

NEGOTIATING BACKPACKING
EXPERIENCE: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA
IN A NEOLIBERALIZING WORLD

A Master's Thesis

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Bilkent University 2023

*To those who never stop exploring
and write their own stories,
first and foremost,
to women*



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OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN A NEOLIBERALIZING WORLD

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
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NEGOTIATING BACKPACKING EXPERIENCE: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL
MEDIA IN A NEOLIBERALIZING WORLD

By Mirac Kulaklı

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Political Science and Public Administration.

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ABSTRACT

NEGOTIATING BACKPACKING EXPERIENCE: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN A NEOLIBERALIZING WORLD

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This thesis is about the relationship between the backpacking experience and digital media in the context of neoliberalism. It investigates those backpackers who reject the working conditions and life style imposed on them by the neoliberal system and become backpackers. It explores the dynamics created by digital media in the backpacking experience. Specifically, it aims to understand how digital media transforms the backpacking experience, what tensions, if any, it creates, how they challenge the ideal backpacker image, and how backpackers negotiate these tensions. A qualitative research design is adopted to explore them, and purposive sampling is applied to investigate the research questions. Participants are self-identified backpackers who resign from work or refuse to start working under neoliberal conditions based on competitive, long working hours and individual interest-based

mentality. They aim to travel around the world freely by sharing their memoirs and daily life on their YouTube and Instagram accounts. The findings, obtained from videos, pictures, titles, texts, and cover photos on YouTube and Instagram profiles between 2012 and 2023, are analyzed through thematic analysis. Neoliberalism is used as the analytical lens to interpret the thematized data by focusing on the neoliberal subject. The three pillars of the study can be expressed as 1. the experience of being a backpacker, 2. being a prosumer concerning the working principles of YouTube and Instagram, accepted as a part of personalized media economies, and 3. neoliberalism. As a result of the research, the paradoxes of low-budget backpackers who want to stay away from neoliberal working conditions and neoliberal market conditions have been identified, which are located mainly between their purpose to start the journey as a backpacker and the conditions that arise with the integration of digital media to this experience. Accordingly, the main argument of the thesis is that those backpackers who started their journey as a backpacker to resist the neoliberal system are pulled into it by their interaction with the digital media. In conclusion, digital media transforms the backpacking experience, producing paradoxes.

Keywords: backpacking, digital-social media, neoliberalism, prosumer, Türkiye

ÖZET

SIRT ÇANTALI GEZGİN OLMA DENEYİMİNDE UZLAŞMA

ARAYIŞI: NEOLİBERALLEŞEN DÜNYADA

DİJİTAL MEDYANIN ROLÜ

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Bu tezin konusu sırt çantalı gezgin deneyimi ve dijital medya arasındaki ilişkidir.

Çalışmanın amacı dijital medyanın sırt çantalı seyahat deneyiminde yarattığı dinamikleri neoliberal bağlam içinde keşfetmektedir. Spesifik olarak dijital medyanın sırt çantalı gezgin deneyimini nasıl dönüştürdüğünü, ortaya ne tür gerilimler ve dinamikler çıkardığını, bu gerilim ve dinamiklerle ideal sırt çantalı gezgin imajı arasındaki ilişkiyi ve sırt çantalı gezginlerin bu gerilimleri nasıl uzlaştırdığını keşfetmeyi amaçlamıştır. Tez neoliberal sisteme ve onun çalışma şartları ve yaşam biçimine karşı durarak gezgin olanların deneyimlerine

odaklanmaktadır. Çalışmada nitel bir araştırma tasarımı benimsenmiş ve araştırma soruları doğrultusunda amaçlı örnekleme uygulanmıştır. Katılımcılar, rekabetçi, uzun çalışma saatleri ve çıkar odaklı zihniyete dayalı neoliberal koşullar altında çalışmaya başlamayı reddeden veya bu koşullara sahip işlerinden istifa eden, kendilerini sırt çantalı gezgin olarak tanımlayan, anılarını ve günlük yaşamlarını YouTube ve Instagram hesaplarında paylaşarak dünyayı özgürce dolaşmayı hedefleyen kişilerdir. Bu kişilerin 2012-2023 yılları arasında YouTube ve Instagram profillerinde yer alan video, resim, başlık, yazı ve kapak fotoğraflarından elde edilen bulgular tematik analiz yoluyla analiz edilmiştir. Neoliberalizm, tematikleştirilmiş verileri neoliberal özneye odaklanarak yorumlamak için analitik bir mercek olarak kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın üç ayağı 1. sırt çantalı gezgin olma deneyimi, 2. kişiselleştirilmiş medya ekonomilerinin bir parçası olarak kabul edilen YouTube ve Instagram'ın çalışma prensiplerine göre üreten tüketici olmak ve 3. neoliberalizm olarak ifade edilebilir. Araştırma sonucunda neoliberal çalışma ortamından ve neoliberal piyasa koşullarından uzak durmak isteyen düşük bütçeli sırt çantalı gezginlerin yaşadıkları paradokslar keşfedilmiştir. Bu paradokslar esas olarak yolculuğa başlama amaçları ile bu deneyime dijital medyanın eklenmesiyle ortaya çıkan koşullar arasındadır. Tezin temel argümanı neoliberal sisteme karşı gelmek için sırt çantalı gezgin olanların dijital medyayı sırt çantalı gezgin olma deneyimine dahil etmeleri sonucu neoliberal sistemin içine çekilmeleri fikridir. Sonuç olarak, dijital medya paradokslar üreterek sırt çantasıyla seyahat deneyimini dönüştürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: sırt çantalı gezgin, dijital-sosyal medya, neoliberalizm, üreten tüketici, Türkiye

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The thesis explores the relationship between the experience of self-identified backpackers (*sırt çantalı gezgin*) who travel in low comfort and the role of digital media in this experience, which is used in sustaining their travel economically. Although there are different types of backpackers, such as long-distance hikers and overnight or weekend backpackers, this thesis mainly investigates backpackers who resign from or refuse to work with neoliberal working conditions based on competitive, long working hours and interest-based mentality and have the aim to travel around the world freely by sharing their memoirs and daily life on their YouTube and Instagram accounts. In other words, the main focus of the thesis is the relationship between digital media and the backpacking experience during a world tour.

Backpacking is defined around five features: traveling on a low budget, meeting different people, being or feeling free, independent and open-minded, and organizing one's journey individually and independently for travelers as long as possible (Welk, 2004). The backpacking phenomenon is defined as a “metaphor of mobility in the modern context is a way of life and travel, and also an expression of identity” (Majstorović, Stankov, & Stojanov, 2013). Based on this, research questions are: How do backpackers negotiate their experiences of traveling with digital media?

How do YouTube and Instagram transform their experiences? What tensions does this create in terms of what they think a backpacker should be like, and how do they cope with these tensions? To answer these questions, the data have been collected based on the research on social media that appeared between 2012 and 2023 regarding the beginning time of the YouTube Partnership Program.

With the digitalization wave, backpackers both share and watch traveling style, the local culture in a traveled country, and travel journeys on popular social media platforms, YouTube and Instagram as prosumers, which is a word that comes from producing and consuming content on social media at the same time (Woerman, 2012). Although it is impossible to know the number of backpackers in Türkiye or the world, it is visible that thanks to digitalization, the number of prosumer backpackers who travel around the world as a backpacker and share memoirs on social media has been increasing day by day. Since digital media give them a chance to gain money from these platforms, they can integrate them into their backpacking experience. There can be some backpackers who do not share their journey on social media. Still, considering the difficulty of obtaining data about them, the scope of research is limited to prosumer backpackers. Since YouTube allows the researcher to find the most extended and most detailed videos about backpackers, and Instagram allows the researcher to get instant photos and short videos in the ‘story’ part, these two social media platforms have been put the scope of this research.

On this ground, the main argument of the thesis is that those backpackers try to open up a space outside of the neoliberal system via digitalization. However, they are trapped by neoliberal conditions of the personalized media economies: YouTube and

Instagram. During this process, they face some paradoxes that are introduced as themes. Then, they spend an effort to negotiate the backpacking experience they dreamed of at the beginning and the experience of being prosumers on YouTube and Instagram, named personalized media economies. Although they want to escape neoliberal market conditions, and since personalized media economies also have neoliberal market conditions, they need a negotiation within these paradoxes reached by thematic analysis.

To give a context, self-identified backpackers positioned themselves apart from the tourism industry and market by not being a tourist and aiming to discover the experiences of the locals (Hannam & Ateljevic, 2007). They also highlight not being institutionalized/industrialized by aiming not to be a tourist, which is also accepted as a part of the tourism market. Their common feature is not being a part of a tourist mentality, but they come from various backgrounds. Namely, backpacking could be done by students or Erasmus students who have to explore the world on a low budget, people who never graduated from university, and people who use Interrail, which is a program that allows them to choose some train routes in the EU to travel, campers in various countries, weekend hikers. This variety shows how the research universe is diverse regarding this subject. However, the scope of the thesis is limited by backpackers who resign from or refuse to work in neoliberal working conditions based on competitive, long working hours and interest-based mentality. Namely, this thesis investigates the experiences of self-identified backpackers who aim to position themselves outside of neoliberal conditions by resigning from or refusing to work in the neoliberal market with the help of digitalization.

Since most backpackers share their experiences on social media, research materials have been chosen as videos, photos, captions, and texts on their online profiles on social media. Social media profiles have been limited, mainly on YouTube and Instagram. From this point, the backpacking experience is considered in relation to digital media, which enables us to explore the tensions between 2012 and 2023. The time slot is chosen based on YouTube Türkiye because the primary research materials have been taken from backpackers' YouTube channels. YouTube Türkiye started providing Turkish content in October 2012 and opened the YouTube Partnership program, which enables financial support to content producers according to the number of videos watched in May 2013 (İlhan, 2018). For this reason, the time slot is chosen between 2012 and 2023.

In the literature, backpackers are discussed concerning their motivations and characteristic features in different regions (Hecht & Martin, 2006; Nok, Suntikul, Agyeiwaah, & Tolkach, 2017; Yaşar, 2018), sustainable practices (Iaquinto, 2015), comparative analysis between ecotourists and backpackers (Xuan, 2008), alternative tourism (Ooi & Laing, 2009), touristic activities, and types of tourism (Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai, 2002). Furthermore, in the literature, the gap between backpacker theory and practices is expressed (Hannam & Ateljevic, 2007) and noted by some scholars (Cohen, 2004; Richards & Wilson, 2004). However, since there is a significant distinction between their methodological approach, whether quantitative or qualitative, and market-based or ethnographic aims, the gap has been perceived from different perspectives but not a holistic view (Hannam & Ateljevic, 2007). For this reason, the gap has been attempted to be filled by exploring some paradoxes that digital media caused in this experience and analyzing negotiations in the

backpacking experience with the help of thematic analysis, criterion-based sampling, and an attempt at digital ethnography. In addition to this contribution, I would like to emphasize that backpacking has not been studied as a thesis from a political science perspective until now. As seen in the National Thesis Repository, only three theses focus on the backpacking experience until today. So, my thesis contributes to filling this gap, especially from the political science perspective, by using neoliberalism as an analytical tool to frame this research.

As it is explored since digital media has a role in shaping backpacker theory and practices, this research can be located as a bridge. Being bridge could refer to three pillars: neoliberalism, digital media, and backpacking experience, exploring the intersectionality of neoliberalism at the heart of political science discipline, a backpacking experience that is part of tourism management, and new media and digitalization. In other words, this study contributes to the literature by focusing on backpackers' subjectivities and relations with digital media. In this way, exploring tensions connects backpacker theory and practices. This is the contribution of the research. The main point to be emphasized here is that backpackers' experiences produce a meaningful discussion in terms of the experience shaped by the double effects of social media and neoliberalism. In other words, the relationship between their experiences and social media is analyzed in the context of neoliberalism, which I argue is the structural force that shapes backpackers' experiences via digital technology. So, although there are some negotiations and attempts to be far away from and challenge neoliberalism, it is seen that these attempts do not depend on individual choices; it is more about structural issues.

For the sake of clarity, I contextualize their experiences and paradoxes in the frame of the neoliberal subject that is defined as being entrepreneurial, self-branded, self-valORIZED, self-disciplined, always-on labor (Guarriello, 2019; Flisfeder, 2015), coherent a part of flexible working conditions (Block, 2018; Hardt & Negri, 2012; Swan, 2021). I aim to explore the role of digital media, specifically social media, in sustaining a life of traveling without regular employment. Neoliberalism is one of the strong ideologies affecting understanding new subjectivities and markets. These components, which are just ordered, are considered in relation to explaining the subjectivity of backpackers, besides neoliberal market conditions, and relations are considered in relation to the concept of personalized media economies used for YouTube and Instagram. The thesis's contribution becomes visible when the relationship between neoliberal subjectivity and the principles of personalized media economies in the case of backpackers is highlighted.

From this point, in the first chapter, the literature review has been introduced to the definition of backpacking and shows studies on backpacking to give a context. Secondly, neoliberal subjectivity is reviewed along with the digital media as a tool to reflect neoliberal components that draw a frame of the theoretical background of the thesis. In chapter three, stages of the research based on thematic analysis have been described in detail in the methodology part. In chapter four, the paradoxes as themes that emerge from the study have been identified. Chapter Five discusses these themes and inferences from the research materials in light of the related literature and theoretical framework, neoliberal subjectivity, and working principles of digital media referring to personalized media economies. Lastly, the main findings and

contributions are highlighted in the Conclusion chapter, touching on some limitations and future studies.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides background information regarding the backpacking experience. The structure of this part is shaped around two headings, which are defining backpacking and studies on backpacking. For clarity, I have focused on the different conceptualizations of backpacking with the help of meta-analysis on this topic to show the variety of the definitions. I give a place to some common points of these definitions to draw a line between mass tourists and backpackers. Then, the tension between the experience economy and backpackers' desire to experience the countries they travel to, local culture, and activities are identified because the experience economy and their integration into this economy become visible when the transformative role of digital media is discussed. Then, the historical roots of backpacking are briefly summarized to show why risky components and discourses meet this experience. Lastly, studies on backpacking have been introduced to show how my research contributes to and integrates into the literature.

2.1. Defining Backpacking

This heading aims to give an idea of the conceptualization of backpacking to introduce one of the pillars of this study. Since the conceptualization of backpacking is various in the literature, the variety of these criteria is presented to give a better understanding of backpackers. These are self-identification, virtual communities, hostels and low-cost accommodation, travel characteristics, independent, organized travel, backpacking travel style, a combination of these criteria, frequented spots/enclaves, and some other articles without specific meaning of a backpacker (Martins & Costa, 2023). In this context, travel characteristics have been introduced around independent tourists who organize their own multi-destination travel with flexible itineraries, with a low degree of planning and no fixed schedules, travel alone or in small groups, with a preference for longer trips, traveling as long as possible, travel with a backpack, travel for leisure (Martins & Costa, 2023). It would also be relevant to remember that in this research, the meaning of backpackers refers to self-identified backpackers who travel alone with a backpack and aim to travel as long as possible on flexible travel routes with a low budget. In line with this, today, the concept of a backpacker is mainly understood as a young traveler who stays in budget-friendly places, meets new and local people, is independent and flexible in terms of traveling time and city, and aims to be on the road for a long time (Welk, 2004).

Furthermore, the literature discusses backpackers' primary motivations for traveling. These motivations are categorized by Martins and Costa (2023) by citing the significant and primary researchers who direct the backpacking studies. These researchers are integrated into this research to show how this study is positioned in

the literature (Cohen, 1972; Vogt, 1976; Mukerji, 1978; Adler, 1985; Riley, 1988). These are ordered as psychological needs, which are improving and developing personal skills, social interaction with an emphasis on meeting new people, interacting with locals, the need to relax psychologically and mentally, developing and strengthening relationships, associating with other travelers, self-fulfillment needs, the pursuit of freedom, independence, and open-mindedness, a realization of the dream of a lifetime looking to become different from others, emphasis on the need to experience the local/foreign way of life that is only experienced once in a lifetime, satisfying curiosity about new things looking for nightlife fun and entertainment, escape and relaxation, contact and knowledge of other cultures, search for authenticity (Martins & Costa, 2023).

I would like to give space to the primary researchers who contributed to the development of backpacking studies in the literature by studying the characteristics and motivations of backpackers (Cohen, 1972; Vogt, 1976; Mukerji, 1978; Adler, 1985; Riley, 1988). In the first sense, this concept is mainly built around what is not. Namely, it is generally defined around the opposition of being a tourist because tourists are not seen as real travelers (Cohen, 2004). The study of backpacking was started by Cohen (1972), who categorized non-institutionalized tourists and their institutionalized ones. Whereas institutionalized tourists conform to conventional features of traveling, non-institutionalized one does not conform to them. Non-institutionalized ones are called drifters and explorers (Cohen, 1972), nomads (Cohen, 1973), wanderers (Vogt, 1976), hitchhikers (Mukerji, 1978), tramping youth (Adler, 1985), and long-term budget travelers (Riley, 1988). Even so, these studies are available to collect under the same title, backpacking.

Despite the various concepts, they commonly point out that they are part of non-institutionalized groups, are inclined to be part of long-term travel without fixed plans, and have uncertainty about their return ticket or date. Moreover, the characteristic feature of the group is that they are a low-budget traveler who prefers hostels or guesthouses where they stay with other independent low-budget backpackers rather than luxury or expensive hotels and use public transportation (Firth & Hing, 1999). In this way, they have more chances to meet other backpackers and local people who are the key to opening unique, experience-based adventurous stories rather than familiar, touristic, spot-based fixed plans. The primary motivation of this group is a tendency to learn local culture by contacting locals and a desire to get an experience like a resident (Muzaini, 2006). That is why they perceive themselves as real travelers because, in this way, they believe that they are escaping the commercialized, known, and out-of-local place. In other words, they would like to “localize themselves” in terms of meeting local culture, language, daily life, food, places, and tradition (Muzaini, 2006). According to them, since just visiting mass and institutionalized touristic spots means impeding unique and personal experiences, they are articulated into the perception that each travel component is an experience. For this reason, studies on backpacking and experience economy are considered together in the literature.

2.1.1. The Tension Between Backpackers and Mass Tourism

Although backpackers are considered one of the tourist typologies in some studies, there is a difference between mass tourists and backpackers in the sense that they explore non-tourist spots, will be away from the luxury, consumption-based travel, and integration with the locals. Although there are some characteristic components

and motivational-based categories about backpacking, backpacking is a very disputable subject when comparing mass tourists. To avoid being a part of a grey area, it would be relevant to explain the features of mass tourists. However, this concept is more than just defined with fixed numbers. The definitive criteria for mass tourism are offered by Poon (1993). These criteria can be ordered as an inexperienced consumer, limited and standardization of the touristic product, fixed travel plans, the crucial role of technology in the production process, such as (online reservations for hotels or airlines, credit cards, etc.), environmental pollution to serve masses, socio-cultural disintegration, mostly being part of scale economies like assembly-line mass production to promote tourism products (Poon, 1993).

On this ground, Cohen (1973) argues the tension between ‘supposed non-institutionalized backpackers’ and their subtle institutionalization. He explains this paradox as “fixed travel pattern (backpacking style) established routines, increasing development and commodification of the drifters and their destinations.” In other words, travel patterns are common among backpackers / prosumer backpackers based on this study (the explanation of the concept is in part of the theoretical framework, and it refers to producing and consuming content simultaneously in social media.). This triggers following the same type of goods and services, in the sense of accommodation, visiting a local(!) unknown(!) destination, where institutionalization begins. In this context, since institutionalization refers to standardization and commodification, using similar equipment and brands for backpacks and outdoor equipment staying in similar hostels and guesthouses are the main components of this concept.

For the sake of clarity, although the paradoxes that I explore in this thesis have a parallel ground with consideration of commodification and standardization, this thesis has more points. These points concern how backpacker negotiates with the existing paradox in the middle of the transformative effect of digital media. This thesis does not discuss tourist typologies, whether institutionalized or not. The reason why tourist typologies are given here is that I would like to show that even before the development of digital media (Web 2.0), the relationship between backpackers and the commodification and standardization of destinations was argued in the literature.

2.1.2. Integration into the Experience Economy: Backpackers 'Desire to Experience Traveled Destination

Despite the growing research on tourism experience and experience economy, this part highlights this issue in relation to the backpacking experience. Since the desire to experience is one of the main components in the backpacker's narration, this part focuses on the studies about the relationship between this desire and the experience economy. The literature considers this relationship referring authenticity, escaping routine, and gastronomy based on traditional foods (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2016; İşçi & Güzel, 2019; Quan & Wang, 2004). The relationship between the experience economy and tourists is also included here because backpackers have a common ground in terms of connecting with the place, using the local goods and services of the destination they travel to, even for different purposes, just like tourists. Since the backpacking experience is shaped around the desire to experience the traveled destination, they become part of the experience economy by creating emotions and memoirs with locals. It is correct to say that getting experience rather than visiting a

tourist spot is their primary target. (Akin, 2021). Moreover, they generally stay for a long term compared to the mass tourists. It does not mean that backpackers focus on tourist spots or activities for a long time; they generally aim to spend time feeling the local habits or culture of the city or country.

Although the reason and role of the traveling experience is articulated into the experience economy, the role of the traveling experience has been discussed by many researchers. To give a context, in early studies, there are two different approaches which are first, perceived traveling or touristic experience as a leisure activity to time out from their daily life activities, relaxation from regular life activities (Gross, 1961), and second, making a distance from own norms and values and society's perspective to build a various view (Turner, 1973), (L. Turner & Ash, 1975). It would be significant to highlight that their passion for getting experience differs from leisure activity or time out from their daily life because they integrate the backpacking experience into their life. To sum up, in the literature, when the functions of the traveling experience are examined, it is visible that while Gross (1961) sees breaking from the daily life experiences as a primary stone for a well-functioning society, Boorstin (1992) perceives it as an artificial experience of mass tourism and degeneration in capitalist societies. MacCanell (1973) took a further step forward in the tourism experience. According to him, they look for their authenticity and unique experiences, which they lose and miss in their daily lives. When they share their experiences, they reconstruct what is experienced by the narrative style they use and where they position themselves in the story.

It would be significant to introduce approaches to the concept of experience in the literature to give a better understanding of the backpacking experience. There are two categories: social science and management /marketing approach (Quan & Wang, 2004). On the one hand, when experience is taken into consideration with a social scientific approach, it is associated with seeking authenticity, attitudes, activities, and interests (MacCannell, 1973; Turner & Ash, 1975; Cohen, 1979; Uriely, 2005). On the other hand, the marketing approach concerns issues such as the quality of experience, the importance of human interaction, prior knowledge from past experiences, and the role of external stimuli. To clarify, it would be relevant to compare these two approaches to understand what experience is exactly in both senses. Whereas in the social scientific approach, experience is an issue that needs to be conceptualized and analyzed in light of psychological, sociological, mental, and symbolic, in the marketing approach, it is a kind of issue to be managed. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Volo, 2009; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012).

I would like to highlight that my research is articulated into this discussion in a sense that the preferences of backpackers' customers, audiences, or followers of the social media accounts are manageable and directable, as the market perspective argued, regardless of the niche or mass market. In other words, while discussing the paradoxes that come from digital media's transformative effect, the thesis shows how backpackers commodify and sell their backpacking experiences and local experiences of traveled countries and, in this way, how they are articulated into the experience economy.

Tourism is one of the primary areas in which the experience economy is integrated by selling and buying the experience (Çulha, 2020; Kim, 2010). On this ground, Stasiak (2013) describes tourist enterprises as “holiday experience factories” that create emotions, impressions, excitements, and memoirs. The emphasis comes from the experience in tourism as vital for consumers. Subsequently, the concept of experience economy comes to the scene in this context. Pine and Gilmore (1999) define the change in economic progress. They claimed that the shift in economic development started from the agrarian economy and passed into the experience economy. Namely, the progression of economic value could be ordered as extracted commodities in an agricultural society, good-based industrial society, service economy, and experience economy. In other words, it goes beyond providing a service; it focuses on staging memorable experiences. Experience economy refers to a multidimensional relationship between brand and consumer. It is based on providing personalized products and services to people. It also includes sensory marketing. In other words, each person has a person they want to be in life and a point they want to achieve. For this reason, a brand needs to understand the person they want to be and the place they want to reach and offer solutions that will accompany them.

It is relevant to remind that backpackers who travel around the world and have social media accounts are the primary producers and consumers of the experience economy because they are part of this economic process by selling their experiences in one of the markets. On this ground, they also watch each other’s experiences on the same platform. Their integration into the experience economy is also considered in relation to brand management and digital reputation in the next part.

Last but not least, in the literature, the backpacking experience is also argued in relation to social and cultural capital by bringing along the development of internet cafes and email addresses. Sørensen (2003) brings this relationship into the stage by identifying the vital function of backpacking travel on the cultural capital with the role of email. He argues that cultural capital can be converted into social capital when returning home. Besides, cultural and social capital can be functional to reach economic capital via marketing the self or individual. On this ground, what is key in the literature is that the 'success' of travel depends on the role of experiences.

Namely, success, which can be counted as a part of neoliberal language, is expressed with various, unique experiences. The link between my thesis and this argument is that social and cultural capital refers to the entrepreneurial side of long-term backpackers, which is introduced as one of the codes in the paradox between low-cost and commercializing traveling. In other words, since their enterprises have been set up based on traveling experience, they can convert their networks and social and cultural capital to economic capital. On this ground, it is visible that the code of entrepreneurship I found in my research parallels the literature in this sense.

2.1.3. Risk Taking/Creating in Backpacker's Narration

Independent traveling, such as long-term backpacking, is frequently presented as an adventurous lifestyle that emphasizes accrediting the traveler with knowledge and a stronger sense of identity (Elsrud, 2001). Adventurous components are considered a kind of litmus test to differentiate backpackers from tourists, who are often considered around mass, package, horde, and lack of independence (Dann, 1999). Risky and adventurous travel is not just a litmus between backpackers and tourists; they are also considered identity claims in their travel's grand narration process.

An adventurous way of presentation can be considered in relation to the concept of risk. Backpackers' relations with risk are defined as non-static and 'active courting of risk' (Giddens, 1991, as cited in Elsrud, 2001). In line with this, Vogt (1976) argues that litmus values are novelty, spontaneity, risk, independence, and many travel options that define the line between backpackers and tourists.

The risk component in their narration also has some historical roots regarding colonialism and is analyzed via a postcolonial perspective (Teo & Leong, 2006).

Besides, Elsrud (2001) touches on the colonial background of 'exploration' by male risk-takers. In this sense, adventure and risk share an intersected ground. It is vital to know how the risk component in their narration is connected with some regions with reference to the colonial roots. The colonial aspect in relation to today's backpacking experience can be explained by the fact that being a real backpacker is considered in relation to travel toward the Wild West of North America, South America, Africa, or Asia rather than Europe. On this ground, Elsrud (2001) defined this relationship as a "whitened" region by moving beyond the limits of familiarity by not routine.

Although there is not much place to conquer, we live in a global, multilinked world, and the relationship between adventure, risk, backpacking, and the country to be a real backpacker has been connected to each other. Even though the scope of the thesis does not draw on colonialism, the relationship is explained here to show the origins of risk and adventure in their narration.

2.2. Studies on Backpacking

The relationship between backpacking and sustainability is studied in the literature (Iaquinto, 2015; Ooi & Laing, 2010) since they do not buy luxury materials or products, they are part of more local services and goods (Iaquinto, 2015; Ooi & Laing, 2010). However, this relationship is disputable; whereas some studies find a correlation between this phenomenon and sustainability practices, other area studies do not find any meaningful relations. The gender perspective on backpacking is also considered in the literature in the sense of how females experience this phenomenon regarding the shared and different points with males (Kaba & Emekli, 2018; Çiçek & Aşan, 2023). Mainly, the studies focus on the characteristics and motivations of backpackers via diversifying the area studies. Such as Canada via picking participants in the hostel where backpackers stay (Hecht & Martin, 2006), Hong Kong (Nok, Suntikul, Agyeiwaah, & Tolkach, 2017), Israeli and Danish Backpacker in India with a focus on their online blogs to show the differences of nationalities (Enoch & Grossman, 2010), Ghana via focusing on backpackers' risk perceptions and risk reduction strategies (Adam, 2015), Africa via focusing the risk and nervous perception (Bell, 2007), Türkiye via making motivational based segmentation (Yaşar, 2018), İstanbul via focusing the motivation of backpackers who are from different countries. Apart from area studies, backpacking is also studied in relation to place-making. Lew (2017) underlines the difference between the place-making process undertaken by backpackers in their daily actions and placemaking by official and tourism authorities. On this ground, how the effect of their communication and their desire to travel 'off-the-beaten-track' shapes the place-making process is searched by focusing on the rhythms and steps of this process (Iaquinto, 2020).

Another study discusses the place packaging process of one of the heritage trails with the help of the experience economy (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007).

Last but not least, I would like to show how my research integrates into this literature. In the first sense, my research shares a similar frame in the sense of touching on place-making and place packaging process; however, since the transformative effect of digital media is considered one of the pillars of my research, there are some different nuances, which is one of the contributions, from the literature. Moreover, most of the research focuses on the motivations and characteristics of backpackers. To contribute, my research explores some paradoxes from adding social media to the backpacking experience via sharing the experience on this platform as an income. Focusing on backpacking considering digital media enables us to update the components of backpacking as well. On this ground, the motivations and characteristics have been compared to the literature to check whether the findings are different or parallel. Additionally, exploring the transformative effect of digital media on the backpacking experience contributes to this literature by showing how the experience is to be a backpacker and a prosumer simultaneously. Lastly, since the gap between backpacking theory and practices is visible, this research aims to help fill the gap by exploring the tensions that digital media creates during backpacking.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Neoliberalism is the analytical lens used while interpreting the data. This chapter explicitly elaborates on backpackers' paradoxes during their backpacking experience. For this reason, the notion of the neoliberal subject has been identified as the first pillar, and the working principles of social media as personalized media economies and the understanding of always-on labor have been expounded as the second pillar.

3.1. Neoliberal Subject

Neoliberalism is defined and discussed in multiple ways in relation to ideology, governance, economic politics, discourse, and understanding of the subject. Foucault (2008) and Dean (2010) define neoliberalism as a form of governmentality as a way of rationalizing the exercise of power. Neoliberal governmentality aims to install society in relation to “conduct of conduct,” the basic assumption of an individualized, self-directing, autonomous decision-making agent who becomes an entrepreneur of oneself. Harvey (2005) sees neoliberalism as a hegemonic economic

and political ideology, claiming that human beings can be advanced by supporting entrepreneurial freedoms and market conditions characterized by free trade, property rights, and market. On this ground, since the subject is reproduced continuously via neoliberal practices and discourses, self-development, self-efficiency, and self-discipline are at the heart of neoliberal subjectivity (Rose, 1999). This study focuses on the components of the neoliberal subject during the backpackers' escaping from neoliberal market conditions and the self-disciplined, resilient, entrepreneurial subject that social media platforms that carry neoliberal market conditions create. Moreover, I would like to give a place to the view of neoliberalism as “a program of the methodological destruction of collectives” (Bourdieu, 1998). According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is not only about a change in the economic and political system but also about the change in society's value systems. Since neoliberal policies destroy the collection objection mechanisms by encouraging to perceive public problems as personal, the “strong individualism” and “individualization of social” become critical components to defining the neoliberal subjects (Layton, 2010; Ferge, 1997).

In neoliberalism, since the subject is considered human capital (M. A. Peters, 2016), the subjectivity is desired to reproduce as autonomous, individualized, free, self-disciplined, self-regulating, and rational (Türken, Nafstad, Blakar, & Roen, 2015). The notion of rationality can be expressed centered on self-interest and cost-benefit analysis, namely, maximizing value in the decision-making process. It is significant to underline that It is dominated by a financial interest-oriented mentality that focuses on earning more, learning, buying, and wanting to add new things to what it has. Thus, the subject becomes comfortable working in endless, competitive

conditions to gain more. In line with this, maximization of value and cost-benefit analysis brings entrepreneurship, and the subject becomes a part of “lifelong learning” and lifelong experiencing (in my case) (Olssen, 2006). The desire to learn and experience makes the subject efficient. In this way, there is no need for traditional disciplinary and coercive mechanisms (Foucault, 2008). For this reason, the subject is paid attention to as a governable via self-monitoring and self-disciplining, albeit autonomous.

I also want to touch on the state's role in contextualizing notions of the neoliberal subject. The neoliberal mentality focuses on efficiency in each area, and public services and social welfare systems are almost suspended to provide it (Lemke, 2001). Neoliberalism encourages the subject to take personal responsibility since the subject becomes more resilient in this unsafe and insecure atmosphere due to the lack of public services (Lemke, 2001). In line with this, the subject focuses on individual development, self-interest, increasing self-valorization, adaptability to problems or out of the comfort zone, and effort to challenge issues as resilient and alone (Walkerline, 2003).

The point that I find very important to remember here is that the components of the neoliberal subject have not been expounded to theorize backpackers as purely neoliberal subjects. These components are explained to contextualize backpackers' paradoxes during the backpacking experience and understand better their behaviors that reference and challenge these components from time to time.

3.2. Digital Media as Personalized Media Economies

In the beginning, I emphasize that the history of digital media is multilayered because the history of its hybrid nature comes from both technological developments and cultural and economic practices. However, since the relevance part of my thesis is more related to cultural and economic practices, there is not much reference to the histories of technical telecommunicational developments. Although the beginning era of digital media is considered in relation to participatory citizenship, a tool to develop democracy and digital activism to enable collective actions for social movements, today is a new market based on free and precarious labor. On this ground, this part and the main focus of the thesis is articulated into the idea that “social media is no longer understood as the dawn of a new era of participatory citizenship, but a new form of free labor.” (Dewdney & Ride, 2014). Furthermore, since digital media is also used interchangeably with “personalized media economies,” referring to YouTube and Instagram, this part explains a working principle of the market (Guarriello, 2019).

3.2.1. The Evolution of Communication and the Internet: The Rise and Role of Social Media

Internet and Web 2.0 are the turning point for communication. The era of Web 1.0 refers to the starting point of the Internet, which only supports content based on text and does not allow participants to be part of the content. However, thanks to Web 2.0, participants can actively join, interact, and develop the content. Tim O'Reilly introduced Web 2.0 in 2004, and people have become part of social media accounts such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs, and Forums. In line with this, these

platforms are defined around the content, which is not just published by individuals in applications and is continuously edited by all users in a collaborative and participatory way (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

I would like to underline that since the new media mainly focused on PR (Public Relations) and marketing perspective, the theoretical framework has been framed in line with this. Additionally, it is crucial to know the relationship between PR and digital media to show what kind of effect digital media has on the backpacking experience in relation to commodification and commercialization, digital reputation, personal branding, and being a prosumer.

The changes between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 are not just about technological change but also about Public Relations (PR) and how we communicate. Namely, the new media needs new ways to communicate. (Public Relations) PR is no longer about finding a suitable media channel; it is more about the interaction between the brand and people. According to Davis (as cited in James & Lavanya, 2013), "Today, PR is less about channeling your message through the right media and more about making connections directly with your audience." Social media is a bridge between audiences and brands because professionals in Public Relations (PR) share their experiences related to brands, goods, or services. Thus, they also play an active role in the value and image of the brand. For this reason, companies care more about advertisement in a digital context. At this point, the concept of influencer marketing comes into the scene. In the literature, the concept is discussed concerning various markets. However, the frame is drawn around traveling with backpacking in the thesis. Since it is declared that backpacking is one of the niche markets referring to the necessity of direct connection with an audience, backpackers become a part of influencer marketing activities. At this point, it would be relevant to underline that

they do not begin to travel with the aim of being a part of influencer marketing activities at the beginning; they have different motivations like exploring the world or themselves, meeting their real version, giving up the routine or intense working, etc. however, they become a part of influencer marketing practices to earn extra revenue to maintain their travels. A recent Twitter study argues that influencer marketing benefits from people named "hand-held names" and develops a rather large reputation and followings in digital channels. Moreover, trust between consumers and social media influencers can be established like among friends (Swant, 2016). In this chapter, digital platforms like Instagram and YouTube are involved in influencer marketing practices.

3.2.2. Social Media Applications and Being Prosumer

Social media is a broad area that covers many applications such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, etc. In this part, I would like to explain the basic principles of YouTube and Instagram, which backpackers commonly use, since these platforms are conceptualized as “personalized media economies” that backpackers integrate into during backpacking (Guarriello, 2019). In other words, knowing the working principles of YouTube and Instagram enables us to see the relationship between consumer, producer, way of marketing, and earning income.

In the first sense, I would like to give a place to the concept of prosumer, which is defined by Toffler (1980). He explains this concept by touching on the pre-industrial area as a first-wave, the industrial area as a second-wave, and contemporary society as a third-wave. According to him, in the pre-industrial period, the members of society had a role in both the production and consumption process of hunting and agricultural activities. The role of consuming and producing among society members

has been separated in industrial areas by the division of labor and specialization. Today, the separation between producing and consuming has become blurred and reintegrated into each other by being defined as the third wave. Even though this concept is not coined in the context of digital media users, this research considers this concept for backpackers who have social media accounts and produce and consume content. At this point, it is also relevant to point out that followers and influencers share the prosuming process together. Since it is a shared process by both sides, both play a significant role in producing the ordinary meaning of the brand. Thus, they do not just receive the brand's message or meaning directly; they build its message together (Ritzer, Dean, & Jurgenson, 2012).

On this ground, it is significant to remind that since backpackers use these applications with a business account option and state their account type as a “video creator” and “digital content producer,” they are considered prosumers in the scope of this thesis. When they choose the option of business accounts rather than personal accounts, they can reach analytics regarding their account interaction.

3.2.2.1. YouTube

YouTube is one of the personalized media economies, a video-sharing platform founded by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim, ex-PayPal employees in 2005, bought by Google. The platform aims to make, upload, and share videos (Rowell, 2011). Today, YouTube is very popular and has content belonging to different categories, such as education, fashion, travel, technology, games, sports, beauty, etc (Rowell, 2011). The influencers (digital content producers or video creators) put their videos in the relevant category to reach relevant target audiences.

If you have a Google account, you can use YouTube because Google aims to collect some platforms under the same email address.

The account can belong to the brand or personal YouTube channel, and then the channel becomes available to upload a video. The channel owner can edit the video, caption, and some tags to reach a large mass in relevant categories. Since users can interact with videos via likes, dislike, and comment, the number of users of this platform is broad. At this point, to reach a relevant audience, which will be necessary for gaining some money from the video and interacting with many users to increase the interaction numbers, there are some crucial points: optimizing the content with proper tags, creatively editing heading and captions, uploading a regular and authentic content, using high technology to reach an image, audio and video quality, adopting a fluent and intriguing style in both spoken and written language, preparing a content which has some questions and parts that allow even encourage people to interact with the channel via comment, like or dislike being active, communicating with other YouTube channels which also have a large number of followers (Lopezosa, Orduña-Malea, & Pérez-Montoro, 2019). The number of interactions is significant because it affects algorithms that allow your YouTube channel to be more discovered by other users who can or cannot be your subscribers (Lopezosa, Orduña-Malea, & Pérez-Montoro, 2019). These ways are also significant for Instagram as well. YouTube consists of two parts: long videos and short videos. Whereas short videos are framed as vertical and less than 15 seconds, other long videos are horizontal and can take hours. This allows users to shoot via mobile phone to upload to YouTube directly.

Furthermore, YouTube has a part to show videos that are popular, trendy, and highly watched and interacted with videos, named Trends. It enables users to be aware of

current, trendy, or viral (popular) videos and content. YouTube offers content to users based on subscriptions and other liked videos and fields of interest in the part of 'Discover.' This way, users can explore different channels and topics of their limited knowledge.

Moreover, YouTube has a feature that broadcasts a live feed to incorporate users into the broadcast via interaction like writing a comment, giving feedback, or asking questions. This part can be used to promote events, share experiences about products, services, or places, play an instrument, chat about their YouTube channel, announce various issues, etc. While YouTubers use the live section, subscribers can buy a feature that can send an animator's sticker and message highlighted and pinned to the top of the chat for a specific time that the YouTuber decides. At this point, it would be relevant to point out that subscribers can also donate to the YouTuber to be part of membership to this channel. Therefore, donors of the YouTubers can have privileges such as early access to the content, exclusive live streams, etc. Thus, add this:

YouTube also offers a restricted part for Kids. In this part, there are more educative and secure videos for children. In this way, families choose the limited time to watch for their children and make a filtration about the content. Besides, YouTube uses the algorithms in this part to offer relevant content based on interest because, in this way, it manages to remain a platform that continues to be preferred. The members' continuity increases interaction (Lopezosa, Orduña-Malea, & Pérez-Montoro, 2019). The increase in interaction makes YouTube preferable regardless of the title, such as product, travel, fashion, politics, and education. All this process positively affects the brand value of YouTube. Therefore, the platform can get advertising revenue by collaborating with brands; the most significant income source is advertising

collaborations with brands. In addition, it offers ad-free, offline video-watching service by selling Premium mode to users and generates revenue in this way.

Finally, the YouTube Partner program, which forms the framework of the thesis, supports the argument that the Backpackers, who are thought to resign from their neoliberal working conditions, complain about the Neoliberal order, and turn to alternative lifestyles, actually change the market. The YouTube Partner program is revenue-sharing between YouTube and youtubers (Lashinsky, 2006). Namely, since YouTube gains money from brands' advertising, it shares with YouTubers (Lashinsky, 2006). Therefore, YouTube makes the platform alive and updated. While doing this, the channel owners can acquire an ad income by displaying ads on their videos. The monetization process has various details depending on YouTube, the channel's owner, and the brand's advertisers.

Here, I would like to give a place to the details of the YouTube Partner Program (YouTube, n.d.). YouTube sets some criteria to be a part of this program. First, the channel must have 1000 subscribers and have watched 4000 hours of public content in the last 12 months, or its short videos must have 10 million views and 1000 subscribers in the previous three months (Guarriello, 2019). Once the channel owners meet these criteria, they can apply to the YouTube Partner Program by signing up for Google AdSense, an advertising program to monetize online content. Thus, they can engage their YouTube channel into the account of AdSense. The YouTubers can apply many times to meet these criteria. After that, they can monetize their videos via different advertisement formats such as pre-roll, which is used before the video starts, mid-roll ads for generally longer videos, transparent ads on the lower part, and display ads beside the video player (YouTube, n.d.). Thus, YouTube shares some of the revenue for ads in the backpacker's videos. The portion

is around 45% or %55 and changed according to the accession of the video, such as comments, likes, and advertisers' offers (YouTube, n.d.). At this point, it is significant to have advertiser-friendly content that is proper and apart from violating copyright and community rules. Namely, if backpackers have advertiser-friendly content, the revenue becomes high and continuous. Besides, the country of subscribers is also crucial for this program because if the channel is subscribed to by other countries, the portion of the revenue changes. Moreover, if subscribers are part of YouTube Premium, it also affects revenue (YouTube, n.d.).

Furthermore, sponsorship is another way of getting revenue from social media; the brand can directly cooperate with YouTubers to introduce or advertise a product or service. In this way, YouTubers take a video to familiarize you with the product or service via positive comments. The revenue depends on the agreement of both sides. Sweepstakes or contests may also be held to distribute the product by YouTubers to increase the number of subscribers and make people familiar with this brand and product. However, the revenue, expectations of the brands, and date of posting directly depend on the agreement between stakeholders. In this case, contracts can be about the number of products or being a sponsorship for specific days or months. Namely, when YouTubers need this product in their life or trip, in the backpacker case, the brand can provide it in exchange for the advertising.

In conclusion, I would like to reference one of the theme parts, which has been shaped around the necessity to find sponsors and earn money from YouTube to go on their world tour as a prosumer backpacker. To better understand the paradox of which they are a part of this requirement, the working principles of YouTube are considered here. For a similar reason, Instagram is also considered here.

3.2.2.2. Instagram

Instagram is one of the popular platforms among backpackers; they use it to share their experiences and places they travel, narrate their stories, and inspire their followers via photos, videos, and lives. Instagram is more suitable for sharing momentary photos or instant short videos. People should sign up to create a profile, follow other users, and make an interaction. There are various parts to interact with other people and explore additional content, brands, people, celebrities, etc. These parts are the 'main page,' which enable to see post of followers; 'stories,' which allow the sharing of temporary photos or short videos for 24 hours; the part 'explore,' which promotes content from non-followers and is based on an algorithm that is about previous like, comments, or follow, when the video is in the explore part, the possibility of extending the followers of the account and interactions increase,' reels' which are maximum 90 second creative and funny videos about dance, speech, music, fashion, collection of pictures with some filters and pieces of music, 'Instagram TV' (IGTV) is another vertical longest (1-15 minutes) video- sharing part, IGTV videos are shown in the explore part based on the target audience, 'Store' is a part that enables people to offer their product located in the business profile; thus, the owner can link other platforms such as a blog or other e-commerce websites, and interact with the target audience (Instagram Help Center, n.d.).

To understand the working principle, it is essential to know two types of Instagram accounts: personal and business (Instagram Help Center, n.d.). While a personal account is set to interact with friends and family members via sharing private photos and daily life and expressing personal thoughts, a business account is designated for brands, companies, and freelancer professionals to make their advertisements to their audiences for marketing and communication purposes, such as making people

familiar to product or service and getting feedback from customers. The business accounts can share their communication number or address in their profile to enable customers to reach them or give feedback. The most important feature of a business account is an opportunity to see statistics and analytic data from Instagram about their followers' profile information like age, demographic characteristics, and accession numbers, whether they increase or decrease (Instagram Help Center, n.d.). Therefore, the owner of this account shaped their content and marketing strategy based on these data.

Furthermore, business accounts can manage access control; they can give one or two users full access, restrict some users from certain posting activities, and make them dependent on the approval process. Moreover, business accounts can reach an Instagram Ad platform. This platform offers business accounts in various ad formats such as single-image, slideshow, video, story, IGTV, and shopping ads. Business accounts can decide the appropriate form for their content, the time and frequency for placing an ad, and choices including demographics, interests, location, behaviors, and linked accounts to reach target and lookalike audiences and audiences based on just context. Thus, advertisements get potential customers in a more relevant and direct way by determining the budget for the ad. Besides, this platform can measure ad performance based on the number of times their ads are viewed, interactions, click-through rates, and conversion rates to optimize and achieve better results. Since Instagram is a visually-focused platform used by a broad audience, advertisers use this platform and new media. Therefore, brands can attract users' attention and create brand loyalty with unique content through this platform.

Advertisements can appear in front of users as a post and in the form of a story, and the format gives users a chance to interact by replying to the story. This interaction

can be achieved by responding, clicking links, and participating in surveys. For this reason, it is vital that the advertisements also support the interaction. That is why the videos for the story are often asked to increase interaction by questions like in mutual communication and targeting for the answer or adding relevant hashtags or avatars to access more people.

Since Instagram has these options and opportunities, it is the most broadly used platform for influencer marketing. Firstly, the sponsorship agreement can be used for influencer marketing practices; brands can offer products to demand to create a post with marketing purposes from Influencers. This collaboration depends on the agreement between both sides; this could be in exchange for many products or services, a discount rate from a brand, or money. Secondly, partnership marketing is related to getting a specific proportion of the seller's products in a particular link or a certain number of products. Thirdly, if the number of followers is high on the influencer's account, the brand pays directly to the influencer to post relevant content related to the brand. In this case, personal branding is another factor for the brand to affect revenue. Lastly, they can be articulated to the brand to direct the marketing campaign via editing the caption and the content or taking some photos, which will be shared on the brand's official account or blog page. These influencer marketing practices depend on many factors, which will be touched on while explaining the working principle of YouTube. Hence, consistency and frequency of sharing a post or story, the time of posting content, quality of the content, visual quality in terms of video or photo resolution, being authentic and creative, using proper and relevant and well-chosen hashtags and captions, which enable you to reach a wider audience, creating a content aligns with target audience's will, interest, and needs, awaring of the features of target audience, engaging with the followers via feedbacks and

questions, or surveys, establishing authentic relationships to make them feel close and sincere and make you feel like one of the family or friends, collaborating with other influencers to reach more people, utilizing and analyzing Instagram features and data are the primary factors to be more visible and credible on Instagram.

It should be noted that this platform is one of the markets in this era and brings new features frequently to make this market alive and dynamic. At this point, I would like to point out that these two platforms have mutually interacted with each other via different methods, and marketing practices are carried on via them. For this reason, influencer marketing practices the relationship between brand and customer, and its reflection on the backpacker case will be analyzed in light of the working principle of these two platforms. At this point, it is essential to point out that these sponsorship relations, promotions, or ad options are the primary tools of neoliberalism because they feed the culture of consumption, which enables the maintenance of neoliberal mechanisms. These parameters for earning money from Instagram or brand sponsorship are a consideration for backpackers. When they enter this market, they need to learn the whole parameters to make more money; they sometimes interact with each other to get tips on these two platforms. Hence, they start this process as an amateur and become a specialist in these two markets by learning the conditions of personalized media economies. Namely, this point shows how the idle (*avare*) backpacker image converts to the prosumer, digital content, video creator, or travel influencer. They are articulated into the neoliberal economic conditions via flexible labor. This is why the theoretical framework is set in relation to digital media.

3.2.3. Influencer Marketing Practices and Personal Branding

Firstly, none of the backpackers identify themselves as influencers, travel marketers, or prosumers. However, the reason why this part is involved in the theoretical framework is that during the inductive analysis of the thesis, it is seen that there are shared and similar patterns between influencers and prosumer backpackers, in a sense, being a part of marketing practices, especially sponsorship relations. Since marketing practices and sponsorship relations depend on influencer marketing and personal branding, these two parameters are introduced respectively.

According to Carter (2016), influencer marketing is “a rapidly growing industry that attempts to promote products or increase brand awareness through content spread by social media users who are considered to be influential.” There are different categories to classify influencers in social media, such as celebrities, industry experts and thought leaders, bloggers and content creators, and micro or macro influencers (Gretzel, 2019). These categories can be differentiated based on the size of their followers, especially on Instagram. While micro-influencers have 500 to 10,000 followers, mega-influencers have over one million (Alassani & Göretz, 2019). Based on the brand's purpose to reach a high number of the target audience, the sponsorship relations are affected by these numbers and categorization.

Furthermore, being a member of mega and micro-influencers has different advantages and disadvantages. Whereas mega-influencers market themselves based on the high number of followers and interactions, micro-influencers compensate for the weakness of low interactions and followers via credibility, higher mutual understanding, and relevance (Alassani & Göretz, 2019). Namely, perceiving the influencer in niche markets as a family member or friend by their followers is the

main advantage of micro-influencers. To follow a similar understanding, followers of the backpackers become a part of the target audience of some travel brands concerning the niche market, such as backpacking or traveling, even though backpackers do not aim for these marketing practices.

As explained, giving credibility, establishing a sincere relationship, and having a high number of followers and interactions are the main parameters for getting revenue. Interactions are not only crucial for earning income from ads, but they also make you more familiar and credible, like a family member or friend (Gretzel, 2019).

In this way, YouTubers, bloggers, or influencers become a kind of celebrity.

Namely, when they are somewhere, their followers interact with them like people they know before because followers are familiar with influencers' routines or expectations. Thus, expectations, presentation of daily routine, character, background, the number of followers, and way of self-presentation create their image, and the concept of personal branding comes into the scene. The concept of the brand in this era is not just about the consumption culture; it is directly related to the tool used to express our beings. Becoming a brand for products is a relatively old issue for this literature; however, becoming a brand for a person is relatively new.

Besides, the branding process has different stages regarding some marketing strategies, named brand management. In short, brand management is familiarizing people with the brand name with positive and valuable attributions and maintaining them. This management can be about personal branding or product branding.

The literature on personal branding was started by Tom Peters (1997) with the argument that each human being is a brand to govern "Me Inc." and discussed concerning marketing literature. Moreover, the secret of success is directly shaped around being a personal brand with personal experiences, abilities, and images

(Roffer, 2002). Furthermore, personal branding is defined around communication skills such as being convincing in an efficient way, being authentic, and being unique in communication (Arruda, 2003). On this ground, Shepherd (2005) considers personal branding in relation to the development of Web 2.0. According to him, personal branding is significant in developing marketing strategies in new media. Namely, being a personal brand is only possible today in the digital context. In line with this argument, personal branding and brand management are directly related to creating an efficient and proper strategy to be known and perceived with positive attributions in social media and other digital platforms. This process begins with a brand management strategy (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). I would like to touch on Chandler (2004), who takes this process from a semiological perspective. Chandler explains personal branding as a process for creating a meaning since a human has described around assigner a meaning, 'homo significant.' Namely, messages via verbal or non-verbal means aim to create meaning, and managing this process is a part of being a personal brand.

Kaputa (2010) perceives personal branding as a key to exist in this era because it is the only way to overcome this competitive market in each area. Celebrities and icons have already discovered this key in their branch; for this reason, they have found their potential, so personal branding is necessary to exist and succeed in this era. Gehl (2011) brings a new perspective to this literature by benefitting from Gilles Deleuze, Eva Illouz, and Mark Andrejevic. He discussed this concept in a critical way rather than strategizing the personal branding process in Web 2.0 via three stages: individual differentiation, emotional capitalism, and auto surveillance. In his theorization, individual differentiation is related to the original and unique feature of the person who believes the control or power to manage this feature to be

differentiated from the ordinary. This can be explained regarding social media because a person can choose whether to reflect specific characteristics in the digital context or not, which feature to be reflected in the digital context. In this way, a person acts on the basis that accepts the person as sovereign and autonomous. The reference to emotional capitalism comes from the relationship between emotion and economy. On this basis, a brand effort to create some specific emotions to shape the actions through the brand, and the brand focuses on the management of the self via emotions and its encouragement to the action. Other brands or personal brands exchange these emotions. This management reminds the surveillance with some updated components.

Lastly, Gehl (2011) explains this process as the personally branded person adopts the image that is perceived by others and “if we watched each other and if marketers and corporations are watching all of us, then the personally branded have chosen to constantly monitor and groom their images in an attempt to control how they are perceived.” This brings auto surveillance to the subject. Since the scope of the subject is not involved in analyzing surveillance mechanisms, the relationship among self-presentation, personal branding, and sponsorship relations has been considered in line with the research questions. Furthermore, since there is a paradox between the ideal image of backpackers and desired self-presentation, personal branding and sponsorship relations are included in the theoretical framework.

3.3. Neoliberalism and Digital Media: Backpacker's Always-On Labor

This part aims to make clear the relationship between neoliberalism and digital media. Initially, digital media is conceptualized as a part of the neoliberal market that

prosumer backpackers integrate into. The transformative effect of digital media is also paid attention to in this part because it has a role in creating a multilinked and commercialized world. Since components of the neoliberal market are the fact that everything is commercialized and commodifiable, the competitive atmosphere, and exploitative labor, albeit flexible, and these conditions are involved in YouTube and Instagram; it is seen that these platforms are also one of the neoliberal markets. Although digital media has a transformative effect in terms of advertising and the size of the market, brand and customer relations continue, albeit in a different form.

Here, I would like to reference the understanding of labor in digital media to show the relationship between neoliberalism and digital media. Digital labor is explicitly explained in relation to “personalized media economies” using the concept of “always-on labor”(Guarriello, 2019).

Labor becomes precarious and digitalized with working conditions' quantitative and qualitative transformations. The roots of the concept of digital labor can be traced back to the autonomous Marxists. However, the thesis does not aim to be part of the debate on conceptualizing labor in the digital era. On this ground, I would like to inform you what I mean by using digital labor. Fuchs (as cited in Yilmaz, 2021) defined digital labor as a paid or unpaid activity to create, disseminate, and reproduce digital media (social media). The debate focuses on whether or not audiences' interaction with content is part of digital labor. However, this thesis searches backpackers' labor as prosumers and perceives their effort as a part of digital labor rather than discussing the labor of audiences. In this context, digital labor is likened to traditional women's labor at home in the sense of being less visible (Scholz, 2012). The reference less visibility here is for the exploitative work in relation to digital labor as a form of precarious labor. Terranova (2000) touches on

“new forms of capitalist exploitation unwaged free labor” in social media platforms from a critical perspective. The exploitative conditions are also taken into consideration by Guarriello (2019). He argues that people under neoliberal capitalism leave their “traditional, secure 9 to 5 jobs to be a professional gamer without any social safety nets and ultimately be always-on-the-clock”(Guarriello, 2019). Although the time and effort spent in personalized media economies are perceived as pleasurable, like free time, flexible and free labor is within the realm of exploitation under neoliberalism. Moreover, even though social media platforms organize a partnership program to share the revenue, digital content creators do not have specific working hours; they are always-on labor in a disciplined manner.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Based on the purpose of this study, a qualitative research design with an exploratory approach has been employed. In order to analyze and report the findings, inductive thematic analysis has been applied. The reason for choosing thematic analysis is to reveal the common meaning parallel to the research question. In other words, this study will explore the transformative digital media effect on the recurring meanings of backpackers with unique characters on the subject I am examining.

During the data collection process, content on YouTube and Instagram is the primary research material of the thesis. Criterion-based sampling, one of the purposive sampling ways, has been implemented to highlight the transformation of the backpacking experience. Being a backpacker, resigning from and refusing to work in neoliberal working conditions are the main criteria of the sampling. In other words, the sample is determined concerning the research question, which investigates one of the specific group.

As Braun and Clarke (2006) denote, thematic analysis is a beneficial tool for "identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data." Thematic analysis helps find out several phenomenal concepts, the experiences that we face in our daily lives without any definite knowledge. It enables us to identify patterns and make sense of them in the context (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In line with one of the aims of thematic analysis, this research focuses on reflecting the truth and tries to unveil or reveal the "reality" regarding the relationship between digital media and the backpacking experience. Since thematic analysis proposes a more flexible road for the researcher to determine themes, the process of defining and naming themes is shaped around the quality and depth of the material rather than focusing on how many times the word is said quantitatively.

The thematic analysis consists of two ways, which are inductive and deductive. The inductive method has been preferred for this study because the main aim of the thesis is to obtain a profound understanding of the dynamics of the transformation process of the backpacking experience with the effect of digital media. Although there is no leading theoretical perspective to collect data in inductive thematic analysis, the researcher can reflect on the relationship between their experience and the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The research is an iterative process because findings have been considered repeatedly to deepen the analysis during the themes' naming, defining, and analyzing process. After that, findings or potential themes and codes are specified a-posteriori. With a similar purpose, the literature review was restricted before data collection because the literature review may limit the analysis and defining themes impartially

by constructing a lens while collecting the data in this study. Literature and theoretical lenses have been considered later to overcome the problem since there is a probability of overlooking potential themes. The most crucial point regarding naming the themes is to find proper titles that reflect the paradoxes of the backpackers' experience, which emerged with the effect of digital media while analyzing the data. The most remarkable criterion in naming themes is finding a heading to reflect the paradoxes of the backpackers. Moreover, when the frame of the themes has been drawn, the "internal homogeneity" and "external heterogeneity" have been considered to specify themes correctly. These two concepts were cited by Patton (1990) to highlight the harmony of the meaning under the same theme and district differences between different themes, respectively (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.1. Research Question

- How do backpackers, self-identified backpackers, quit their jobs that are a part of neoliberal working conditions and refuse to start careers under these conditions, having social media accounts, producing content in Turkish, going on a world tour alone, negotiate their traveling experiences with digital media?
In specific terms,
- How do backpackers negotiate their experiences of traveling with digital media?
- How do YouTube and Instagram transform their backpacking experiences?
- What tensions does this create in terms of what they think a backpacker should be like?
- How do they cope with these tensions?

4.2. Participants

Since the research is exploratory, participants' profiles have been chosen purposively to explore the relationship between the backpacking experience and digital media. In other words, purposive sampling, one of the non-probability sampling, has been preferred for this research. With criterion-based purposeful sampling, the researcher chooses a sample that can find answers to their questions in order to discover, understand, and gain awareness (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1988). The people within the scope of this research are self-identified backpackers who aim to travel around the world alone. They resigned from their job, a part of neoliberal working conditions based on competitive, long, stressful, and endless hours, refused to start to work within these conditions, and shared their travel on their social media account with Turkish content. As stated, “the value of qualitative research comes from the particular description and themes developed in the context of specific site and particularity rather than generalizability” (Greene & Caracelli, 1997, as cited in Cresswell, 2018). In line with this, this research consists of primary and secondary sources. The importance of the core participants, which is also the reason for choosing as a sample, and their profiles have been explained at the end of this heading. While determining how many people are at the primary and how many people are at the secondary sources of the research, it is important that the answers obtained from the analysis, the emerging concepts, and the processes begin to repeat each other. This is named data saturation or thematic saturation (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2016). For this reason, when the emerging concepts and processes started to repeat each other, data collection was finalized by accepting the data/theme

saturation was reached. The primary sources' diversity, popularity, and distinct features have also been considered. The participants' names have been written based on their profile names on YouTube and Instagram, respectively. Besides, since the research universe is vast and intense, the number of followers and views changes. Because of this changeability, the number of views and interactions are not accepted as criteria. Primary participants have been chosen based on their importance, which is noted in the profile of the participants. The study consisted of five primary and three secondary backpackers, the three refusing to start their careers and the five resigning from neoliberal working conditions.

Criteria used to select participants

- Self-identified backpackers
- Having the aim to travel around the world
- Resigning from a job that is a part of neoliberal working conditions or refusing to start under these conditions
- Having social media accounts (YouTube and Instagram)
- Speaking and producing content in Turkish
- Traveling alone

4.2.1. Profiles of the Participants

■ nabertuu – Tuğba Evin: She resigned from her job associated with the media market in İstanbul and complained about her intense workload and absence of work-life balance. She has taken her first ticket to India and produces content on YouTube and Instagram regarding her world tour. She is the first core sample to start framing the thesis regarding Neoliberal working conditions. She shared her first YouTube video parallel with her world tour as well. She comes from India

to Türkiye and is currently in Belgium. She uploaded her first video in May 2022.

- **gezmekenkolay – Anıl Ünlü:** He was born in Ermenek, Karaman, which is not a Metropol city in Türkiye. After graduating from a reputable university in Ankara, he did not want to start his career with a job in neoliberal working conditions. He traveled during his university years with a very low-cost budget in European countries. Then, he started his world travel with Sri Lanka. He shares his world tour from the beginning on YouTube and Instagram. He is currently in Tanzania and is carrying on an Africa tour. He uploaded his first video in January 2018.
- **yol günlükleri – Emre Durmuş:** He was from Hatay, which is not a metropolitan city in Türkiye. He started his world tour before graduating from the university in İstanbul. He started his travel earlier than other primary backpackers. Initially, he did not share his journey on YouTube, but then he began to upload to gain money and collect memoirs. Then, he cooled off from YouTube and became interested in other entrepreneurial issues. During the world tour, he was chosen to show the transformation process from backpacker, YouTuber and entrepreneur. He is a user of both Instagram and YouTube. He is currently on the road as well. He uploaded his first video in October 2011.
- **plansız gezgin – Bestami Köse:** He was born in Hassa, Hatay. He also refused to start his career under neoliberal working conditions. He started his world tour from Europe via a meeting interrail program. He visited many countries as a backpacker and collected backpackers under the Facebook group and Instagram

profile with the name Interrail Türkiye and some other versions referring to other topics such as yardımrail and erasmusrail. He is a founder of this group and is very popular among many backpackers and ordinary people, so he is one of the core samples. He is an entrepreneur who organizes backpacking festivals and tours as well. He is a user of both Instagram and YouTube. He is not currently on the road. He uploaded his first video in January 2015.

- Ayşe Kocalar: She was working in İstanbul and resigned from her job, a part of neoliberal working conditions. She started her world tour from Africa via the voluntary program. She shares her travel journey from the beginning on YouTube and Instagram. She has been on the road for almost a year in some African countries. She is preparing to travel to Iran. Ayşe has been chosen to explore gender aspects and less experience in terms of years of traveling and producing content compared to other backpackers. She uploaded her first video in August 2022.

- Ugur Kola: He was born in Samsun and resigned from his job in 2018. He started to travel in Türkiye. Then he goes on his travels around the world. In the beginning, he did not produce content for social media; he worked in hostels voluntarily to maintain his travel. Nowadays, he is in Thailand. He uploaded his first video in 2020. He is chosen as a first secondary source because he meets with some backpackers, such as Ayşe and Tuğba, in Zambia and Thailand and asks questions, which is very informative for this research about their travel.

■ Arda Pazır: He was born in İzmir. He also resigned from his corporate job, which refers to the neoliberal working conditions, and started to travel around the world. He explained each detail of his story, from the resignation process to becoming a backpacker. He started his travel in Thailand. His first video is from 2021, but there is also some information that he started content producing in 2018.

■ Mert Aktaş Travel: He resigned from his job, where he worked for seven years, to travel worldwide. He has been on the road for five years. He started his travel from Thailand. Nowadays, he is in Taiwan. Since he opened a new channel with a different name, there is not much detailed information.

4.3 Data Collection and the Structure of the Data

Although there is a debate about whether document analysis is a way of data collection process (Bowen, 2009), document analysis is considered a way of data collection process in this research. Under this heading, the data collection process has been transparently explained to provide trustworthiness (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985).

At the beginning of the research, semi-structured interviews and document analysis were chosen for data collection. The ethics committee approval was taken for this purpose (see Appendix A). However, positive responses to the interview requests could not be received due to reasons such as the big earthquake and the fact that the backpackers were always on the road. For this reason, the supplementary role of document analysis to provide data triangulation has been replaced by a primary role. Therefore, document analysis became an independent/separate way of the data

collection process (Bowen, 2009). In this scope, digital materials have been chosen. Digital materials have been taken from social media profiles, as Creswell (2018) gives a place to explain the form of these materials as “form of photographs, art objects, videotapes, website main pages, e-mails, text messages, social media text, or any forms of sound.” Since the aim is to highlight the digital media’s effect on the backpacking experience, the posted videos, photographs, captions (social media text), reels (videos), and stories (photographs and videos) on YouTube and Instagram have been considered to explore the role of digital media in backpacking experience.

As is highlighted, the researcher should be able to differentiate pertinent and non-pertinent information (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In line with this, researchers need to “winnowing,” which refers to focusing and disregarding some parts to “aggregate data into a small number of themes, something between five and seven themes” because of the intensity and richness of the text and image data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, as cited in Creswell, 2018). Therefore, findings have been thematized into six categories, and samples have been chosen in light of this principle. In line with the research's aim, their perspective and speech toward YouTube and Instagram, their working principle, followers, viewers, subscribers, information about brand sponsorship, their life before traveling, comments toward a traveled area, traveling style, accommodation, feelings during traveling, travel application, local people, the source of earning money, perspective toward the concept of freedom, social, economic and individual components have been lighted on closely. After lighting on, pertinent and non-pertinent data are separated to thematize. As the process is iterative, the last sample and data were reached a month ago before finalizing the thesis.

Moreover, the coding process was challenging because videos and photos do not have a standard format. The stages of document analysis are explained as reaching documents, (1) checking the originality of documents, (2) adapting a system for coding and categorizing, (3) analyzing data, (4) using it, (5) (Forster, 1994, as cited in Sak, Şahin Sak, Öneren Şendil, & Nas, 2021; Merriam, 2009). As requested, the documents' originality and reliability representativeness have been checked (Bowen, 2009).

To provide information about the structure of the data, the backpackers' YouTube channels and Instagram profiles are primary sources for the study. In line with this, the captions, videos, and photos in YouTube and Instagram profiles are the core sources of the study. The secondary sources are framed around their other interviews focusing on the same backpackers' backpacking experience on the YouTube channels of other YouTubers.

Here, explaining the structure of backpackers' YouTube channels and Instagram profiles would be relevant. Videos consist of three different contents: one of them is more about their self-introduction, like their background, character, personal issues, plan about a world tour, their change being on the road, etc., the second one refers to the country they traveled such as food, culture, geographical issues, nature, etc., and the third one is about sponsorship videos which can sometimes intersect personal videos as well because the way of advertising comes from personal experiences or narrations. The same categorization can be seen on Instagram as well. However, there would be some exceptions for some backpackers because some photos that contain their face, image, or visuality can be shared without informative captions regarding their background and the traveling country as a fourth category.

Furthermore, the secondary sources have been chosen in line with the research questions. Since these backpackers are known for their high numbers of followers, some content producers have interviewed them about their background, traveling style, and travel's meaning. Since these videos also give an insight into their backpacking, background, and self-introduction, they are included in the research.

4.4. Data Analysis

This study's data analysis is based on Braun and Clarke (2006) and their advised steps. The six stages of thematic analysis have been applied in light of the research questions. As a first step, the narration of the backpackers has been listened to and written with some initial notes. They have been read several times to become familiarized adequately. Secondly, initial codes were specified after familiarizing with the data; the reading process still reached some common and different points. The reading and listening process of the data has been carried out sentence by sentence to get proper codes. Thirdly, since the codes have been shaped regarding the common points and differences, they have been organized in relation to themes because codes give reference to the common broader categories, which can be named themes, allowing the researcher to specify themes. Since the research is exploratory, it is essential to remember that it aims to thematize the meanings. In the fourth step, themes are reviewed in terms of the coherence principle regarding initial coding and entire data. Then, these processes were considered repeatedly, the tensions were explored, and codes and themes were organized. Generated themes, available in Chapter 5, have been named and defined based on the principles of "external heterogeneity" and "internal homogeneity." Repeated considerations allow us to define and name themes deeply that reflect the tension and paradoxes as a fifth step. The last step was producing the report. Considering the research questions of the

thesis, generated themes and patterns have been clearly defined to reflect the transformative power of digital media in a neoliberalizing world.

The feature of flexibility was brought into the scene by Braun and Clarke (2006) to emphasize how useful it is in analyzing a “rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data.” It is necessary to underline that although the flexibility of research is always centered in this method, there is no place to give arbitrary issues, and insights are not followed (Holloway & Todres, 2003). For this reason, the necessity to provide a place for each step is considered; each process has been explained with its details and reason transparently. This would enable other researchers to compare and synthesize this thesis with further research (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Moreover, the part to give findings has been written in both languages, which are Turkish and English, to provide a linguistic expression to offer raw data based on the principle of transparency. Additionally, Patton (1988) described qualitative data as providing “depth and detail. Depth and detail emerge through direct quotation and careful description”.

Furthermore, since the priority is coherence between the theoretical framework and methods that match what the researcher wants to know, this research has been carried out in line with this coherence principle regarding research questions and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, the research question leads themes in an inductive and exploratory way because this research is data-driven, apart from fitting a preexisting coding frame. However, after naming and determining themes, since “researchers cannot themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum,” the analysis in light of findings, themes, and theoretical framework has been placed in the discussion and conclusion part (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, the theoretical

orientations of neoliberalism and digital media have been integrated into this research to provide a theoretical triangulation.

4.5. Ethics and Trustworthiness

The backpackers in the sample are visible and known through social media. Since the findings were obtained from the content shared by these people on their unlocked social media accounts with their consent, there is no informed consent form in this study. In parallel, the use of the contents of social media profiles as a data source has been approved by the Bilkent University Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix A). Besides, as YouTube and Instagram can be considered public applications and social media content was uploaded by their consent into unlocked profiles in public social media applications, there is no need to get an informed consent form. It is also appropriate to consider that it is not possible to make personal contact with backpackers who are included in the sample and produce content constantly on the road to explain why there is no informed consent form in this research.

As Lincoln and Cuba (1985) suggested, the trustworthiness of qualitative research has been organized around four main criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Asking people with general knowledge about the research subject and specializing in qualitative research methods to examine the research in various dimensions is another measure that can be taken in terms of credibility. This method is called peer debriefing (Creswell, 2018). In this thesis, peer debriefing was provided since the expert was given feedback by critically looking at the data collected from the research design, analysis, and processes until

the writing of the results, and the thesis advisor discussed and examined the coding process several times. Besides, raw data (direct quotation) in Turkish and its translation in English have been provided to meet the credibility of the research.

Regarding each step and iterative process, descriptions showing the environment and context are also included as much as possible to be transferable while putting the data. Additionally, they are explained with details transparently to build an ‘audit trail’ to be confirmable. Furthermore, theoretical orientations of neoliberalism and working principles of new media have been presented for comprehensive analysis and meeting theoretical triangulation, which is one of the dependability criteria. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out, under the finding part, the direct citations have also been supplemented to gain confirmability.

4.6. Reflexivity

The concept of reflexivity bears on the “analytic attention to the researcher’s role in qualitative research” (Gouldner, 1971, as cited in Dowling, 2006). Reflexivity can be expressed as both a process and concept and a tool for adding credibility to research (Dowling, 2006). Although inductive thematic analysis, which means having no leading theoretical perspective to the data collection and analysis process, has been implemented for this study, it is significant to reflect the researcher’s orientation to the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

My research originates from a curiosity about long-distance walkers and their subjectivities, which can also have some backpacking features. The curiosity originated from ten days spent on Lycian Way walking. During my bachelor’s, I took

some social theory courses emphasizing the perspective of subjectivities. While taking these courses, I started to walk Lycian Way, marked as a long-distance hiking trail with a Mediterranean coastal view in Türkiye, for around ten days. Due to the difficulty of reaching objective and proper data on this subject, the subject has evolved into today's topic.

During the evolutionary process of the topic, my thesis advisor shared with me the backpackers on the world tour she follows on YouTube since I am also highly interested in these people and the concept of backpacking. Then, we shared the backpacker channels and profiles with each other. Then, this research was brought into the scene.

Furthermore, it would also be relevant to mention my travel experiences with backpackers and backpacking. I have met and spent time with backpackers during my several camping experiences. During my travels abroad alone, I stayed in hostels, socialized with other backpackers, and listened to their road stories. Moreover, in my travels, I have also used the application of Couchsurfing, which is also used and referred to by backpackers in this research. In other words, I familiarized their pursuit and way of travel.

CHAPTER FIVE

IDENTIFYING THEMES

The findings obtained from the documents are included in this part of the research. Methodologically, inductive coding was followed in the analysis of the data. The reason for this is that in thematic research, the researcher is able to analyze the documents as objectively as possible by getting rid of their own world of meaning and value integrity. Themes and their sub-codes will be introduced in this section as well. The next part discusses the literature, theoretical framework, and findings together. The main themes have been determined around two contrasting concepts because it is seen that backpackers are the subjects at the center of these paradoxes.

5.1. Between Freedom and Discipline

In this section, findings on the paradox of freedom and discipline will be presented. Findings were themed with these two concepts in order to reflect the intertwined contrast. Sub-codes can be expressed as follows: Rejecting everyday exploitative routine and falling out into self-discipline, always-on labor, and spontaneity, the pressure to increase followers. The general finding is that backpackers stuck in the

place between the pursuit of freedom and backpacking experience with disciplined prosumer conditions come from the working principle of social media.

5.1.1. Rejecting Everyday Exploitative Routine, Falling Out into Self-discipline, and Becoming Always-on Labor

To give a direction, it is seen that backpackers are always-on labor to improve their social media profiles while escaping the disciplinary and exploitative, competitive neoliberal work conditions in work and social lives and pursuing their desire to explore, and, in this way, they become prisoners of another discipline. In the most general sense, the reasons for starting their travel stories of backpackers who resigned from or refused to begin their careers in competitive, long, stressful, and endless hours of neoliberal working conditions refer to the theme of freedom. The will to stay away from mainstream life and exploitative working conditions are part of the disciplinary conditions that backpackers want to escape, shaping the first part of the theme: freedom. In addition, findings that can be added to the second part of the theme, which refers to self-discipline and always being always-on labor, are included and visible, emphasizing social media's disciplined conditions. In other words, disciplinary conditions are about editing content for long hours or the necessity to share the content at certain hours to develop their social media accounts. This desire for freedom from the neoliberal working conditions, but the disciplinary conditions brought about by the necessity to make money through digital media, has created this paradox as the theme. So, although travelers escaped neoliberal conditions, they fell into the trap of another neoliberal market, social media.

I would like to use a trendy video on Instagram to show how backpackers have a critical perspective toward exploitative working conditions. Ayşe shares a reel video with critical lyrics about the neoliberalizing world, with a caption as “ I was born as a diss to this song. By the way, I had a life that was literally the same as the song.” Besides, she puts photos from her travels that remind her audience of the concept of freedom. Her emphasis on freedom and critical perspective shows the first part of the theme: freedom. Her caption gives a clue about her background before resigning from her job.

Now, we are going to school, we are graduating, we are getting in line, we are looking for a job. We are looking, we are looking, we are looking, we are looking, we are looking, we are looking, we are finally getting the intern salary. Suppose we find a house by chance -17. We're entering right now. We save. We pay rent and dues. We pay debts, we pay fees. We pay taxes. We become role models. Every morning, we eat a pastry for breakfast. We eat it on the way, but we are still late, we go for 1.5 hours. We arrive in 1.5 hours. Maybe we're a little irritated, but we're still calm. After all, there is something worse; we know, we hear. What are we doing? We are patient. What are we doing? We give thanks (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023a).

(Şimdi şöyle yapıyoruz Okula gidiyoruz, mezun oluyoruz, sıra giriyoruz, iş bakıyoruz Arıyoruz, arıyoruz, arıyoruz, arıyoruz Sonunda stajyer maaşına razı oluyoruz Tesadüfen bir ev bulursak -17. katta Hemen giriyoruz. Tasarruf ediyoruz Kira ve aidat ödüyoruz. Borç ödüyoruz, harç ödüyoruz Vergi ödüyoruz. Örnek insan oluyoruz Her sabah kahvaltıda bir poğaçaya simit yiyoruz. Onu da yolda yiyoruz ki yine de geç kalıyoruz 1,5 saat gidiyoruz. 1,5 saat geliyoruz. Belki biraz doluyoruz ama yine de sakin oluyoruz. Sonuçta beterin beteri var; biliyoruz, duyuyoruz Bayramda falan eşi, dostu yine biraz görüyoruz. Napıyoruz? Sabrediyoruz. Napıyoruz? Şükrediyoruz.)

Discourses of backpackers generally criticize the dominant mentality about the obligation to follow the mainstream life stages based on cost-benefit calculation: prestigious education or career, full-time job, buying a house and car, and competitive and exploitative working conditions. Namely, this quotation shows what backpackers want to be free from, like in the previous examples.

[...] While taking the university entrance exam, the education system in Türkiye did not offer any of us options such as what we want to be, what our hobbies are, what our talents are, and how we want to shape our life... I had to choose a profession in this country because we cannot say, "I will never be anything; I

don't want to have a profession; I want to pursue my dreams (Gezmekenkolay, 2018).

([...] Üniversite sınavına girerken Türkiye'deki eğitim sistemi hiçbirimize sen ne olmak istiyorsun, hobilerin neler, yeteneklerin neler, hayatını nasıl şekillendirmek istiyorsun gibi seçenekler sunmadı...ben hiçbir şey olmayacağım, ben meslek sahibi olmak istemiyorum, ben hayallerimin peşinden koşmak istiyorum diyemediğimiz için bu ülkede bir meslek seçmek zorundaydım [...])

Another criticism comes from Tuğba, who started traveling almost one year ago by resigning from her job. Her complaint clearly shows how she wants to escape the endless and stressful neoliberal working hours and become a backpacker. Here, I would like to underline that what Tuğba complains about is a component of neoliberal working conditions. In Bangkok, Tuğba and Uğur met in Tuğba's second month of her world tour. Tuğba answered the question of why you start the world tour as:

[...] I mean, it will be a very classic answer, but it is a desire that I have had since my childhood, the desire to explore, but such is not only in the world but also in Türkiye. When I was at university, I studied at a university in Muğla, and I was never a person standing in my place like this. Actually, I was a student who always hitchhiked to the nearby cities and went to the villages. Exploring places like this and meeting people develops me a lot. At a time when my job is also very stressful, I can't do anything anymore. I have dreams, I have something I want to do, and I'm trying to save money, but I can't do it. I have about 3 to 4 years of ad agency experience. I have been working in the media sector for the last year, but at a time when I was on the computer for 12 13 hours a day when the job was very stressful, I said that I needed to take action now; this is not me. Every day with such depression, I turn the computer on and off, look at the wall, cry a little, and sleep. This was how my whole day went. When these crying crises increased so much, I left the job with a momentary decision. (Uğur Kola, 2022b).

([...] yani çok klasik bir cevap olacak ama çocukluğumdan beri zaten böyle bir içimde olan bir arzu; keşfetme arzusu ama böyle sadece dünyayı değil Türkiye'de de öyle. Ben üniversitedeyken Muğla'da üniversite okudum ve hiç böyle yerimde duran bir insan değildim. Sürekli otostopla yakın şehirlere giden köylere giden bir öğrenciydim aslında. Sürekli böyle bir yerleri keşfetmek insanlarla tanışmak beni çok besliyor. İşimin de çok stresli olduğu bir dönemde artık şey dedim yapamayacağım olmuyor. Hayallerim var, yapmak istediğim bir şey var, para biriktirmeye çalışıyorum ama bunu ben beceremedim. Yaklaşık 3 4 yıllık bir ajans deneyimim var son 1 yıldır da medya sektöründe çalışıyordum ama işin çok stresli olduğu günde 12 13 saat bilgisayarda olduğum bir dönemde dedim benim artık harekete geçmem lazım bu ben değilim. Her gün böyle depresyonla bilgisayarı açıyorum kapatıyorum duvara bakıp biraz ağlıyorum ve uyuyorum. Bütün günüm böyle geçiyordu. Bu ağlama krizleri çok artınca anlık bir kararla işi bıraktım [...]).

In the continuation of this conversation, the dialogue between them shows that social media platforms are more of a market than just a place where memoir is shared, and

the market has conditions that need to be learned. In other words, it is clearly seen that she faces neoliberal market conditions again, even in another market that can be named personalized media economies. This parallels my argument that while they escape from neoliberal markets, they are trapped by another neoliberal market. Uğur recommends Tuğba's YouTube channel for subscribing. Since Tuğba entered YouTube just before starting the world tour, Tuğba said:

I sometimes forget to remind myself this because I am trying to learn YouTube while learning to travel; on the one hand, I am very active on Instagram; I also love being active on Instagram, sometimes I can get confused, I can't catch up, but I will learn it over time. (Ugur Kola, 2022b).

([...] bunu hatırlatmayı ben bazen unutuyorum çünkü gezmeyi öğrenirken YouTube'u da öğrenmeye çalışıyorum bir yandan instagramda çok aktifim; instagramda aktif olmayı da çok seviyorum bazen kafam karışabiliyor, yetişemeyebiliyorum ama onu da öğreneceğim zamanla [...])

Another finding comes from the Ayşe and Uğur; they traveled together in some parts of Zambia. Here, I intend to underline the concepts of productivity, randomness, and spontaneity because they help to illuminate the research questions. The reason why I emphasize these concepts is that they continue to speak in a neoliberal language even though they want to get away. The video emphasizes these concepts many times, and they are defined as a tool to explore many unique things, places, and people. The video is shared with a caption:

Hello, everyone. In this video, we went on a random tour of villages in Livingstone, Zambia. Ayşe and I had a delightful and productive day. The smiling faces of the children made us smile. Enjoy watching. (Ugur Kola, 2023b).

(Herkes merhaba, bu videoda Zambia'nın Livingstone şehrinde rastgele köyleri dolaşmaya çıktık. Ayşe ile çok keyifli ve verimli bir gün geçirdik. Çocukların güler yüzleri bizlerin yüzünde gülücükler açtırdı. İyi seyirler.).

When they left the hostel on the same travel, Uğur said: “I take my laptop with me. I carry it in my backpack; no locker is here, so I must take it with me.” Then he warns Ayşe about her cameras. “Your camera is there. Look, someone can steal it, put it in

your bag. I think your only important item is right now.” Ayşe agrees on this as well (Ugur Kola, 2023a). (“Kameran falan orda bak çalarlar falan çantana at tek önemli eşyan o bence şu an. Bence de diyor Ayşe.”). The emphasis that the most essential item is the camera, and the fact that they carry them all the time, and their equipment have to be secure in order to continue to produce and edit content is a crucial component to refer to the concept of discipline because they are always-on labor to edit, organize and stock videos and contents. I would like to show from the following example that this backpacker, who refused to start his career due to long, endless hours and neoliberal working conditions and started to travel the world by producing content, emphasizes that the background of being a prosumer backpacker is a 12-hour work and edit, albeit flexible. This clearly shows that he is disciplined while seeking freedom. In Anıl’s story (24 hours visible), he explains his daily routine (see Appendix B).

Here is the background: 6.30 departure and breakfast. Video montage between 7:30 and 12:00. Lunch. Video montage between 12:30-18:00. Between 18.00-19.00, an hour tour of the village and city, exploring the surroundings. Evening meal. 20:00-22:00 video montage. Read a book for half an hour and sleep. The background of the sentences "Oh, how nice you are traveling around, you are in a different city every day, you go wherever you want and do not give an account to anyone" is filled with working 12 hours a day, seven days a week. (Gezmekenkolay, 2023)

(Buyrun bu işin arka planı: 6.30 kalkış ve kahvaltı. 7:30 ile 12:00 arası video montajı. öğle yemeği. 12:30-18:00 arası video montajı. 18.00-19.00 arası bir saat köyü şehri gezme, etrafı keşfetme yürüyüşü. Akşam yemeği. 20:00-22:00 video montajı. Yarım saat kitap okuyup uyku. ‘Ohh ne güzel gezip dolaşıyorsun, her gün ayrı bir şehirdesin, istediğin her yere gidip kimseye hesap vermiyorsun’ cümlelerinin arka planı, 7 gün, günlük 12 saat çalışma ile dolu.)

In this example, the backpacker (Anıl) is aware of how they are spending an effort on her social media accounts. Moreover, when Ayşe shares a video about the devastating earthquake, she expresses her obligation to share content in her profile, apologizing for sharing enjoyable travel diaries. She also tells us the necessity to go on sharing because of the working principles of social media. Namely, she is in the

middle of neoliberal market conditions that ignore personal problems to provide a continuity of financial outcomes. On this ground, it is seen that the requirements for producing content are not just dependent on their will. In another finding, the implicit necessity or obligation to make a continuous record becomes visible because the backpacker explains why the previous travel step was not recorded as content. Again, the significant point becomes just a financial outcome, albeit with some flexibility. Then, he touches on the concept of freedom by reminding the subscription to his channel.

I am in Casablanca, Morocco, right now. I came here after a 5-hour flight; before that, I couldn't shoot a video because I was so sleepless. I arrived at the airport, gave my luggage, went straight to the plane, and went to sleep, so now I start shooting videos [...] I was in Istanbul 24 hours ago and am now walking in Brazil as a free backpacker. Subscribe to my channel to follow my adventures in Brazil. (Emre Durmuş, 2017a)

(Şu an Fas'ın Kazablanka şehrindeyim 5 saatlik bir uçuştan sonra buraya geldim, bundan önce video çekemedim çünkü çok uykusuzdum. Havaalanına geldim, bagajımı verdim ve direk uçağa binip uyudum o yüzden şimdi video çekmeye başlıyorum [...] 24 saat önce İstanbuldaydım ve şu an Brezilya'da özgür bir backpacker olarak yürüyorum. Brezilyadaki maceralarımı takip etmek için kanalıma abone olun.)

Here, I present the most obvious example of how backpackers want to avoid competitive and exploitative work conditions and, paradoxically enough, how digital media traps them. He tells his story about the decision-making process of starting the world tour. Also, he used the word 'rat race' to describe the neoliberal work conditions he escaped. He is also critical of society's expectations, tasks, and teachings based on mainstream life conditions, which can be considered a criticism of neoliberal cost-benefit calculation about life.

From 2013 to 2015, I started to get a little pursuit with the dream of traveling the world. At that time, I was studying electrical and electronic engineering. When I realized that the education system was going to be a ridiculous place and saw that it did not add anything to me, I quit. Being an engineer was not very important for me because even when I became an engineer, I realized that I was in that rat race; there were tasks given to me, and I had to complete them. In other words, I was compelled to follow what I was taught rather than live and experience my own

life, but I had no idea what to do. I was aware of all this, so here is a running and racing capital system; something is going on, but I did not know what to do or what to do about my own life. I decided that the best way to answer these questions is to tour the world. I stayed on the road for two years and did all kinds of things to keep on the road. I worked voluntarily; I traveled by hitchhiking and did activities you would not believe. Because I thought that the best thing that could happen while building my own life would be to get to know different cultures somewhere in the world and integrate the things I learned from them with the various people I met into my own life. (Emre Durmuş, 2023)

(2013'ten 2015'e kadar falan dünyayı gezme hayaliyle böyle birazcık kavrulmaya başlamıştım. Türkiye'yi otostopla geziyordum zaten her yerini sonra 2015 yılında dünyanın her yerini gezme kararı aldım. O zaman elektrik elektronik mühendisliği okuyordum ve eğitim sisteminin saçma sapan bir yere gittiğini fark edince ve bana hiçbir şey katmadığını görünce bıraktım. Benim için mühendis olmak çok da mühim bir şey değildi çünkü mühendis olunca bile o fare yarışında olduğumu fark ettim sanki böyle bana verilen görevler var ve onları tamamlamak zorundayım. Yani kendi hayatımı yaşamak ve deneyimlemekten ziyade bana öğretilen şeylerin peşinde koşmak gerekiyormuş gibi bir zorlama vardı ama ne yapacağıma dair bir bilgim yoktu. Bütün bunların farkındaydım yani burda bir koşturma yarış kapital sistem bir şeyler dönüyor ama ben peki ne yapacağım, kendi hayatıma dair ne yapacağımı bilmiyordum. Bunları cevaplayabileceğim en güzel yolun da dünya turu olduğuna karar verdim. 2 yıl boyunca yolda kaldım ve yolda kalabilmek için binbir türlü iş yaptım. Gönüllü çalıştım, otostopla gezdim, inanamayacağınız aktivitelerde bulundum. Çünkü kendi yaşamımı inşa ederken olabilecek en güzel şeyin dünyanın bir yerlerinde farklı kültürler tanımanın ve tanıştığım farklı insanlarla onlardan öğrendiğim şeyleri kendi hayatıma entegre etmenin doğru olacağına inanıyordum.)

Then, he explicitly touches on the role of YouTube in his experience. The first role is a tool to buy experience, which reminds us of the concept of experience economy discussed in the next chapter. Another role refers to the obligatory role of being a YouTuber or influencer. He also touches on how he is trapped by the will to buy a house with a Bosphorus view. He emphasizes that his priority is not to produce content to make money, but he defines this process as 'blurry.' It is understood from his discourse that the content is a tool to trigger some emotions, which is regarded in relation to the concept of personal branding detailed in the discussion section.

Namely, although he does not want to be part of the rat race, which refers to neoliberal conditions, he lost himself in the neoliberal mentality that encouraged him to earn more money and buy houses and furniture. Besides, he still uses the neoliberal language such as "buying experience." In this way, he becomes a part of the experience economy, which is also one of the neoliberal markets. Namely, digital

media does not allow him to escape from neoliberal conditions; it even integrates him into another economy.

Then I met YouTube; YouTube came into my life; of course, these things happen after two years. So, YouTube has not been in my life since the beginning. Of course, many people don't know this. My life changed again when I met YouTube. From where? I started making money. What happens when you make money? I focused on buying experience with the money I earned. Because I thought that the experiences I could buy with money would make me ask excellent questions in my life and that I could set sail on the learning journey much better with their changes. So, YouTube was a huge motivation because it kept me on track. It kept asking questions, an incredible tool igniting my learning. So what happened? When I started making YouTube, identities began to be uploaded to me. Of course, I was doing this unintentionally without realizing it because how would I know? When I started making YouTube, a celebrity, influencer, and YouTuber began to make sense as if I was doing this for these adjectives. Of course, that made me sad. Because I was basically trying to build the life I wanted to live, I was actually doing this to make money from my other digital ventures, from blogging to the content I shot on YouTube and what effects it had on my life. The work I did was not the goal, but I went on a world tour and traveled this much. YouTube came into my life, and I produced content on YouTube, and then this is what happened: a capital life order that I actually built unintentionally began. When I started making money, I started buying tangible things. When I started earning money, I saw what I could do for myself and started to build different lives with the emotions taught and impulses. I had a house with a view of the Bosphorus and began buying furniture. In fact, I began to take on responsibilities that did not serve me. We do not realize that we are making the things we buy with the money we earn own us. All the money we earn is supposed to keep us alive and pave the way for what we want to do. [...] You don't even realize what you're doing in such a chaotic state while you think [...] I sat down and thought again about making money; why am I making money? How do I earn money? By the way, there are a few different areas where I make money; I do not just make money from YouTube; all digital ventures, by the way. How much money will I earn, and how much time will I devote to work? I sat down and decided. The flow is like this: I decided to work only three days a week, the other four days should belong to me, and I should use it as I want [...] (Emre Durmuş, 2023).

(Sonra YouTube ile tanıştım, YouTube hayatıma girdi tabii 2 yıl sonra oluyor tabi bunlar. Yani YouTube başından beri hayatımda yoktu. Bunu birçok insan bilmiyor tabii. YouTube ile tanışınca hayatım yine değişti. Neden? Para kazanmaya başladım. Para kazanınca noluyor? Kazandığım parayla deneyim satın almaya odaklandım. Çünkü parayla satın alabildiğim deneyimlerin hayatımda yine çok güzel sorular sorduracağını bunların değişimleriyle beraber öğrenme yolculuğuna çok daha güzel yelken açabileceğimi düşünüyordum. Dolayısıyla YouTube çok büyük bir motivasyon oldu çünkü beni yolda tutuyordu. Soru sordurmaya devam ediyordu ve öğrenmemi inanılmaz ateşleyen bir araç oldu. Sonra neler oldu peki? YouTube yapmaya başlayınca bana kimlikler yüklenmeye başladı. Tabi bunu ister istemez farkında olmadan ben de yapıyordum çünkü nerden bileyim. YouTube yapmaya başlayınca işte ünlü, influencer, YouTuber böyle sanki bu sıfatlar için bunu yapıyormuşum gibi bir anlamlar yüklenmeye başladı. Bu beni üzüyordu tabi. Çünkü temelde yaşamak istediğim hayatı inşa etmek için çaba gösteriyordum. Bunu blog

yazmaktan tutun da YouTube 'da çektiğim içeriklere kadar diğer dijital girişimlerimden para kazanmak ve onun hayatıma ne gibi etkileri var aslında bunun için yapıyordum. Yaptığım işin kendisi amaç değildi, peki dünya turuna çıktım ve bu kadar yolculuk yaptım YouTube hayatıma girdi ve YouTube 'da içerikler ürettim sonra ise şu oldu: benim aslında istemeden inşa ettiğim kapital bir hayat düzeni başladı. Para kazanmaya başlayınca somut şeyler satın almaya başladım. Para kazanmaya başlayınca kendi kendime yapabileceğim şeyleri görüp öğretilen duygularla dürtülerle farklı yaşamlar inşa etmeye başladım. Boğaz manzaralı bir evim vardı, eşyalar satın almaya başladım. Aslında bana hizmet etmeyen sorumluluklar yüklenmeye başladım. Kazandığımız parayla satın aldığımız şeylerin bize sahip olmasına sağladığımız farkında değiliz. Kazandığımız paranın tek yapması gereken bizi hayatta tutmak ve yapmak istediklerimiz konusunda önümüzü açması [...] Öyle bir şeyin içine giriyorsun ki su çok bulanıklaşmaya başlıyor sen doğru bildiğin şeyleri yaptığını zannederken o kadar kaotikliğin içerisinde ne yaptığının bile farkında olmuyorsun [...] Para kazanma dair de oturdum tekrar düşündüm ben neden para kazanıyorum? Ben nasıl para kazanıyorum? Bu arada benim para kazandığım birkaç farklı alan var sadece YouTube 'tan para kazanmıyorum; hepsi dijital girişimler bu arada. Parayı ne kadar kazanacağım, işe ne kadar zaman ayıracağım? Oturdum bunlara karar verdim. Şunda şöyle bir akış haftanın sadece 3 günü çalışmaya karar verdim diğer 4 günü bana ait olmalı ve istediğim gibi değerlendirmeliyim [...])

In the end, he underlines again and again the responsibilities and discipline that come from being a YouTuber. As seen, producing content is not the target; he wants to travel and get experience freely, but he becomes a part of discipline in relation to being a prosumer. It is seen that what social media brings him is his skills in marketing. Since he produces content professionally, he underlines his capability to understand the emotions that social media content can trigger. The underlining of this ability shows how he is still in relation to neoliberal language and skills.

To summarize, being out of the rat race, earning only as much money as I needed, and being able to build my life again was by asking questions and answering these questions [...] Let's go on the subject of YouTube, why I do not make YouTube videos. Because I took a dislike to YouTube. Why? It started to take away too much from me, and the second reason was that I felt that I had to carry the attributes that were imposed on me. I don't want to take them. I don't want to be someone who falls into the category of influencer, Youtuber, or celebrity. If I were a person who shared something about the awareness I experienced, it would be enough for me in your life [...] Now I am the master of social media; I'm not saying this from such an egoistic place; I understand everything now. When content is produced, when I see an advertisement or any content, I can clearly see what emotion it triggers. A third reason is that everyone who travels on the road creates a perception as if they have to produce content on YouTube as if they have to live for Instagram. I am very upset about this because my priority has not been to produce content anywhere I have been. Basically, my aim was to go there, experience it, and then turn the reflections into content. (Emre Durmuş, 2023)

(Özetleyecek olursam fare yarışından çıkmış olmak, sadece ihtiyacım olduğu kadar para kazanmak ve tekrardan yaşamımı inşa edebiliyor olmak sorular sorup bu sorulara cevap

verebilmemle oldu [...] Gelelim YouTube konusuna, neden YouTube videoları çekmiyorum çünkü YouTube'a dair biraz soğudum. Neden soğudum? Çok fazla benden götürmeye başladı ve ikinci nedeni de aslında bana yüklenen sıfatları taşımak zorunda olduğumu hissettim. Ben bunları taşımak istemiyorum. Ben influencer, YouTuber, ünlü kategorisine giren birisi olmak istemiyorum. Ben kendi yaşadığım farkındalıklara dair bir şeyler paylaşan bir insan olsam hayatınızda yeterli benim için [...] Sosyal medyanın artık piri oldum; bunu böyle egoist bir yerden söylemiyorum artık her şeyini anlıyorum. Bir içerik üretildiği zaman bir reklam gördüğüm zaman ya da herhangi bir içerikte onun hangi duyguyu tetiklediğini çok iyi rahat görebiliyorum artık. Üçüncü bir nedeni ise yola çıkan seyahat eden herkesin sanki YouTube'da içerik üretmek zorundaymış sanki instagram için yaşamak zorundaymış gibi bir algı yaratması. Ben buna çok üzülüyorum çünkü şimdiye kadar gittiğim hiçbir yerde önceliğim buraya içerik üretmek olmadı temelde amacım oraya gitmek, orayı deneyimlemek sonra oradan çıkan yansımaları içeriğe dönüştürmekti.)

5.1.2. Spontaneity and the Pressure to Increase Followers

This is the second sub-code of the theme of 'between freedom and discipline.' This code also introduces findings in line with the paradox between these two concepts. Since backpackers want to be spontaneous in their travel, they emphasize their actions without any pressure or plan. However, regarding the working principle of digital media, the main point to increase the number of interactions and followers is the continuity of content production. For this reason, it is better to look at these findings with this principle. As the literature also shows, backpackers do not want to plan their travel for different reasons. They can be spontaneous in the sense of where to stay or go and when to go or eat. However, since their social media profile needs content and they need to build a connection with their followers, they mostly have a plan about the time for sharing or editing content or reaching the internet. Besides, they feel under pressure to keep the camera open to build a connection with followers because they often make statements about moments that are not recorded. Their travel is not just restricted via being always-on labor; their other concern is about increasing the number of followers and interactions. In line with this, they always remind audiences to subscribe to their YouTube channel or follow their Instagram account. In other words, reminders about subscribing to find sponsors and the emphasis on the importance of followers' support are seen as a shared discourse

due to the providing of financial flow through social media. This reminder appears on both platforms, not just on YouTube or Instagram. Satisfaction with the increase in followers and sadness is also expressed when interactions decrease. Followers are directed to comment, like the photo or video. In fact, Mert, whose interactions have dropped considerably due to the algorithm, starts from scratch by opening a new account, and he states that it affects his mood in travel. The need for support, which he expressed many times in his video, is shaped around the need for views, interaction, and subscriptions. It is understood that he sees being a YouTuber as a labor exchange and uses the word ‘strategy’ to develop his channel. Having a plan for stock videos and the times to share them is also a reference that he cannot be entirely spontaneous and be part of strategies and plans. He tells his story in the video, “My New World Tour Travel Chanel! I Opened A New Youtube Channel” (Mert Aktaş Travel, 2022). In this example, he still uses strategies to develop his enterprise on YouTube; it means he can not avoid commercial relations in this market.

Greetings to everyone from my new YouTube channel, you all. Those who know me already know. For those who do not know me, welcome to my new channel. I want to summarize that I have been traveling the world for many years and sharing my adventures on YouTube for three years. I decided to open a new channel; I have had around 130 videos in 3 years. Since my old channel could not develop, that is, after three years, the views are still few at 300 500, because YouTube did not recommend me, I thought that I could not get my effort's worth due to some difficulties. I thought I could be more successful. That is why I opened this channel, everyone. Welcome, the guys; please subscribe, comment on the videos, and give likes because I opened this channel from scratch, and now I'm doing it again from scratch. I need your support a lot. All I need is your support right now, so give lots of likes, subscriptions, shares, and support, everyone. Apart from that, let me briefly talk about how I will do my strategy. (Then, he started to talk about the number of stock videos and their sharing time and date.) The only thing that has changed is the YouTube channel; there is no problem other than that; I am in good health and very happy, except for YouTube. When we put Youtube in place, When the views and subscribers increase, I hope my labor will be rewarded, everyone. (Mert Aktaş Travel, 2022).

(Yeni Youtube kanalımın herkese selamlar arkadaşlar. Beni tanıyanlar zaten biliyordur. Beni tanımayanlar için de yeni kanalıma hoşgeldiniz. Kısaca bir özet geçmek istiyorum, ben uzun yıllardır dünya turu yapıyorum ve düz hesap 3 senedir de Youtube'da maceralarımı paylaşıyorum. Yeni kanal açma kararı aldım, 130 civarında videom vardı bugüne kadar 3 sene içinde. Eski kanalım bir türlü gelişemediği için, yani 3 sene sonra hala izlenmeler çok kötü 300 500lerde kaldığı için, YouTube tarafından önerilmediğim için bazı sıkıntılardan dolayı emeğimin karşılığını alamadığımı düşündüm ve yeni bir kanal açıp yani bu kanalı açıp daha tecrübeli ve düzenli bir şekilde yürütüp daha iyi yürüyebileceğimi daha başarılı olabileceğimi düşündüm. Onun için bu kanalı açtım arkadaşlar. Hoşgeldiniz, sizden istediğim arkadaşlar abone olun, videolara yorumlar atın, beğeniler atın çünkü bu kanalı sıfırdan açtım, artık sıfırdan yeniden yapıyorum desteğinize çok fazla ihtiyacım var. Hatta tek ihtiyacım olan şey sizin desteğiniz şu an, o yüzden bol bol beğeni abonelik yardırın, paylaşın, destek olun arkadaşlar. Onun dışında stratejimi nasıl yapacağım ondan kısaca bahsedeyim. (Then, he started to talk about the number of stock videos and their sharing time and date.) Tek değişen şey YouTube kanalı arkadaşlar, onun dışında hiçbir sıkıntı yok, sağlığım yerinde çok iyiyim, YouTube anladım dışında keyfim çok yerinde, çok mutluyum buralarda. Youtube'u da yerine oturttuğumuzda; izlenmeler aboneler arttığında, umarım emeğimin karşılığını alacağım arkadaşlar.)

Then, I would like to give space to Tuğba, who has been on the road for almost one year. The pressure to record each step of her travel is visible in her contents.

Otherwise, the number of followers can decrease. Since being sincere and unique is significant for audiences to perceive Tuğba as a family member to follow actively.

The second video that Tuğba shares, titled “India: I’m Going Abroad for the First Time,” consists of each step of her travel, even the moment she pays an airport departure fee (Nabertuu, 2022a). She shares the video, in which she transits from Türkiye to Kazakhstan, and includes sections from the Indian airport and the house where she stays on Couchsurfing is an app for free accommodation. Ultimately, she explains by writing that I forgot to shoot a closing video, but it is not a big deal for the first edit (Nabertuu, 2022a). Although she resigned from the media market due to the pressure to work long, stressful, and endless hours, she is trapped by another pressure from the different neoliberal market: social media.

The most explicit example of this code comes with an emphasis on being spontaneous (acting without a plan), the difficulty of talking to the camera, and reminding the subscription to increase his followers. Despite this difficulty, he kind

of 'has to' go on producing content to increase followers. In other words, he cannot be entirely free to act and decide on social media because it has some market conditions that he should adopt to gain money from there. So, they are disciplined by adopting these market conditions.

[...] I'm going to Brazil soon. I'll take a flight in about half an hour. I'll go directly to the city of Rio in Brazil. There's a carnival in Rio anyway; I'll be landing right on the carnival. I'm very curious about what awaits me because I haven't made any plans. I do not have my carnival ticket, a place to stay, no food, I don't know what to eat, I only have \$200. Other than that, I don't have any other money; I don't know, I'm very excited. By the way, I will try to keep this camera on more throughout my trip, I will share these adventures and memoirs with you more. I'll try to share, but it's tough, especially being able to look at this camera and tell something. So not everyone can do it, and I can't either [...] (The caption comes into the scene: after 13 hours)... I set foot on four continents in 24 hours. Meanwhile, I left Kadıköy and went on the European side, then Morocco, Casablanca, and now in South America, Rio, Brazil... This is a very interesting geography; I really don't know anything. This obscurity is the most exciting thing [...] Subscribe to my channel to follow my adventures in Brazil. (Emre Durmuş, 2017a)

([...] Ben birazdan Brezilya'ya gidiyorum. Yaklaşık yarım saat sonra bir uçuş yapacağım. Direk Brezilya'nın Rio şehrine gideceğim. Rio'da karnaval var zaten karnavalın tam üzerine düşüyor olacağım. Çok merak ediyorum beni neler bekliyor çünkü hiçbir plan yapmadım. Karnaval biletim yok, kalacak yerim yok, yiyecek; yemek bilmiyorum ne yiyeceğim, yanımda para sadece 200 dolar var. Onun dışında başka param da yok, bakalım bilmiyorum çok heyecanlıyım. Bu arada bu kamerayı seyahatim boyunca daha çok açık tutmaya çalışacağım; bu maceralarımı anlarımı sizinle daha çok paylaşmaya çalışacağım ama bu gerçekten çok zor, özellikle bu kameraya bakıp bir şeyler anlatabiliyor olmak yani herkes yapamaz ben de yapamıyorum zaten [...]) (The caption comes into scene: after 13 hours) [...] 24 saatte 4 kıtaya ayak bastım bu arada Kadıköy'den çıktım Avrupa yakası Fas, Kazablanka şimdi de Güney Amerika Rio yani Brezilya'ya gidiyorum [...] Çok ilginç bir coğrafya burası gerçekten hiçbir şey bilmiyorum. Bu bilinmemezlik en heyecanlandırıran şey oluyor [...] Brezilyadaki maceralarımı takip etmek için kanalıma abone olun).

Furthermore, Uğur mentions his story on his YouTube channel. This story justifies why the channel is considered one of the enterprises in the social media market in this thesis.

People were telling me you can't do it, you can't make it, now you're joking. How does your follower count say over 100k? I opened a shop, can you share it to advertise it in your story? (Uğur Kola, 2022b).

(insanlar bana yapamazsın başaramazsın diyorlardı şimdi de şaka yapıyorsun sen nasıl 100 bini geçersin (takipçi sayısını kast ediyor) böyle bir yer açtım paylaşır mısın diyorlar)

Then, he used “success” to define this number of followers and subscribers. From this point, it is evident that there is no mistake in seeing the YouTube channel as an enterprise, and the enterprise’s success is measured with reference to the number of followers, views, and interactions. This example shows that backpackers cannot entirely escape neoliberalism because they still focus on success in relation to the relationship between the number of followers and the enterprise, his YouTube channel. This success also refers to the digital reputation because, in this conversation, another backpacker, Tuğba, adds:

I really consume YouTube travel vlogs like crazy; a person whose video I watch is chatting with me right now; I would never have thought of this in Türkiye. (Ugur Kola, 2022b).

(Gerçekten manyak gibi YouTube gezi vlogu tüketen bir insanım, sürekli videosunu izlediğim bir insan benimle şuan sohbet ediyor, bunu Türkiye’de asla düşünemezdim bile)

Uğur expresses his pleasure:

It is like a joke. People are coming miles and miles to see me, but I wanted to achieve that. Touching someone feels so good. I’m not selfish who only thinks about myself, and I have never been. (Ugur Kola, 2022b).

(şaka gibi ama beni görmeye gelen insanlar oluyor kilometrelerce yol gelip. ama ben bunu başardım istedim. Birilerine dokunmak çok güzel hissettiriyor ben sadece kendimi düşünen bencil bir manyak değilim ve hiç de olmadım.

Although there is an emphasis on being spontaneous in videos, discourses show how the continuity of sharing content is a responsibility to increase followers and make them permanent. Even in the video that includes a section from his engagement, he informs his followers about the continuity of his content by sharing his travel and time. He integrates himself into these conditions since social media needs continuity to earn money.

[...] I will be in another continent on Sunday, I will go somewhere and take stock photos or videos in there and edit in Türkiye. Sometimes I will go with my fiancée. (Ugur Kola, 2022a).

([...]) Ben zaten Türkiye'ye gidip geliyordum şimdi belki şöyle olacak gidicem işte videoları çekip gelicem, Türkiye'deyken paylaşacağım bazen ya da Duygu ile gideceğim çok bir şey değişmeyecek aslında yine seyahata devam edeceğim. Bunların da bilgisini vereyim dedim).

He also goes on to produce content on his honeymoon in Thailand to provide a continuity of content, which is very important for his digital reputation and personal branding. Additionally, this is a point where public and private lines are blurred. In line with this point, it is also seen that some photos or videos include the crying or fearing moments of the backpackers (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023e).

5.2. Between Desire to Connect to Local Cultures and the Pressure to Commodify Them

The main point here is that all backpackers underline not visiting a tourist spot where commonly known spots are far from being local. They are all self-identified backpackers interested in the local people, places, culture, and components. The main findings are that they all use cultural components in their video as a caption or cover video in their content. This theme reflects another paradox that travelers fall into. The stuckness between the desire to connect local culture, which is central to the experience of being a backpacker, and their commodification, even if that is not their purpose, is central to this theme. In other words, travelers refer to their religious beliefs and cultural and historical codes while visiting less known or less industrialized places such as Africa, South America, India, and Nepal. Here, with the transformation of those codes into content, the transformative effect of social media comes into the scene; when those codes are presented as content, they are commodified and contribute to the experience economy, which is discussed in detail in the next section.

One of the backpackers, like others, uses the main cultural components of the countries he visits as content. Moreover, the point I would like to draw attention to here is that by marketing the experiences, like camping in the desert in Morocco or climbing a volcano in Indonesia, he becomes a part of the experience economy even though he frequently states that he has no intention of doing so.

I had almost no money in my pocket when I started to travel. I discovered dozens of things that can be done without money. Some things are much more valuable than money. I worked dozens of different jobs and earned my own money. It had fascinating natural views. I attended various festivals and had fun like crazy. I also had unique experiences; I've camped in the desert in Morocco, rock climbed in Norway, climbed a volcano in Indonesia, and swam with fireflies in Cambodia. I lived with Hinduism in India and experienced Zen philosophy in Japan. (Emre Durmuş, 2016a).

(Yola çıkarken cebimde neredeyse hiç param yoktu. Parasız yapılabilecek onlarca şey keşfettim. Paradan çok daha değerli şeyler var. Onlarca farklı işte çalıştım kendi paramı kazandım. Birbirinden büyüleyici doğa manzaralarına sahip oldu. Birbirinden farklı festivallere katıldım, çığlıklar gibi eğlendim. Eşsiz deneyimler de yaşadım; Fas'ta çölde kamp yapıp, Norveçte kayaya tırmandım, Endonezya'da volkana tırmanıp, Kamboçya'da ateş böcekleriyle yüzdüm. Hindistan'da Hinduizmi yaşayıp, Japonya'da zen felsefesini yaşadım.)

I would like to present a finding that clearly reveals the paradox regarding less-explored and industrialized Africa. In the example, Ayşe states that she started her journey from Africa because she thinks that when a place becomes a tourist spot, its naturalness and beauty disappear. On this ground, her effort to be far away from the industrialized areas, which enables the opening of tourism markets, is visible. She thinks that this threat is also relevant to Africa in the future. In her words:

Why [Africa?] Because it's so beautiful. Of course, I didn't know before I came, but I wanted to see their different cultures and tribal life. There is a different world here. So, thinking there is something to be learned or discovered here, maybe they will become a tourist attraction in the future because I may not see them in the future; I came directly to Africa and saw it when I could and continued after that. (Ugur Kola, 2023a)

(neden çünkü çok güzel. Gelmeden önce bilmiyordum tabiki ama kültürleri çok farklı, kabile hayatlarını görmek istedim. Burda apayrı bir dünya var. O yüzden burada öğrenilecek veya keşfedilecek şey olduğunu belki ileride de, (zamanla turistikleşiyor çünkü) ve ileride bunları göremeyeceğimi düşünerek direk Afrika'ya gelip görebileceğim zaman görüp ondan sonra devam ettim.[...])

In line with this, on the same travel, Ayşe and Uğur go to a village that is undiscovered by people other than locals (based on their conversation) and ask for permission to take a video in their personal areas, such as a garden, house, etc. When they get consent, they give money to them. However, locals do not demand any return for this. I would like to provide a space for this story in their words to show backpackers are also aware of transforming locals' personal lives into content. Namely, they are in the middle of the paradox of connecting to or commodifying local culture. Since they earn money by transforming local's personal lives into content, they pay money to them or help them. After recording a video, when they were leaving this house, Uğur says:

We can give some help to the families we shoot with; we buy something from them, we pay something to them to thank them for their help. (Ugur Kola, 2023b).

(çekim yaptığımız ailelere biraz bir miktar yardım yardım yaparız ya; bir şey alırsak bir şey öderiz sağ olsunlar yardım ediyorlar.)

Then, they want to buy a kind of bread as a help, which is just one kvaça (currency). After learning this, they pay more money to thank you, the house owner, for the permission to take a video. Ayşe adds: “After all, we shoot people's private lives with a camera in our hands”(Ugur Kola, 2023b). “Sonuçta elimizde kamerayla insanların özel hayatlarını çekiyoruz”. In this sense, she makes commodification, the other side of the Paradox, visible. Namely, they express their pleasure in connecting with locals but are trapped by the threat of commodifying them. Some digital applications also provide a way of connecting with the locals. Since the local people offer a free stay in their homes, they generally prefer to use the application, which is Couchsurfing. They underline that in this way, they can observe their culture and connect with them closely (Ayşe Kocalar, 2022b). Hitchhiking is another way to communicate with locals during their travel because most of them perceive it as the cheapest way to start a conversation about the places that locals rather than tourists

know(Ayşe Kocalar, 2023f). They also record their hitchhiking and Couchsurfing days as content (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023f; Emre Durmuş, 2018c). On this ground, the cultural components are shared as cover photos for their videos, reels, and posts on social media. Such as geisha figures, African children, tribal dances, tribal games, traditional wedding ceremonies, local but become touristic activities, getting on a camel or making safari on the dessert, traditional food, and clothes. Although they want to experience watching local dancers or conventional wedding ceremonies, they transform this experience into a kind of product on social media because they need to make their travel constant. In this way, they become a part of neoliberal market conditions.

5.3. Between Low-cost Traveling and Commercialization of Traveling

This theme comprises three sub-codes: marketing the apps and brands they use, click-baiting as a marketing strategy, and combining backpacking and entrepreneurship. As it is known, low-cost traveling is the primary component of backpacking. On this ground, since digital media brings a new stage to low-cost traveling via commercializing travel, this theme is expressed around the paradox of the backpackers with these two sides. In other words, backpackers are in the middle of another paradox between needing to travel on a low budget and commercializing their travel to provide a financial flow. When they give information about their low-cost traveling and sponsorship and promoting ways, some backpackers also view these contents. This is about commercializing, but this commercializing gives motivation to the other backpackers as well. This function and the reason why this thesis considers them a prosumer become visible in this way. The function of being a prosumer is seen in the example. Since she consumes the content produced by other

backpackers, she becomes a part of this market by producing new content. She is still part of the producing and consuming process. For this reason, I considered them as prosumer backpackers. Uğur asks Ayşe about her budget and whether she has a high or limited budget. Ayşe:

This trip was something I had always wanted so much, but I did not save money for this travel, so I made a very sudden decision. After watching a few YouTubers, I wanted this because I want to do it like this. (Uğur Kola, 2023a).

(Ya bu benim her zaman çok istediğim bir şeydi ama oturup da aman ben bu şey için para biriktireyim gibi bir şeyim hiç olmamıştı çok ani karar verdim. Birkaç YouTuberi izledikten sonra iyice böyle, ben yapmak istiyorum diye istedim bunu.)

5.3.1. Marketing the Applications and Brands They Use

This code refers to backpackers' comments or recommendations of some specific applications and brands that sponsor them. Their posts, reels, videos, and stories have introduced and promoted travel equipment, materials, and applications. The frequency of promoting changes is based on their agreement with a brand. The sponsorship is discussed in the next chapter in relation to the concept of the target audience. The findings are introduced around some airline companies for ticket sponsorship, which can be business or economy class (Emre Durmuş, 2018a), bus companies for the ticket and Europe travel tours (Emre Durmuş, 2019b), some outdoor companies for travel pieces of equipment, and applications which are 'Cambly' about learning English (Emre Durmuş, 2018g), 'Polarsteps' which shows travel routes of the backpackers (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023i), and 'Travel Ladies' which enables for the free stay for women traveler (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023j), and Worldpackers which is about combining traveling and voluntary jobs (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023k). In one of the sponsored content, Emre and his friend traveled from Vietnam to Doha in Business Class (Emre Durmuş, 2018a). It is seen that they express their happiness to provide the continuity of their travel with a low budget but, in return,

they have to advertise this brand in their content via recording every single detail, such as what the welcome drink is, whether wine or champagne, what welcome pack includes for long hour flight like a facial mask or cream, etc. Since advertising, the sponsor and brand-customer relations are at the heart of neoliberalism, although they challenge it, they are also articulated into the market. In their words:

[...] We have good news for you: Qatar Air has sponsored us for our next flights, and now we are on our way to the plane. It will not be an ordinary flight for us; we will fly in business class for the first time in our lives and want to experience business class together. [...] (Emre Durmuş, 2018a).

([...] Size güzel bir haberimiz var, bundan sonraki uçuşlarımızda bize Qatar Air sponsor oldu ve şimdi uçağa doğru gidiyoruz. Normal sıradan bir uçuş olmayacak bizim için, hayatımızda ilk defa business class uçacağız ve business class deneyimini beraber yaşayalım istedim. [...])

I would like to bring another example to show how a backpacker takes a role to advertise the company that sponsors his travel in Europe via bus. He puts his comments and informs audiences about the brand in detail. Although they want to stay away from neoliberalism, they are part of neoliberal brand and customer relations in social media accounts. This is what makes it a paradox. Since he has to travel cheaply, he opens up a place for brand and customer relations in other neoliberal markets to make their travel constant. He negotiates to be a backpacker regarding low-cost traveling and being a part of marketing relations.

I especially want this video to be about experiences. How are the journeys made with bus tours? What is the difference between Eyobus and other companies? I have already started to feel the difference. They sponsor this video. Of course, I will talk about them, but I want to say something objectively. (Emre Durmuş, 2019b).

(Bu video özellikle deneyim videosu olsun istiyorum. Otobüs turlarıyla yapılan yolculuklar nasıl oluyor, Eyobus'un diğer firmalardan farkı ne? ki ben o farkı şimdiden hissetmeye başladım. Bu videoya onlar sponsor tabii ki onlardan bahsedeceğim ama objektif olarak bir şeyler anlatmak istiyorum.)

I would like to underline that they advertise brands by combining their experiences during the travel; sometimes backpackers integrate the brands into their video for 1

or 2 minutes or organize unique content about the brand or application. To exemplify how their experiences are commercialized, the application of Cambly is advertised in his content, organized just by this brand with a %20 discount code for his subscribers. In this video, he also tells his experiences to show how necessary it is to know English for travel (Emre Durmuş, 2018g). This example directs the researcher to define this theme around commercializing travel.

To reflect on how they are in the middle of the paradox between cooperating with a sponsor as a way of articulation to the neoliberal market and traveling with a low budget, I would like to touch on his words after some criticism came from his followers in the comments.

[...] Finally, I don't have to answer to anyone for sponsorships, but I still can't help despite the explanation about why I cooperate with sponsorship and how I share everything I do to be useful. I've been posting since I started so that nobody doesn't use money as an excuse. This is the point we've come to: how did you buy that fruit? I told about the things I lived and did when I went on a free world tour, Maybe it would be useful to someone, but now, that video hurt me the most. (Emre Durmuş, 2016b).

([...] Son olarak sponsorluklar için de kimseye hesap vermek zorunda değilim ama neden sponsorluk iş birliği yaptığı, nasıl yaptığımı faydalı olsun diye yediğim her halı paylaşıyorum yine yaranamıyorum. Yola çıktığımda beri parayı bahane etmeyin diye paylaşım yapıyorum hala geldiğimiz nokta hani parasız geziyordun o meyveyi nasıl aldın oluyor. Parasız dünya turuna çıktığımda yaşadığım ve yaptığım şeyleri anlattım belki birilerine faydalı olur diye ama o video en çok bana zararı oldu.)

5.3.2. Click Baiting as a Marketing Strategy

It is seen that backpackers benefit from the click-baiting strategy while commercializing their travels and contributing to their budgets. Since click baiting directs viewers and followers to click on that content, the number of views increases. That is why backpackers also use click-baiting as a marketing strategy for their own content. It is evident that although their beginning point is traveling with a low budget apart from the neoliberal market, they are still in the middle of different

neoliberal markets via considering a way to market their videos. They even developed a marketing strategy to increase their revenue. This tactic is implemented by using sex, fear, and risk-related photos and captions in the cover photos of videos. Putting two semi-nude people kissing on the video cover photo titled “I have spent a night in Thailand Ladyboy Street.” (Arda Pazır, 2021). The findings can be continued with the caption "legal prostitution in Bangladesh"(Mert Aktaş Travel, 2023e), “The Turkish Traveler Who Leads a Prayer To The TALIBAN! War Memorial In Afghanistan,” with a picture that consists of men who wear white traditional clothes (Mert Aktaş Travel, 2022b), “I ‘am in a country that is free of prostitution Dirty Country Bangladesh Dhaka” (Mert Aktaş Travel, 2023d), “5 Hours in the forest where tiger lives” (Mert Aktaş Travel, 2023c), From Dangerous Cliffside to Wild Isolated Forest (Mert Aktaş Travel, 2023b), Extraordinary Life on the Back Streets (Mert Aktaş Travel, 2023a), Before the Train Crashed (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023d), Zanzibar Island New Year's Eve Party / Man to Man Lap Dance? (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023b), Heavily Armed Soldier Stops (Gezmekenkolay, 2022e), A First Days in Africa - Near Death Day (Nabertuu, 2022b), Tense Moments with Russian Police (Gezmekenkolay, 2022a), Surviving in the desert is my most challenging journey (Emre Durmuş, 2019a), School of Massacre (Nabertuu, 2022b).

5.3.3. Combining Backpacking and Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is common, especially among long-term (more than one year) backpackers. Namely, Bestami, Anıl, and Emre have some enterprises regarding travel. They are entering the competitive market of travel with these enterprises. Although all of these markets have different mentality or aims, they are neoliberals in terms of profit, customer, brand, and sponsorship relations. In the first sense,

Bestami, who is the founder of Interrail Türkiye, collects backpackers under the same roof so that they can help each other. Cooperation with investors or brands comes into the scene when the community grows. Bestami explains this process by using commercial language referring to investment, cake, business, etc., as

[...] Think, you are 25 years old, you run a community. This community is growing, growing, and becoming 1.5 million members. This time, you are faced with the promise of doing business by brands or big investors; you come, there is a cake, the business grows very big, it becomes huge, but at the end of the day, if the business is successful, you make money, I never thought of it if it is not successful...(Orkohub Creative, 2020).

([...] 25 yaşındasın, bir topluluk yönetiyorsun. Bu topluluk büyüyor büyüyor 1 buçuk milyon üye oluyor. Bu sefer markalar ya da büyük yatırımcılar tarafından iş yapma vaadiyle ki yapıyorsun geliyorsun pasta var, iş çok büyüyor devasa oluyor ama günün sonunda iş başarılı olursa para kazanıyorsun başarılı olmazsayı hiç düşünmedim [...])

In the continuation of the speech, Bestami talks about getting into the organization market, running a campsite, and establishing a brand for tours in Europe. He also explains how he copes with debts that arise due to some work, with reference to being a backpacker. These enterprises become part of neoliberal market conditions, but Bestami also makes a point of reference to the neoliberal subject in terms of adaptability, risk-taker, and entrepreneurial.

I was robbed dozens of times while I was traveling. I know how to move on with my life when I lose everything instantly. I was robbed 20 days ago in Uganda, Sri Lanka, India, and Brazil. I was robbed in Barcelona, Nepal [...] So I learned this in my life. In fact, at the point where I lost everything at once, I had nothing. While I was visiting Rome, I only had my passport in my pocket and a small backpack. In the meantime, Interrail Türkiye is growing; there are 4000 5000 people, maybe 10,000 people [...] At that point, you evolve into a person who sees how to go on life with less or how to solve all the difficulties more easily while traveling. It also helps you establish a communication network that can get you out of there in 1 or 1 and a half years when you come across a debt of 3 million in your business life.” (Orkohub Creative, 2020)

(Ya ben gezdikten sonra onlarca kez soyuldum tamam mı, Her şeyimi bir anda kaybettiğimde dımdızlak kaldığımda hayatıma nasıl devam edeceğimi biliyorum. İşte Srilanka’da Hindistan’da Brezilya’da daha 20 gün önce Uganda’da soyuldum. Nepal’de Barcelona’da soyuldum [...] O yüzden şunu öğrendim hayatımda aslında her şeyi bir anda kaybettiğim noktada, ben sıfırdım Roma’yı gezerken, sadece pasaportum var cebimde, küçücük bir sırt çantam. O ara Interrail Türkiye büyüyor işte 4000 5000 belki 10000 kişiyiz [...] O noktadan bir şekilde minimal yaşamayı daha az şeyle nasıl hayata devam edileceğini ya da seyahat ederken bütün zorlukların hepsinin nasıl daha kolay çözüleceğini gördüğün bir insana evriliyorsun. O da ticari hayatımda o 3

milyonluk borca denk geldiğin zaman oradan 1 veya 1 buçuk senede çıkarabilecek bir iletişim ağı kurmayı başardığımı düşünüyorum.)

On the ground of combining backpacking and entrepreneurship via establishing a community, Emre has some digital enterprises as well. He set up some start-ups and communities, including the digital nomad community and gezerkenkazan.com, focusing on digital working models. This also refers to the flexibility of digital labor, which is discussed in the next chapter. Although backpacker aims to resist the neoliberal mentality and working conditions, it is seen that there is a negotiation between traveling with a low budget and being an entrepreneur. Since this negotiation is done by making labor and working conditions flexible, in fact, neoliberalism is not challenged; it is still at its heart because the flexibility of labor is one of the elements of neoliberalism.

[...] I was focusing on what YouTube taught me. For me, I was enjoying it. So, the videos are sincere. I am not an actor, so I can't do anything fake or perform anything I write or draw. You expect people to do the same, too, but they do not. It's not like everyone has to be a YouTuber. Just for this reason, I opened a website called 'gezarkenkazan.com.' I started explaining more than 300 different online things to do there. Because you don't need to be a YouTuber; you can be, by the way. I'll tell you a lot of things about it. I'm ready to tell you everything I know, but there are so many different jobs that you can do many different online jobs suitable for your own character. Therefore, we started to tell you all of them one by one while browsing. We gathered together and opened a digital nomad community. I have already shared that if you want to make money online while traveling the world, your life is independent of location, which can lead to more fantastic lives. We've rounded up everyone who's done this. If you come, I will leave a link below. (Emre Durmuş, 2023).

([...] Ben YouTube'un benim için bana öğretilerine odaklanıyordum ve ondan keyif alıyordum. O yüzden samimi oluyor videolar. Ben bir oyuncu değilim dolayısıyla fake bir şey yapamıyorum ya da herhangi bir yazdığım çizdiğim bir şeyi oynayamıyorum. İnsanların da bunu yapmasını beklersiniz ama öyle olmuyor. Sanki herkes gezgin influencer olmak zorundaymış gibi düşünülüyor. Sırf bu nedenden de 'gezerkenkazan.com' diye bir site açtım. 300 den fazla farklı online yapılacak işi orada anlatmaya başladım. Çünkü YouTuber olmanıza gerek yok yani oladabilirsiniz bu arada. Onu da anlatıyorum onunla ilgili bir sürü şey anlatacağım size, bildiğim her şeyi anlatmaya hazırım ama o kadar farklı iş var ki siz kendi karakterinize size uygun çok daha farklı online işler yapabilirsiniz. Dolayısıyla gezerken kazan da hepsini tek tek anlatmaya başladık. Bir sene geçti aradan şimdi de bu işleri bir araya toplayıp dijital nomad topluluğu açtık. Zaten paylaşmıştım, eğer isterseniz dünyayı gezerken online olarak para kazanmak istiyorsanız hayatınızı çünkü yerden bağımsız oluyorsunuz ve bu daha fantastik hayatlar yaşanıza sebep olabiliyor. Bunu yapan herkesi bir araya topladık. Eğer gelerseniz aşağıya link bırakacağım.)

The research materials show that Anıl organizes boutique tours to Moscow, India, and various African countries, not frequently, with an emphasis on being different, sincere, and authentic for a few participants with backpackers.(Gezmekenkolay, 2022b; Gezmekenkolay, 2022c) In conclusion, it is discovered that most long-term backpackers have some digital enterprises based on backpacking experiences. Since they have a high number of followers, they find a ground to promote their enterprises as well. Although they challenge neoliberalism in some cases, sometimes they become a part of it.

5.4. Between the 'Ideal 'Image of a Backpacker and the 'Desired 'Self-presentation of the Backpacker

This paradox focuses on the backpacker who manages the ideal image and the desired self-presentation of the backpacker. They can organize how to draw a desired self-presentation of their profile via editing videos by cutting or adding like a designer. Although there is an ideal image of a backpacker who is a risk taker and adventurous, some digital applications come to the stage with a risk-minimizing effect. In other words, sometimes going somewhere unknown can be risky or adventurous; however, thanks to some digital apps and content on YouTube, risk can be abolished or minimized. In this way, there are fewer unknown places. On this ground, the backpacker has to manage the ideal image and self-presentation. However, self-presentation can be shaped around risky and adventurous memoirs as part of the ideal image. The same dilemma is valid for messy and fancy appearances because, on the one hand, they sometimes have to underline looking messy to be part of the ideal image. On the other hand, they sometimes present themselves as an opponent to this image. For this reason, this theme consists of sub-codes that focus

on the dilemmas between seeking adventure, risk-taking, and risk-minimizing, messy, and fancy appearance.

5.4.1. Seeking Adventure, Risk-taking, and Risk-minimizing

Since digital media enables backpackers to avoid possible problems and risks in their travel, the concept or components of risk have been changed. I would like to show how digital apps can minimize some risks. For example, Couchsurfing, an app commonly used for free accommodation provided by local people, works based on the reference system from backpackers who stay in the accommodation; the risk becomes minimized because other backpackers see the comments on whether the accommodation is safe or not. In line with this, as backpackers can share information about routes in the app, which is Polarsteps, risks can also be minimized. Similarly, backpackers can communicate about possible risks, safe zones, or accommodations in some backpacker groups, such as "interrail Türkiye" and "gezgin kadınlar."

Digital media brings a new perspective to the concept of risk; however, it does not mean that the concept of risk has been abolished in backpackers' narration. In other words, it is seen that the risk is more about illegal actions such as entering a museum, train, or bus without a ticket (Emre Durmuş, 2016b), continuously taking a picture, or recording a video in a forbidden place, like on a border between Mexico and the US or in Casablanca airport (Emre Durmuş, 2017a). Since it is forbidden to take a video somewhere in Venezuela, backpackers had trouble with soldiers and continued to record this trouble as well (Emre Durmuş, 2018d). In another example, he went to a favela in Brazil and presented this memoir as I Entered Brazil's Most Dangerous Neighborhood (Big Trouble) (*Brezilya'nın En Tehlikeli Mahallesine Girdim (Sıkıntı Büyük)*) (Emre Durmuş, 2022). On this ground, it is visible that thanks to digital media, he knows where or which favela is dangerous in many aspects, where taking

videos or photos is forbidden. However, they are in the middle of the ideal image of backpackers and desired self-presentation. This paradox is also about their will and the conditions that they face. They need to find a way to strengthen their narration with some risky and adventurous elements. In this way, they can find a permanent place and be part of the ideal image in social media. For this reason, they disregard the rule referring to some forbidden issues in their narration:

On the first day after arriving in the Hawaiian Islands of America, we embarked on the Hawaii Jungle Adventure and climbed the Paradise steps, Hawaii's forbidden zone. Moreover, nothing is left that has not happened to us in this adventure. The adventure, which started with the magnificent landscapes of Hawaii, later turned into an action movie where we escaped from the Police. For the first time in my life, I escaped the American police.” (Emre Durmuş, 2018i).

(Amerika'nın Hawaii adalarına geldikten sonra ilk gün Hawaii Orman Macerasına atıldık ve Hawaii'nin yasak bölgesi Cennet merdivenlerine çıktık. Ve bu macerada başımıza gelmeyen kalmadı. Hawaii'nin muhteşem manzaraları ile başlayan macera daha sonra Polisten kaçtığımız aksiyon filmine döndü. Hayatımda ilk defa Amerikan polisinden kaçtım.)

Their desired self-presentation is not just about disregarding the rule; they also give a place to be part of dangerous events. The reason why dangerous events and adventurous narration are highlighted is that both components are relevant to their personal branding on social media. For this reason, they should manage their image for their digital reputation, which is very important to exist and be permanent in social media.

We came across a legendary party in CUBA. This time, we found ourselves in the most dangerous village around. We stayed overnight in a tent in the garden of someone we didn't know. We camped, continued by hitchhiking, trucks, and buses in the morning. (Emre Durmuş, 2017c).

(Küba'da efsane bir partiye denk geldik. Bu sefer kendimizi buraların en tehlikeli köyünde bulduk. Gece hiç tanımadığımız birinin bahçesinde çadırda kaldık. Kamp attık, sabah yol otostopla kamyonlarla otobüsle devam ettik.)

5.4.2. Messy and Fancy Appearance

As looking messy is a part of the ideal backpacking image, not being fancy is emphasized in some examples. They need to manage their appearance to be preferable in personalized media economies. They also have some conditions or necessities to be watchable and preferable.

[...] You would not think that a man who has been making videos for years with messy hair and does not look at himself will have plastic surgery. [...] (Emre Durmuş, 2017d).

([...] saçları başları dağınık yıllarca video çeken üzerine başına bakmayan bir adamın estetik yaptıracaklarını herhalde düşünmezsiniz. [...])

When an airline company sponsored him to fly in a business class, the air hostess directed him to the economy class. At that time, he says:

I can't look rich. Is poverty close to a person that much? Is it so clear that I am a backpacker? (Emre Durmuş, 2018h).

(Şöyle zengin görünemedim fakirlik bir insanın üzerine bu kadar mı yapışır ya bu kadar mı belli ediyorum çapulcu sırt çantalı gezgin olduğumu?)

Whereas Emre's words can be accepted as an effort to emphasize a messy appearance in line with the ideal image of a backpacker, even though he sponsored to fly in business class, Ayşe draws her image as an opposed to the pressure, which is about messy appearance of a backpacker:

[...] Now, most of you may question me regarding things like putting on earrings, necklaces, and lipstick; you might think I am such a fancy backpacker with make-up. I don't have to be messy. I'm happy like this; I like it like this. I like to travel like this. [...] (Ayşe Kocalar, 2022b)

([...] şimdi çoğunuz şey de düşünüyor olabilirsiniz küpe takıyorum, kolye takıyorum, ruj sürüyorum hani böyle makyajlı süslü backpacker mı olur, böyle süslü sırt çantalı gezgin mi olur diyor olabilirsiniz. Olur niye olmasın, olabiliyormuş demek ki. Sırt çantamla geziyorum diye ille makyaj karşılığı olup çok salaş olmak zorunda değilim. Böyle mutluyum, böyle seviyorum. böyle gezmeyi seviyorum. [...])

Additionally, emphasizing being a part of the ideal messy look can be important in terms of local prices in some travels. When one of the backpackers draws a messy image with a heavy backpacker, the costs can change. Reflecting a messy appearance rather than fancy can affect the audience's support in an economic sense as well. Thus, emphasizing some components referring to the ideal image of backpackers shows they are under pressure since they manage their accounts as backpackers rather than ordinary travelers or mass tourists with different types of target audiences in social media accounts. In line with this, when they take a video in a fancy house, they need to explain how they rent this house. In his words:

We told the waiter, we are not tourists; we are travelers, we are backpackers; show us local places, what the rental prices between you; we want one of them, and we will not stay for a short time. In the end, we rent the beautiful house. (Emre Durmuş, 2017e).

(Biz turist değiliz, gezginiz, sırt çantalı gezginiz; bize yerel yerleri gösterin, kendi aranızda nasıl ev kiralama fiyatlarınız var, onlardan kiralayalım biz uzun süre kalacağız; 3-5 gün değil.)

In conclusion, since personal branding, digital reputation, and way of self-presentation are important for social media named personalized media economies, they give importance to these points. In this way, they are part of neoliberal market conditions again.

5.5. Between Staying with Oneself/Being Alone and Connecting with Others

This part introduces the paradox between being alone and connecting with others. The origins of this paradox come from digital media as well. Although backpacking symbolizes being alone, independent, and individual person, thanks to digital media, backpacker has some ties consolidated. In this theme, "others" refer to the society, family, and backpacking community of which the backpacker is a member. As it is

explained, the backpacker is a person who travels alone, independently, and away from the community. However, since digital media transforms this experience, it is seen that backpackers can integrate into society by being a part of a common agenda thanks to digital media, the backpacker community via some Facebook groups or applications, and family with the help of social media and other communication applications. Many backpackers express that they communicate with their families. Ayşe underlines that she calls her mother every day thanks to digital technology. Their family can get news from their social media accounts, and some of them inform their family if the content is about a dangerous experience. Moreover, her family sends her updated videos to friends and people who know her to support her travel (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023h). To explain how being a part of the backpacker community is, it is better to give space to the founder of Interrail Türkiye, and the spirit of backpacking and perceiving this group as a kind of family has been emphasized. To provide a context, when someone in this group writes a post to invite this group members to the wedding, stating, “My real family will not attend the wedding ceremony, but this group is my other family,” the group admins make a digital invitation to announce wedding ceremony to the group members. Members from all over the world and Türkiye met with each other via hitchhiking at this wedding in Mersin (Tedx Talks, 2016). Facebook groups do not just consist of Interrail Türkiye; there are some others. Gezgin Kadınlar, Yardımrail, and Erasmusrail are the main groups enabling backpacker communication (Gezgin Kadınlar, 2015).

In the context of being a member of society, it would be crucial to draw attention to the organizational and logistical efforts to help voluntarily to the earthquake area.

Many backpackers organized a broadcast to collect money for earthquake victims together. All of them use their social capital to save and help earthquake victims. Thanks to their networks, they built an aid center in Hatay (Interrail Türkiye, 2023b). This point shows us that backpackers can take responsibility for social issues.

5.6. Moving Beyond Neoliberal Boundaries: Politics in the Agenda

This heading is added to introduce findings to show how backpacker is transformed from the image of being idle into being aware of political agenda integrating into the digital media. The common agenda is not just about social problems but also political issues. In the new backpacking experience, backpackers shared their political and economic critiques in both cases for Türkiye and the country they travel to as well. This theme shows that backpackers do not only have components such as commodification and marketing but also their critical and collective sides. In other words, it shows that the whole story is not entirely about integration into the YouTube or Instagram market. Findings here referring to the critical side of the backpackers who have complexity will be presented here and discussed in the detailed version in the next chapter. The inequality of income, the lack of the right to access clean water and proper education, and exploitative working and life conditions are commonly criticized. In one of the videos, they went to Syria to help people there and express how conditions are harsh for these people because of the war (Emre Durmuş, 2020a; Emre Durmuş, 2020b). Moreover, Emre informs his audiences about the working conditions in Africa by saying, “There are many people who work for 1 or 2 dollars per day. There is no clean water in the houses; they need to go to some specific spots.” (Emre Durmuş, 2018b). It is argued that public schools consist of 500 people, and private schools are expensive even if they are 40-50

people (Emre Durmuş, 2018b; Ugur Kola, 2023b). One of the backpackers was a volunteer in a private school; the owners demanded permanency because she was white and attracted customers to the school. When Ayşe tells this story, she criticizes them and explains why she gave up being a volunteer there based on these conditions. Furthermore, it is seen that backpackers have political and economic criticism towards different countries as well. This criticism shows how backpackers challenge the neoliberal subject, which only focuses on financial revenue and individual interest-based mentality. They also open up a space to challenge this subjecthood during their travel. For example,

The gap between the rich and the poor, you can see it very easily in Venezuela, so this is a really painful situation. (Emre Durmuş, 2018f).

(İki uçlardaki uçurum, zengin ve fakir arasındaki uçurumu Venezuela’da, böyle yerlerde çok rahat görebiliyorsunuz yani bu gerçekten acı bir durum.)

In Venezuela, he explains the relationship between government, cartels, and prices, how staple foods are expensive and sold in the black market, the low minimum wage, and the high inflation rate. The trouble people live with purchasing power is almost zero. Again, although no financial or personal outcome comes with this criticism, there is an insistence on expressing these problems and inequalities.

[...] The people live so poorly because of the absurd policies of the man in the head of state. Of course, there are other exploiting states. The heads of state agreed with them because of the exploiting states and bad politics. I do not know; many things are going on in the country. The policies of all countries are already very similar. Even if you go to Brazil, you hear the same policies: They take bribes, and they favor the rich, not the people. It is the same whether you come to Kenya or the same whether you go to the Philippines or Cambodia. [...] (Emre Durmuş, 2018b)

([...] Baştaki devletteki adamın saçma sapan politikaları yüzünden halk bu kadar fakir yaşıyor. Tabii başka sömüren devletler var, sonra sömüren devletlerin yüzünden onlarla anlaşılan devlet başkanları ve kötü politika ne bileyim bir sürü şey var ülkede dönüp biten. Politikalar, bütün ülkelerin politikaları zaten birbirine çok benziyor; Brezilya’ya gitsen de aynı benzer politikaları duyuyorsun, yok rüşvet yemişler yok halkı değil de zenginleri kayırmışlar, Kenya’ya gelsen de aynı, Filipinlere gitsen de aynı Kamboçya’da da aynı. [...])

Lastly, it is seen that the critics are not just for other countries; some of them criticize the economic and political conditions in Türkiye. They complain about the exchange rate since they exchange the currency during travel. Moreover, during the election process, the democratic level and lack of separation of power in Türkiye are also criticized. However, in order to avoid problems for them, political critics of Türkiye are not expressed with direct quotations. Even though they can face difficulties due to this criticism on public platforms, they continue to speak about their critical ideas. So, it shows that they do not always calculate cost benefits.



CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSING THEMES

This section discusses the themes identified in the previous chapter, connecting them to the analytical framework, neoliberal subjectivity, and providing the answers to the research questions: How do backpackers negotiate their experiences of traveling with digital media? How do YouTube and Instagram transform their experiences? What tensions does this create in terms of what they think a backpacker should be like, and how do they cope with these tensions? On this ground, the main finding is that digital media is the source of paradoxes for backpackers and their own ways of negotiating. In other words, the role of digital media in this experience and its frame in relation to neoliberal subjectivity informs the findings in this part. Namely, the paradoxes are examined by focusing on the notion of the subject with the help of the neoliberal lens, the working principle of social media, and the concepts of personal branding, experience economy, place-making, and place packaging. The detailed version of the examples is located in the part which is the identification of themes.

6.1. Between Freedom and Discipline and Neoliberal Subjectivity

In the literature, the neoliberal subject has been defined as being active, entrepreneur of the self, investors in themselves, self-authorization, and human capital, which refers to the accumulation of social relations (Flisfeder, 2015). In this context, the

first paradox is between freedom and discipline. In other words, the common point among backpackers is that all of them express their complaints about the competitive, disciplined routine, exploitative conditions, consumption of status symbols such as luxury houses and cars, societal pressure, and expectations through mainstream life; full-time prestigious employment, marriage, having a kid and expenditures on children, which push them for backpacking. Although they come from different backgrounds and demographical features, this complaint is their common point. As it is declared, all these components describe the elements of the neoliberal subject and market, even marriage, having kids, and counting their expenditures because these expectations come from a particular cost-benefit calculation (Read, 2009). What makes these features a paradox is that while the subjects flee from neoliberalism, they fall into the trap of self-discipline, being always-on labor, the pressure to find a way to be an investor in themselves, be self-branded, to be active, have social capital, reach the desired reputation.

To be more precise, backpackers who resign from a job that is a part of neoliberal working conditions or refuse to start under these conditions want to be far from the daily routine, disciplined work life, and social practices shaped by neoliberalism. However, referring to one of the arguments of the thesis, they are trapped by other neoliberal markets, which are personalized media economies, by sharing their world tour journey on their social media account. Although they use the concept of freedom to define being on the road and express their complaints through their previous disciplined life, they face many disciplinary issues again. For this reason, the role of social media is available to define as a source of these paradoxes.

In one of the findings, in the video, Ayşe uses the song "In the Name of Money"; she complains about her former disciplined life limiting her freedom (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023a). However, at the same time, she is exposed to the discipline to share this video at 9 p.m., which is the best time to get more interaction. In other words, although the lyrics criticize the exploitative working conditions of the neoliberal market, the worsening economy, the non-critical, even thankful people, and mainstream life conditions, she becomes a part of the disciplined life by sharing content at a specific time to get more interaction and by stock photos and videos to provide a continuity of content. On this ground, although YouTube and Instagram support a kind of freedom in a sense to travel via partnership programs, and she shares photos that remind her of the concept of freedom from her travel, she becomes under pressure in terms of the number of followers, interactions, and continuity of contents.

Sometimes, backpackers can realize and express the pressure. In an example of a video about an earthquake to express emotions, she finalizes the video by apologizing for sharing content about their happy travel. She also justifies sharing positive or introductory content about traveled countries because of the obligation to earn money via interactions. However, she expressed that although the agenda is about such a devastating earthquake, perceiving producing content is an obligation because she considers these platforms a source of her income. Although Ayşe and other backpackers are free to work regardless of the location, they are in the middle of the disciplinary working conditions because even the time to share content is not dependent on their will (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023c).

To contextualize these issues, I would like to remind you of the working principles of social media. Since YouTube and Instagram allow users to earn money, prosumer backpackers who are users and producers of content on social media spend an effort to earn money and make their travels constant by producing content because they started their journey with a low-cost budget. To earn money, they must create unique, continuous, reputable content to attract audiences' attention and increase their followers. As YouTube and Instagram offer users a partnership program, prosumer backpackers try to reach a certain number of followers and audiences to earn money. Since YouTube and Instagram show the analytics about estimated new audiences and the most effective time for the application for more interaction, backpackers should share their posts, videos, or stories in their profile at certain times for certain countries. This also brings them a kind of discipline. The necessity or obligation for editing, shooting, and sharing makes them "always-on labor" (Guarriello, 2019).

Here, I would like to underline that prosumer backpackers are always-on labor to produce and edit their content because of the necessity to gain money. It is seen that they also mention the difficulties of editing photos and videos during traveling (Gezmekenkolay, 2023). At the same time, they always carry their technological devices in their backpacks (Ugur Kola, 2023a). Despite difficulties, they should provide their safety to produce continuous content. The necessity brings responsibility and self-discipline to backpackers; they feel the pressure to increase the number of followers and produce a proper, preferable, which means enable to reach a high number of likes and comments, unique contents continuously. Additionally, although they express their will and pleasure to be spontaneous, which

they were not like in their previous life before resigning, the pressure to produce unique content leaves them in a paradox as they have to have stocked images to create content and edit them, even when they are in the most spontaneous time. Spontaneity is always referred to by backpackers (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023f; Emre Durmuş, 2017a). Emre expresses his pleasure in being spontaneous about going to Rio Carnival without planning to buy a ticket, but he still acts with a plan to produce content for some reason (Emre Durmuş, 2017a). It would be significant to underline that the will or plan to create content is a version of self-discipline. However, his perception is about being only self-authorized to decide on his travel. He is under pressure to transform this memoir into content but presents himself as the only one who authorized the travel without a plan.

The link I would like to be seen here is that backpackers' YouTube and Instagram profiles should be considered their own brands. Although there is no finding about their name-finding processes, what is seen from the whole research is that the profile names and their contents refer to processes such as the brand's memorability, attractiveness, etc. The most critical point is the concept of "personal branding," also mentioned in the theoretical framework (Peters, 1997). In other words, when looking at social media profiles and backpackers' experiences through a theoretical framework, these profiles can be considered brands (Me Inc) and their products to be managed (Peters, 1997). As mentioned, backpackers share their content, experiences, and even feelings in order to gain followers and interaction on their profiles. These shared contents are about their experiences, and even their feelings that can be considered private are commodified. The most important point I would like to emphasize here is this: The argument of the thesis is not that they want to

commodify their own experiences, but they unintentionally become a part of this commodification process, and that is the role of social media in the backpacking experience.

I would like to discuss the concept of personal branding here. After the number of followers and interaction increase, the permanence of this increase and the transformation of this interaction into money is possible by providing credibility. Here, too, the difficulties and conveniences of the daily routine of the prosumer backpackers and their emotions are reflected on the screen, and the bond they establish with the follower comes into play. Followers are curious, commenting, and interacting like family members. This bond is possible by providing credibility (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). It is crucial for recall, one of the stages of personal branding, in the continuity of content production. In this way, the follower keeps their interaction with the profile updated.

To make it more clear, prosumer backpackers talk about the difficulty of speaking, editing, and ensuring the safety of equipment while looking at the camera and that the background of the work is full of working 12 hours a day, seven days a week (Gezmekenkolay, 2023) (see Appendix B). These examples show the main conclusion of the thesis: They have become a part of the personalized media/digital economy via YouTube and Instagram, although they want to stay away from the components of the neoliberal market. There is no mistake in defining the subject here as an entrepreneur and an investor of their own company. Since they describe these experiences and time spent investing in the self, this reminds me of the inference in the literature: “production of reputation is an important element of investing in the

Self,” again regarding neoliberal thinking (Flisfeder, 2015). In one of the examples, once, a backpacker had his computer stolen and asked for help by recording and sharing it. Another backpacker also gave place to the moment he cried. In line with this, backpackers also emphasize that good things do not always happen to them. The transparency here increases the follower's connection with the profile and adds credibility to the relationship between followers and backpackers. Again, I would like to emphasize that the argument of the thesis is not to read backpackers' intentions or to claim that they set out by targeting these stages when starting this experience.

The conclusion here is that although they aim to make their travels constant in the sense that being continuous, sharing their memories, and inspiring others on this road, setting out with their demands for freedom with a low budget, they still commodify their feelings, thoughts, experiences, and backgrounds. This commodification can be associated with the notions of neoliberal subjects such as self-discipline, being unique, active, entrepreneurs, and self-authorized. Here, one of the roles of social media is blurring a personal and public distinction based on the commodification process of some emotions. Namely, some individual actions based on personal emotions, such as crying or fearing, also become publicized.

Last but not least, although they start their travel with a will to be free from neoliberal conditions and discipline, they are stuck in the place between both issues. In other words, they are on the road without a limited time or full-time job. However, the necessity of editing, shooting, organizing, and stocking content and sharing them at a specific time puts these subjects in a kind of discipline. They are under pressure

to increase the number of followers and interactions and to provide their permanency. Since a high number of interactions is possible with posting at a specific time, they are disciplined via this condition. Thus, they cannot be entirely free from neoliberal components because they are part of the commodification process, flexible labor, and always on-labor and self-disciplined.

6.2. Between Desire to Connect to Local Cultures and the Pressure to Commodify Them and Neoliberalism

Moving from the commodification perspective, another paradox is between the desire to explore local cultures and their commodification. Regarding this paradox, almost all backpackers emphasize that they are not tourists and want to explore the non-commercialized and the local. The distinctive point of backpackers is that they want to “localize” themselves” (Muzaini, 2006). The desire to explore and emphasize not being a tourist here is the desire to explore the undiscovered, not a part of the tourism industry known as a tourist spot. This exploration is also aimed at non-commercialized places that local people generally know. In other words, instead of an architecture or a national park visited by tourists, it can be a local cafe that sees those tourist spots or a place unknown to the masses. In parallel with this, the difference between backpacking and tourists in the literature is defined as its relationship with the locals (Muzaini, 2006). The backpacker's use of this digital application called Couchsurfing, which offers the opportunity to meet local people and stay in their homes for free while traveling on a low budget, hitchhiking and staying in hostels can also be commented as an emphasis on their relationship with the local. On this ground, It is visible that the paradox of serving to commodify local spots or cultural components by sharing on social media. In other words, along with

the desire to connect with the locals and stay away from the commercialized tourist spots, they transform local components into content on social media.

Here, I would like to bring the most striking example to make clear the debate on this issue. When Ayşe and Uğur went to a village which has not been visited before by white people or tourists (based on their conversation), they asked for permission to take a video of the house and garden of local people to record and share their daily life, their local and cultural components in their profile (Ugur Kola, 2023b). When they get permission from them, although the local people do not demand money in return for permission to record the video, they give them some money for their channel's support via permission. Besides, they underline that they always give some money as thanks for this permission. Since they earn money from their content, they transform local's daily lives and personal places into content. At the same time, they would love to connect with the locals. Although they want to build a sincere relationship, the relationship is professionalized via money and transformed into content.

Commodification can be explained from the findings as follows: the commodification of a place, which sometimes happens by making the unknown place known; that is, it is a kind of place-making (Iaquinto, 2020). For example, the fact that one of the backpackers went to a village founded by women who escaped from male violence and female genital mutilation or a less-known town somewhere and turned it into content by promoting it, that is, by making it known (Ayşe Kocalar, 2022c). When this content is consumed by the audiences or other backpackers or tourists, that place and the culture of that place are commodified.

Although the backpacker is making a place inadvertently, this introduction to the audience makes this place known by mass and commodified. I would like to explain this commodification process step by step. In this case, it is a place-making to make the village founded by women known and to share on social media that backpackers visited it with a will to discover. Because sharing this content by one of the backpackers means that another backpacker is included in the visit list, and the frequent visit of this place by another backpacker makes that place popular among the backpacker group, even if it is not among the tourists, and means that the place is opened to mass (among backpackers) visits. At the same time, this place can become a tourist spot with an increasing number of viewers visiting it. This process of turning into a tourist spot will be discussed in detail in another paradox between low-cost traveling and commercializing travelers with a suggested word place packaging (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007).

To explain this paradox deeply, as can be seen in another example, the elements that are part of the local culture, traditional clothes (Ugur Kola, 2023b), and tribal dancers (Ayşe Kocalar, 2022a) on the cover of the video make the content attractive and authentic, and commodify that culture or local elements. Besides, sharing pictures of local dishes, making positive and enjoyable comments about them, and promoting even local food as an experience make this commodification visible. Here, I would like to bring the concept of the “experience economy” from the literature to the stage (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Introducing local food, dance, cultural components, and local activities and presenting them as experiences revitalizes the experience economy that prosumer backpackers are a part of, intentionally or unintentionally. One even stated that he wanted to spend money on buying

experiences instead of a house and a car (Emre Durmuş, 2023). On a parallel ground, but in other words, prosumer backpackers are both producers and consumers of this economy. Due to the effect of social media, they are both backpackers and digital content creators, as they state in their Instagram profiles. Here, I would like to remind you of the business account of Instagram since Instagram gives an ability to a business account to reach analytics about interactions, impressions, and the number of acquired accounts. This way, account owners can see audience insights, posting performance, and follower activity. Besides, Instagram allows these accounts to promote their profile by choosing to provide ‘more profile visits or more website visits or more messages’ with defining target audience based on country, city, and age in feed, stories, explore, or reels part for a fee. Thanks to algorithms, Instagram determines the relationship between frequency and estimated reach accounts and the time of sharing as well. Namely, for example, even if the 6-day advertising period is fixed, the cost increases as the estimated number of accounts is reached (see Appendix C). They also give some hints about their analytics, such as saying hi to new followers when their post or story reaches a high number of people or sometimes complaining about the Instagram algorithms not reaching an increased number of accounts. On this ground, they can boost their posts about the local culture to gain more accounts that affect brand partnerships. This will be discussed regarding the paradox based on the necessity to travel at a low cost and commercialize the journey.

The inference from this paradox is that backpackers, as they stated, begin with their travel with a pursuit of exploring the local culture and meeting its components; however, when they share a video, picture, or story on their social media account,

these cultures and elements become commodified. Hence, they become a part of the experience economy in this way.

6.3. Between Low-cost Traveling and Commercialization of Traveling and Neoliberalism

This paradox is based on marketing and entrepreneurialism. Furthermore, marketing has been coded around two components. The first component is the marketing of some brands and digital apps. The second marketing component is about their videos. It is based on “clickbait,” which refers to content that primarily aims to attract attention and encourage audiences to click on a video or picture (Shang, Zhang, Wang, Lai, & Wang, 2019). The third component touches on the combination of backpacking and entrepreneurialism.

First, I would like to discuss the first components referring to some sponsorships. The characteristic feature of a backpacker is shaped around low-cost traveling because of the limited budget. In this context, they give space in their videos and posts to tell how even a limited budget makes possible the world tour. They all give some tips about it. One has a specific video with the caption: All About the Free World Tour (Emre Durmuş, 2016b). Since the low budget has been centered on this traveling, some marketing issues, sponsorship, and advertisement for certain brands come into the scene. At this point, I would like to underline that the conditions of sponsorship and the amount of money or product for advertisement in video or post cannot be specified since they are not publicized.

In some cases, backpackers share their content regarding applications, brands, or products with a marketing purpose and introduce them to followers. Typical applications are Couchsurfing, Travel Ladies, Polarsteps, Worldbackers, Cambly, etc. Besides, other sponsors, such as an airline company and Eyobus, a tour company, sponsored some of the backpackers to travel in some European countries with the company's bus. Since backpackers have a large number of followers and interactions on the YouTube channel and Instagram, brands sponsored them to reach the target audience.

Firstly, to comment on this, when I look at it from the brand's perspective, since the new media make it easy to reach a target consumer, the brand sponsors the backpacker. Because the followers of backpackers consist of travel lovers, and when travel-related brands sponsor them, they can easily reach the target audience and use their promotion budget efficiently. To use their sources efficiently, brands should choose relevant backpackers with a certain high amount of interaction and networks. On this ground, it is seen that this is a competitive market for backpackers. Secondly, when I look at backpackers' perspective, they can provide a continuity of their travel for free or low budget. Besides, as Emre stated, they can "buy an experience" by commercializing their followers or interactions (Emre Durmuş, 2023). These sponsorships contribute to their personal branding because they become a part of social capital via being a part of an accumulation of social relations during networking and symbolic capital via an accumulation of reputation. In other words, this is a kind of win-win situation. To show the paradox here, again, I would like to underline that probably, they are not aware of their commercializing process to make their travel continuous; they aim to inspire other people who do not have a high

budget or be beneficial to people who want to start traveling via sharing some comments and hints of traveled country.

The second component of marketing shapes around click-baiting. Click baiting aims to draw attention and entice users to click through and can be used as a marketing tactic (Shang, Zhang, Wang, Lai, & Wang, 2019). An example from the findings will be given to discuss how backpackers use click-baiting as a marketing strategy. This is a strategy, as high engagement and viewer counts are crucial to earning more money from YouTube and Instagram's partnership programs. Besides, it is also a key to cooperating with a brand as a sponsorship.

While sharing content on social media accounts, the profile owner can determine the cover photo and captions that will appear on the profile. Some backpackers share some sex, fear, and risk-related content as a cover picture of the videos. These cover pictures draw the audience's attention to the content and trigger them to click. An example is putting a semi-nude kissing picture with the caption, "I have spent a night in Thailand Ladyboy Street." (Arda Pazır, 2021). When you click on the video, you see that he is walking on the street in nightclubs, which is unrelated to the cover picture.

Another example is also sex-related; the backpacker put a cover picture with the kissing people with the caption "legal prostitution," but in the video, he is walking in the dirty streets, which has garbage and people, and gives some information about Bangladesh and tells the legality of the prostitution. To give an example, a fear-related caption is "The Turkish Traveler Who Leads a Prayer To The TALIBAN! War Memorial In Afghanistan," with a picture that consists of men who wear white

Afghan clothing called a *perahan turban* (Mert Aktaş Travel, 2022b). On this ground, backpackers use click-baiting as a tactic to market their videos. Namely, they commercialize their traveling via clickbait. In this way, they increase their number of interactions and viewers, gaining more money from social media and opening a door for different sponsorships to make their travel continuous.

I would like to emphasize here that backpackers must understand the social media market's conditions related to customer relations and revenue and increase their digital reputation and presence in the market. Since Click-baiting increases their channels' familiarity and monetary value, they are becoming self-branded and self-valorized because they and their experiences are products in their channels. In personalized media economies, this market is also highly competitive as many prosumer backpackers produce content about the same country.

Entrepreneurialism is one of the codes that can be understood, referring to neoliberal subjectivity and commercializing their travel later. When you look at the beginning years of the backpackers, the pursuit of exploring was visible, and they earned money by selling street music, bracelets, etc. Then, it is seen that they become an entrepreneur such as Bestami via festival and tour organizations *gezgin-fest* and *Avruparail* (Orkohub Creative, 2020), Anıl via tour organizations for different countries with emphasis on authenticity and locality (Gezmekenkilay, 2022c), Emre via founding a community for digital nomads and some start-ups, etc. (Emre Durmuş, 2023). As Bestami also stated, since backpackers face challenges during their travel, they become resilient subject and capable of solving problems regarding their enterprises as well.

In order to reflect this code and paradox well, I would like to remind you that these people set out by resigning or refusing to start their careers. I already mentioned that the names and contents of these people's social media profiles could also be seen as an enterprise because they spend their time editing and shooting, disciplining themselves to post at certain hours to earn money. They also manage their personal branding via these actions. The fact that they see and respond to critical comments in their content and try to make their travels continuous by adapting to challenging conditions is a reference to their resilience. Apart from that, I would like to bring their enterprise to the scene; Emre, Anıl, and Bestami have been travelers for many years and have made various enterprises. By establishing the Interrail Türkiye group, Bestami gathered more than 1 million professional or amateur backpackers under the same roof and stated that he received collaboration offers from brands as he is the manager of this group (Orkohub Creative, 2020). In other words, amateur or professional backpackers have become the target audience for travel-related brands. Since Bestami also operates a campground with various collaborations and partners and organizes traveler festivals and bus tours to Europe, he used his social capital to commercialize his experiences referring to the resilient and entrepreneurial subject. After a while, this festival also became a brand, and its consumers consisted of the members of this group. Emre's establishing various start-ups, forming the digital nomad group, and gathering them under one roof can be considered a similar effort. In addition, Anıl's organizing tours to Moscow, India, and various African countries at certain times of the year with a local and authentic emphasis can also be considered an enterprise.

I would like to show here that backpackers who flee neoliberal market conditions have become resilient and risk-taker subjects after the difficulties of their travels. Using their social capital, they enter the travel-related neoliberal markets. In other words, they have converted their social capital to target audiences in neoliberal markets by signing up profiles in the personalized media economies and setting up travel-related brands. Here, too, they become risk-takers, resilient, entrepreneurial, and efficient subjects who can do well with cost-benefit features regarding the neoliberal subject.

Here, I would also like to discuss these tour organizations about place-making and place packaging to show the paradox between low-cost traveling and its commercialization via social media. As seen, some backpackers organize tours to various places to create a source of income to continue their travels. Some tours are emphasized as local and authentic, unlike other ordinary tours organized for tourists. Despite this emphasis and a few participants, some local places have become known by mass. In this way, they are part of place-making (Iaquinto, 2020). Then, these authentic and local places are shared by participants, entrepreneurs, and prosumer backpackers. During the promotion process of tours, these places are presented via comments, original shoots, and edits. Here, the term “place packaging” comes into the scene to comprise this presenting and promoting process to maximize visitor engagement in relation to the present experience economy perspective (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007). To make clear this point, the fancy package as a traditional way of advertising can inspire the term place packaging. Namely, since the fancy package was used to promote an object in conventional advertising, promoting a local and

authentic place via digital media is called place packaging. Again, this place became commercialized via packaging regarding promotions.

It is seen that prosumer backpackers can establish travel-based enterprises through digital media, of which they are both producers and consumers. They can advertise themselves, and in this way, they can become a part of a competitive market. With these initiatives and the impact of the digital economy, they are reintegrated into the neoliberal market. Concerning neoliberal subjectivity, it is seen that they are entrepreneurial resilient, adaptable, and flexible. Since their promoting ways, shaped around the place-making and packaging process by highlighting authenticity and the place's locality, differ from ordinary promotion, they address niche markets by increasing their digital reputation.

6.4. Between the 'Ideal' Image of a Backpacker and the 'Desired' Self-presentation of the Backpacker

Under this heading, I would like to focus on the paradox between the ideal image and desired self-presentation of backpackers, which is mainly shaped around being not a tourist and some components in their backpacking narration regarding being a part of unique experiences, seeking an adventure or risk-taking and digital effect on risk minimization, as a first pillar. Furthermore, the second pillar of this paradox is more about adding a gender aspect, an ideal image, and desired self-presentation. This theme and code are discussed via touching studies on backpacking and social media effects.

Before I comment and discuss the point from the example, I would like to touch on the literature to clarify and show its parallelism to the discussion on this part. The narration on risk and adventure has been used as identity claims in Backpacker's grand narration (Elsrud, 2001). Furthermore, the risk and its reward are generally shaped around countries or places that tend to be described as poor, third world or underdeveloped, and primitive (Elsrud, 2001). Since this research wants to avoid reproducing these discourses again, these countries are considered less known, explored, and industrialized. Moreover, as the backpackers are from Türkiye, and the countries in Africa or South America are far away from Türkiye geographically, these countries become mostly a part of their narration regarding risk and adventure. Risk and adventure are also the points to distinguish between institutionalized and dependent tourists and independent and non-institutionalized backpackers.

What I would like to show here is that the ideal backpacker image has been associated with risk and adventure for years. In other words, the point I have reached from my own findings is that backpackers include their own risk and adventure narratives in accordance with this ideal image. Here, the establishment of the adventure component is also realized by illegal behavior. Entering the bus, train, or museum without a ticket, escaping from there when someone wants to be punished, continuing to shoot the camera in a place where it is forbidden to shoot, being in areas that can be considered dangerous, filming a video in Mexican-US border and highlighting the discourse on staying in the most dangerous favela in Brazil are the prominent examples. Besides, they make these examples a part of their content. Elsrud (2001) also highlights this issue by citing.

Perhaps it is the most unwanted souvenirs that best embed one's journey in one's memory—and which, paradoxically enough, may be most status-enhancing. Malaria, or the scars from a knifing tragedy in Bogota, are incidents which, mentioned in passing, make a strong impression and immediately promote the victim from tourist to traveler (Mathlein, 1998).

In line with this highlighting, the headings and captions of videos are another example to show how the component of risk is presented in their narration to be close to an ideal image. As can be seen from findings, such as escaping from the police, hitchhiking, camping in an unknown place, and entering a forbidden zone are seen as a desired self-presentation parallel to the ideal image of the backpacking experience, which is non-static and “active courting of risk” (Giddens, 1991, as cited in Elsrud, 2001). In other words, even if the person experiences these as a backpacker, they turn them into content and build self-presentation through these narratives. The effect of social media here is that when the backpacker narrates events that carry these risk and adventure components or embarks on these adventures, they can find the opportunity to reflect them as he wishes on his YouTube and Instagram profile, which are a competitive market in terms of the number of views or sharing. In other words, hitchhiking and staying outside or in a tent in an unknown place is part of their adventure and risk-taking narrations. Here, I would like to show the other side of the coin in relation to digital apps. Since technology develops, we can be aware of where they are through live broadcasts or the stories they post on Instagram, which also shows the effect of technology on risk minimization. Although the discourse of I set up a camp in an ‘unknown’ place is emphasized in their stories, the question of how much the place is unknown compared to the past comes to our minds again with technology. Besides, even though backpackers stay in the homes of local people they do not know through the Couchsurfing application, the reference system based on comments and points made

by others in the application creates a risk-minimizing effect. Also, the fact that backpackers have ideas about each other's places and routes, even if they are not touristic, overshadows the emphasis on the unknown and discovery of that place. Since backpackers are prosumers, they already have an idea of the country that they travel to.

As a result, although the theme of risk and adventure is the main component of not being a tourist and being an ideal backpacker, the relationship between risk and the unknown is re-discussed with the development of technology. That is why the concepts of risk and adventure stand out through doing some illegal actions and their consequences. Backpackers, who are a part of the competitive market on YouTube and Instagram through content creation, are positioned in the tension between the ideal image of backpackers and the desired self-presentation, with the effect of technology for this risk-taking component. In other words, taking risks and embarking on an adventure are visible. However, this risk can be relatively minimized with the help of technology, and it continues to be presented as content in social media and attract attention.

I would like to mention another tension here related to the messy and fancy look of the backpacking image. The concept and components of self-presentations are considered here associated with the concept of personal branding - digital reputation on social media. In other words, since social media gives backpackers a chance to make up their personal profiles to build a presence in these competitive markets, users may construct their identities in these markets. This presence is brought into the scene about the backpacking image. While describing the changes, one

backpacker emphasized that he had nose surgery but did not do it for an aesthetic purpose. The emphasis here is an effort to show the close position of the ideal backpacker image outside of comfort and luxury. In parallel with this, in another video he shot in a sponsored business class, he emphasizes his messy look with the same aim.

Although being a backpacker is defined as being out of comfort, luxury, or fancy zone, one of the women backpackers sometimes highlights her actions, such as makeup and putting on earrings, which is far away from the ideal image of a backpacker. This different way of presentation can be commented as a necessity to survive in the backpacker travel market; she should make a difference in this market by producing distinct travel vlogs. However, she also needs support from her followers as a low-cost backpacker, so she underlines the low-cost backpacker's image and overcomes the questions from followers. This self-presentation also enables her to present her distinctive features in the competitive digital market. Thanks to digital media, she has a chance to be a “curator of her profile”; her narration is designed in a unique way (Flisfeder, 2015). To give a whole picture, it would be relevant to point out that in other videos, audiences see her makeup-free versions as well.

As it is clearly seen, backpackers are the curators in their profile; they construct the way of their presentation in their social media accounts. With the effect of digital technology, they are in the middle of the paradox between the pressure to be part of the ideal image of backpackers and the desired self-presentation. This paradox brings them pressure to integrate risky and adventurous components, which can be minimized via digital technology, into their narration because this story can become

presentable in this way. Their profile also shows an effort to be presentable by positioning themselves as not tourists and being real backpackers. They mostly write the number of their visiting countries or cities. This brings them closer to the ideal backpacker's image. It shows that they become part of the neoliberal subjectivities with an emphasis on investing in themselves.

6.5. Between Staying with Oneself/Being Alone and Connecting with Others

This heading will focus on the paradox between being alone and connecting with others. The discussion on negotiating this paradox is shaped around continuing relations with family, backpacking spirit, and members of this collectivity or community, part of society. In other words, in line with the neoliberal subject, a backpacker is a person who is on the road independently and individually. Since the role of digital media is the center of this paradox and negotiation, the feature of independence and staying with oneself is challenged by digital applications. In this context, due to the effect of digital applications, how being an independent and individual subject sometimes transforms into a close relationship with family, the backpacking community, and society is expounded.

Firstly, all samples of this research are traveled alone around the world. They are autonomous in the sense of where and when to go. Since they are mobile, being part of any group takes much work. However, independent and individual backpackers cannot escape being part of the backpacker community in hostels, buses, trains, and streets because the image of backpacks is also shaped around the symbol of the backpack (Walsh & Tucker, 2009). In other words, since sometimes the belongings

can be framed around symbols to show being a member of the group, the image of the backpack can connect the member of this community during traveling (Walsh & Tucker, 2009). Namely, traveling style or traveling places, being a hitchhiker, staying in hostels where backpackers stay in the same room, and traveling with the same type of backpack rather than luggage are the points that make people into group members. Add to physical symbols, the digital applications and social media tie them to their family, backpacking community, and society, to which they belong before traveling. To show the role of digital media here, I would like to mention the role of Facebook groups, specifically Interrail Türkiye, which enables communication among backpackers. The founder of this group expresses how the dynamics have been established in the group via the spirit of a backpacker. Bestami praises collectivity by praising being idle (*avare, işsiz*) and warmhearted (Tedx Talks, 2016). In one of the examples, when someone in this group writes a post to invite this group members to the wedding, stating that real family would not attend the wedding ceremony, but this group is my other family, the group admins start a digital invitation to announce group members and members come from all over the world and Türkiye via hitchhiking met with each other this wedding in Mersin (Tedx Talks, 2016). This group' and the app Polar Steps' members ask questions as a post to help each other via teaching where they can stay on the street, which McDonald's or Starbucks is open in cities worldwide, and where is safe or dangerous. Backpackers also get information about routes that can be followed in a specific geography and general hints about traveling as a backpacker in these groups. In line with this, Couchsurfing has a section for backpackers to write comments and references to give an idea about other backpackers. To add a gender perspective detected from materials, the app of travel ladies and 'gezgin kadınlar 'on Facebook group brings a

consolidation as a women backpacker. Thanks to them, women can empower and help each other with gender-related subjects. This example shows that digital media has a role in consolidating the spirit of backpacking and being a member of the backpacking community. This consolidation is not only about being a member of the backpacking group but also a member of society. Since digital media connects backpackers to society via developing communication, they could organize some social responsibility projects in ordinary times and extraordinary times, such as earthquakes. Besides, since digital media is vital to have a common agenda, Ayşe or Anıl, or many backpackers, could join or organize a broadcast to collect a donation for a devastating earthquake in Türkiye while they are in one of the African countries, or Emre donates an income which comes from the number of viewing of some videos. I would like to underline that the group, which is Interrail Türkiye, was founded in 2008 to help each other and collect backpackers under the same roof. Thanks to them, they established an organization and aid center for the earthquake in Hatay Aktepe; they provided services such as food and health. Some celebrities visited there, and their visibility increased. Before the earthquake, they also organized a festival on the Hakkari - North Iraq border based on philosophical events and pieces of music to address children's emotions. This way, although they are far from their home country, the possibility of being part of a common agenda is provided via digital media such as Twitter and Instagram. In the family context, digital media has continuous news to backpackers' families because Instagram allows them to share instant photos or short videos. Since independent and individual backpackers communicate with their families via WhatsApp and social media, family and other ties go in the way of negotiation. They are between staying themselves, referring to the resilient and independent subject, and being connected to

the ties and some identities (Flisfeder, 2015). Despite the self-authorization and capability of the backpacker, the independent budget from family, freely deciding on traveling location or accommodation, and spontaneous and autonomous actions, digital media has a role in empowering backpackers' ties.

In conclusion, regarding the paradox between staying oneself and being connected with others who are society, family, gender, or backpacking community, digital media has a vital role in establishing and being part of a common agenda and consolidating the identity that comes from these ties. At this point, it is very significant to underline that since the backpacking image is perceived in relation to idle (*avare, işsiz*) or a person who does not take responsibility for social issues, this image is negotiated around the new backpacking identity thanks to social media. In this case, this new identity refers to being a digital content creator as a job and people who set up social responsibility projects.

6.6. Moving Beyond Neoliberal Boundaries: Politics in the Agenda

In the literature, backpackers have been considered idle (*avare*) because their focus is just on the local culture, being on the road, meeting with people, and enjoying. However, the understanding of backpacking has been transformed when digital media enables a common agenda and develops background information about political issues.

Although backpackers have some powerful components of the neoliberal subject and are a part of neoliberal working conditions in some sense, they are not only these

components. When they have a space, they express a point indicating their feeling of stuckness in each paradox. This is also visible in the political aspect. In other words, they do not shy away from expressing the political and economic problems in the countries they visit. They talk about the difficulties or even impossibility of access to clean water, proper and equal education, humane living conditions, and food in African countries, criticize the neoliberal system that causes this, and draw the attention of their viewers there (Ayşe Kocalar, 2023g; Ugur Kola, 2023b; Emre Durmuş, 2018b). They also criticize the exploitation of cheap labor by highly industrialized countries. They highlight the inequality of education between private and public schools in Africa (Ugur Kola, 2023b). In their travels in South America, they also point out issues such as the inflation rate and the poverty of the people, the gap between rich and poor due to the wrong economic relations between the cartel and the state (Emre Durmuş, 2018e). In the case of Türkiye, the high exchange rate is one of the issues they criticize. In addition, their criticisms of the government, especially during elections, such as being undemocratic and the separation of power not working well, show that they are not only focused on the number of followers. This indicates that they consider platforms such as YouTube and Instagram not only as a source of income but also as a platform where they can criticize the system. In this way, they challenge competitive and selfish subjects. Besides, their critics also challenge neoliberal subjecthood, which always makes a cost-benefit analysis. As a last point, I would like to remind one of the understandings of neoliberalism, which are “a program of the methodological destruction of collectives” and “individualization of social” (Bourdieu, 1998; Layton, 2010; Ferge, 1997). On this ground, it is visible that backpackers are positioned opposed toward these two components. Since they criticize undemocratic political issues and mechanisms and

exploitative conditions, it can be commented that they challenge the idea of individualization of social and the destruction of collectives by presenting their critical views toward this system.



CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The final points reached after discussing in detail in the previous chapter will be given in this part. A backpacker is a person who travels on a low budget, explores new places, has a close relationship with the locals, has a passion for discovery, and aims to be on the road and make his travel continuous. Digital media offers some partnership programs to content creators, and backpackers become part of this program to earn money to make their travel constant. On this ground, there is no doubt that the backpacking experience is combined with the content creation process. In its broadest sense, the thesis shows how digital media has transformed the backpacking experience. The transformative effect of digital media becomes visible with the subjectivity of backpackers who resign from a job that is a part of neoliberal working conditions or refuse to start to work under these conditions. Although backpackers start their travel with the motivation of fleeing away from neoliberal dynamics, they are always-on labor to produce content on social media platforms, called the personalized media economy and determined by neoliberal market conditions. On this ground, this research explored some paradoxes of backpackers caused by the transformative effect of digital media. Although YouTube and Instagram provide some options to earn money, the amount of income is based on the number of consumers, followers, and interactions. That is, the brand, consumer,

sponsor, and influencer marketing practices determine the digital reputation of the user. Even though the income that YouTube and Instagram offer is additional revenue via pleasurable free time actions such as sharing and spending time on these platforms, this is seen as a maintenance of exploitative digital labor. The labor to produce and consume the content also brings some obligations to the prosumer. Since backpackers want to go on travel, they are disciplined themselves to be efficient, resilient, self-branded, and self-valorized. Digital reputation, influencer marketing practices, and being competitive to reach more audiences put backpackers in the middle of some paradoxes. I would like to introduce these paradoxes respectively. Firstly, as they stated each time, backpackers travel for the purpose of discovery and freedom rather than making money, fame, or financial gain. However, since they need to develop their social media accounts to earn money from these platforms, backpackers continuously produce content, edit, and share at certain times, bringing responsibility and discipline to the backpackers who pursue freedom. Moreover, although they want to be spontaneous, they always plan to share and edit time or time to reach the internet with the same purposes necessary to increase followers. Secondly, the primary goal is exploring local culture and local places for them; however, since they have to convert traveled areas and countries into content, they commodify the local components of the culture even though they want to stay away from this. Thirdly, as their budget is low, they find some strategies to commercialize their travel via integrating into click-baiting, sponsor relations, and some enterprises and spend their labor like a full-time worker on YouTube and Instagram. Fourthly, since these platforms allow prosumer backpackers to be curators of profiles, referring to the autonomy to decide what kind of video or content is added to the profile, they are sometimes pressured to be articulated into the

risky and messy components to integrate them into their stories. Fifth, although they are independent and individual backpackers, thanks to digital media, they can be part of the common agenda of society, family, and the backpacking community via some social responsibility projects as well. Lastly, this is the point to show how they are more than neoliberal subjects because although they become a part of personalized media economies with different purposes, they still express the exploitative and irrational life conditions in Türkiye and foreign countries.

For the sake of clarity, in line with the notion of neoliberal subject, one pillar of the paradoxes backpackers face is a self-disciplined, self-authorized, entrepreneurial, risk-taker, independent, and individual subject. At the same time, they have some challenging points to overcome these notions regarding the spirit of community that refers to society, family, and backpackers. In other words, they are in the middle of being self-disciplined and free, explored and commodified, low-cost traveling and commercialization of their travel, being alone and connected, risk-taking and risk minimization. I would like to underline that this research does not reduce backpackers to the neoliberal subject; it argues how neoliberal conditions and digital markets trap them regarding YouTube and Instagram. On this ground, backpackers are more than neoliberal subjects because when they have their own space as they carry on their ties, pursue freedom and exploration, and express their observations and ideas about the countries they traveled to or home country, even embedding them in a political agenda. They are aware of the inequalities in education, economy, and food and criticize them, especially in African and South American countries. Since digital media gives them a chance to integrate themselves into the agenda of their home country, they criticize various issues, including the instability

of the currency, lack of logistical organizations in extraordinary situations such as earthquakes, political polarization, or lack of democratic conditions especially in the period of voting. In other words, the backpacking experience has been transformed by the effect of digital media. This transformation has been discussed with the backpacker's relationship with exploring, being free, and the local, and the paradoxes produced in the context of these concepts. During this transformation, with the sharing of experiences and emotions as content, the line between public and personal has been blurred. In addition, the backpackers, represented as idle, unemployed, and away from the awareness of social and political issues, challenge neoliberal, self-interested, individual subject notions by integrating themselves into the public agenda in the home country and by seeing and expressing inequalities wherever they go. From this point of view, the main contribution of the thesis to the literature is that it makes these paradoxes visible by putting the subject in the center without being reductionist.

To sum up, digital media has brought a new dimension to communication, has made the other end of the world accessible with its personal branding and marketing practices, and has integrated an unknown place into the experience economy and the personalized media economy by facilitating the place-making and place-packaging process. These economies are multi-linked considering globalization and multi-layered regarding brand, producer, consumer, prosumer, and subject relations. The paradoxes of backpackers produced by this multi-layered and multi-linked economy are framed by entrepreneurial, resilient, capable, adaptable, self-authorized, disciplines, branded, valorized and objectified, and rational components, which form

the neoliberal subject. Moreover, the backpackers in my study negotiate the neoliberal subject imposed on them by digital technology.

I would like to give a space to the limitations of this study. Data and methodological triangulation have not been provided because a positive response to the interview requests could not be received due to reasons such as the big earthquake and the fact that the backpackers were always on the road. Backpackers did not reply to many messages, attempts, and emails since some are from the earthquake area; interviews could not be done. For this reason, there was no chance to be part of the member-checking process, a strategy to provide credibility. Furthermore, since the feelings, expressions, and discourses are intertwined, drawing a rigid line between themes is not possible in a few cases. In other words, this research is limited in providing external heterogeneity rigidly regarding few findings.

Last but not least, this research can be deepened by varying the material with followers' comments in future studies. When followers' comments are added to this study's equation as data, the relationship between the dynamic that emerges and the themes determined in this study can be examined. In this study, it can be questioned whether backpackers who want to stay away from neoliberal conditions or quit while working under these conditions, and who also produce content for YouTube and Instagram, exist in other cultures and countries or not, if there are what kind of dynamics they have, if any, or their relationship with the themes found in this study can be analyzed. Future studies can also investigate what kind of tensions the countries or continents that backpackers visit in the narrative of the travelers and what kind of dynamics specific to the region or continent have emerged.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A



Bilkent Üniversitesi

Akademik İşler Rektör Yardımcılığı

Tarih : 11 Ocak 2023
Gönderilen : Mirac Kulaklı
Danışman : Tahire Erman
Gönderen : H. Altay Güvenir
İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başkanı
Konu : "Escaping ..." çalışması etik kurul onayı

Üniversitemiz İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu, 11 Ocak 2023 tarihli görüşme sonucu, "Escaping everyday life in neoliberal modernity: The case of backpackers" isimli çalışmanız kapsamında yapmayı önerdiğiniz etkinlik için etik onay vermiş bulunmaktadır. Onay, ekte verilmiş olan çalışma önerisi, çalışma yürütücüler ve bilgilendirme formu için geçerlidir.

Bu onay, yapmayı önerdiğiniz çalışmanın genel bilim etiği açısından bir değerlendirmedir. Çalışmanızda, kurumumuzun değerlendirmesi dışında kalabilen özel etik ve yasal sınırlamalara uymakla ayrıca yükümlüsünüz.

Kovid-19 salgını nedeniyle konulmuş olan kısıtlamaların yürürlükte olduğu süre içinde, tüm komite toplantıları elektronik ortamda yapılmaktadır; aşağıda isimleri bulunan Bilkent Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu Üyeleri adına bu yazıyı imzalama yetkisi kurul başkanındadır.

Etik Kurul Üyeleri:

Ünvan / İsim	Bölüm / Uzmanlık	
Prof.Dr. H. Altay Güvenir	Bilgisayar Mühendisliği	Başkan
Prof.Dr. Erdal Onar	Hukuk	Üye
Prof.Dr. Haldun Özaktaş	Elektrik ve Elektronik Müh.	Üye
Doç.Dr. Işık Yuluğ	Moleküler Biyoloji ve Genetik	Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Burec Aysen Ürgen	Psikoloji	Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Didem Özkul McGeoch	İletişim ve Tasarımı	Yedek Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi A.Barış Özbilen	Hukuk	Yedek Üye

Kurul karar/toplantı No: 2023_01_11_02

Staff Application Form for Experiments with Human Participants

(A separate application form must be completed for each experiment and staff member.)

Please check one: ☐ I need a formal approval letter for an external agency (TÜBİTAK, etc.)☒ An internal communication letter informing me of the approval will be sufficient**1. Name of applicant (graduate students should indicate their supervisors)**Mirac Kulaklı (Master's Student, Department of Political Science and Public Administration,
Supervisor: Tahire Erman)**2. Funder of grant/studentship if any:**

-

3. Full title of experiment/project

Escaping everyday life in neoliberal modernity: The case of backpackers

4. When do you wish to start data collection: 09.01.2023**5. Aims of the project:**

The aim of this project is to explore the experiences of the people who define themselves as backpackers (*gezgin*) that aim to make their travels financially sustainable by pursuing a low comfort life, and who used to work in white-collar jobs before traveling. We focus on their main motivations of becoming a backpacker and their future plans about it. We locate their experiences in the frame of neoliberalism in which every day life is void of the social and identities are defined through consumption and prestigious career paths. We aim to explore the role of digital technology, specifically social media, in sustaining a life of traveling without regular employment.

6. What will the participants have to do? (Provide a brief outline of procedure, for survey work, a copy of the survey should be attached to this form.) Please indicate if the participants may be exposed to stimuli which may upset them:

The primary data source of this research is semi-structured in-depth online interviews with backpackers. The second source of data is the videos published in social media, which will be analyzed using the technique of content analysis. The interviews will mostly be online and take approximately 30-45 minutes. The participants are expected to talk about the process of becoming a backpacker and their experiences of traveling. Probe questions will be raised when some important issues are not mentioned by the respondent. Questions that violate the privacy of participants will not be asked. Special attention will be paid not to upset respondents while they talk about their travel experiences.

7. What sort of people will the participants be and how will they be recruited? In the case of children state age range. (Any participant who has not lived through his/her 18th birthday is considered to be a child!)

Children are not included in this study.

The research covers three groups of participants:

- a. Backpackers traveling alone who quitted their white-collar jobs in Turkey
- b. Backpackers traveling with partners who quitted their white-collar jobs in Turkey
- c. Digital nomads who work remotely and aim to travel around the world

^{1*} Adapted from www.york.ac.uk/depts/psych/www/research/ethics/StaffPGEthicsForm.doc

The respondents will be both women and men between the ages of 20 and 40.
There is no need for CRB clearance as the thesis supervisor of the researcher is an academic at Bilkent University.

8. Arrangements for consent and debriefing (attach information sheet and consent form)

Please see the attached informed consent form and information sheet (gönüllü katılım formu /aydınlatılmış onam formu)

9. How will you guarantee confidentiality of participants?

All interviews will be stored and backed up on investigator Mirac Kulaklı's password-protected computer and portable device. The interview records will be encrypted and anonymized.

Consent forms are stored securely in a locked cabinet, separately from the research data.

10. Please upload an electronic version of this word-processed form (without signatures) along with other application material. Paper copies of all application material, (properly signed where indicated, and initialled on all other pages) should be sent after possible modifications suggested by the committee are finalized.

Signature(s):

Person carrying out the work

[Redacted Signature]

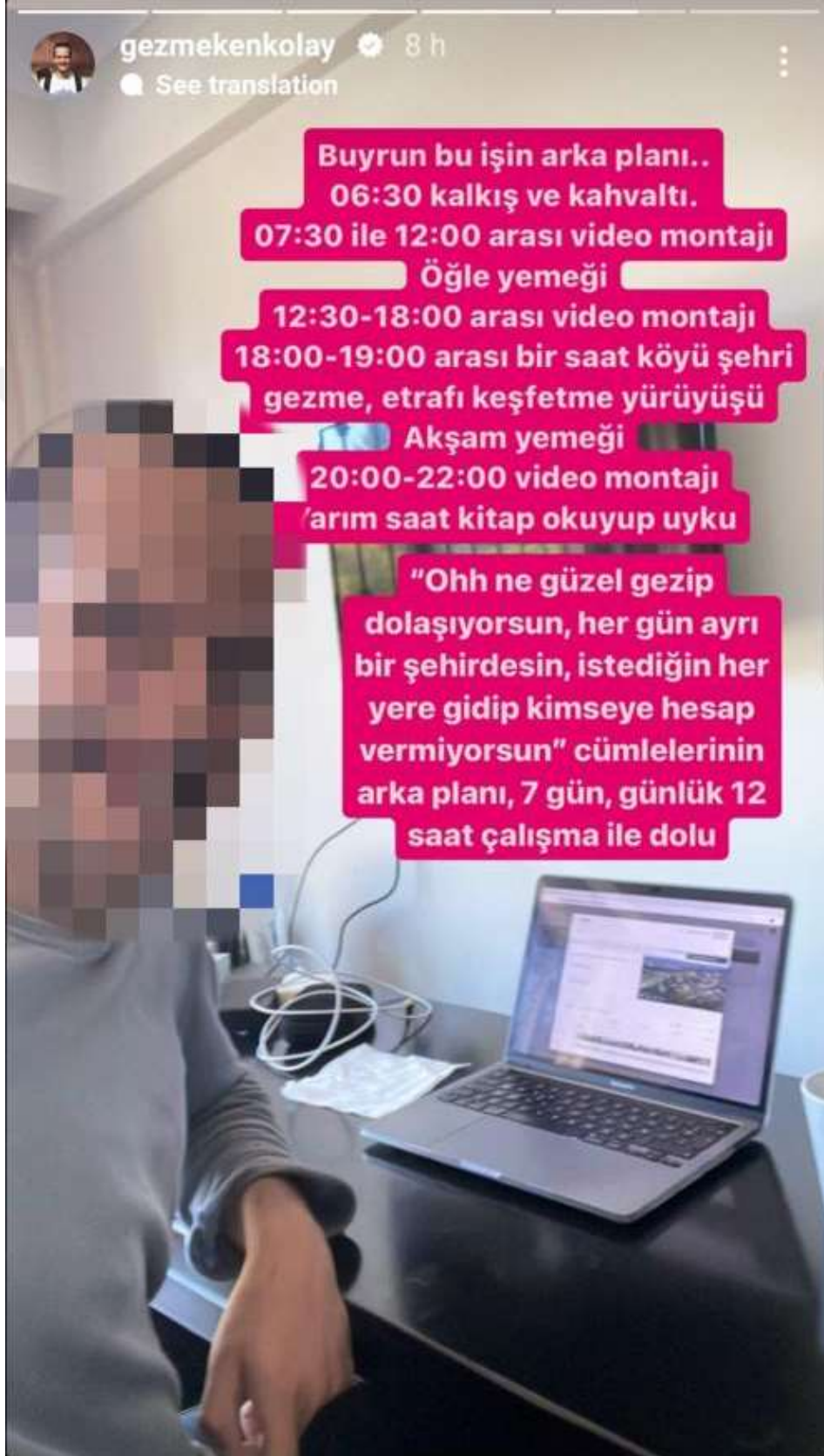
Supervisor, thesis supervisor: I am satisfied that that the procedures adopted will ensure the dignity, welfare and safety of all participants in this work.

[Redacted Signature]

The signature above signifies that researchers will conform to the accepted ethical principles endorsed by relevant professional bodies, in particular to

Bilkent University does not allow the use of students of research investigators as participants. Students who have the potential of being graded by the investigators during or following the semester(s) in which the study is being carried out should not participate in the study. Students may not receive any credit for any university course, with the exception of the GE250/GE251 courses, for their participation. The GE250 and GE251 (Collegiate Activities I and II) courses include an optional activity which encompasses volunteering as a participant in a research project.

Appendix B



Appendix C

Bütçe ve Süre

6 Günde ₺324

Toplam Harcama

1.200 - 3.200

Tahmini Erşim

Bütçe

Günlük ₺54

Süre

Bu reklamı ben duraklatana kadar yayınla

Süreyi ayarla

6 Gün

İleri

Bütçe ve Süre

6 Günde ₺1.302

Toplam Harcama

4.900 - 13.000

Tahmini Erşim

Bütçe

Günlük ₺217

Süre

Bu reklamı ben duraklatana kadar yayınla

Süreyi ayarla

6 Gün

İleri