ethics committee decision was taken from Mus Alparslan University, The Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee and Ethics Committee Permission was obtained (Document date and number: 14.01.2021-923).

Data Analysis
There are two important elements in data collection with the netnography method. The first element is data that researchers directly copy the posts that the virtual community members share through computer mediated communication, the second one is the data they observe regarding virtual communities and their members, their interactions with each other and the commentary posts about the content. Within the guideline of these two elements, the process for collecting and analysing data within the scope of the research took place in five phases; (1) Finding the most active virtual communities that is appropriate to the scope of the research. (2) Becoming a member of the virtual communities to focus on. (3) Examining the posts that members share about the subject. (4) Compiling the data analysed under certain categories and subcategories. (5) Interpreting the resulting categories and subcategories. This study adopted a manual approach to analyse the data. This approach is seen as effective when the dataset is reasonable in size, can be organised quite readily and the researchers are very familiar with the context (Kozinets, 2010). These criteria applied to the present case material. An established

qualitative data analytic process was adopted (Berge, 2007). First, the user generated quotes were identified and checked; second, codes were analytically developed and inductively identified from the data and applied to the content; later, codes were transformed into main and subcategories; after that, all materials were sorted by those categories. Next, by identifying similar phrases, patterns, relationships, commonalities or disparities, the sorted materials were examined to isolate meaningful patterns and processes. Finally, the identified patterns were considered in the light of previous research theories, and a summary made. The coding of main and subcategories was cross checked by two qualitative research experts, with an average agreement of assigning the categorical labels of 98%.

Validity or credibility concerns come to the fore in qualitative research. For the validity of the study, the researcher collected and analyzed the subjective data created by the participants in the field with an unbiased approach. It is stated that for validity in qualitative research, the researcher must exhibit an unbiased attitude (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this research, no comments were made in order not to affect the communication of the community members in the natural flow. In addition, the comments of the users in the findings section were presented directly.

FINDINGS

As a result of the data obtained from the virtual camping communities examined within the scope of the research, five main and seven subcategories have emerged. Main categories emerged are named as "search for knowledge", "technical information", "recommendations", "dangers" and "camp diaries" and the subcategories that are emerged related to the main ones are named as "beginners", "campsite rush", "getting in the sleeping bag", "cold related issues", "fighting insects", "experience" and "pleasure". The main and subcategories emerged in the research are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Main and subcategories emerged in the research

Main categories	Subcategories
Search for Knowledge	Beginners Campsite rush
Technical Information	
Recommendations	Getting in the sleeping bag Cold related issues Fighting Insects
Dangers	
Camp Diaries	Experience Pleasure

Search for Knowledge
Adventure lovers who are committed to camping search for knowledge on various subjects by becoming members of virtual camping communities. Especially, besides individuals with no experience of camping, others with experience also search for answers to their questions in these platforms. Hence, according to the posts shared in virtual communities, this category is studied under two subcategories as "beginners", "campsite rush".

Beginners

It is observed that individuals with no experience of camping are also seen in these virtual communities. Although they don't have any knowledge on this subject, by taking part in these platforms, they aim to experience camping with the knowledge they would gain. Hence, it cannot be ignored how important the interaction in these virtual communities is for beginners. Here are a few examples that could be evaluated in this category in accordance with the posts shared:

> *"Hello guys, I've been obsessed with camping for a while, I am looking forward like crazy, but I have no previous experience, no knowledge, there is no one around me who does it. So, this will be a general question, what should I make use of? For this, I am looking for good guidance, which I need primarily for shopping: it can be a site, a book, or a podcast."*

> *"Hello there; first of all, I would like to express that I have no experience and I will buy a tent for the first time. I would like to ask you for your tent brand model advice, which I can use in the high plateaus of the Eastern Black Sea region between April and September, one that is rain-resistant. My budget is in the range of 600-850 TL. Thank you in advance for your help."*

> *"It would be great if there are places that you know, which are not too difficult to get there. Saroz is actually not that close, but I can also get advice from you. In the meantime, I have never had a camping experience, but I don't think I will have trouble with food or fire, I should be starting somewhere."*

Campsite rush

Members of the virtual camping communities interact with each other about campsite options. They try to identify the area they will camp by taking the thoughts of other people who have previously experienced certain campsites. Furthermore, it is seen that those who are satisfied with the campsites they have previously experienced share information about them on these platforms. Here are a few examples to be evaluated under this category;

> *"I'll be leaving tomorrow. I would be glad if you could tell us about the camping areas on the route or in Kas, which has washbasin shower, etc... And the ones that you were satisfied with; as I will decide according to your experience. Thank you very much in advance."*

> *"We as three friends, will rent a car for two days from Istanbul. We want to escape somewhere for two days. Are there any places you know about? If there is a sea or a lake, it would be also very grate to plunge. We are looking for a quiet and free place; a place where a campfire or something like that won't cause a problem."*

> *"Stop by the skirts of the Kızlarsivrisi. From Büyüksöğle village near Elmalı, take the dirt road leading to Kızlarsivrisi. You can make great observations there as the air is drier at height and there is no light source that causes light pollution around."*

> *"Is there anyone who can recommend a place that we can reach without a transportation from Istanbul and reach with a relatively short walk? Last year, we camped in Uludağ, in February again. Transportation to Uludağ from Istanbul was quite easy. However, this year we want to go somewhere different. I'll be happy if you can help."*

Technical Information

Members especially share theoretical information on water disinfection with each other on these platforms. In this technical information, information such as how many minutes and how the water should be boiled is tried to be explained by showing a scientific basis. Here are a few examples of the posts shared:

> *"My suggestion would be to boil water for one minute at sea level for water disinfection and boil it for an additional minute for every 1,000 feet (305 meters) above sea level."*

> *"There are various ways to disinfect water. You can disinfect the water with many methods; however, the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) recommend boiling it as the best method. The CDC believes that none of the methods other than boiling are 100% effective in killing all disease-causing agents. The CDC also recommends filtering the boiled water. It takes approximately one kilogram of wood to boil 1 litter of water."*

> *"As the water gets warmer, there is a point where it starts turning into a gas. This is known as the boiling point. At sea level, when the water reaches 100 ° C, its temperature no longer rises and it begins to turn into steam completely. At altitudes above 2000 meters (6,562 feet), boiling for an additional 3 minutes is recommended by the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) to keep the water hot enough to terminate all risky microorganisms."*

Recommendations

Individuals who are members of virtual camping communities advise each other on various topics. Among these recommendations, how to get in the sleeping bag, and what kind of clothes should be worn or not in a sleeping bag take an important place. They include that there is a cold related issues regardless of the season and what should be done on that matter. In addition, they also provide some recommendations on insects which are very common especially in some regions depending on the location of the camping area. Therefore, this category is divided into three subcategories such as getting in the sleeping bag, cold related issues and fighting insects.

Getting in the sleeping bag

Things to do when getting in the sleeping bag is one of the important issues that campers should pay particular attention. Members who have experienced camping before share their recommendations on this issue with other members. Among these recommendations, especially warming the body with some exercise, and then choosing the right outfit before entering the sleeping bag are important. As a general opinion, although it is thought that thick clothes should be worn inside the sleeping bag during night, but it is perceived that the right thing to do should be wearing thin clothes after warming the body. A few examples of this issue in the posts:

"In my opinion, your first mistake is your clothes when getting in the sleeping bag. Since sleeping bags are materials that protect the person from the cold by keeping your body temperature, getting in the sleeping bag with thick clothes causes the stagnant air trapped in the bag to warm up much later and thus it makes you feel cold. Therefore, and in my opinion, the right thing is to dress as thin as possible before getting into a sleeping bag. In your example, I think it would be more accurate if you only got into the sleeping bag with bottom/top underwear."

"If you crush the tent area and build a 25-30 cm high snow wall around it after you set up your tent, it will greatly protect you from the wind blowing outside at night. Therefore, you will be less cold. If you haven't done this, I suggest you try it next time."

"I usually sleep in a sleeping bag with my light clothes, and I put my clothes under me in the bag. When you wake up in the morning, your clothes are both dry and warm."

"The best thing is to move around enough to warm up and get undressed before the body cools down and to get in the sleeping bag with your liner underwear. Drinking something hot just before going to sleep also helps a lot. In my sleeping bag, when something thick is on me, I also feel cold. There should be some space in a sleeping bag so that hot stagnant air forms and warms up the person. In other words, once you get into a bag with thick clothes on, the clothes themselves are cold and they prevent the reflection of body heat into the sleeping bag."

Cold related issues

Campers experience a cold related issues regardless of the season. This issue is thought to be important in order to enjoy the camping and avoid various health problems. Therefore, members provide advise each other on what clothes and materials they should use in order not to get cold during the camping and where they can get these materials. A few examples that can be evaluated under this category:

"Summer or winter, I take my roller, Thermarest Ridgerest model mat (in my opinion, those are one of the best foam mats ever) with me and lay it under the inflatable mat. I get a pleasant insulation and comfort. If you have just gone out to that occasion with an inflatable or foam mat that its r value needs further confirmation, this can surely cause you to feel cold."

"My guess is Uludağ is between -10 and -14 at night. You will get very cold with Makalu magnum. I don't think a second foam mat under would be of enough benefit to keep you from getting cold. I have never used the other product you mentioned, so I cannot comment on it. But my advice is to go with a sturdier sleeping bag that might be borrowed as well."

"Unfortunately, chill is an integral part of winter camps. I have a thick goose feather coat, I recommend it to you as well. There is also goose feather vest. It helps one to keep warm inside. And my last humble recommendation is Tnf and Keen snow boots.

> *They have Thinsulate filling in. Also, their sole is made of felt. It makes a substantial difference. In other words, with a goose feather + sturdy boots + sturdy gloves and a quality balaclava, those colds become bearable."*

> *"Based on the recommendation and the reviews on the site, I bought this tent for 460 TL (with a coupon it came down to 390 TL) from AliExpress. Price performance is very good. I also had the chance to use it in rainy weather. It is a very beautiful and light tent. I do recommend it."*

Fighting Insects

For campers, it is important to pay attention to the insects in the region, especially when choosing campsites. As this situation can be annoying most of the time, it is seen that campers on virtual platforms warn each other and offer various advices on protection from insects. Here are a few examples of the posts on this subject:

> *"Make sure you take a good fly repellent product with you. Especially around Pokut and Sal, there are very small flies like plunder and they do hurt a lot. Also, make sure to have a poncho or a really good raincoat with you. And keep in mind that the meadow ground will be wet for almost 24 hours."*

> *"Remember, lakes are rich in mosquitoes in hot seasons."*

> *"I once camped on the beach in Çanakkale. Mosquitoes were getting into human nostrils, and ears. It is something nothing else; especially on the European side, there is a significant mosquito problem."*

Dangers

According to the posts of individuals who are members of the virtual camping communities, it is seen that the major problems they may face in the camping areas is the wild animals. Besides, they should also pay attention to the situations unique to nature such as lightning strikes. Failure to take precautions against such dangers can have serious consequences. Therefore, individuals share their knowledge with other group members such as how to take precautions and what should be considered when they come across with some wild animals. Here are a few examples to be examined under this category:

> *"Attention, rain is something else, thunder is completely different. Do not risk it, if it is very dark as if it will rain heavily, or it is stormy or started to lightning, etc., Do not mount it under a single tree under a big tree. You can go in better weather conditions."*

> *"You are in the middle of the wildlife. I'm talking about wolf, boar, jackal, bear, and all kinds of reptiles. They can be very dangerous."*

> *"In order to avoid boars, it is absolutely necessary not to consume food near the tent or throw the leftovers around the tent if you have already. You also have to keep making noise so that the boar doesn't come there as there are people."*

"Perhaps wolves are considered as more dangerous animals. Because wolves rarely roam alone, generally they are in packs. The greatest fear of humans is to come across a pack of wolves with perhaps 12-15 in quantity. The recommendation for this is to keep the fire burning all night long. Wolves are very afraid of fire. This way, you can defend yourself and your campsite."

"The rain got lighter, but I didn't want to get out before sunrise. Meanwhile, a bear bellow broke while I was pondering about these. While trying to guess the distance, the animal bellowed again ... It was bellowing every 20-30 seconds. I cannot comprehend the distance, but let me guess it was some 300 or 1000 meters at most. And the voice was echoing as there was a mountain. This time I was more scared than the first. The nearest highway is at a distance of 8-10 km by the bird flight. No cell phone service around."

"At the last camp, something came next to the tent, it growled, but it was not a dog or jackal growl. He had a loud voice. As far as I know the boar doesn't growl. A bear comes to one's mind."

"This summer, in a very irrelevant place, in a forest campsite, near Bolu Köroğlu, a scorpion came out from under the tent at a cool altitude that can be considered as quite high."

Camp Diaries

It is observed that individuals who are members of virtual camping communities share knowledge with each other about their experiences such as how they spend their time in the campsite, which campsites they prefer, and how they torch a fire. In line with the posts made, this category is studied under two subcategories as experience and pleasure.

Experience

In virtual camping communities, it is frequent that one comes across with posts about the various experiences of campers. These posts include topics such as the beautiful landscapes they see, the materials they use, the route they choose, storytelling about a day spent in the camp. Here are a few examples from this category:

"Feeling cold, I woke up at 6 am in a Makalu Magnum (comfort -2) sleeping bag, at +2 degrees (according to Google weather). Under the sleeping bag there is the Ridgerest Solar mat (r value 3.5). In 15 days, there will be a one-night activity in Uludağ. I decided to think about something so that I would not get cold there too, and that I could sleep well at night."

"I have been to İgneada twice, but always in the summer. Those are the places with truly magnificent nature. Last summer, we spent a night in a tent in Begendik, very close to the Bulgarian border (border flags in Bulgaria can be seen), next to the beach. For some reason, I hadn't thought of going in winter. It was good. I will consider this with my daughter. We also went to Kıyıköy. We sailed both rivers by boat. There were

campers along the stream, and we envied them (we couldn't camp because of my wife). That's why this place is more attractive than Igneada."

"I decided to torch a fire right away, both to warm up and to protect against wild animals. I had plenty of kindling with me, those little round candles, petroleum jelly cotton, and so on. I lined a row of wood on the snow 2 meters away from the tent. I put a candle on it and lit it, put some kindling on top of it, and on top of it I arranged relatively dry, easily broken branches that I had collected from the lower parts of the trees in a form of an Indian tent. I put thicker branches around it. The aim was to keep the first fire long and let the wet branches dry and catch fire. It worked, I just managed to torch the fire the first time."

"We spent the Saturday preparing firewood, enjoying the hammock, cooking and eating, drinking something hot and visiting the immediate surroundings. We made tea from the leaves of fir trees, but it must be because of the type of the tree, that it was not like a pine leaf. It had no aroma, as if we were literally drinking only hot water. We tried again by crushing the leaves and boiling them for a long time, but again it didn't work."

Pleasure

In the virtual communities studied, it is noteworthy that campers make posts about the pleasure they get along with their camping experiences. The excitement of the scenery in the camping environment, torching a fire, watching the stars is revealed in the posts they made. Here are a few examples in this category:

"We woke up in the morning with our hearts fluttering in a wonderfully beautiful environment. We lit the fire and explored the surrounding area until the snow water melted and boiled for breakfast. There were incredible views."

"We have telescopes in order to observe the stars, we intend to rest in a tent under a tree during the day, enjoy the sea at around 17.00-18.00, chat and watch the stars until morning."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Virtual communities are platforms that provide a natural, high level of reality and sincere ethnographic data source in many areas. The prevalence of these communities day by day shows that the quality of interaction and communication between people continues through virtual environments rather than traditional environments. Therefore, it is stated that before communicating with virtual communities, which attract the attention of many areas, one should have information about the culture, hierarchical order, social structure and values of the group. The systematic monitoring, interpretation and analysis of virtual communities are realized through netnographic research (Baysal & Kayacan, 2022; Mutlu & Bazarcı, 2017). In this direction, in this study, it is aimed to examine the behaviours and attitudes of individuals who

are members of camping virtual communities in Turkey, their experiences and their sharing on the sites they are members of, using the netnography method.

Although camping is regarded as a recreational activity that requires no special knowledge and could be achieved by anyone, where, how, how long a camp should be set up, clothes to be preferred, required camping equipment, correct employment of camping equipment and safety measures are main concerns to be dealt with. In this perspective, the interaction of the individuals with previous experience by sharing their knowledge and experience in the virtual communities in which they are a member of will help in keeping individuals who want to camp safe from possible problems.

The knowledge, experience, behaviour and attitudes of members of virtual camping communities have been studied under categories by netnography method. It is observed that the first category emerged regarding the comments made by individuals on these sites is the search for knowledge. In this category, individuals who have never camped before or do not have enough knowledge about camping are exchanging knowledge. Furthermore, individuals who have some knowledge about camping, interact about subjects like where to camp and also which sites are suitable and safe on this matter. Therefore, although camping is a recreational activity related to nature, the posts of individuals in virtual communities are seen as to have significance in attaining knowledge about the subject. Akar (2010) states that people in virtual communities create an environment of loyalty by connecting with others. Besides, Lam et al., (2010) defines that individuals who are members of virtual communities share knowledge, experience and recommendations by interacting with each other. Technical information is another subject that campers share with each other in virtual communities other than general information. They share some technical information such as how many minutes and how to boil water in order to make it potable while camping. In this perspective, sharing this kind of information about camping in virtual communities occurs to be important in order not to experience problems in a camp site.

Recommendations is another category that has emerged as a result of researching camping virtual communities. It is seen that campers advice each other, through the virtual communities they are members of, on matters such as the correct use of sleeping bag, how to deal with various insects in a campsite, and what kind of materials to use in order not to get cold. Uzkurt and Özmen (2006) as well define virtual communities as communities that are created by people who come together on a special subject and provide and share the information they needed. Similarly, Saygın and Ersoy-Arca (2020) state that members open posts asking for help on topics, products and manufacturers they do not know. The recommendations written here assist members in their choices. Other members are also helpful when asked about products that are not in the group. When a problem is encountered in the group, members try to find a common solution in solidarity, and these solutions are effective in the formation of group rules.

Another category emerged as a result of the research is examined under the heading of dangers. In this category, issues like how campers should take precautions against wild animals such as wolf, boar, jackal, bear etc. and what to do when faced with them are significant. Additionally, it is also mentioned of possible dangers that could occur from natural phenomena such as lightning, and thunderbolt. As there may be a certain level of danger in every recreational activity, it is obvious that there may be situations that could endanger individuals exclusively

in recreational outdoor activities. In this perspective, it is important to gather information about various dangerous situations especially before going to camp sites and to take necessary precautions. In this context, it is possible to notify that the posts shared in virtual communities inform and warn individuals against possible dangers. Saygın and Ersoy-Arca (2020) state that informational questions are asked in virtual communities and explanatory articles for informational purposes are frequently shared. Communication is therefore strong in the virtual group. It is stated that individuals direct each other with their questions and requests. Similarly, members of the camping virtual community guide each other about possible dangers.

The last category emerged as a result of the research is named as camp diaries. This category includes the experiences of the individuals in a campsite and the pleasure they get from camping activity. Studying the relevant literature, Hagel and Armstrong (1997) as well consider virtual communities as a platform that experiences are shared. It is observed that individuals who have an interest in camping activity feel the need of sharing experiences gained in the camp site as well as subjects like information and recommendations. Similarly, Kitapçı et al., (2012) states that consumers feel the need to convey information electronically by sharing their positive or negative experiences about products with other consumers through different social networking and forum sites. Sharing information and experience about a recreational activity such as camping that is practiced in nature, through virtual platforms with others can be regarded as a complement to the pleasure that they get from the activity itself. Moreover, such sharing about one's experiences can be encouraging and guiding the others who want to camp but don't have the courage yet.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study focuses on the sharing of individuals in camping virtual communities. In this study, it is seen that virtual communities play an important role in the exchange of information between individuals. It can be said that they can obtain information about recreational activities, such as camping, which cannot be known without experience, through virtual platforms, quickly and easily. Therefore, individuals who have no previous camping experience and who will go camping for the first time can obtain detailed information and get advice through these platforms. In addition, they can take precautionary measures for possible dangers they may encounter during their camping experience. Besides, it is seen that camping equipment is also very important. In this direction, the results of the research can offer an idea to the suppliers of camping equipment. In addition, this study may contribute to the development of the method by paving the way for more researchers to use netnography, which is a newly used method in Turkey, in line with the opportunities it offers to researchers.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited only within the time period it is conducted so, the future research may include a broader data collection time period. Moreover, this study focuses only on the virtual camping communities in Turkey. The inclusion of different countries in similar studies to be carried out in the future may reveal the intercultural difference and enable more diverse results to emerge. This study is based only on campers. In the forthcoming studies, different experiences and cultures may emerge by working with individuals interested in different recreational sports.

Conflicts of Interest: There is no personal or financial conflict of interest within the scope of the study.

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