

Meditation as a Leisure Activity: A Content and Comment Level Analysis*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the scope, metaphors, motivations, and outcomes of meditation. In this study, qualitative research method was used. Youtube social media platform was searched using the keyword "meditation". Considering the number of subscribers of the channels, the most followed meditation channel in Turkey was determined. Videos that have reached more than 300,000 viewers and subjects related to renewal and empowerment were selected and content analysis was conducted on 10 videos and 10,803 comments. The motivations for participation in meditation classified under four groups: psychological, social, physical and need for change. Moreover, those, who follow the meditation channel on Youtube meet their psychological, cognitive, and spiritual needs through meditation. Therefore, meditation has similar features with many active and passive activities in terms of motivations and outcomes. It is important that not only administrators and psychiatrists, but also public institutions working on public health encourage participation in meditation activities due to the psychological, physiological, and physical benefits offered to the person.

Keywords: Leisure, meditation, meditation motivation, benefits, Youtube

* This study is not included in the study group that requires TR Index Ethics Committee Approval.

1. Introduction

In changing world conditions, people try to understand themselves and their thoughts in order to improve their living conditions. The increase in people's stress levels, the frequent occurrence of depression, anxiety and panic attacks (Totzeck et al., 2020) makes it necessary to gain an awareness and understanding of one's inner world (Walsh, 1983; Wachtel, 2014; Farrell & McClelland, 2017). In recent years, meditation has become an alternative therapy method to reduce stress, improve mental performance and coping skills for various psychological disorders, regardless of a specific mental illness (Aftanas & Golosheykin, 2005). At the same time, meditation helps reducing the negativities encountered in vital life domains and increases the positive effects, as it strengthens the individual's mental awareness and permanently improves well-being (Blasche et al., 2021). Despite a growing number of studies on the impact of meditation, studies providing empirical evidence, especially outside the therapeutic context, are surprisingly scarce (Sedlmeier et al., 2012). Although meditation has similar characteristics in relation with individuals' motivations and outcomes for participating in various leisure activities, it has not received the necessary attention in the literature. In other words, it is observed that meditation studies, as a passive activity in leisure time research, receive relatively less attention than other fields (Choe et al., 2014; Choe et al., 2015; Choe, 2012; Grafanaki et al., 2005). Since the subject of meditation does not receive sufficient attention within the scope of leisure literature, the subject, scope and metaphors, motivation and outcomes of meditation were examined from the positive psychological perspective.

Since there are not many theories in the field that address various dimensions of leisure such as motivations, satisfactions and restrictions, research on leisure is carried out with the theories of established disciplines such as psychology, sociology or economics (Searle, 2000). The positive psychology discipline offers new opportunities and methodologies to examine the purposes of meditation, which has wide applications to promote health in medicine, business, and education (Shapiro et al., 2016). Therefore, this study is conducted based on the theory of leisure motivations from the perspective of positive psychology. One of the main concerns for leisure researchers is to understand individuals' motivations for participating in leisure activities (Dillard & Bates, 2011). Leisure motivation theory questions the relationship of participation in leisure activities with intrinsic motivation, negotiation of constraints, and culture from the perspectives of psychology and sociology (Hills et al., 2000; Dillard & Bates, 2011; Chan & Pang, 2012). The study, which is inherently handled from a positive psychology perspective, focuses on intrinsic motivations and the outcomes that develop with these motivations.

One of the most striking ways for people to control their physiological reactions to the complexity and innovation caused by the developments in the world is the Eastern understanding of meditation, with its protective effect on the mental and physical health of modern people (Wallace & Benson, 1972). As a reaction to the change in the world, meditation has led individuals to develop observation, awareness, kindness and a common meaning with others (Campo et al., 2016), and it is beneficial in minimizing feelings of loneliness and maximizing hedonic and eudaimonic effects (Akhter-Khan et al., 2022; Pandya, 2021; Saini et al., 2021; Duncan & Weissenburger, 2003). In terms of these effects, meditation represents a valuable field of study as a leisure activity. In this regard, the study will provide data on the value of meditation as a leisure activity for individuals to stay healthy under changing world conditions. The findings will help to develop various suggestions for businesses and public health institutions to popularize meditation. The study is seen to have a pioneering value as it evaluates both the motivations and outcomes of meditation.

In this context, the study seeks answers to four basic questions. Answers to these questions will help to understand the nature of the relationship between meditation and leisure activities and move it into a broader and richer field of knowledge. These questions are:

- 1- What are the contents/topics of meditation videos published on YouTube?
- 2- What metaphors are used in the videos?
- 3- What are the factors that motivate participation in meditation?
- 4- What are the outcomes obtained as a result of meditation?

2. Conceptual Framework

This part of the study mentions the concepts of meditation and meditation and leisure.

2.1. Meditation

Meditation is a form of exercise that involves directing one's attention and awareness to a specific object, sound, image or object in order to experience enlightenment or approaching a higher power (West, 1979). Meditation defines developing a deeper understanding of the nature of mental processes, consciousness, identity and reality to foster psychological well-being (Walsh, 1983), and a death and rebirth that occurs depending on evolving human life, creating new behavioural patterns, redefining the situation and listening to every part of the body (Garrett et al., 2011). Tang et al., (2015) points the capacity of meditation to enhance psychology of attentional and emotional self-regulation. Meditation has been practiced for 3000 years due to the mediators' intentions to cultivate positive qualities including compassion, and generosity, offers pathways to extraordinary states of mental health and attention control that have been systematically developed (Shapiro et al., 2016). Meditation has maintained its original form from South Asia within the scope of Buddha's meditation teachings since ancient times, but has taken a more complex structure in Tibet, with Chan teachings of China and Zen teachings of Japan (Walsh, 1983). These Eastern meditative techniques have been developed, tested, and refined over hundreds of generations to develop a method by which individuals can achieve a state of mental peace and serenity, and are considered a strategy that can be easily adapted to the needs of clinicians and their patients in the West (Manocha, 2000).

Depending on the teachings with the need for an educational practice in which knowledge and skills of personal insight, emotional stability, and psychological ease are gained (Garrett et al., 2011; Salmon et al., 2004; Norman & Pokorny, 2017) through contemplation, concentration, use of nature sounds, guided meditation, and meditative movement exercises such as Yoga and tai chi, qigong, breathing exercises, and Mantra (Sharma, 2015). Due to its details, subtleties and complexity meditation follows a form of yoga, body scanning, sitting meditation, home practice sessions and other assignments through the focus of attention in breathing (Salmon et al., 2004). Meditation is basically a mental activity that involves the individual sitting or lying passively, with his eyes closed, and sometimes focusing on a particular sound (Hjelle, 1974; Wielgosz et al., 2019). The tasks here are shaped depending on which meditation teaching and which application area the individual will prefer. Meditation practitioners disrupt the structure of the self by focusing on the immateriality of the core self, in line with Buddhist beliefs, with practices limited to esoteric, in other words, inner-oriented meaning (Lomas et al., 2015: 849). On the other hand, practices or techniques such as loving kindness, mindfulness, and transcendental are encountered during the meditation process. For example; Loving kindness meditation is inspired by mindfulness meditation. The aim here is to increase attention, maximize positive emotions and minimize negative emotions (Totzeck et al., 2020). Each of these practices is grouped under three headings: the attention family, the constructive family, and the deconstructive family. Dahl et al., (2015) states that the attention family is used to strengthen the capacity of reorienting attention to a chosen object and being aware of the processes of thinking, feeling and perceiving, while the deconstructive family aims to generate insights by exploring the dynamics of perception, emotion and cognition about self, others and the world with the process of self-questioning. On the other hand, according to these researchers, the 'constructive family' includes systematically changing the content of thoughts and feelings by reinforcing psychological patterns and replacing the maladaptive self-schema with the compatible self.

Individuals meditate to overcome psychological or emotional problems or to better understand life, expand their consciousness and gain wisdom (Sedlmeier et al., 2012). The essence of meditation is conscious awareness, which contains extremely slow deep thinking, or contemplation at a high level of understanding. Many authorities in this field believe that the meditative state reduces the individual's level of self-absorption, making him/her less defensive, more open to experience, more accepting, and less self-absorbed. It is psychologically and physiologically more refreshing than deep sleep (Sumter et al.,

2009), as it creates the potential for "liberation" of the self through judgment (Salmon et al., 2004). Besides, transcendental motivation is a simple, effortless procedure that can be easily learned by anyone of any age, culture, religion, or educational background in order to experience the unlimited energy, intelligence and happiness that everyone finds in Maharishi's teachings (Roth, 1987).

2.2. Meditation and Leisure

Aristotle states that music and meditation, are the only leisure activities produced by an internal attitude based on voluntary participation and questioning which are different from pure relaxation and entertainment and have nothing to do with consumption (Beatty & Torbert, 2003). In order to understand this statement, the relationship between meditation and leisure is necessary to observe the changes of leisure towards open-ended, non-instrumental practices that are the right of everyone, rather than relaxation offered to a privileged few (Mathiowetz, 2016). From a Buddhist perspective, although it may not seem clearly recreational at first glance, it appears to have leisure qualities in terms of the nature and consequences of the experience (Chick & O'Regan, 2014). This relationship is related to meditation serving as an avenue for meaningful leisure activities (Newman et al., p.568). More clearly, meditation is a fun and passive leisure activity (Tsaour et al., 2021; Hjelle, 1974), which is sometimes welcomed with enthusiasm due to placebo and expectation effects (West, 1979), as a response to the stress of modern life.

The relationship between meditation and leisure activities depends on the outcomes of reducing stress, alleviating anxiety and depression, improving mood, overall health and well-being (Choe et al., 2015). In this relationship, meditation, a cost-effective tool that offers emotional balance and an improved quality of life, is chosen in free time and with the participants' own free will. Grafanaki et al., (2005) states that meditation, like various other leisure pursuits, brings people closer to their spirituality, contributes to individual selves such as "being in their ones' body, looking at who they are, helps coping with daily life, and provides a way to escape from the busy pace of life. the researchers state that it helps to seek and maintain a kind of "balance". Also, spiritual experiences such as freedom and liberation experienced during the meditation process (Garrett et al., 2011) are similar to reactions such as awe and appreciation and the feeling of freedom that arise with nature and innovations in recreational areas where leisure activities are carried out (Schmidt & Little, 2007).

3. Methodology

In this study meditation videos published on the Youtube social video sharing platform and the comments made on these videos were examined through qualitative approach. YouTube is a valuable source of information that provides a high amount of community feedback (Thelwall, 2017; Siersdorfer et al., 2010). Using the keyword "meditation" on Youtube the most followed meditation channel in Turkey was determined. The videos selected are the ones that have reached over 300,000 viewers and are related to the renewal and empowerment of the individual. The 10,803 comments of the meditation participants on the channel and 10 videos were both examined between May and July, 2023.

The YouTube platform, which has continued to grow rapidly and become the second most visited website in the world, has been determined as the main case study area for investigating research questions related to digital culture and society in a broad sense (Arthurs et al., 2018). However, when examining the comments made on the platform, it is not possible to determine which commentators are in a fully meditative state. For this reason, both the practioners' and listeners comments were examined holistically. The analysis process was carried out with two students who have knowledge and experience in meditation. In this process, first of all, the students were informed about the subject of the research. Afterwards, a short training was given on how to organize themes, sub-themes and codes regarding to motivation, benefit, subject/content and metaphors used. Inter-coder reliability was ensured in the study by analysing the findings separately (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). After the analysis was completed, peer debriefing technique (Rose & Johnson, 2020) was used to ensure the credibility and consistency of the

study. At this stage, an academican specialized in qualitative research and working in the field checked that there was no problem between the findings and interpretations.

In this study, individuals' motivations for and outcomes of participating in meditative practices, the content of meditation in the online environment, and the metaphors used in practice were determined within the scope of the relationship between meditation and leisure. These phenomena can be investigated on two levels: the content level and the comments level. On the content level motivations and outcomes of the practitioners were examined. On the other hand, comment level was used to determine the content of videos and the metaphors used. Manifest content analysis was used to analyse the videos on content and comments levels. Manifest content analysis, which allows a quality process to be carried out by only including a large amount of quality texts related to the research question, includes a process of selecting data sources, analysing the data and interpreting the results (Dooley, 2016).

4. Findings

Within the scope of the study, first the published videos had been watched and the contents of the videos were determined based on the expressions in the titles and in the videos. These headings are classified under six categories in Table 1. In this context, it has been seen that meditation videos are at the forefront, especially with their content of affirmations and the law of attraction. On the other hand, there are also videos on getting rid of bad habits such as smoking and getting rid of superstitions and negative thoughts. Additionally, the healing and law of attraction categories are divided into three sub-themes.

Table 1. Meditation contents/topics

Theme	Sub-Theme
Affirmations	
Healing	Health
	Emotional
	Cognitive
Law of attraction	Achieving intentions
	Love
	Money
Superstitions	
Getting rid of bad habits	
Purification of negative thoughts	

It was understood that various metaphors were used during the sessions in order to enable individuals to reach a meditative position. The metaphors seen in Table2 are effective elements in activating the senses in the videos. These metaphors appeal to our tactile sense with expressions such as "*the gentle breeze caressing your face*", "*walking on a path covered with gray stones by bare foot to feel the ground*" or "*feeling the silky moss*". On the other hand, "*hearing the smell of cool moist soil*" appeals to the sense of smell, and "*seeing the bright white light*" appeals to the sense of sight. Lastly, to appeal the hearing sense "*listen to the whispers of the leaves coming from the trees*" is one of the most used sentences in the videos.

Table 2. Metaphors used in the meditation process

Category	Theme	Sub-theme	Code	
Sense of sight	Sky factors		Stars	
			Moon	
			Sun	
			Cloud	
			Universe	
	Earth factors	Animals		Birds
				Deer
			Plants	
		Forest		Flowers
				Trees
			Soil	
		Others	Light	
		Colours		
Sense of hearing	Tree leaves			
	Bird sounds			
Sense of smell	Smell of flowers			
	Smell of soil			
	Moss smell			
Sensation	Touch of the wind			
	life energy			
	Touch the soil			
	The warmth of the sun			
	Coolness of water			

One of the main topics of the study is to examine motivations of meditation practitioners. The findings of this content are given in Table 3. It has been observed that individuals commenting on the YouTube have relatively similar motivations to participate in meditation. Accordingly, the motivations of individuals to start and continue meditation are grouped under four headings. Each motivation is divided into sub-themes and individual motivations are divided into 15 sub-themes. Commentators who meditate due to psychological needs mentions their motivation as follows; *"I have been suffering from anxiety since the Elazığ earthquake and I listen to it wishing for healing, I hope this terrible mood will decrease over time."* *"Even though there were people around me, I always felt lonely and I had a lot of financial and spiritual problems, but for a moment I felt safe and at peace."* A person who meditated for healing or physical needs commented on the videos as follows: *"... I could never sleep because I was lost in excessive thoughts. I have listened to so many meditations for months, but none of them were this effective."* An example comment in the category of need for change is *"I do this meditation almost every evening, it really is like a miracle, I did it to shape my life the way I want... I spend every day experiencing a miracle."* Another commentator explained his motivation for the video he listened to as follows: *"For months, whenever I find myself feeling bad, empty, or in need of help, I always turn to this video."* While the sense of curiosity is seen as an important element among the reasons for individuals to start meditation, this emotional state is not included in the table because it disappears during the continuation of meditation.

Table 3. Meditation motivations

Categories	Themes
Psychological Needs	Loneliness
	Feeling of despair
	Feeling Safe
	Stress
	Anxiety
Social Needs	Stress
	Socialization
	Being loved by people
Healing/Physical Needs	Belonging to a group
	Physical relief
	Sleeping disorder
	Health problems
The need for change	Past traumas
	Transforming the flow of life
	Being a positive person
	Changing energy

Within the scope of the study, the outcomes of the meditation were also examined. The evaluations made based on the comments showed that the meditation practitioners have three different outcomes. These outcomes are grouped under three categories as emotional, cognitive and spiritual. Each of these categories has expanded through sub-themes and codes. One of the important comments about the outcomes of meditation is an example of both cognitive and emotional outcomes. *"I had slept while listening to you for about 3 months. Thanks to you, my sleep pattern is great, I wake up peacefully and happily. I was a person who bit his teeth while sleeping, broke his teeth, and suffered from jaw problems because of this. Now I have none left"*. It is possible to give examples of cognitive outcomes through two interpretations, including past experiences and awareness. The first of these is *"I've been having flashbacks to my childhood since I did this meditation"*, the second is *"I've been doing this meditation for 3 years, it increased my awareness tremendously, there are changes in my character, I broke away from my habits that I struggled with a lot and couldn't break away from"* Another commentators said that *"deep changes had begun in my life and the essence of my existence, with the meditations on your channel. There were visible changes in my life as it deepened"* and *"There are indeed meditations on this channel that are very suitable for awareness and peace"*.

Table 4. Aimed outcomes with meditation.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Sub-theme</i>
<i>Emotional Outcomes</i>	Tranquillity	<i>Cognitive Outcomes</i>	Consciousness	Subconscious cleaning
	Joy			Coding the subconscious
	Relaxation			Slow down the mind
	Happiness			Enhancement
	Turning inward			Deep rest
	Self-compassion		Memory	Regeneration
	Calmness			Memory
	Self-value			Remember/Forget
	Forgiveness			
	Relief from stress and anxiety			
<i>Spiritual Outcomes</i>	Using nature's energy	<i>Cognitive Outcomes</i>	Awareness	Of earth
	Attunement			Of self
	Existence and vitality			Of past experiences
	Exist in unique harmony			About the moment
	Being one with life		Creating common awareness	
	Being one with universe		Thought	Reducing mental mobility
	Being one with nature			Purified negative thoughts

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In order to encourage people to proactively participate in active and passive activities, it is important that participants understand the purpose of the activity and see the time spent as fun and valuable (Tsaur et al., 2021). Meditation, one of the areas of interest of positive psychology, facilitates individuals to transcend themselves with an effective mechanism through a specific purpose in which they can develop meaningful changes in their psychological and emotional well-being (Martin et al., 2023). Meditation is also a valuable activity area as it provides the individual with the opportunity to get away from negative emotions, relax and alleviate loneliness by providing a sense of unity (Akhter-Khan et al., 2022). In this context, this study provides useful information to explore the fun and valuable aspects of meditation activity by examining it in terms of its topics, metaphors, motivations and outcomes.

Within the scope of the study, meditation videos were first grouped according to their topics. Videos prepared to encourage individuals' mental transformation and well-being are divided into seven groups in terms of the scope. This distinction focuses on issues that may contribute to both the physical and psychological well-being of individuals. From another perspective, the aim of the videos is mental transformation of individuals. This transformation is reminiscent of the transformation created by the placebo-effect. Placebos have traditionally been considered as deceptive therapies which mean "I will please" in the context of social symbols and interpersonal factors surrounding the healing process (Margo, 1999). The effect of placebos on the individual depends on the strength of the expectations, not on how the expectations are formed (Montgomery & Kirsch, 1997; Paturel, 2012). Similarly, meditation aims to bring a different perspective or transform perception by focusing on certain issues in one's mind. In this regard, meditation practices are expected to transform the person, just like placebos, depending on the strength of the individual's expectations.

Metaphors used in the videos help to direct the individual's attention. More specifically, metaphors represent the effort to reach listeners and make them understand the importance of the current moment (Silvestre-López, 2020). McCord and Neef (2005) state that the deprivation of various forms of stimulation during leisure activities may cause the emergence of problematic behaviours of the individual. Therefore, it is thought that not being guided by instructors with such metaphors within the scope of meditation, in other words, lack of stimulation, may cause problems such as not being able to focus or have any positive results from the meditation.

The analysis of comments gathered from Youtube sharing platform shows meditation is similar to many active and passive activities in terms of individuals' motivations and outcomes. It allows evaluating the instructive structure of motivation research about the reasons for participating in activities and how these activities occur (Chen & Pang, 2012) in the context of meditation activity. Beard and Ragheb (1983) examined leisure participation motivations under four headings: intellectual, social, competence and stimulus avoidance. These motivations, determined by Beard and Ragheb (1983) can also be evaluated in terms of meditation effectiveness. When evaluated from an intellectual perspective, meditation offers an internal focal point for individuals to get to know or discover themselves, nature and other people. In this regard, it can motivate individuals due to the needs of developing close relationships by being more tolerant towards other people, acting more calmly in difficult times, and getting rid of the stresses of daily life. On the other hand, Dillard and Bates (2011), seeking an answer to the question "Why do people recreate themselves through leisure activities?", pointed out the importance of escape, improving relationships, personal mastery and winning motivations, among many other elements. Although there is no expectation or need to win in meditation, the other three motivational elements are also valid for meditation.

Another important finding of the study is the outcomes that the practitioners are expected to achieve through the videos. This finding shows that those who follow the meditation channel on Youtube meet their psychological, cognitive and spiritual needs through meditation. Although meditation is not associated with competition, socializing or physical activities, it is physically passive and can stimulate mental activity, like many other leisure activities such as yoga, gardening, walking, and reading books (Choe et al., 2015). These outcomes vary depending on the individual's experience level. Choe (2012) states in his research that inexperienced people find the process calming and relaxing because they can enjoy quiet time despite the difficulty of concentrating. According to the researcher, experienced ones focus on developing their minds through deep observation and actively integrating meditation methods into their lives, both at work and in leisure, to achieve a higher level of freedom and complete freedom from worries, thoughts and other external obligations.

The findings obtained within the scope of this study reveal the benefits of encouraging meditation as an easily accessible activity, both individually and socially. Encouraging the individual's sense of unity with self, the environment and others during the meditation process concerns not only the individual but also the society. Therefore, public institutions as well as managers and tourism marketers are responsible for protecting the mental and physical health of the public and need to support and encourage meditation as an area of activity. It is possible for public institutions and marketers to provide facilities of spiritual development. Also, free online meditation courses coordinated by public institutions will enhance the living conditions of public. Particularly, considering the increasing interest of people in meditation (Sedlmeier et al., 2012), providing easily accessible meditation training for everyone by experts on the subject for the public benefit may be effective in raising individuals' awareness. In addition, the meditation courses to be opened will be beneficial in creating a more widespread social interaction by improving the interpersonal relationships of individuals.

In this study, meditation as a form of leisure activity is evaluated with findings obtained from Youtube. Therefore, the study is not generalizable. To generalize the findings of meditation motivations and outcomes, scale is needed to be developed and applied in the leisure literature. Additionally, the effect of meditation experience on leisure time satisfaction should be examined in order for the study area to have

a richer flow of information. Also, face-to-face interviews with individuals who meditate will be effective in evaluating the study from a broader perspective.

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