

Analyzing Extreme Sports Perceptions of University Students

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to analyze extreme sports perception of students currently studying at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University. A total of 75 students took part in this study that was conducted in line with qualitative research method. As a result of 10 focus group interviews organized among groups of 7 participants, it was identified that the very first emotions felt upon hearing the statement 'extreme sports' had been adrenalin, sensation, risk, action, fear, courage, speed, passion and extraordinariness. Extreme sports activities are naturally perceived as the kind of sport activities that involve an element of danger. In a number of extreme sports viz. skydiving, hang gliding and parachuting it was identified that primary motivational factors had been sensation and adventure seeking. The first choice of students who were extreme-activities enthusiasts was reported as paragliding ensued by rafting, mountain biking, skiing, kite surfing and climbing respectively. One of the reasons explaining the unpopularity of extreme sports among some students was declared to be the high-cost of essential equipments.*

Keywords: Extreme sports, University Students, Focus group interviews

1. Introduction

In the course of time having failed to truly adopt the idea of leisure time, which was merely limited to activities such as religious holidays, bayrams (Islamic holidays), weddings, and celebrations, and in antique age that witnessed seasonal planting and harvesting of crops commonly practiced in all agricultural societies; and upon the transmission of rural man to urban man after the preindustrial and industrial ages alternatively, a novel demand for leisure time activities emerged with the introduction of notions of labor and laborer and this demand in response grabbed a position in the list of basic needs of all individuals. In accordance with this new approach, an upward trend was witnessed in the disposition and desire of partaking in recreational activities among citizens organized under specific groups within their society.

Concept of leisure time started to play a determinant value having designated the life quality of a novel notion in any society and started to have an accentuated significance as a result of decreased time spared for work and further advancements in technology. Leisure time concept unleashed a structure that could offer intrinsic and extrinsic motivation impinging upon relevant individuals. This structure is an expression of personal values of individuals and can play critical role in better understanding the relevant person (Willis, 1991).

Sports activities moved further at a great pace in due time and extended its scope even wider. Without paying heeds to the culture and historical process, humans have always resorted to sports to distinguish themselves and emphasize their status and dignity compared to the others (Allman et al., 2009).

Modern life style and latest popularity of sports led to a remarkable rise to participating in extreme sports and adventure activities among the young generation at most (Şimşek, 2010).

Among young people in particular, participating and performing an extreme sports is constantly rising despite the intrinsically high-risk potential of a number of outdoor extreme sports. Unless youngsters consider a sports activity challenging to a certain extent, they are most likely to lose interest and choose not to practice. Risk-free activities would deprive young minds from testing physical challenges that would help them to be motivated and stimulated. These are critical assets for improving risk-taking and risk-management skills of young people and for the betterment of their mental wellness. Avoiding problems, developing testing skills, overcoming their fears are analogous with motivational factors in targeted achievement for a good number of adventure-seeking athletes and youngsters. Risk is decidedly one of the inherent facts of life itself (The New York Times Upfront Magazine 2016, February, 8, pages: 22-24).

In the definition of extreme sports concept, terms such as 'extraordinary sports', 'leisure time sports', 'adventure sports', 'life-style sports' and 'alternative sports' are ubiquitously used interchangeably. Extreme sports have gained popularity by means of their risk focus and adrenalin load and usually defined as sports activities in which any accident or misdeed could result in severe injury or even death. Extreme sports activities characteristically involve danger and these activities basically require speed, height, advanced physical effort, balance, quick decision making and exclusive vital equipments. Studies related to participants of risky sports revealed that these people have two unique personality traits namely seeking of sensation and extreme self-efficacy. These two traits are recognized to be the basic factors leading to an increased participation to risky sports and recreational activities (Ceylan et al., 2016).

Extreme sports are generically known to be sports performed in the nature and open spaces. Those in the nature can become physically stronger and psychologically calmer and they can relax their mind and soul in a peaceful setting. Individuals spending time outdoors without the

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overt pollution of city life are likely to gain numerous benefits. Although motivation to partake in an outdoor sports activity may vary, it is a convenient way to relax and feel refreshed, rested and rejuvenated so that coping with the hustle and bustle of urban life becomes way easier. It is thus reasonable to claim that outdoor activities render physical and mental benefits to participants and help them maintain a positive attitude in personal and social life. A high demand emerged since free-time of people and these activities could share a large number of overlapping hours.

In any given outdoor recreation the very first psychological factor affecting participants' activity experience is the perception of freedom, which relates to independently choosing an activity with passion and dedication. Involved individual perceives that the activity has been the outcomes of his/her free choice. In addition, two relevant criteria were also suggested; motivation for the action and quality of obtained result. This concept is still widely used in defining leisure time behaviors. Even though personality traits may identify the type of leisure-time behaviors or render a direct effect on such actions, these relationships are inseparably intertwined (Ibrahim & Cordes, 2002).

Campbell and Johnson conducted a study on the developing sports in England and identified that 5% of young population were active practitioners of minimum one extreme sports and 12% were quite motivated to take part in an extreme sports. In the United States it was measured that between the period from 1978 to 2000, participation ratio to such sports increased by a percentage of 244.7 (Campbell and Johnson, 2005).

Consequent to this increased interest towards extreme sports, an identical rise was measured in literature studies focusing on this particular issue. Irrespective of this global popularity however, in Turkey, there is a scarcity of studies on extreme sports. It is therefore suggested that current study is a valuable resource for developing extreme sports in Turkey and a reference for the participants of extreme sports.

2. Method

Prior to implementing the research, groups each of which contained 7 students from Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University Department of Physical Education and Sports and participants were selected from those who chose one of the courses (BSD coded) such as Teaching of Basketball and its Theory, Teaching of Aerobics and its Theory, Teaching of Tennis and its Theory. A total of 10 focus group interviews were conducted with the group members and one assistant. Maximum variation sampling was implemented. Data were recorded in writing by the assistant reporter. Every single interview lasted circa 20-25 minutes. Interviews were conducted in the form of question, answer and conversation and 3 questions were asked. Particular attention was paid to select functional questions reflecting the way people talk in real life. To ensure the comprehensibility of questions, a pretest was applied to a group of 5 students.

Focus group interviews play vital function in collecting qualitative data. Qualitative research can be defined as the technique focusing on a topic of which limits are within the sphere of pattern and methods while focus group interviews are basically interview discussion technique practiced with a group (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Focus group interviews are planned discussions on a predetermined topic and aimed at exploring the opinions of a preselected group of participants (Baş, Çamır, & Özmalda, 2008). Focus group interviews are one method of 'exploring the thoughts'. It is advised to form focus group interviews with 6-8 participants. One advantage of this technique is that researchers can include larger numbers of participants to their research which would otherwise be a problem if personal interview method was used. Focus group interview method is effectively used in customer-satisfaction researches in marketing sector and in studies related to measuring the level of meeting students' expectations in higher education programs (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Questions should fit to conversation style and daily language and should not involve technical terminology (Kruger & Casey, 2000). In the analysis of focus group interviews, quantification is not an appropriate and favorable method. In focus group interview that is a qualitative data collection method, there is no need for quantification since generalization is not the main concern (Fern, 2001). Hence percentage, frequency or statistical tests or tables are unrequired in the presentation of results. Further to that results are not to be quantified by all means (Suler, 1995). Rather than quantitative data it is crucial to prioritize the way different personal opinions are presented. In addition, as opposed to the claim of the researcher, presenting unveiled differences is vitally important here as it is critical in all of the qualitative studies (Kitzinger, 1995). Content analysis is the best alternative for data analysis process (Kitzinger and Farquhar, 1999). The best way in data analysis is to identify key themes under specific headings while analyzing during or after the recording process. Even small notes taken during recording stage are considerably helpful for the ensuing analyses. In the reporting of focus group interviews not the digits but what the participant's state is more significant (Creswell, 1998). In this report perceptions that are generically designed according to the themes should be provided.

3. Findings

In this study data were collected from the participants via focus group interviews. Within the scope of validity and reliability test of the data collection tool developed by the researchers, the comprehensibility of the test was checked and questions hard to understand were revised and post questions were concocted to the end of obtaining extensive information if needed. In the focus group interviews among participants below-listed questions were sought for an answer:

1. What are the first three feelings on your mind when you hear the statement 'extreme sports'?
2. Have you ever done an extreme sports activity?
 - If your answer is No, please explain why.

- If your answer is Yes, please specify the extreme sports you experienced.

3. How do you feel when doing an extreme sports activity?

Interviews under three headings of questions were changed into sub questions in a conversation form. Those having tested an extreme sports activity shared their experiences with the rest of group and it was seen that those who have not tried it before were then motivated to experience an extreme sports activity.

At the end of interviews with students it was identified that first feeling associated with extreme sports was adrenaline and other feelings were in the order of sensation, risk, action, fear, courage, speed, passion, extraordinariness and physical relaxation. During the implementation of interviews it was seen that those who preferred to live their life attentively answered such; risk, fear and unusual.

A vast majority of students stated not to have practiced extreme sports and the first reason they provided for this answer was "lack of such interest", second reason was "high cost of the equipments", third reason was "lack of a culture or environment that guided them to extreme sports".

Those who were engaged in extreme sports claimed to do paragliding mostly and the ensuing preferences of extreme athletes were listed alternately as rafting, mountain biking, skiing, kite surfing and climbing.

Participants also emphasized that engaging in an extreme sports altered their life perspective, created a sense of difference, offered joy and boosted self confidence.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

In this age extreme sports have gained a vital position globe wide, yet in Turkey its popularity could witness a jump only after the 2000s in particular. Easy access to extreme sports in a specific region people live can lead to an increased ratio of participation. On the other hand studies on participation to extreme sports draw attention to the critical effect of factors such as close environment, financial means, personality, personal risk perception etc. to further elevate participation ratio. At the same time technological advancements, means to access information, visual and printed resources can also play vital role in boosting the awareness on extreme sports and overall ratio of participation.

Obtained findings of this research highlighted that the very first feelings associated with extreme sports are adrenaline, sensation, risk, action, fear, courage, speed, passion and extraordinariness. Extreme sports activities are reported to be danger-involving sports in essence (Ewart, 1983). Şimşek (2010) points to the distinguishing characteristics of extreme sports since it allows the individual to maximally experience a high risk perception, advanced level of concentration, sensation, sense of adventure, disposition for freedom and a unique way of living. He also added that the most salient feature separating extreme sports from branches of traditional sport is death risk

involved in the former one. Shoham (1998) examined the role of perceived benefits of participating in extreme sports. In his research he designated that the preliminary motivating factor for skydiving, hanggliding, parachuting and identical extreme sports are sensation and adventure seeking. The most effective demographic factors underlining sensation and adventure seeking were reported to be age and gender. Findings suggested that sensation pursuit was more common among men compared to women, it started to rise between age nine and fourteen, reached to the peak at late-adolescence period (mid twenties) and slowed down in parallel with the rise in one's age (Roth, 2007; Guskowska & Boldak, 2010).

Zarevski et al., (Zarevski et al. 1998) highlighted that in the dimension of feeling, a.k.a sensation and adventure seeking, extreme athletes proved to be more dominant than traditional athletes. Extreme sports are differentiated from other types of sports since it allows the individual to maximally experience a high risk perception, advanced level of concentration, sensation, sense of adventure, disposition for freedom and a unique way of living. The most salient factor separating extreme sports branches from traditional sports branches is the death risk involved. It can thus be argued that extreme sports practitioners willingly embrace risk to perform these branches. Risk taking is viewed as one of the most critical motivational factors that can facilitate participation to extreme sports rather than traditional sports branches (Shoham, 1998). Studies related to seeking of sensation and adventure revealed that in the adventure experience paradigm structured by Martin and Priest (1986) it was argued that due to an increased interest towards adventure experience, a shift was witnessed in perceived risk and perceived competency (Priest & Bunting, 1993).

The things individuals see and hear around and the lifestyle of their close associates also leave some effect on their lives. Because of the requirement to analyze individuals together with their environment, the habitat of humans also modify the way they take part in certain activities. Based on the role of environment in getting acquainted with sports, it has been detected that people can also start extreme sports with the friend recommendation. Results of this study manifested that the first choice of students performing extreme sports was paragliding while rafting, mountain biking, skiing, kite surfing and climbing came next in a row. As this study was conducted in Muğla city conveniently located near Fethiye that is a reputed global brand in paragliding and endowed with easy transportation to companies offering paragliding service, it is feasible to claim that paragliding ranked the top popular extreme sports among respondents. Likewise an analysis of the other popular extreme sports confirms that favorable geographical characteristics of Muğla region provide optimum conditions to practice these extreme sports.

Within the context of this study one of the reasons that students avoided extreme sports was the high cost of equipments. This is an expected finding since all participants were students financially dependent on their parents. Further to that since most of the extreme sports equipments are imported and they are sold at inflated

prices in Turkey it becomes more challenging to access these tools. This finding can be explained with the opportunity theory correlating participation to outdoor recreation with one's income level. This theory asserts that the ratio of participation to outdoor recreation is correlated with open public use of outdoor recreation resources, accessibility and cost. Low income level would be a natural limiter of participation to costly recreation activities. Since low income is one reason accounting for decreased level of participation to recreational activities it is most likely that individuals would mostly opt for group activities. This is also a reflection of opportunity theory that in line with increased income level individuals would go for costly activities, participate in greater numbers of activities and generally select solo activities. The factors that might motivate an individual towards outdoor sports may be a challenge to solve. Lead factors that guide an individual to perform any outdoor recreation from amateur level to the professional level are quintessentially related to the person's physical condition, personality, the means s/he has on hand, and morality (income level, environment, friends etc.). A number of researchers claim that the effective factors in participation to an outdoor recreation are one's personality and present condition while others argue that in addition to personal needs, an abundance of factors such as social, psychological and personal elements can also play role. A summation of results obtained from all relevant studies indicate that the reasons for an individual to participate in an outdoor recreation vary such: love of the nature, escape from the crowds, routine, family and responsibility, engaging in a physical activity, creativity, relaxation, self development, acquiring new skills, building social relations, meeting new people or observing them, connecting with potential people they want, connecting with the family members, desire to know and be known, helping others, social responsibility, stimulant factors or attractive built, gaining social power, self-realization, fighter spirit, defiance, desire for success, competition (inner and outer), spending time and getting rid of boredom, and lastly intellectual aesthetics. Though personal differences do exist, nearly all participants select to be a part of recreational activities on grounds of physical development, novelty seeking, gaining new experiences, self testing, self development, being creative, need for socialization, need for resting and relaxing, fulfillment of competitive instincts, health and other relevant factors (Ardahan & Yerlisu Lapa, 2010).

Shoham et al., (1998) underlined that the factor motivating an individual towards extreme sports is the opportunity to move away from the routine of daily lifestyle. Risk taking, feeling of success, extroversion, extraordinariness, fun and amusement are some of the significant factors that motivate people to experience an extreme sports activity (Shoham et al., 1998: 307- 321). Individuals aiming to experience such emotions can satisfy their desire for sensation via engaging in an extreme sports activity. On the other hand those who avoid experiencing emotional experiences involving death risk, injury risk, maximum sensation and adventure would commonly opt for traditional sports.

In light of all the findings obtained from this research suggestions below can be provided to increase university students' participation to extreme sports;

- Taking into account the benefits obtained from outdoor recreations and extreme sports it is essential to increase the participation of university students to these sports branches. Universities and local administrations should cooperate and upon measuring the opportunities of their region they are suggested to offer minimum-risk involving activities by conducting a number of modifications for the seekers of extreme sports.
- Participants strive hard to perform these activities with a limited budget hence a few physical requirements for these activities could be reimbursed by universities and associations/clubs.
- Seminars, promotion meetings and various other conventions should be organized within the body of universities to popularize some extreme sports feasible to perform in their geographical area.
- Continuity should be ensured in the participation to activities.
- Outdoor sports always involve a risk factor due to the untamed nature of the outer environment. On that account it is a must to prepare contingency emergency plans even for the seemingly easiest activity and all participants should be briefed accordingly.
- To provide periodic first aid trainings for participants universities, associations/clubs or concerned federations should organize certified courses.
- In all branches of outdoor sports motivational factors are basically getting rid of boredom and stress, field of interest, uniting with the nature, gaining and utilizing new skills. Considering that those individuals have a positive experience in being a part of extreme activities, participation to extreme sports should be supported to build a healthy society and nonparticipants should be motivated to get involved in an activity.

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