The Role of Instagram in Destination Branding and Marketing: The Case of Turkey

ABSTRACT

The almost infinity of the growth potential of the tourism sector, the increasing number of visitors despite all the global variables and negativities, and the economy created by the sector encourage the emergence of new destinations. However, this situation brings with it intense competition. Destinations, on the other hand, actively use many elements, especially social media platforms and tools, in this process to provide competitive advantage. Considering that physical marketing and distribution were preferred more in the past, today this situation has almost turned into the opposite. The sale of touristic products through distribution channels such as agencies and sales offices has now been replaced by e-commerce and social media has become the most used dynamic of this trade has started to use social media actively in destination branding studies and in the promotion of the destination. In this study, it is aimed to analyze the evaluations of ten city destinations, which are accepted as brands in Turkey, through the instagram application, which has reached incredible numbers in terms of usage prevalence in the last ten years. In addition, within the framework of the findings obtained in the study, suggestions were developed on destination branding and marketing.

Keywords: Tourism Marketing, Destination Branding, Social Media, Instagram, Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

The economic size of the tourism sector, the increase in the number of visitors and the income obtained from tourism on a global scale encourage the emergence of new destinations. However, this situation also brings with it intense competition. Destinations use many elements especially social media platforms and tools to gain competitive advantage (İlban & Kömür, 2019: 275). These special areas, where direct sales methods are used intensively in accordance with the marketing requirements of the age, take positions according to the needs and expectations of the tourists and increase their power by renewing themselves day by day. In the past, sales of touristic products through distribution channels such as agencies and sales offices have now been replaced by e-commerce, and social media has become the most used dynamic of this trade (Özçoban, 2019: 222). Thanks to social media platforms such as instagram and youtube, blogs and microblogs, countries have started to actively use social media in marketing activities, destination branding studies and promotion of the destination by emphasizing the features of the destination by constantly interacting with tourists. Countries and destinations that actively use social media can accelerate the branding process by reaching millions of tourists directly or indirectly (Tosyalı & Öksüz, 2020: 1486). In this study, it is aimed to analyze the evaluations of ten city destinations in Turkey which are considered as brands, through the instagram application, which has reached incredible numbers in terms of usage prevalence especially in the last ten years. In addition, within the framework of the findings obtained in the study, suggestions were developed on the subject of destination branding and marketing.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Destination and City Branding

Today, brand studies are experienced not only between products or businesses but also between countries, regions and cities. Cities that want to gain competitive advantage and adopt the advantage it provides as a vision, try to market by highlighting the features that will contribute to their branding, by developing these features. Because the main purpose of cities or countries is to be visited and to increase tourism revenues. Because being remembered and being remembered with positive feelings has an important function that increases the likelihood of revisit. Statistics related to tourism; it reveals striking results about the differences in touristic demand towards countries or regions with similar touristic characteristics. For example, Ünüsan & Sezgin (2005) investigated the reasons why Spain attracts more tourists than Greece and Turkey although Spain, Greece and Turkey which are Mediterranean countries with similar climatic conditions have similar attractions. As a result of the study, it was emphasized that the brand value of the cities plays a critical role in the choice of destination. Therefore, the brand is the most basic target of marketing

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studies. Because a brand is that it has no borders. The brand is to be prominent among many options. A brand can be a name, sign, symbol, term that defines the product in every sense or it can be defined as a combination of several of these (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008: 225). Cities also carry out their own branding activities by combining their various features as brand products. Cities have many tangible and intangible features such as history, culture, nature, climate and touristic places (Avcılar & Kara, 2015). As a matter of fact, Istanbul has become a brand by being mentioned among the leading cities of the world with its unique works (Serçek & Hassan, 2016: 9). In addition, the economic conditions of cities should be considered as a brand element. In order for city branding to be successful, all attractive features of the city must be conveyed to the target audience. The existence of a large mass in the context of the "global village" feature attributed to the world; it can make reaching the target audience very difficult and complex. Here, the aim of cities is to make themselves visible with strategic marketing moves to be carried out through the target audience. Therefore, city branding is a process that covers all marketing activities that bring the city's unique identity to the fore and make them noticed. The branding of the city is to make the city visible outside the borders, to make it noticeable and to make it preferable. In this context, cities will be recognized not only by the target audience but also by the investors by branding. Brand studies that started in the 1960s; it is among the new topics that attract attention in the context of touristic destination branding (Güzel et al., 2018: 125). Each destination is essentially a brand with its own unique features. Destination branding is to reveal the features that make a destination unique and to make it unrivaled (Qu et al., 2011: 466). In other words, it has succeeded in increasing the impact of the unique features of the destination on tourists (Campelo et al., 2014: 155). Therefore, destinations that discover and develop the elements that create strong brands successfully realize their brand positioning moves and in terms of tourism, the brand city provides significant advantages to the country tourism in the international arena. However, for the country, the city brand can mean much more than the elements included in the brand content. For example, some cities; Paris can represent a number of feelings, expectations or associations such as love, Rio carnival and entertainment, Milan fashion, Barcelona culture and New York energy city. As a matter of fact, Anholt (2006) emphasized that the representations in question are directly connected to the history and fate of the cities and the countries in which they are located. In this way, rather than a single city, a single destination branding understanding, the countries; it has been stated that tourism has started to adopt the understanding of regional or urban promotion and branding (İlban, 2008: 122). Therefore, a successful branding by considering cities holistically with the countries in which they are located will help to provide a much greater advantage in the competitive environment (Kavaratzis, 2004). However, a brand is a promise of quality and trust given by the city or country (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). In this context, it can be thought that there is a mental contract between the brand and the consumer or between the city, the country and the visitor. Therefore, branding is arguably one of the most important marketing strategies (Lee et al., 2006: 816).

Destination and City Marketing

According to the American Marketing Association (2017) marketing; customers define them as activities that create value for society, such as consumers, communicate, present and require an exchange process. Destination marketing serves two main purposes. First; it is the creation of environments that will enable the touristic resources, products and services of the destination to be brought together with the visitors in an efficient and effective manner. Secondly, it is the realization of production, promotion and simultaneous planning activities that can affect the purchasing decisions of the target audience (Öter & Özdoğan, 2005: 134). Destinations and cities try to implement the theories and strategies within the marketing discipline in the marketing activities they develop during the branding process. In this context, the foundations of city marketing are based on the emergence of the concept of social marketing (Kotler & Levy, 1969). Fuggle (2016) emphasized that for the success of destination marketing, it is necessary to create an impressive visual brand to use the website and social media tools effectively, to highlight the experiences, and to create an advertisement and impressive message. As a matter of fact, Loda et al. (2009) stated that the clear information on the destination websites has an effect on the persuasiveness of the visit intention. Destinations and cities need a complex marketing strategy in which the service and product exist together and are tried to be marketed together (Kavaratzis, 2004). In other words, destinations and cities also carry out marketing activities in order to keep up with the competition conditions, just like in product and service marketing. The main purpose of destinations and cities is to gain competitive advantage and attract more tourists and investors. Therefore, while trying to respond to the demands and needs of all actors involved in marketing activities such as cities and destinations, local residents, local administrators and the private sector, they also try to create value by highlighting the attractiveness of the region (Gümüş, 2016; Özsöz, 2018). The concept of destination and city marketing refers to a process that covers planning and quite complex issues ranging from the organization of the city to education and employment (Gümüş, 2016). For this reason, it is necessary to determine common goals and create a common vision in destination and city marketing and to act together in order for marketing activities to achieve successful results (Dinnie, 2011; Kotler et al., 2014).

The Place and Importance of Social Media in Destination and City Branding and Marketing

In the past, one-sided communication providers in city promotion, marketing and branding activities; some traditional tools such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines and even postcards were used. Although related tools have an important function, they are considered to be both costly and difficult to provide feedback and limited communication channels (Zhou & Wang, 2014). Today, depending on the development of technologies, one-sided communication has left its place to two-sided interaction with the increasing popularity of social media. Social media is defined as online tools that facilitate social interaction, support the creation and sharing of information among users and make sharing interactive (Hansen et al., 2011). With social media, city branding and marketing can be realized with much more affordable budgets compared to traditional media. However, the fact that social media is an open and transparent, lively and instantly accessible platform can be more effective than traditional media in the marketing and branding process (Zhou & Wang, 2014; Ulucan & Demirkol, 2017). Social media affects not only the individual in daily life but also many different sectors, especially tourism (Leung et al., 2013). For example, the tourism sector, as in other sectors, popular applications; especially in marketing activities as one of the rapid communication tools (Özdemir, 2008:158-159). Social media applications can be used to obtain information about important changes and decisions in tourist perspective during travel, in all travel experience stages before and after travel (Minazzi, 2014; Amaro et al., 2016). The rapid increase in the number of social media users and the time spent on social media reveals the role and importance of social media management in reaching target markets easily, quickly and effectively.

Social media; it can provide information and experience with instant interaction through opportunities such as getting to know the destination, having information about its touristic attractions, transportation, accommodation, entertainment, eating and drinking and being informed about activities (Sarı & Kozak, 2005: 258). As a matter of fact, in Özdemir's (2007) study, regarding internet applications; expressed visual, audio and textual data as comprehensive and necessary information providers to the decision-making processes of tourists. In addition, the posts shared on social media platforms are archived, and the created content provides an area that can be easily accessed by other people when requested (Blackshaw, 2006). In this context, social media mediates the realization of many activities that take place in tourism regions. Sharing and interacting on social media platforms and receiving instant feedback also provide a sense of trust. Visitors plan private and safe routes and activities from previous experiences (Gümüş, 2016). For all these reasons, social media channels are actively used in branding strategies to interact with and attract consumers in national and international markets (Ulucan & Demirkol, 2017). On the other hand, the use of social media in destination and city branding can also contain some threats. Namely; social media areas open to everyone can appear as areas where negative experiences are also shared. These negative experiences affect the thoughts and thus can damage the branding process of the destination and the city in areas with high interaction (Zhou & Wang, 2014). However, conflicting information that may arise in the shares of stakeholders responsible for branding on the relevant platforms may damage the brand value of the city and cause loss of trust. Therefore, since there are many categories of information that users can access on social media platforms, social media significantly increases the awareness of a city in terms of positive and negative consumers without the limitation of time and place.

The Place and Importance of Instagram as a Component/Tool in Destination and City Branding and Marketing

Cities are directing their marketing efforts to these platforms in order to interact with consumers and gain competitive advantage against other cities, with the increasing diversity of social media applications and the increase in the number of users day by day. Cities are trying to increase their brand values through social media activities they carry out in order to attract the attention of tourists and investors in social media as a communication channel. Instagram is one of the intermediary platforms in question. Instagram, founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010 and acquired by Facebook in 2012. It is a high-value social media platform where photos and videos are shared on iOS, Android and Windows operating system devices (Tutgun, 2015: 55). It is seen that various studies on the use of instagram focus on other remarkable issues besides instagram being a social media platform. For example, McCune (2011) examined the motivations of users for using and sharing instagram. In this context, tourist profiles who intend to visit the touristic destination can be considered as the research subject of future studies. Hochman & Manovich (2013) dealt with the distribution of photos shared on instagram according to the socio-cultural differences of thirteen different cities. In this context, it can be thought that instagram is a serious data source with the potential to direct the marketing activities of cities. Silva et al. (2013) conducted a behavioral analysis on the photos shared via the instagram application and concluded that the shares made using the application are an indicator of the cultural behavior of the users and also reflect the class differences of the users. In addition, the instagram platform which has more than one billion users around the world, directly affects the information search, purchase and experience sharing processes of users (Terttunen, 2017: 13). In his study, Saatçioğlu (2017) examined the place and importance of social

media applications in city branding specifically for the Instagram account of Izmir Metropolitan Municipality. In the context of city branding, the study aimed to determine the level of interaction between the municipality and the local people and potential visitors through social media, through the posts made in 2016. @cityofizmir has examined the posts on the municipality's Instagram account. According to the findings obtained from the study; the "places to see" category was the category in which the most content was shared with photographs and geographical indications. According to the results of the study; the @cityofizmir project, run by the municipality, is successful as a social media brand communication application in city branding. Research shows that touristic destinations and tourism businesses also use the instagram application widely that tourists and touristic destinations share two-way instantaneous interaction under certain topics (hashtags), they can instantly access experiences and shares about destinations they can decide on a holiday with the information they access instantly show that they can make reservations (Lin & Huang, 2006: 1204; Terttunen, 2017: 15-16; Shuqair & Cragg, 2017: 1). Therefore, instagram is one of the social media platforms that draws attention as an important tool in destination and city branding and marketing.

METHOD

Purpose of the Research

Instagram accounts of the top 10 metropolitan cities with high brand value in Turkey are analyzed by internal analysis method in this research and the shares of this information on instagram accounts are analyzed. It is expected that the data obtained will be recommended to cities aiming to increase brand value.

Field Selection Process of the Research

In this research, according to the "Metropol 30" study, metropolitan brand strength was determined by rating between AAA+ (exceptionally) and D in Turkey, followed by the rights fee ratio, revenue, average cost of capital / discount ratio and brand valuation steps and brand values were determined. According to the law number 6360, 30 cities in Turkey have the status of metropolitan cities. 77% of the population of Turkey lives in metropolitan cities and 75% of Turkey's gross domestic product is obtained from metropolitan cities. According to the Brand Finance Turkey Metropol 30 report in Turkey, as of 2019, it is stated that the 10 provinces with the highest brand value among the 30 metropolitan cities in Turkey are Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Decaeli, Bursa, Antalya, Konya, Gaziantep, Adana and Mersin respectively (www.brandirectora.com).

Universe and Sample of the Research

According to the law number 6360, 30 cities in Turkey have the status of metropolitan cities (www.brandirectory.com). The cities of Turkey with the status of metropolitan cities constitute the universe of this research. The top 10 cities with the highest value in the brand value ranking among these provinces are the samples of this research.

Data Collection Process of the Research

Instagram Facebook, Instagram and Youtube evaluation form developed by Kılıçarslan and Albayrak (2020) was applied to the section prepared for Instagram while the instagram accounts of the cities were examined in the study. The criteria determined for Instagram consist of the number of followers, the number of followers, the number of posts, likes, comments, the average of likes and the average of comments. In the research, the official instagram accounts of the provinces were checked to obtain the data.

Analysis Data of the Research

The first 10 provinces determined according to the brand value ranking in the research were examined by the content analysis method. The data obtained are categorized.

RESULTS

According to the analysis conducted by the content analysis method, the first 10 instagram accounts with the highest brand value were examined. The accounts examined, starting from the day of the first sharing, all the shares have been examined.

Table 1: Numerical Information about the Official Intagram Accounts of the Provinces According to Brand Value

Ranking	Cities	Follower	Followed	Sharing	Like	Comment	Overage of Likes	Overage of Comment
1.	İstanbul	7.556	2	131	25.147	69	484,58	4,59
2.	Ankara	3.177	154	147	194	4	79,38	0,20
3.	İzmir	5.013	25	198	29.751	60	434,40	2,17
4.	Kocaeli	1.424	93	108	1.923	5	0,68	66
5.	Bursa	29,9 t.	43	247	16.016	111	825,14	4,31
6.	Antalya	5.455	25	205	13.307	47	365,18	2,33
7.	Konya	18,1 t.	43	288	157.144	112	2.170,40	4,53
8.	Gaziantep	3.269	26	174	24.249	48	258,22	1,28
9.	Adana	16,3 t.	4	224	26.485	90	951,28	5,86
10	Mersin	1.255	67	91	76	2	39,58	0,24

Table 1 also contains numerical information about the shares of instagram accounts. Follwers, Followed, likes, shares and comments of the accounts have been examined in detail. In addition, it was tried to reach an average value by taking the averages of the number of likes and comments of the accounts. When Instagram accounts were sorted by brand value, similar ranking was not observed in the number of likes, comments, or followers of the accounts.

Table 2: Instagram Sharing Content of Provinces According to Brand Value Ranking

Ranking	Cities	Nature	Historical and Cultural	Art	Gastronomic Values	Video	Tourist Attractions
1.	İstanbul	63	73	7	6	19	1
2.	Ankara	57	65	14	11	10	7
3.	İzmir	97	49	4	27	22	4
4.	Kocaeli	50	13	3	3	40	1
5.	Bursa	81	85	7	34	26	10
6.	Antalya	129	44	1	15	17	-
7.	Konya	86	95	5	50	31	6
8.	Gaziantep	20	75	17	50	12	6
9.	Adana	74	84	1	26	34	1
10.	Mersin	39	35	1	8	8	-

In table 2, the shares on the instagram accounts of the provinces were examined in terms of content. The themes that were extensively shared in the reviews were mainly shared in the order of nature and landscape, historical and cultural content, gastronomically specific foods and drinks, and introductory videos. In some of the shares made, it turned out that more than one feature decoupled together. Cities with more cultural and historical resources focused on sharing in this direction, while cities with fewer cultural and historical elements made more shares related to landscape and nature content or man-made elements. One of the remarkable results of the reviews is that when looking at the shares made on official and religious holidays or special occasions, there are shares on the instagram accounts of Bursa, Konya and Adana provinces. It has been observed that in the shares made, different subject content shares were made instead of the same type of shares consecutively. There are also provinces that provide space for sports content sharing. These cities are Konya, Bursa, Ankara and Izmir provinces respectively. The shares made about tourist attractions are man-made elements, such as shopping, which a tourist spends his time with when he arrives. The video shares made by the provinces on their instagram accounts are of an introductory nature and consist of destination-related elements. Konya and Gaziantep provinces have given more space to the local food and beverage sharing of the provinces.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

People, countries, destinations and businesses can share various information about themselves via instagram, which is widely used around the world. Instagram is an extremely useful tool as it allows people to meet new people, share information with people they know, search for places they do not know or wonder about, be aware of the features of places they plan to go, the businesses found there and the products and services they offer. It is understood from the relevant literature that the use of instagram is also common in the field of tourism, especially in destination branding and marketing (Lin & Huang, 2006; Mc Cunne, 2011; Hochman & Manovich, 2013; Silva et al. 2013; Saatçioğlu, 2017; Shuqair & Cragg, 2017; Terttunen, 2017; Marine-Roig & Huearts, 2020). In this study, similar results were obtained with the related literature. In general, tourists share in order to immortalize the moment they are in and to prove that they are in the relevant destination. Since the tourists do not have a purpose to promote and market the destination in general, the contents of the posts are the touristic beauties of the destination. Therefore, in this case it

can be more convincing for people who see or wonder about the relevant posts (Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020). In this context, T.C. Ministry of Culture and Tourism who is primarily responsible for Turkey's tourism promotion and branding, the Tourism Development Agency and tourism businesses in the destinations the following suggestions have been developed.

✓ The sharing of visuals that will attract the attention of tourists can be emphasized.

✓ Images of local people and tourists can be shared.

✓ In order to take into account the areas that remain in the background for destinations emphasis can be given to the sharing of relevant places.

✓ In order to spread the demand over 12 months rather than certain periods of the year, it can be planned to share appropriate time zones for different countries.

✓ Famous people or institutions in the field of travel can be invited to destinations and their support can be received at the promotion point.

✓ Images and videos that will provide destination branding can be created.

✓ The suggestions developed for tourists within the scope of the study are as follows.

✓ Considering that social media is a platform where people can reflect their styles and images, they can give more weight to posts about destinations.

✓ Support can be provided for image and marketing studies by sharing about destinations that are not shared much.

✓ Destinations can be considered as meeting places of various cultural activities and riches rather than just a holiday area.

✓ Turkey is an outstanding destination that draws attention with its diversity of tourism beauties. In this respect, tourists can share with a holistic approach.

✓ Tourists can use more words and hashtags in the description part of their posts to improve their image for both themselves and the Turkey destination.

As a result, the success of destination marketing and branding activities is closely related to the level of perception by target markets. Tourists give more space to the internet for information search processes in order to obtain information about destinations as in every subject. In this context, the analysis and follow-up of tourist behaviors and tastes is extremely important. In future research, the analysis of brand destinations at a more comprehensive and international level can be the subject of studies.

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