Digital Game Habits and Motivations of Youth in the Context of Uses and Gratifications Approach

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Abstract

In today's digital world, individuals deal with different activities to spend their free time. One of these activities is undoubtedly digital games. The aim of this research is to reveal the digital gaming habits and motivations of young people. The theoretical basis of this research conducted for this purpose is the uses and gratifications approach. Qualitative research method was preferred in this study. Semi-structured interview form was used as data collection tool. The focus group of the research consisted of 10 young people. Content analysis was also used to evaluate the data obtained from the interviews. As a result of the research, it was revealed that the basic digital game motivation of young people is to spend time and to relieve their stress. In addition, participating young people see digital games as a means of socialization. The escape motivation is also one of the important motivations expressed by young people. Considering the time allocated to digital games, it can be said that young people play games for 1-2 hours a day on average. Participating youth stated that they mostly preferred mobile devices as a digital game platform. PC and game consoles lagged behind mobile devices. Action games and strategy games ranked first in the preferred game types.

Keywords: Digital Games, Uses and Gratifications, Content Analysis, Game Genre, Games Platforms

Introduction

Although the concept of the game is as old as human history, it is an important part of human civilization and culture. This phenomenon, which first appeared with a simple imitation behavior, has become an important element of fields such as war, faith, and art over time. Technological innovations have shaped our leisure time activities while making human life easier in many areas from health to education. The most tangible effect of technology on leisure activities has been through digital games. While adults of all ages spend time with digital games, especially young people are more interested in digital games. The aim of this research is to reveal the digital gaming habits and motivations of young people. The theoretical basis of this research conducted for this purpose is the uses and gratifications approach.

In the early 20th century, the relationship between the individual and the media has always been interesting. The effects or ineffectiveness of media tools on the individual has been the main guide of media theories. At this point, the uses and gratifications approach has given media research a view from the passive audience perspective to the active audience assumption. This approach should be considered in terms of functionalist theory in sociology and motivational theory in psychology. Basically, this approach claim that individuals use media to meet certain needs. In other words, it focuses on what individuals do with the media, not what the media does to the individual. Basic elements of the uses and gratifications approach include the individual's psychological and social environment, communication needs and motives, attitudes and expectations towards media, functional alternatives to using the media, communication behavior and their consequences.

In line with the aims and theoretical basis of this study, qualitative research method was preferred. The data acquisition technique is semi-structured interview. Content analysis was applied to the data obtained from the interviews. 10 young people aged between 19 and 25 who have been playing digital games for more than 5 years were included in this study. The results of this research are also limited to these participating young people.

Context of Uses and Gratifications

Communication studies were initially shaped by the conviction that mass media have an unlimited power over the society, as can be seen in the stimulus-response model. In the following years liberal approaches came to prominence, in which the audience was active, and the responsibility shifted from tools to the audience. Within the framework of this approach, it has been argued that the audience is in an active position rather than a passive position. Therefore, research conducted in communication studies have moved from a vehicle-centered position to an audience-centered one. In the studies carried out in the 1950s and 60s, it started to be revealed that the audience consists of individuals who consciously make the decision to watch. One of the most famous and important approaches developed in this direction is the uses and gratifications approach. This approach questions how the audience uses the means of communication and for what needs. The main concern of this approach has been on why people use certain media. According to this approach, the audience receives and uses communication tools or information in these tools in line with their needs (Güngör, 2016, pp. 123-126; Özer & Birsen, 2010, p. 352). This approach was based on the question of "What does the media do to individuals?" instead of the question " What does the individual do with the media?"it was based on the question. The emergence of this approach dates to the early 1940s. The roles of Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler in shaping

this approach should not be forgotten. Researchers draw attention to the needs of people and their active use of the media. According to them, people meet their daily needs in various ways such as mass media (Güngör, 2016, p. 127). Indeed, according to a study on television viewers conducted in 1972 by Dennis McQail, Jay Blumler & Joseph Brown, viewers watch television to address four needs: The first is the need for self-appreciation, and the second is social interaction. Others are excitement and fun (Fiske, 2014, pp. 268-270).

Although the uses and gratifications approach is an approach developed for traditional media, research on television has stood out relatively compared to other communication tools (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010, p. 351). Nevertheless, as Özgür Köseoğlu stated, "the strength of the uses and gratifications approach is also due to its application to different media contents" (2012, p. 65). Therefore, it can be said that this approach is applicable to many media tools and their content.

Although this approach has been used extensively in academic research, it has also received some criticism. For example, the understanding that the individual dominates communication tools is one of the main points of criticism. Because while placing the individual in the position of the subject only, it also places the mass media in a way as an object. Therefore, it is thrown into a position that literally clears the mass media. In that case, it comes to the conclusion that we should never criticize those who make up the messages of the mass media. Because they are not "guilty" in any way. In other words, no matter what the audience did, the audience did it themselves. The result is that no one but the audience (especially the mass media) can be criticized (Güngör, 2016, p. 134; Erdoğan & Alemdar, 2005, s. 166-167).

It is also stated that the uses and gratifications approach has evolved into a more important and different position with the spread and development of new media tools with the criticisms made since those who use new media tools are in an active position than ever before. Moreover, while the audience in question consumes the content, on the other hand, they are in the position that creates the content. Indeed, as stated by Anabel Quan-Haase & Alyson Leigh Young (2010, pp. 351-352), although this approach was developed for traditional communication tools, it is possible to use it for new media tools. Because, on a ground where the boundaries between producer and consumer are blurred, it is of great importance to determine why and with what motivation the audience prefers new media tools or to determine the reasons for choosing new media instead of traditional media and to try to make a detailed explanation about this. However, as Bellarmine A. Ezumah points out (2013, p. 30), the fact that the new media allows individuals to choose among many media has been a factor that strengthens the uses and gratifications approach. As a matter of fact, it is known that many research on new media (especially the internet) using this approach started in the 2000s (Alikılıç, Gülay, & Binbir, 2013, pp. 45-46). It is seen that researchers especially use this approach to determine why and how individuals use new media (especially social media), or for what motivations (Karimi, Khodabandelou, Ehsani, & Ahmad, 2014, p. 56).

It is possible to find many studies in the literature on social media, internet or other tools of new media that adopt the uses and gratifications approach (Ahorny, 2015; Akçay, 2011; Al-Jabri, Shoail, & Ndubisi, 2015; Alikılıç, Gülay, & Binbir, 2013; Ezumah, 2013; Kara, 2016; Karimi, Khodabandelou, Ehsani, & Ahmad, 2014; Karakoç & Gülsünler, 2012; Krause, North, & Heritage, 2014; Köseoğlu, 2012; Köroğlu, 2015; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Koçak, 2012; Özer, 2016; Özata, Kılıçer, & Ağlargöz, 2014; Öztürk, 2018; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Tanta, Mihovilović, & Sablic, 2014 Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009; Üçer, 2016

Whitling & Williams, 2013; Wook Ha, Kim, Libaque-Saen, Chang, & Park, 2016; Göncü, 2018).

As can be seen in the studies in the literature, the uses and gratifications approach are generally based on quantitative methods. However, this approach does not exclude qualitative methods such as in-depth interview and observation (Jensen & Rosengren, 2005, p. 69). Therefore, there are also qualitative studies in the literature that adopt the uses and gratifications approach. For example, Ömer Özer & Haluk Birsen (2010) are the leading researchers who recommend conducting a qualitative research on this approach. Özer and Birsen examine the reasons why violent games are played within the framework of the uses and gratifications approach. Although the researchers state that quantitative methods are frequently used in this approach, they state that the results obtained with quantitative data (for example questionnaire) collection techniques are limited and this is also reflected in the comments. However, they state that this approach can be developed if different data collection techniques are used. As a matter of fact, they created a sample of 14 people in their study and tried to reach the result by conducting in-depth interviews with the participants.

Digital Games

Play is defined as a leisure that occurs spontaneously, that has no purpose, and makes that people happy. The game activity has the following features:
- It occurs spontaneously.
- It occurs in sense organs, nerves and muscles, and mental level.
- Its Experiences are repeated.
- It limits the time and space itself.
- It shows regular development stages (Akın, 2008, p. 1)

Roger Caillois defined game as a voluntary activity that is made for fun, continued at a specific place and time, and that can have unexpected results (Pala & Erdem, 2011, p. 54).

Johan Huizinga defines people who play games as "ludens" and people get to know their daily life through play. Humans experience the illusion of reality with games and develop strategies against life. According to Huizinga, playing games is an important activity in the life of societies. Huizinga states that people even live with games (Yenğin, 2012, pp. 93-96).

According to Huizinga, game comes before culture and is independent. Game is not serious and should be considered outside of ordinary life. The game has its limitations, and it is played in the "magic circle" that can be accessed and exited. Cushion and Sumo wrestling are examples that can explain this concept.

In order for the game to be considered as a "game", it must be free, direct, non-interest and inclusive. In modern societies, the game has been commercialized. Huizinga opposes game being a business (Oskay, 2000, p. 150). Ehrmann et al. (1968) opposes Huizinga's idea of abstracting the game from an external reality. According to him, games, culture, and reality are connected to each other, they interact mutually.

Mc Luhan, on the other hand, describes the game as a machine that acts when players agree to be puppets. Again, according to Mc Luhan, games are an element of mass media that has become an extension of social selves, not private ones (Kızılkaya, 2010, p. 50).

Whether it is digital or traditional, the game, which examines many scientific fields from psychology to anthropology, from sociology to communication sciences that constitute the content of the study, has an important place in the mental, physical, and cultural development of a child pedagogically. According to Toksoy, game is an important actor in social maturation, acquisition of identity and formation of self (2010, p. 205). Through game, a child gains experience, empathizes, learns to respect others, learns patience, adaptation, discussion, problem management, and cope with stress (Yavuzer, 1999, p. 170).

With the development of Internet technologies, digital games played on various devices such as computers, atari, consoles, mobile phones or tablets allow people from all over the world to play with each other in the same game not only by playing against artificial intelligence in the game, but also in virtual and augmented reality. In short, it covers all games played in digital tools or environments, which allow the person to participate in the game personally in the environment it is in.

The concept of digital games in Turkey began to be put forward in the 2000s (Binark & Sütçü, 2008, p. 43), the concept of digital games from social media to mobile games, consoles to virtual devices has continued to be discussed. The discussion is psychological in terms of the fact that digital games sometimes increase addiction and violence (Uysal, 2017; Aydoğdu Karaaslan, 2015; Irmak & Erdoğan, 2016; Dolu, Büker, & Uludağ, 2010) and sometimes sociological in terms of revealing new identity constructions (Binark & Bayraktutan-Sütçü, 2009; Sucu, 2012; Kan, 2012; Batı, 2011), sometimes aesthetics within the framework of game design (Barmanbek, 2009; Sezen, 2011), sometimes economical in terms of being considered as an industry and a sector (Sormaz & Yüksel, 2012; Karahisar, 2013) continues as studies.

Method

In this study, qualitative research method was preferred because it was aimed to determine the digital gaming habits of young people between the ages of 19-25. According to Yildirim & Şimşek (2008, p. 39), qualitative research: a type of research in which qualitative data collection techniques such as observation, interview and document analysis are used, and a qualitative process is followed to reveal perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic manner in a natural environment. According to Altunışık et al. (2010, p. 302), qualitative research techniques, which have an interdisciplinary feature, deal with the research problem with an interpretative perspective with a holistic approach. The events and facts discussed in the study are evaluated in terms of the meaning people attribute to these facts and events. The research questions determined for this study are as follows:
1- What gratifications do young people most use digital games to achieve?
2- What age do young people start playing digital games?
3- What tools do young people play digital games on?
4- How long is the time spent by young people for digital games?
5- What genres of digital games are young people interested in?

Focus Group

In this study, the participants were determined using the criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods. Criterion sampling consists of people, events, objects, or situations with the qualifications determined in accordance with the purpose of the study (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2016). The main criteria set by the

researcher in selecting the group determined for the study are that participants play digital games for 5 years or more, and that participants are between the ages of 19-25. The results of this study are limited to young people included in the sample. Verbal information was provided to the working group determined by voluntary participation for the purpose of the research.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	Age	Sex	Profession	Educational Level
P1	19	Male	Student	Bachelor's Degree
P2	19	Male	Cashier	High School
P3	25	Male	Academician	Master's Degree
P4	22	Male	Student	Bachelor's Degree
P5	20	Male	Sales Person	High School
P6	20	Female	Childminder	High School
P7	21	Female	Student	Bachelor's Degree
P8	21	Female	Student	Associate's Degree
P9	22	Female	Nurse	Associate's Degree
P10	24	Female	Academician	Master's Degree

The study group of the research consists of 10 young people. 5 of these young people between the ages of 19-25 are male and 5 of them are female. The educational level of the participants ranges from high school to graduate school.

Data Acquisition

Semi-structured interview form was used as data acquisition. In this form, there are questions prepared to evaluate digital game playing habits and motivations. In the preparation of their questions by the researcher, it was important that the questions were not multidimensional, while they were easy to understand. Attention has been paid to principles such as the fact that questions do not give direction to the interviewer. Research data was obtained using a voice recorder in meetings held at the time and place of appointment of participants.

Analysis

Content analysis was used to evaluate the data obtained from the interviews. In content analysis, there were four stages: processing the qualitative research data obtained from the

documents, coding the data, finding themes, organizing codes and themes, defining, and interpreting the findings (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2008). At this point, the data collected from the study through interviews were coded. Some themes were reached from the results obtained from the coded data. The formula belonging to Ole Holsti (1969, p. 129) was used to ensure validity and reliability. According to this formula: Reliability = 3M / N1 + N2 + N3 is the number of encoding agreed upon on the M value in this formulation, and the N value is the number of encoding each encoder does. According to this formula, the compatibility between encoders was 89%.

Findings

In the interpretation of the research findings, firstly, the participants were asked questions within the framework of the research questions of the study and the answers received were shown in the tables. Then, the data obtained through content analysis were divided into themes and evaluated.

Table 2: The Motivations of Young People Participating in the Research to Use Digital Games

P1	This is how I spend my free time.
P2	Entertainment and Socialization
P3	It helps me relax
P4	It helps me learn new things
P5	I think it improves my problem-solving ability
P6	Digital games are funny and educational
P7	Being able to team up with my friends and suceed things in digital games makes me happy
P8	Digital games help me spend my free time as well as help me learn English
P9	I like to do things in games that I can't do in real life
P10	Thanks to digital games, I get away from the problems of daily life

If we look at the results of other studies on digital game motivations, excitement and entertainment motivation came first in the study of Pala & Erdem (2011), while digital game motivations were determined as an assessment of entertainment and leisure in the study of Ünal et al. (2013). In the study of Uluyol et al. (2014), digital game motivations were determined as entertainment and stress relief. In the study conducted by Topal & Aydın (2018), digital game motivations were determined as stress relief and competition. Finally, in the study conducted by Bağcı (2019), the motivations of spending time and relieving stress came to the fore as the motivation of the digital game.

Table 3: Ages at which Young People Participating in the Research Start Playing Digital Games

P1	Since 9 years old
P2	Since10 years old
P3	Since 12 years old
P4	Since 7 years old
P5	Since 8 years old
P6	Since 7 years old
P7	Since 6 years old
P8	Since 10 years old
P9	Since 10 years old

P10	Since 13 years old

Table 4: Platforms Used by Young People Participating in the Research to Play Digital Games

P1	Mobil devices
P2	Mobil devices
P3	Game console
P4	PC
P5	PC
P6	Mobil devices
P7	Game console
P8	Mobil devices
P9	Mobil devices
P10	PC

In their study on the most preferred digital game platforms, Taylan, Kara & Durğun (2017), In their study concluded that the PC used first to play games, and mobile devices were used after the computer. In the research conducted by Bağcı (2019), it was determined that digital games are played more on mobile devices.

Table 5: Times and Frequencies of the Young People Participating in the Study to Play Digital Games

P1	I play at least 1 hour 3 days a week
P2	I play 2 hours a day playing
P3	I play for 1.5 hours every day
P4	I play for 1 hour a day
P5	I play at least 4 hours every day
P6	It does not exceed 1-2 hours a day
P7	2-3 hours for at least 3 days a week
P8	2 hours a day
P9	1 hours a day
P10	2 hours a day

When other studies on the time spent with digital games are examined, it was seen that in the study conducted by Ünal et al. (2013), 59% of the participants stated that they played games for less than 1 hour a day. In the study conducted by Yavuz & Tarlakazan in (2018), 50% of the participants stated that they spend less than 1 hour a day for digital games. Unlike these studies, 61% of the participants in the study conducted by Topal & Aydın in (2018)2 stated that they played games for more than 3 hours a day.

Table 6: Game Genres Preferred by Young People Participating in the Research

P1	Action Games
P2	Online Games
P3	Action Games
P4	Online Games
P5	Strategy
P6	Simulation
P7	Online Games
P8	Strategy
P9	Strategy

Considering the researches on game genres preferred by young people, action and strategy genres games were the most preferred game genres in the study conducted by Ünal et al. in (2013). In the study of Uluyol et al. In (2014), the most preferred game genres were action games and strategy games. In another study conducted by Taylan et al. In (2017), it was seen that action games and sports / racing games were preferred more. Action and sports games became the most preferred game type in the study conducted by Yavuz & Tarlakazan in (2018). In the study conducted by Topal & Aydın in (2018), the most preferred game genre was the puzzle / quiz type.

Content Analysis Findings

Digital Game Play Motivations

In general, it is possible to collect the motivations for playing digital games under three headings. First, the most dominant motivation for playing games is the motivation to spend free time/have fun/relieve stress. For example, P1 stated that "games above all the best way for me to spend leisure time. Because games are fun. In addition, games increase my motivation against difficulties and obstacles" while another participant P3 said that "I already have a very stressful work life. I relax by getting away from my daily troubles while playing games." P6 draws attention to the relaxion and entertaining functions of digital games as well as their educational functions. P6 stated that "It helps me to improve my English while spend my free time."

Second, it is the socialization function of digital games. P7 stated that "We team up and play with my friends in PUBG. We also have the opportunity to meet new people," P7 said that "We can exchange games in online games via Playstation. Thus, I meet new people". Finally, problem solving / escape are the motivation expressed by the participants. P9 stated that "thanks to the games, I can explore other different worlds. Games improves my imagination," he said. P5, on the other hand, said that "games become a testing ground in terms of creating solutions to the problems in daily life".

Time Allocated to Digital Gaming

Two different views emerged regarding the time that participants devoted to digital games. The first view is that digital games occupy a very important place in leisure activities. P5 stated that "After I come home from work, I play games on the computer for about 4 hours. I don't have many other activities like listening to music, watching movies, or reading books" again P7 stated that "I spend my remaining time from lessons only for games. Spending time on social media is boring for me. "

In the second view, participants state that digital games do not have an important place in leisure activities. P9 stated that "For me, watching social media and TV series takes more time than playing games", P1 stated that "Playing games in my spare time is an occupation that comes after listening to social media and music". At this point, we can say that the use of social media has an important place among young people's leisure activities.

Digital Game Genres and Digital Game Platforms

Preferred game genres include online games and offline game genres. Preferred online games are usually both single-person and multiplayer games, such as PUBG and Fortnite, which can also be played on mobile platforms. Strategy, simulation and action games are more preferred in offline games. While Civilization and Total War series stand out as the strategy game, it has been revealed that the Call of Duty series and Assasin's Creed series games are played by the participants as the action game. In terms of digital game platforms, the choice of mobile game platforms (smartphones, tablets) and non-mobile (PC and game consoles) game platforms stands out. It should be noted that participants who prefer computers and game consoles do not use mobile platforms. Users who prefer mobile platforms stated that they also play games on the PC from time to time.

Conclusion

Compared to other media such as books, movies, and radio, digital games seem to have an unusually wide appeal and serve a surprising number of emotional, social, and intellectual needs. The digital gaming environment is an increasingly complex and diversified environment. In today's digital world, individuals engage in different activities to spend their free time. One of these activities is undoubtedly games in digital environments.

It is observed that individuals of almost all ages play digital games in different environments, especially using mobile devices. The finding in this study that young people have the habit of playing digital games to spend time supports this result. There are various findings in the literature that support this finding. Onay-Durdu et al. (2005) concluded in their studies with university students that students play games to relieve stress. Çavuş et al. (2016) stated in their study that university students mostly played computer games to relax and relieve stress. Topal & Aydın (2018) concluded in their study that university students mostly preferred computer games to relieve stress. Uluyol et al. (2014) found that pre-service teachers preferred computer games mostly for entertainment.

One of the important results of the study shows that participating young people view digital games as a means of socialization. Especially young people who spend time with online games communicate and socialize with their peers. In the study conducted by Johnson et al. in 2016, it was confirmed that the motivation to socialize is an important point for young people who play digital games. In addition, the escape motivation is one of the important motivations expressed by young people. Young people are turning to digital games to get away from the troubles in daily life.

Considering the time allocated to digital games, it can be said that young people play games for 1-2 hours a day on average. This result is consistent with the results obtained in other studies (Ünal, et al., 2013; Tarlakazan & Yavuz, 2018).

Participating youth stated that they mostly preferred mobile devices as a digital game platform. PC and game consoles lagged behind mobile devices. This result shows us that the convergence features of devices such as smartphones and tablets also shape game habits.

Action games and strategy games rank first in the preferred game types. Participants noted that the violent content in action games functions as an element of relaxation. Participants

stated that they preferred strategy games, especially because they developed problem-solving practices.

Digital games are a new phenomenon for young people as entertainment and leisure activities of the developing new media technologies. In general, digital games are a technological entertainment tool by young people. It should be emphasized to young people that digital games have not only entertainment function but also an educational and instructive function. From an academic point of view, the digital game world is a suitable field for interdisciplinary studies. Qualitative and quantitative research can be conducted especially on the educational function of digital games.

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