

# SOCIAL MEDIA, PRODUCT GROUPS AND TURKISH CONSUMERS' PREFERENCE

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**Abstract** - The use of social media in Turkey is above the world average. Social media is being used intensely by the public. This situation provides the companies with a great opportunity to easily access the consumer. The aim of this study is to identify which social media channels and which product groups are most followed and to bring suggestions to companies about this. In the study, the convenience survey method was preferred and 661 usable questionnaires were obtained. As a result of the study, the most used and important social media site in Turkey is Instagram. This site was followed by Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Snapchat and LinkedIn respectively. The most important and followed product group is clothing products. This product group was followed by technological, book-stationery, travel, cosmetics and food and beverage respectively. As a result, companies should actively use the most important social media sites. So that companies can increase brand value and communicate better with the consumer.

**Keywords** - Social Media, Product Group, Consumers' Preference, Marketing

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social media, an environment in which consumers express themselves freely, is constantly growing (Packer, 2011, p.2; Chung et al., 2016, p.288). According to the Digital in 2016 report, World population is 7.395 billion people, 46% of them are internet users, 31% are active social media users and 27% are active mobile social media users. In other words, 2.307 billion people are active social media users (Kemp, 2016). This statistic value shows that the integration of social media with consumers in the world has reached a very advanced level. It can be predicted that the number of active social media users will increase in the future. According to the same report, the number of active internet users increased by 10%, the number of active social media users increased by 10%, and the number of active mobile social media users increased by 17% compared to the previous year (Kemp, 2016). These values show that social media is used intensely by consumers and the usage rate will increase. Active social media users and mobile social media users in Turkey are 53% and 45% of Turkey's population, respectively. (Kemp, 2016). When compared to the world population, it is seen that Turkish consumers use social media more actively and this usage is mostly realized with mobile devices. In fact, this situation offers great opportunities for companies. For example, companies can set a homogeneous target market, reach out to the consumers whom they determine as their target market, can get the consumer's ideas before they produce goods/services, try to increase their own image via social media. Companies use two-way communication with the consumer using social media. In addition, through the social media, companies can offer solutions to the problems of the consumer and obtain product design ideas that can meet the needs of the consumers. As a result, the use

of companies' social media channels has many advantages for companies. The purpose of this study is to suggest which social media sites are used more and which sectors are more followed in these sites for companies operating in Turkey or considering operating in the future. In the study, the importance of the social media channel for companies was touched upon, and analyzes were made about which sites and sectors are more important for consumers. Social Media

Communication is very important for all stakeholders in society. Now all the individuals in society are a click distance away from each other. Social media is the communication channel that enables all stakeholders to be very close to each other. Social media is the name of a technological and web-based communication channel that brings individuals so close together. Social media has moved the concept of communication to a different medium and has caused a great change in communication. But before touching on the concept of social media, it is worth mentioning the concept of web 2.0 and the concept of user-contributed content. Web 2.0 is a platform in which content and applications are modified in a participatory fashion by all users instead of individuals (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.60-61). That is, with the use of web 2.0, all the stakeholders of the community are beginning to interact with each other. In this case, the concept of User Generated Content (UGC) has emerged. The UGC is to define the various media contents that are open to the public by end users (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61). As a result of the unification of these two concepts, the concept of social media emerges and is defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010,

p.61). Social media is one of the most important channels of communication that allows people to share information on, interact with brands they consider, purchase behavior, assess, awareness, information acquisition, attitudes, post-purchase communication, express their beliefs, experiences and ideas in the 21st century (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012, p.4444; Hudson et al., 2016, p.27; Mangold and Faulds, 2009, p.358; Kudeshia et al., 2016, p. 257). Social media has not only allowed hundreds or even thousands of people to communicate with each other but also allows social media users to communicate with products and companies (Mangold and Faulds, 2009, p.357). This has led to the use of social media as a communication channel for companies. Companies have begun to use social media communication channels for purposes such as marketing their products, building brand value, enhancing customer loyalty, advertising, promotion, building strong and friendly relationships, reaching the customer, cost-effective, access and collect information about consumer, consumer engagement, promoting their products, customer targeting, increasing traffic to their website, identifying new business opportunities, creating communities, distributing content, collecting feedback from customers, reducing marketing cost, customization, increasing brand awareness, improving brand image, personal selling, publicity or public relations, connectivity, positive effects on brand trust and on brand loyalty (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012, p.4444-4445; Godey et al., 2016, p.5834; Abzari et al., 2014, p. 823; Enginkaya and Yilmaz, 2014, p.219-220; Kaur, 2016, p.34; Thackeray et al., 2008, p.338; Michaelidou et al., 2011, p.1155; Papasolomou and Melanithiou, 2012, p. 319; Felix et al., 2017, p.119; Laroche et al., 2013, p. 76). That is, social media is making significant contributions to all of its applications and increasing

popularity to enable companies to achieve their goals and also offers the opportunity to interact with consumers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.68; Enginkaya and Yilmaz, 2014, p.219-220).

Large-sized companies use the social media communication channel (Shi et al., 2016, p.578). For example, 73% of the companies in the fortune 500 magazine in 2012 had an official company account on Twitter, while Facebook official company account was 66% (Abzari et al., 2014, p. 822). But the social media channel is not just a communication channel that large-sized companies can use. Small and medium-sized companies also prefer this channel because of its low cost (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.68; Michaelidou et al., 2011, p.1154; Brajos-Gomez et al., 2015, p.443; Karaduman, 2013, p.466-467). In addition, when the low technological opportunities of the small and medium-sized companies are considered, it can be said that social media can overcome obstacles and limitations of the small and medium-sized companies (Dahnil et al., 2014, p.119). As a result, the use of the social media communication channel adds accretion value to the companies and is recommended for use in marketing communication. Companies use social media communication channels through social media sites. Social network sites are generic terms given to sites where users interact with each other, allow users to share content such as photos and videos, and make friends with each other (Kaur, 2016). There were more than 150 social network sites (SNS) in 2009, and the most popular social media network is Facebook (Michaelidou et al., 2011, p.1153). According to Saravanakumar and Sugantha Lakshmi (2012), Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the most used sites by individual users and companies and are used for promotion and brand image creation or development.

## II. METHODOLOGY

	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Income</b>		
Female	327	49.5	Under 500 TL	243	37.3
Male	334	50.5	500-749 TL	148	22.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>661</b>	<b>100</b>	750-999 TL	85	13.1
			1000-1749 TL	61	10
<b>Education</b>			1250-1499 TL	37	5.7
Pre University	296	45.2	Above 1500 TL	73	11.2
Bachelor's Degree	268	40.9	<b>Total</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>100</b>
Post Graduate	91	13.9			
<b>Total</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>100</b>			

Average age is 21.40

Social media usage time average is 4.60 hours per day.

Note: TL shows the Turkish Lira. 1 US Dollar = 3.64 Turkish Lira

**Table 1: Demographics of Respondents**

The study was conducted in order to find out what social media communication channels are most used

by the consumers and which are of great importance and convenience sampling method was applied. Since

social media is heavily used by young people (Packer, 2011, p.2), young people have been preferred as the target audience. As a result, 661 usable questionnaires were obtained. The questionnaire consists of questions about demographic and social media. Survey questions about social media are designed as "what social media channels do you use? you can make multiple choices", "you rank the product groups that you most follow in social media starting from 1" and "you rank the social media channel that you most use starting from 1". Demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

It can be said that when the demographic characteristics are interpreted, the number of males and females is balanced. In the case of education, the number of Pre-University and Bachelor's Degree is near and the number of Post Graduate is lower. It is expected that the income situation will be below 750 TL because of the majority of the youth who use social media. Because young consumers usually have a permanent job after college graduation. Demographic characteristics are scattered as expected. This is an important step in the correctness of the study.

Analyzes of social media were done in two different ways according to their importance and the site used. For the use of social media sites, the items marked by the participants were used as frequency values for

that site. For example, the number of participants who marked facebook site constituted the frequency value of facebook. The same analysis was performed on the other sites. Table 2 and Figure 1 are obtained as the result of this analysis.

No	Social Media Sites	Frequency	%
1	Instagram	545	22.7
2	Facebook	528	22.3
3	Youtube	501	20.9
4	Twitter	314	13.1
5	Snapchat	311	12.9
6	LinkedIn	102	4.2
7	The Others	95	3.9
Total		2396	100

Table 2: Analysis Results for Social Media Sites

When Table 2 is taken into consideration, respectively Instagram, Facebook, Youtube and Twitter are the most frequently used sites of social media users in Turkey. It is suggested that companies should consider Table 2 for marketing communication efforts through social media communication channels. So that, companies can reach more target audience. In addition, these efforts, which concentrate on specific social media channels, are carried out effectively and efficiently and cost advantages are gained.

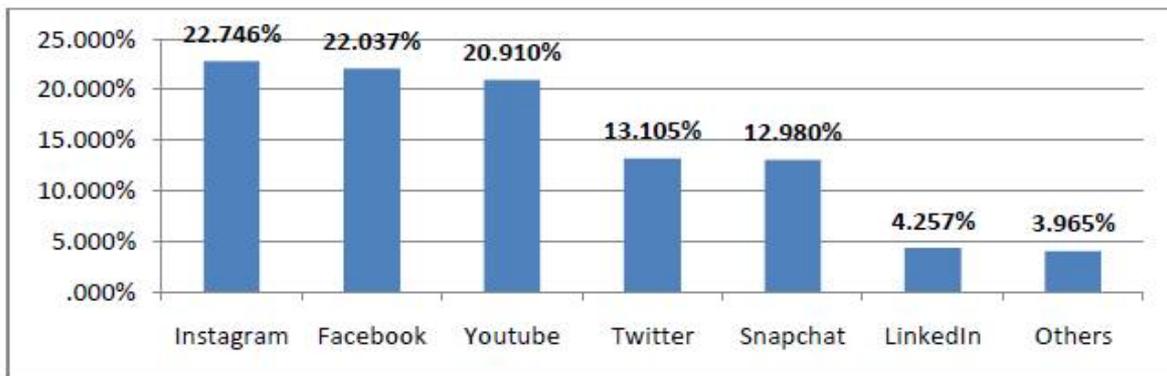


Figure 1: Chart of social media sites

Total scores for product groups or social media sites were obtained based on the importance score of the participants in the ranking analysis of product groups and social media sites according to their importance. For example, if there are 6 different importance levels for Facebook social media site, then the number of participants marking the 1st degree is multiplied by 6, the number of the participants marking the 2nd importance is multiplied by 5, the number of the participants marking the 3rd importance is multiplied by 4, The number of participants marking the degree of importance is multiplied by 3, the number of

participants marking the level of importance of 5 is multiplied by 2, and the number of participants marking the level of importance of 6 is multiplied by 1, and the scores obtained for each importance degree are aggregated to form a total score. The total scores obtained constituted the total importance score for each dimension and the highest rated dimension represented the most significant dimension for the participants. This analysis has been done for product groups on both social media sites and social media sites. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3, Table 4, Figure 2 and Figure 3.

No	Social Media Sites	Total Scores
1	Instagram	2924
2	Facebook	2665
3	Youtube	2275
4	Twitter	1404
5	Snapchat	1320
6	LinkedIn	422
7	The Others	292

Table 3: Results of importance analysis on social media sites

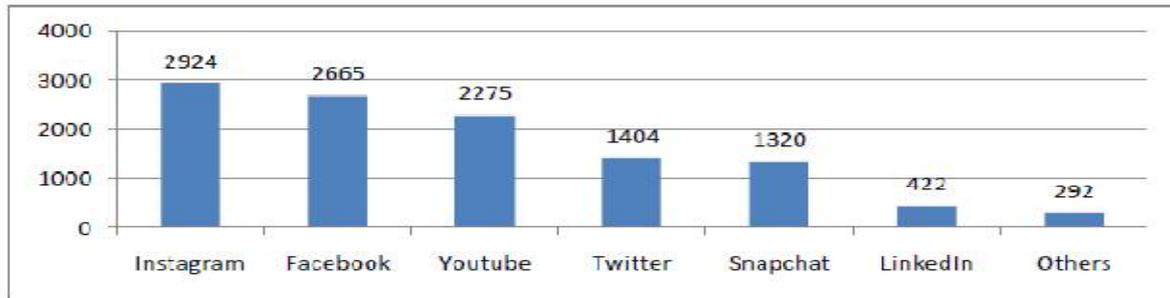


Figure 2: Chart of importance analysis on social media sites

According to the results of Table 3, the most used social media channel in Turkey is Instagram. The most popular social media sites after Instagram are Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn and others respectively. In this case, Instagram is seen as the most important social media site that must be used in marketing communication by companies. Then Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Snapchat can be actively used. Participants did not score high on other site dimensions. As a result, it can be said that the social media sites mentioned in the survey are sufficient for the Turkish consumers. It is thought to be beneficial for companies to actively use the social media sites in Table 3 in a way that makes more effort on the highest rated site.

No	Product Group	Total Scores
1	Clothing products	3143
2	Technological products	2503
3	Book-stationery products	2310
4	Travel	2195
5	Cosmetic	2043
6	Food and beverage	1846
7	The Others	504

Table 4: Results of importance analysis on product Group in Social Media Sites

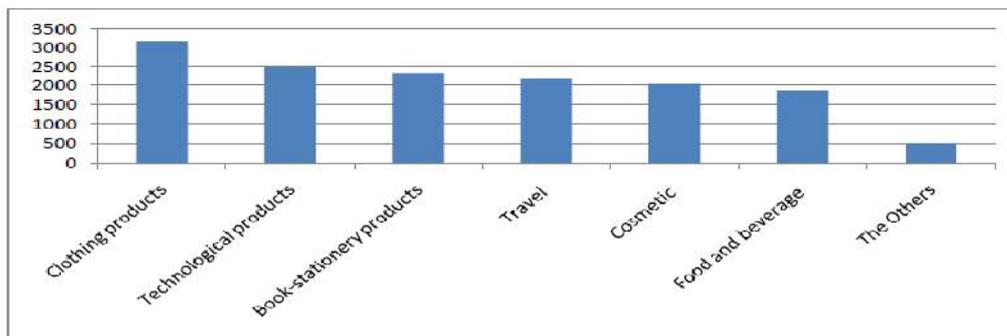


Figure 3: Chart of importance analysis on product Group in Social Media Sites

According to the results of Table 4, the most followed and most important product group in social media is clothing products for Turkish consumer. This product group is followed by technological products, book-stationery products, travel, cosmetics, food and beverage and other products respectively. In other words, it is important for clothing companies operating in turkey to make marketing communications using social media sites. The other dimension is low, indicating that the product groups used in the survey are sufficient for the consumer.

## CONCLUSION

More than half of Turkey's population is actively using social media. In this case, companies using social media actively have the potential to reach a large target audience. To achieve this, companies use social media communication channels for marketing communication efforts. Social media is applicable to all companies because of the cost advantage of social media communication channels. In this study, research was conducted on which social media channels and which product groups are more important in these channels. As a result of this study, consumer preferences for social media channels have changed over time. While the most used social media sites were Facebook, Twitter and Youtube in 2012 (Michaelidou et al., 2011; Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012), today's most used and important site has been Instagram social media site bought in 2012 by Facebook (<https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instagram-accessed> 08.03.2017). It is suggested that the companies that want to establish brand value should implement the marketing communication efforts more through Instagram. Then, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn sites can be used for marketing communication respectively. So that, companies can optimally use their budgets for marketing communications. As consumers gain more information and awareness about the company, the corporate and brand value of the company is positively affected. The product group followed most by the social media users in Turkey is the clothing sector. This sector is followed by technological, book-stationery, travel, cosmetics and food and beverage sectors respectively. It is considered that the efficiency of the companies will increase if the companies operating in Turkey allocate the budgets to the social media communication channels taking these product groups into account. As a result, social media communication channels should be used both to communicate in two dimensions and to better understand the consumer.

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