

# USES AND GRATIFICATIONS APPROACH, SOCIAL MEDIA AND PERSONAL BRANDING: A STUDY ON SOCIAL MEDIA USERS IN TURKEY

Hatun BOZTEPE TAŞKIRAN

## ABSTRACT:

The uses and gratifications approach has been an important part of communication studies for a long time, viewing target audiences not as passive recipients of messages disseminated via the communication processes but rather as active individuals who consciously consume media to satisfy their social or psychological needs. In older communication researches, the approach aimed to define the reasons why target audiences prefer certain kinds of 'traditional' media. However, it has recently been used in order to explore why people use social media (and to identify the needs people wish to satisfy by using them). The approach could also be used to explain whether (and how) people use social media to satisfy the recently popular need for personal branding. In light of the information mentioned above, the study deals with social media in relation to the uses and gratifications approach and analyses social media as a communication means able to gratify the need for personal branding. A total of 414 social media users in Turkey have answered a questionnaire. This quantitative research method has been designed for the research conducted as a part of the study. The data obtained from the research has shown that social media users in Turkey prefer to use social media to satisfy their needs of information seeking, social interaction, information sharing, passing time, entertainment, expressing opinions and relaxation and for convenience utility, communicatory usefulness and 'surveillance'. Besides, it has been found out that many of the participants use social media for the purpose of personal branding.

## KEY WORDS:

brand, information sharing, personal branding, social media, uses and gratifications approach

## Introduction

Most older studies on media communication focused on explaining how media affect their target audiences and regarded them as passive recipients of media contents. Lippmann's, Laswell's and Bruntz's works could be pointed out as suitable examples of outlining the powerful effects of media on the target audiences.



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hatun Boztepe Taşkıran  
Faculty of Communication  
Istanbul University  
Kaptan-ı Derya İbrahim Paşa Sokak Beyazıt  
Fatih, İstanbul  
Turkey 34116  
hatun.boztepe@istanbul.edu.tr

Hatun Boztepe Taşkıran received her Bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Communication (the Department of Public Relations and Publicity) of the Marmara University in Turkey and her Master's degree and doctoral degree from the Marmara University's Institute of Social Sciences (the Public Relations Programme). She has been working as an Associate Professor at the Istanbul University (the Faculty of Communication, the Department of Public Relations and Advertising). Apart from numerous articles and book chapters, she is the author of three books – *Governmental Public Relations*, *Public Relations* and *Relationship Management and Brand Communication Management and Digital Strategies*. Her main research areas are Public Relations, corporate communications, digital communication and brand communication.

In those kinds of initial studies on the issue, mass media's supreme effects influencing the helpless audiences were likened to magical bullets or drugs propelled through hypodermic needles.<sup>1</sup> The uses and gratifications approach, on the other hand, is an audience-centred approach that attaches importance to the active role of target audiences in the processes of media consumption. The approach, which argues there are different reasons for people to use media, asserts that individuals use media (and their contents) to satisfy their social and psychological needs.

Scholarly studies on media reception initially used the approach to determine the audiences' motivations for using radio and television. Nowadays, researches based on the approach may have similar purposes, but their concern has shifted away from radio and television towards social media, which emerged as a result of the rapid development of information and communication technologies. The approach has been frequently referred to in some of the most recent studies which aim to find out more about the needs target audiences wish to gratify by using social media.

As social media are a communication platform where users share contents that they often create themselves, they have a capacity to satisfy their target audiences' needs of showing their difference from others and being distinguished in a competitive atmosphere of the recently popular trend of personal branding. From this point of view, it could be argued that social media are used with the purpose of personal branding, and that the uses and gratifications approach is significant in demonstrating the idea that people use social media to gratify their needs of becoming individual 'brands' and communicating their 'brands' with others.

In light of the information presented above, the study aims at evaluating social media use for personal branding in connection with the uses and gratifications approach, determining Turkish social media users' expectations and purposes related to social media and showing how they make use of social media in terms of personal branding. In research conducted as a part of the study, the reasons why Turkish people use social media and the question whether they make use of social media to become distinguished and different from their 'rivals' on basis of personal branding have been investigated and analysed in relation to the approach.

## Evaluating Social Media Use in Relation to the Uses and Gratifications Approach

The audience-centred uses and gratifications approach that sees target audiences as active differs from other notions which tend to argue that the tools of mass communication greatly affect the (rather passive) target audiences. The approach, which accepts that the target audiences use media to gratify certain needs, claims they select and use media contents in line with their needs. As stated by Katz et al., "*the social and psychological origins of needs generate expectations of mass media or other sources which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (...) resulting need gratifications or other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.*"<sup>2</sup> This point of view explaining the way the uses and gratifications approach deals with the relationship between media and target audiences underlines the fact that people use social media for both social and psychological needs, and that social media could either gratify these needs or satisfy other, unrelated ones.

The uses and gratifications approach gives the media audience members active roles<sup>3</sup> and considers them as individuals who possess control over their decisions. "*It examines media behaviours from the audience member's view ... (and) seeks to explain*" the needs that shape the ways and the reasons people use the media and the gratifications derived from their use.<sup>4</sup> However, this approach based on the idea that people consume media according to their personal needs<sup>5</sup> does not explore what the media offers to people, but rather what the

target audiences find in media and what sort of satisfaction they get while using them.<sup>6</sup> It opposes the view that media contents can manipulate their audiences and that certain desired effects could be forced on them.<sup>7</sup>

Stafford et al. state that the uses and gratifications approach, previously used "*in research and decision making related to the promotion of emerging radio and television media*", has continued to be employed in terms of investigating the reasons of media use and the satisfactions yielded by it.<sup>8</sup> The popularity of the approach, as indicated by Quan-Haase and Young, is a result of the fact that it argues the target audiences are active and motivated in their media usage, offering the grounds to study the satisfaction obtained through media use.<sup>9</sup> Nowadays, the uses and gratifications approach is applied in order to determine the purposes, needs and expectations of target audiences associated with using 'traditional' media, but also to answer the questions of the purposes and expectations of social media users.

Ruggiero, who studies the researches on uses and gratifications conducted since the 1950s to the present day, claims: "*theoretically and practically, for (uses and gratifications) scholars (...) the basic questions remain the same: why do people become involved in one particular type of mediated communication or another, and what gratifications do they receive from it?*"<sup>10</sup> The fact that the question studies based on the uses and gratifications approach aim to answer has remained the same for decades implies the use of social media in the recent years, given their popularity, could or must also be explored in relation to the approach.

Social media, which emerged as a result of the development of information and communication technologies, are often defined as digital media. Nowadays, intelligent mobile phones, websites and social networking sites are all considered to be digital media.<sup>11</sup> Digital media include the features offered by Web 2.0 technologies and thus make it possible for people to communicate in an interactive and dialogue-based way, without any restrictions related to time and geographical distance. Social media, which could be seen as an outcome of the Internet-based practices constructed on the technological infrastructure of Web 2.0,<sup>12</sup> have brought forth dramatic changes in the ways people communicate with one another. Each day social media usage and the numbers of their users show a tendency to increase, making it a must to thoroughly understand their features that help explain their increasing popularity.

Social media could be defined as "*participatory online media where news, photos, videos, and podcasts are made available via social media websites*".<sup>13</sup> Their rising popularity is related to the fact that they are a communication medium based on participation and interaction. In social media communication, each user has an active role in creating contents, and thus it is described as a communication means consisting of content produced by its users.

The notion of user-generated content (abbr. UGC) means that mediated messages are created by ordinary media users. In other words, "*user-generated content refers to media content created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and primarily distributed on the Internet*".<sup>14</sup> As opposed to 'traditional' media, communication via social media is not based on contents created exclusively by people whose occupation is associated with producing and presenting professional media texts. Moreover, individuals who are rather passive while consuming 'traditional' types media contents, stop being inactive the moment they interact with social media.

Another reason behind social media's rising popularity is that they are based on the principle of interaction. The very facts that both the source and receiver of information disseminated by social media create and share contents and are active in providing feedback makes social media communication interactive. After

1 BRYANT, J., ZILLMANN, D.: A Retrospective and Prospective Look at Media Effects. In NABI, R. L., OLIVER, M. B. (eds.): *The Sage Handbook of Media Processes and Effects*. Los Angeles : Sage Publications, 2009, p. 11.

2 KATZ, E. et al.: Uses and Gratifications Research. In *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1974, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 510.

3 YAYLAGÜL, L.: *Kitle İletişim Kuramları Egemen ve Eleştirel Yaklaşımlar*. Ankara : Dipnot Yayınları, 2010, p. 71.

4 LIN, C. A.: Uses and Gratifications. In STONE, G., SINLETARY, M., RICHMAND, V. P. (eds.): *Clarifying Communication Theories: A Hands-On Approach*. Ames : Iowa State University Press, 1999, p. 207.

5 GÜNGÖR, N.: *İletişim Kuramları Yaklaşımları*. Ankara : Siyasal Kitabevi, 2011, p. 107.

6 LAZAR, J.: *İletişim Bilimi*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Ankara : Vadi Yayınları, 2009, p. 29.

7 IŞIK, M.: *Kitle İletişim Teorilerine Giriş*. Konya : Eğitim Kitabevi, 2014, p. 63-64.

8 STAFFORD, T. F. et al.: Determining Uses and Gratifications for the Internet. In *Decision Sciences*, 2004, Vol. 35, No. 2, p. 266.

9 QUAN-HAASE, A., YOUNG, A. L.: Uses and Gratifications of Social Media: A Comparison of Facebook and Instant Messaging. In *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 2010, Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 351.

10 RUGGIERO, T. E.: Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In *Mass Communication & Society*, 2000, Vol. 34, No. 1, p. 29.

11 GERSHON, I., BELL, J. A.: Introduction: The Newness of New Media. In *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 2013, Vol. 54, No. 3, p. 29.

12 BERTHON, P. R. et al.: Marketing Meets Web 2.0, Social Media, and Creative Consumers: Implications for International Marketing Strategy. In *Business Horizons*, 2012, Vol. 55, No. 3, p. 263-269.

13 EVANS, D.: *Social Media Marketing an Hour a Day*. Indiana : Wiley Publishing, 2008, p. 37.

14 DAUGHERTY, T. et al.: Exploring Consumer Motivations or Creating User-Generated Content. In *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 2008, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 16.

all, any social medium “provides a mechanism for the audience to connect, communicate, and interact with each other and their mutual friends through instant messaging or social networking sites”.<sup>15</sup> Social media users comment on a video, idea or photo shared by others whenever and wherever they wish to do so, while they also share what they want via their personal accounts. Thus, they communicate interactively and in a dialogue-based way. Nowadays, social media are amongst the primary sources of obtaining news and connecting with other people.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is a must to discuss the reasons why social media are that popular amongst people living their lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The uses and gratifications approach has been frequently referred to in the recent years in order to find out what kinds of target audiences’ needs are satisfied by social media; the approach has provided a ground for studies focusing on the issue.<sup>17</sup> An overview of relevant publications focusing on this topic shows there are several studies dealing with social media in connection with the uses and gratifications approach. One of them, Whiting and Williams’s study, has brought forth a comprehensive list of the needs and satisfactions met by social media. The list of the target audiences’ needs gratified by social media (as stated by Whiting and Williams, according to the data obtained in their research) includes the following items:

- Social interaction (using social media to communicate and interact with others).
- Information seeking (using social media to seek out information or self-educate).
- Passing time (using social media to spend free time and relieve boredom).
- Entertainment (using social media to seek entertainment and enjoyment).
- Relaxation (using social media to relieve day-to-day stress and pressure).
- Expression of opinions (using social media to express one’s thoughts and opinions).
- Communicatory utility (communication facilitation and providing information to share with others).
- Convenience utility (providing convenience or usefulness to individuals).
- Information sharing (using social media to share personal information with others).
- ‘Surveillance’/knowledge about others (watching people or things and monitoring what others are doing).<sup>18</sup>

As part of their study, Whiting and Williams conducted a total of 25 in-depth interviews with individuals aged between 18 and 56 with questions aimed at eliciting responses about the uses and gratifications related to social media. One of the results of the research is that people have a tendency to use social media to share information about themselves with others. The fact that 40% of the people participating in the research use social media to share information about themselves with others is very important to consider.<sup>19</sup> This implies a need to conduct thorough research studies that will provide empirical data on the use of social media to satisfy people’s needs related to personal branding in the context of the uses and gratifications perspective.

## Personal Branding and Social Media

“Brand” centres on the idea of differentiating products and services from their rivals; however, new aspects have recently been added to the term’s traditional definition or function. The notion of brand, which could be defined by American Marketing Association as a name, term, symbol or other feature that serves for differentiating products or services of a seller from the ones owned by another seller,<sup>20</sup> is not only about distinguishing between different products and services. In addition to products or services, institutions, cities, countries or touristic places and individuals have often been branded as well.

15 CORREA, T. et al.: Who Interacts on the Web? The Intersection of Users’ Personality and Social Media Use. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2010, Vol. 26, No. 2, p. 247-248.

16 SOLIS, B., BREAKENRIDGE, D.: *Putting the Public Back in Public Relations*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2009, p. 167.

17 CHEN, G. M.: Tweet This: A Uses and Gratifications Perspective on How Active Twitter Use Gratifies a Need to Connect with Others. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2011, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 759.

18 WHITING, A., WILLIAMS, D.: Why People Use Social Media: A Uses and Gratifications Approach. In *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 2013, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 364-365.

19 See: WHITING, A., WILLIAMS, D.: Why People Use Social Media: A Uses and Gratifications Approach. In *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 2013, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 362-369.

20 *Common Language Marketing Dictionary*. [online]. [2019-03-25]. Available at: <<https://marketing-dictionary.org/b/brand/>>.

Similar to the essential idea of branding, personal branding serves for the purpose of differentiating an individual from their rivals. In other words, a person’s individual efforts of making themselves different from the others are personal branding’s essence and key objective. Factors such as globalisation, internationalisation of labour force, high levels of rivalry and presence of many candidates for the same professions on the labour market have given people many reasons to concentrate on personal branding efforts; they need to ‘stand out’ amongst others.

Identity, which defines who a person is and encompasses their characteristics, is seen as an essential factor of establishing personal brands. From this viewpoint, it could be said that a personal brand is shaped in line with an individual’s identity features. The term “identity” explains all concrete and abstract features of a brand,<sup>21</sup> and many identity theories associated with building brands have been established upon specific products or services. However, personal branding is affected by several factors such as people’s identities, roles, ages and mood states.<sup>22</sup> For this reason, not only an individual’s social roles, age and education level, which are parts of their identity, but also their characteristics that make them different from others are essential in ‘launching’ a personal brand.

Like product and service brands, personal brands are based on brand identities; however, in personal branding a person’s identity features are significant. “A personal brand identifies, clarifies, and communicates who you are to the world around you (...) the key to brand communication lies in creating your own personal brand and communicating it before others do it for you.”<sup>23</sup> Since personal brands are based on unique personal traits<sup>24</sup> that make individuals different from others and thus allow them to ‘stand out’ amongst their rivals,<sup>25</sup> it is important for a personal brand to be authentic and able to reflect an individual’s personality.

Hence, “(a) personal brand should be authentic; reflect (a person’s) true character; and be built on (his or her) values, strengths, uniqueness, and genius”.<sup>26</sup> It is a prerequisite for individuals to make an inner exploration which will help them understand their authentic traits and skills that make them different from others in order to establish a strong and successful personal brand.<sup>27</sup> Besides, “personal branding entails capturing and promoting an individual’s strengths and uniqueness to a target audience”.<sup>28</sup> If individuals establish their personal brands based on their unique traits, values and talents, and communicate them to others, they could be successful in realising the differentiation purpose of the branding process.

The development trends of information and communication technologies have presented new communication channels that offer numerous opportunities for individuals to tell their target audiences about themselves, i.e. to establish brands by making themselves distinct from others. “With technological barriers crumbling and its increasing ubiquity, the Web has become the perfect platform for personal branding”.<sup>29</sup> As stated by Shaker and Hafiz, “online personal branding connotes a way to communicate favourable attributes of an individual self in the online platform in order to differentiate oneself from others”.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the essential features of social media make them possible to be used in personal branding. Social media have the capacity to communicate a person’s identity features, values and skills to a large group of target audiences quickly and without any restrictions related to time or location discrepancies.

Using their social media accounts, individuals create contents that help them establish their personal brands, while they also share their professional experience by posting about their ideas and thoughts on various

21 KAPFERER, J.: *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. London: Kogan, 2008, p. 178.

22 BENDISCH, F. et al.: Fame and Fortune: A Conceptual Model of CEO Brands. In *European Journal of Marketing*, 2013, Vol. 47, No. 3-4, p. 601.

23 ARRUDA, W.: Brand Communication: The Three CS. In *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 2009, Vol. 51, No. 5, p. 409.

24 LAIR, D. J. et al.: Marketization on the Recasting of the Professional Self the Rhetoric and Ethics of Personal Branding. In *Management Communication Quarterly*, 2005, Vol. 18, No. 3, p. 320.

25 GANDER, M.: Managing Your Personal Brand. In *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 2004, Vol. 18, No. 3, p. 100.

26 RAMBERSAD, H. K.: A New Blueprint for Powerful and Authentic Personal Branding. In *Performance Improvement*, 2008, Vol. 47, No. 6, p. 34.

27 WEE, L., BROOKS, A.: Personal Branding and the Commodification of Reflexivity. In *Cultural Sociology*, 2010, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 52.

28 KOÇIAJ, J. et al.: Personal Branding Perception by Albanian Students. In *International Journal of Global Business*, 2016, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 74.

29 LABREQUE, L. I. et al.: Online Personal Branding: Processes, Challenges, and Implications. In *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 2011, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 38.

30 SHAKER, F., HAFIZ, R.: Personal Branding in Online Platform. In *Global Disclosure of Economics and Business*, 2014, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 109.

topics.<sup>31</sup> Personal branding “demonstrates self-performances and presents a sense of individuality that can help to differentiate a personal brand from its competitors”.<sup>32</sup> In conclusion, social media offer a capacity that must be used by individuals in order to establish their personal brands and communicate them to other users.

## Method

### Purpose of the study

The uses and gratifications approach, which attributes an active role to target audiences in choosing and using media contents, is important in order to identify the needs satisfied by using social media. Therefore, the following research has been conducted as a part of our study with the purpose of explaining why people in Turkey use social media and what their expectations are while using them. Besides, the use of social media in terms of personal branding will also be discussed. The study aims to answer these questions:

**RQ1:** What are social media habits of social media users in Turkey?

**RQ2:** What needs do social media users in Turkey want to satisfy when they use them?

**RQ3:** Do social media users in Turkey use them with the purpose of personal branding?

In relation to the problems posed by the research, the research hypotheses could be formulated as follows:

**H1:** Social media users in Turkey use social media to satisfy their various needs as suggested by the uses and gratifications theory.

**H2:** Social media users in Turkey use social media for personal branding.

**H3:** Turkish social media users’ utilisation of social media for personal branding changes along with the variance of education level.

**H4:** Turkish social media users’ usage of social media for personal branding becomes different in line with the variance of age.

**H5:** Turkish social media users’ usage of social media for personal branding changes in accordance with the variance of time spent on social media.

### Research model

Research model could be defined as the organisation of necessary conditions for a researcher to collect and analyse data suitable for their purposes. The scanning model that focuses on describing and introducing both previous and current situation as they are and that does not aim at changing or altering the factors included in a study has been used in this research.<sup>33</sup> The scanning model helps a researcher collect, process and evaluate data according to their field of interest, which is the basic reason why it has been used in this study.

### Population and sampling

The population included in the research consists of social media users living in Turkey. According to We Are Social’s *2018 Global Digital Report*, 63% of Turkey’s population (51 million people) are active social media users, and the number of Turkish social media users has risen by 6% (3 million people) since January 2017.<sup>34</sup> The fact that a majority of people in Turkey are active social media users and that their utilisation of

social media has a tendency to further increase are the reasons to carry out this study. Since it is not possible to include all Turkish social media users in the research, and there is not an entire sample list of them, the non-probability sampling technique is used. When a researcher does not have an entire sample list of a population or it is not possible to reach an entire population and/or its number is too high, non-probability sampling could be applied.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, snowball sampling – one of the non-probability sampling techniques – has been used to reach social media users in Turkey. Later, the first group of participants have helped us find other active social media users who could be included in the research. Apart from snowball sampling, convenience sampling has been used as well; in accordance with the data collected from a preliminary survey so as to identify other individuals who could participate in the study.

### Technique and means used to collect data

A questionnaire, i.e. a quantitative research method has been prepared for the study to collect data in line with the purposes of the research. Apart from the basic demographic questions about sex, age and education level of the participants, questions about their social media using habits and other matters referring to Whiting and Williams’s list<sup>36</sup> mentioned above have been taken into consideration as well. In addition, a Likert scale has been included in the research with expressions designed to understand the needs satisfied by social media and whether (or how) people use social media for personal branding. The participants have been asked to state their agreement/disagreement levels in terms of the stated expressions.

The questionnaire form has been digitalised and e-mailed to the participants via a hypertext link. The digitally distributed questionnaire form has been sent to a total of 856 people initially included in the research sample. 414 individuals (48.36%) have filled the questionnaire (in time period between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2018 and 25<sup>th</sup> November 2018). Since no problems have been identified in their answers, all of them have been evaluated and included in the findings. When a population is 100 million, it is enough to reach 384 individuals for a 95% correspondence level, resulting in  $\pm 0.05$  sampling error.<sup>37</sup> In light of this information, the number of people included in the research can be accepted as sufficient.

Given the fact that snowball sampling – i.e. a non-probability sampling technique – has been used, the research sample does not represent the entire population defined as all social media users in Turkey. However, the data obtained during the research is still able to provide information on Turkish people’s use of social media for the purpose of personal branding.

### Processing Data

In the evaluation process, the questionnaires filled by the participants have been coded and made ready to be processed. The coded data has been evaluated using the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)* software, and analysed via frequency analyses and average charts. The reached level of reliability is high (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.982$ ) in relation to the participants’ reactions to the expressions aimed at determining their purposes for using social media.

## Findings

Out of the 414 social media users who have taken part in the study, 227 are men (54.8%) and 187 are women (45.2%). Amongst them, 51.4% (213 individuals) are aged between 18 and 28; 39.9% (165 individuals) between 29 and 39; 7.5% (31 individuals) between 40 and 50; and 1.2% (5 individuals) between 51 and 61. Two of them (0.5%) are primary school graduates; 14 (3.4%) graduated high school; 17 (4.1%)

31 NOLAN, L.: The Impact of Executive Personal Branding on Non-Profit Perception and Communications. In *Public Relations Review*, 2015, Vol. 41, No. 2, p. 288.

32 CHEN, C. P.: Exploring Personal Branding on YouTube. In *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 2013, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 334.

33 KARASAR, N.: *Bilimsel Araştırma Metodu*. Ankara : Hacettepe Taş Kitapçılık, 1984, p. 79.

34 WE ARE SOCIAL: *Digital Report 2018*. [online]. [2018-10-10]. Available at: <<https://digitalreport.wearesocial.com/>>.

35 BÖKE, K.: Örnekleme. In BÖKE, K. (ed.): *Sosyal Bilimlerde Araştırma Yöntemleri*. İstanbul : Alfa Basım, 2009, p. 122.

36 WHITING, A., WILLIAMS, D.: Why People Use Social Media: A Uses and Gratifications Approach. In *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 2013, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 364.

37 YAZICIOĞLU, Y., ERDOĞAN, S.: *SPSS Uygulamalı Araştırma Yöntemleri*. Ankara : Detay Yayıncılık, 2004, p. 54.

vocational school; 217 (52.4%) have a Bachelor's degree; 164 (39.6%) a Master's degree or PhD. The social media platforms they use are as follows:

- 212 individuals (51.2%) use *Facebook*;
- 324 individuals (78.3%) use *Twitter*;
- 365 individuals (88.2%) use *Instagram*;
- 201 individuals (48.6%) use *LinkedIn*;
- 110 individuals (26.6%) use *Periscope*;
- 268 individuals (64.7%) use *YouTube*;
- 122 individuals (29.5%) use *Foursquare*;
- 89 individuals (21.5%) use various blogging tools;
- 58 individuals (14%) use various discussion forums;
- 36 individuals (8.7%) use other social media.

The fact that the participants might use more than one social media platform has been taken into consideration while preparing the questionnaire form (it has been designed to allow them to make multiple choices). Regarding the time they spend on social media, it has been found out that 5.8% (24 individuals) spend up to one hour a day using social media; 19.1% (79 individuals) one to three hours a day; 16.4% (68 individuals) three to five hours a day; 34.1% (141 individuals) five to seven hours a day; 24.6% (102 individuals) either seven or more than seven hours a day. The needs satisfied by using social media, according to the answers of the participants, are listed below:

- social interaction (using social media to communicate and interact with others) – stated by 327 respondents (79%);
- seeking information (using social media to seek out information or self-educate) – stated by 355 respondents (85.7%);
- passing time (using social media to spend free time and relieve boredom) – stated by 275 respondents (66.4%);
- entertainment (using social media to seek entertainment and enjoyment) – stated by 202 respondents (48.8%);
- relaxation (using social media to relieve day-to-day stress) – stated by 161 respondents (38.9%);
- expression of opinions (using social media to express one's thoughts and opinions) – stated by 195 respondents (47.1%);
- communicatory utility (communication facilitation and providing information to share with others) – stated by 230 respondents (55.6%);
- convenience utility (providing convenience or usefulness to individuals) – stated by 231 respondents (55.8%);
- information sharing (using social media to share personal information with others) – stated by 329 respondents (79.5%);
- 'surveillance'/knowledge about others (watching people or things and monitoring others) – stated by 226 respondents (54.6%).

According to the obtained data, people in Turkey use social media to satisfy the needs of information seeking, passing time, information sharing, expressing opinions, entertainment, relaxation and social interaction and for convenience utility, communicatory usefulness and 'surveillance'. The evaluation of the participants' answers is shown in Table 1 below. In order to understand the average values stated in the table, it is necessary to take into account that 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest value signifying the participants' agreement with the expressions posed in the questionnaire.

Table 1: Evaluation of the participants' opinions on the needs and gratifications related to their social media use

	Uses and Gratifications	Average	Standard Deviation	Number
<b>Social Interaction</b>	Social media are a suitable platform to interact and socialise with other people.	3.90	0.976	414
	Social media enable me to communicate with people more effectively than face-to-face communication.	3.90	1.287	414
	Social media offer a more diverse social life.	3.56	1.247	414
<b>Seeking Information</b>	Social media offer information on products and discounts.	3.90	0.965	414
	I learn about the recent developments via social media.	4.16	0.955	414
	Social media enable me to learn about current affairs.	4.17	0.957	414
<b>Passing Time</b>	Social media are a good way of spending one's free time.	3.82	1.038	414
	I spend time on social media when I get bored.	3.87	1.017	414
	I prefer to use social media in my free time.	3.76	1.095	414
<b>Entertainment</b>	I have access to entertaining content via social media.	3.97	1.028	414
	I watch the videos I like and listen to my favourite music on social media.	4.03	1.050	414
	I play the games I like on social media.	3.47	1.469	414
<b>Relaxation</b>	I forget the stress of daily life while I spend time on social media.	3.65	1.323	414
	I do not think about anything else when I use social media.	3.47	1.454	414
	Social media is a good way of moving away from everyday reality.	3.51	1.386	414
<b>Expression of Opinions</b>	I share my thoughts with other people via social media.	4.09	1.087	414
	I express my thoughts by making comments and liking posts or photos on social media.	4.12	1.091	414
	Social media are a good platform to share my ideas and thoughts about various topics with other people.	4.12	1.088	414
<b>Communicatory Utility</b>	Social media provide me with new information to talk about with my friends.	4.08	1.074	414
	I talk about the issues I learn from social media in real life with other people.	4.08	1.070	414
	In my opinion, the information circulating on social media is one of the sources that could be used while communicating with other people in real life.	3.97	1.161	414
<b>Convenience Utility</b>	I prefer social media because of their convenience utility.	4.13	1.050	414
	I prefer social media as they do not require technical knowledge or skills.	3.89	1.242	414
	I like social media's accessibility (they are available anytime and anywhere).	4.23	1.006	414

<b>Information Sharing</b>	I share information about myself with others via social media.	4.20	1.191	414
	Social media are a good platform to introduce myself to others.	4.21	1.216	414
	I make my knowledge and skills to be known to others via social media.	4.24	1.193	414
<b>'Surveillance'/ Knowledge about Others</b>	I use social media to learn about what other people are doing.	3.93	1.217	414
	Social media is a good platform to learn about other people	3.91	1.167	414
	I like stalking people's lives on social media	3.66	1.323	414

Source: own processing

Given the participants' reasons to use social media in relation to the uses and gratifications approach, we may state that the social media users in Turkey use these platforms to satisfy a number of different needs (as shown in the previous table). The fact that the participants use social media to share information about themselves with others to satisfy their need to share information also means that social media are eligible to be used in personal branding. Below are the answers of the participants to the expressions designed to find out whether (and how) people use social media for personal branding (see Table 2 below). In order to understand the average values stated in the table, it is necessary to take into account that 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest value signifying the participants' agreement with the expressions posed in the questionnaire.

Table 2: Evaluations of social media use for the purposes of personal branding

Uses and Gratifications Related to Personal Branding	Average	Standard Deviation	Number
Social media are good platforms for me to communicate who I am and which traits I possess to other people.	4.02	0.986	414
I use social media to present my personality traits, knowledge and experience that make me different from other people.	4.15	1.087	414
Social media are an ideal platform to introduce and express myself to other people.	4.02	0.959	414
I use social media to establish my personal brand.	4.06	1.003	414
Social media are a platform that could be used to make myself different from others and stand out amongst my rivals.	4.04	1.110	414
I use social media to make other people realise my traits, knowledge, experience and skills.	4.13	1.102	414
Social media are an ideal platform to introduce myself personally.	4.14	1.101	414
Social media contribute to my fame, making me more 'on demand' in terms of my profession or skills.	4.14	1.071	414
I use social media as a platform where I can create content to establish my personal brand.	4.18	1.089	414
I try to become a person who comes to minds at first by sharing my opinions, knowledge and experience about various topics on social media.	4.12	1.141	414
Social media are a platform where everybody can express themselves to their target audiences through their personal efforts.	4.21	1.091	414

Source: own processing

It is remarkable that the average values of the participants' answers to the questions designed to determine social media use in terms of personal branding have all exceeded the value of 4 (out of 5). Our research thus shows that social media users in Turkey use social media for personal branding; in other words, social media are used to gratify a need that could be defined as personal branding. Turkish social media users use for the purpose of personal branding these social networking sites:

- *Instagram* is first with 77.5% (marked by 321 individuals);
- *Twitter* is second with 73.7% (marked by 305 individuals);
- *LinkedIn* is third with 47.3% (marked by 196 individuals);
- *YouTube* is fourth with 44.9% (marked by 186 individuals);
- Facebook is fifth with 40.1% (marked by 166 individuals).

These are followed by *Periscope* with 30.4% (marked by 126 individuals), blogs with 13.5% (marked by 56 individuals) and discussion forums with 8.7% (marked by 36 individuals).

Furthermore, the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been used to determine whether the participants' agreement levels on the expressions about social media use for personal branding changes in relation to the group averages depending on the variances of education level, age and time spent on social media platforms.

It has been found out (with regard to the participants' agreement levels associated with the mentioned expressions) that there is a significant statistical difference in the group averages depending on the participants' education levels since the test result is  $p < 0.05$ ; however, there is not a statistical difference in the group averages depending on their age since the test result is  $p > 0.05$ . There is a statistical difference in the group averages depending on the time spent on social media since the test result is  $p < 0.05$ .

According to the data obtained from the research, H1 has been verified; furthermore, it has been shown that social media users in Turkey use them to satisfy their needs of information seeking, social interaction, information sharing, passing time, entertainment, expressing opinions and relaxation and for convenience utility, communicatory usefulness and 'surveillance'.

The average values of the participants' responses to the expressions designed to determine the use of social media for personal branding have been evaluated and H2 has therefore been verified, ending up with the result that social media users in Turkey acknowledge using social networking sites for the purposes of personal branding.

Besides, the data obtained from the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been evaluated in order to test hypotheses H3, H4 and H5, which also reflect on the utilisation of social media for personal branding. As a result, the data has shown that Turkish social media users' usage of social media for personal branding changes according to the variance of education level, and thus H3 has been verified. Moreover, it has been proven that Turkish social media users' usage of social media for personal branding does not change according to the variance of age, and thus H4 has been falsified. It has also been understood that Turkish social media users' usage of social media for personal branding changes according to the variance of time spent on social media, and thus H5 has been verified.

## Conclusion

The uses and gratifications approach, one of the fundamental theories explaining why and to what extent media audiences seek media products, sees the recipients as active agents engaged in the communication processes. According to the approach, the individuals that are active in consuming communication messages use social media to satisfy their social and psychological needs. The first studies utilising the approach focused on exploring the reasons why the media audiences use 'traditional' mass media such as TV, newspapers and

radio,<sup>38</sup> but lately people's reasons to use social media have been investigated instead.<sup>39</sup> Social media have the capacity to satisfy various needs – information seeking, relaxation, entertainment, learning about others and spending free time. In addition, they allow people to establish and develop their personal brands.

In their study, Whiting and Williams deal with social media utilisation in relation to the uses and gratifications approach, showing that people have a tendency to use social media to share personal information with others.<sup>40</sup> Taking this finding as a starting point, it could be said there is a need to determine whether social media are used to satisfy people's need of personal branding and thus to conduct studies which will offer more thorough empirical data about the issue in relation to the uses and gratifications perspective. Similarly to product and service brands, personal branding also gives priority to differentiation and is defined as efforts to make individuals different from their rivals due to their unique skills and traits. Several studies on personal branding<sup>41</sup> emphasise the importance of Internet technologies (and social media in particular) in terms of personal branding.

Our study focused on determining the reasons why social media users in Turkey prefer to use social media in relation to the uses and gratifications perspective; the issue of personal branding via social media was addressed in detail. According to the data obtained from the research, people in Turkey use social media to satisfy the needs of social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment, relaxation, expressing opinions, information sharing, and for convenience utility, communicatory utility and 'surveillance'. Moreover, they frequently use social media to share information about themselves with others, indicating a strong connection between social media use and personal branding.

The research proves that social media are an important tool for satisfying people's psychological and social needs. Given the uses and gratifications theory's key idea that target audiences are active, we may return to our findings and confirm it is still valid. However, the notable absence of comparative studies conducted in different countries makes it difficult to investigate the different ways how social media users living in diverse cultural environments perceive personal branding in terms of social networking.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- ARRUDA, W.: Brand Communication: The Three CS. In *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 2009, Vol. 51, No. 5, p. 409-416. ISSN 1520-6874.
- BENDISCH, F. et al.: Fame and Fortune: A Conceptual Model of CEO Brands. In *European Journal of Marketing*, 2013, Vol. 47, No. 3/4, p. 596-614. ISSN 0309-0566.
- BERTHON, P. R. et al.: Marketing Meets Web 2.0, Social Media, and Creative Consumers: Implications for International Marketing Strategy. In *Business Horizons*, 2012, Vol. 55, No. 3, p. 261-271. ISSN 0007-6813.
- BÖKE, K.: Örneklem. In BÖKE, K. (ed.): *Sosyal Bilimlerde Araştırma Yöntemleri*. İstanbul: Alfa Basım, 2009, p. 103-149.
- BRYANT, J., ZILLMANN, D.: A Retrospective and Prospective Look at Media Effects. In NABI, R. L., OLIVER, M. B. (eds.): *The Sage Handbook of Media Processes and Effects*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009, p. 9-18.
- CHEN, G. M.: Tweet This: A Uses and Gratifications Perspective on How Active Twitter Use Gratifies a Need to Connect with Others. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2011, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 755-762. ISSN 0747-5632.
- CHEN, C. P.: Exploring Personal Branding on YouTube. In *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 2013, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 332-347. ISSN 1533-2861.
- Common Language Marketing Dictionary*: [online]. [2019-03-25]. Available at: <<https://marketing-dictionary.org/b/brand/>>.
- CORREA, T. et al.: Who Interacts on the Web? The Intersection of Users' Personality and Social Media Use. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2010, Vol. 26, No. 2, p. 247-253. ISSN 0747-5632.

38 See: STAFFORD, T. F. et al.: Determining Uses and Gratifications for the Internet. In *Decision Sciences*, 2004, Vol. 35, No. 2, p. 266.

39 See: QUAN-HAASE, A., YOUNG, A. L.: Uses and Gratifications of Social Media: A Comparison of Facebook and Instant Messaging. In *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 2010, Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 351.

40 WHITING, A., WILLIAMS, D.: Why People Use Social Media: A Uses and Gratifications Approach. In *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 2013, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 368.

41 See, for example: LABREQUE, L. I. et al.: Online Personal Branding: Processes, Challenges, and Implications. In *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 2011, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 38; NOLAN, L.: The Impact of Executive Personal Branding on Non-Profit Perception and Communications. In *Public Relations Review*, 2015, Vol. 41, No. 2, p. 288.

- DAUGHERTY, T. et al.: Exploring Consumer Motivations or Creating User-Generated Content. In *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 2008, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 16-25. ISSN 1525-2019.
- EVANS, D.: *Social Media Marketing an Hour a Day*. Indiana: Wiley Publishing, 2008.
- GANDER, M.: Managing Your Personal Brand. In *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 2004, Vol. 18, No. 3, p. 99-102. ISSN 1360-3108.
- GERSHON, I., BELL, J. A.: Introduction: The Newness of New Media. In *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 2013, Vol. 54, No. 3, p. 259-264. ISSN 1473-5784.
- GÜNGÖR, N.: *İletişim Kuramları Yaklaşımları*. Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2011.
- İŞİK, M.: *Kitle İletişim Teorilerine Giriş*. Konya: Eğitim Kitabevi, 2014.
- KAPFERER, J.: *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. London: Kogan, 2008.
- KARASAR, N.: *Bilimsel Araştırma Metodu*. Ankara: Hacettepe Taş Kitapçılık, 1984.
- KATZ, E. et al.: Uses and Gratifications Research. In *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1974, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 509-523. ISSN 0033-362X.
- KOÇIAJ, J. et al.: Personal Branding Perception by Albanian Students. In *International Journal of Global Business*, 2016, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 74-92. ISSN 2151-7541.
- LABREQUE, L. I. et al.: Online Personal Branding: Processes, Challenges, and Implications. In *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 2011, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 37-50. ISSN 1094-9968.
- LAIR, D. J. et al.: Marketization on the Recasting of the Professional Self the Rhetoric and Ethics of Personal Branding. In *Management Communication Quarterly*, 2005, Vol. 18, No. 3, p. 307-343. ISSN 0893-3189.
- LAZAR, J.: *İletişim Bilimi*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 2009.
- LIN, C. A.: Uses and Gratifications. In STONE, G., SINLETARY, M., RICHMAND, V. P. (eds.): *Clarifying Communication Theories: A Hands-On Approach*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1999, p. 199-208.
- NOLAN, L.: The Impact of Executive Personal Branding on Non-Profit Perception and Communications. In *Public Relations Review*, 2015, Vol. 41, No. 2, p. 288-292. ISSN 0363-8111.
- QUAN-HAASE, A., YOUNG, A. L.: Uses and Gratifications of Social Media: A Comparison of Facebook and Instant Messaging. In *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 2010, Vol. 30, No. 5, p. 350-361. ISSN 0270-4676.
- RAMPERSAD, H. K.: A New Blueprint for Powerful and Authentic Personal Branding. In *Performance Improvement*, 2008, Vol. 47, No. 6, p. 34-37. ISSN 1930-8272.
- RUGGIERO, T. E.: Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In *Mass Communication & Society*, 2000, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 3-37. ISSN 1520-5436.
- SHAKER, F., HAFIZ, R.: Personal Branding in Online Platform. In *Global Disclosure of Economics and Business*, 2014, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 109-120. ISSN 2305-9168.
- SOLIS, B., BREAKENRIDGE, D.: *Putting the Public Back in Public Relations*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2009.
- STAFFORD, T. F. et al.: Determining Uses and Gratifications for the Internet. In *Decision Sciences*, 2004, Vol. 35, No. 2, p. 259-288. ISSN 1540-5915.
- WE ARE SOCIAL: *Digital Report 2018*. [online]. [2018-10-10]. Available at: <<https://digitalreport.wearesocial.com/>>.
- WEE, L., BROOKS, A.: Personal Branding and the Commodification of Reflexivity. In *Cultural Sociology*, 2010, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 45-62. ISSN 1749-9755.
- WHITING, A., WILLIAMS, D.: Why People Use Social Media: A Uses and Gratifications Approach. In *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 2013, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 362-369. ISSN 1352-2752.
- YAYLAGÜL, L.: *Kitle İletişim Kuramları Egemen ve Eleştirel Yaklaşımları*. Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2010.
- YAZICIOĞLU, Y., ERDOĞAN, S.: *SPSS Uygulamalı Araştırma Yöntemleri*. Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık, 2004.