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A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF AIRLINE WEBSITES: AN EVALUATION OF THE AIRLINE COMPANIES THAT HAVE DIRECT FLIGHTS TO ISTANBUL ATATURK AIRPORT IN 2013

Abstract:

The demand of the air transportation is showing increase rapidly in Turkey. At the same time, İstanbul Airport is near the top point from the point of air traffic in Europe. Because of the rapid development of information technology since the 1990s, many people today intensively use this technology for research, socializing, shopping, and many other activities. This study attempts to evaluate airline company websites using the content analysis method. According to the conclusions of this study, some recommendations are made to improve the websites that were included in the study thereby evaluating the websites of the airlines that have flights to İstanbul Airport in 2013.

Keywords:

Airlines, websites, content analysis.

JEL Classification: R40, C40, L81

Introduction

Today, many people use the Internet for shopping, and both goods and services are purchased online. According to the results of the “Survey on ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Usage in Households” conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute (Turk Stat) in 2014, 23.4% of the online shoppers in Turkey between January and March 2014 purchased travel tickets and booking a hotel which is related to travel (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2015). In 2012, worldwide online travel sales are over 162 billion US dollars and %37 rate of total worldwide online travel sales is flight tickets as reported by Statistic Brain (2015).

Developed initially by The Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) in 1969 as a military network, the internet began to be used for general purposes towards the end of 1980s, and its use has spread extremely quickly since the beginning of the 1990s (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). As of March 2011, there are over 2 billion Internet users around the world. Nowadays, it is over 3 billion as reported by Internet World Stats (2014).

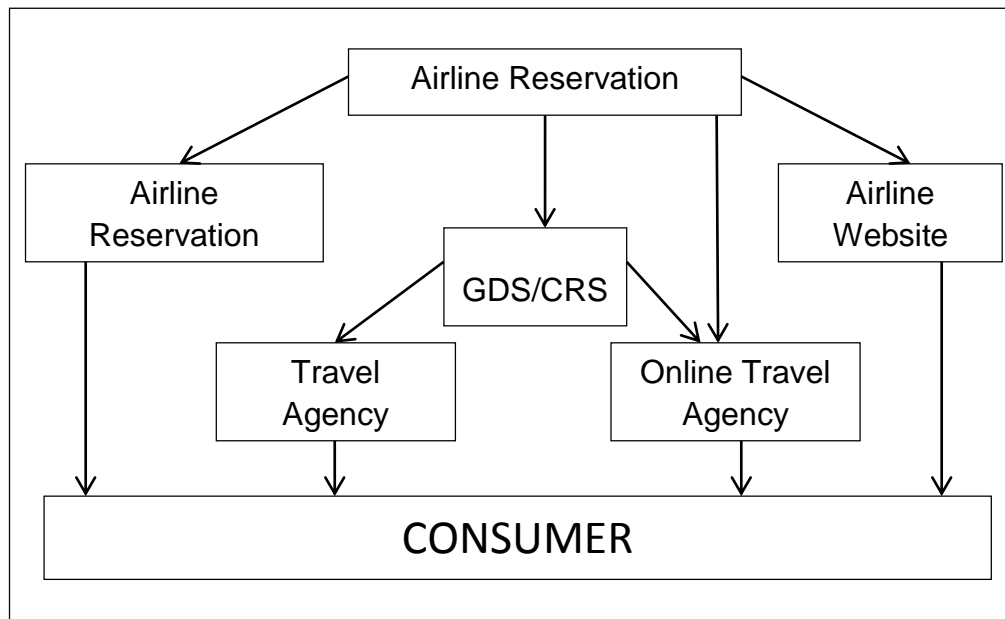
The rapid increase in worldwide internet use and e-commerce has created the need to evaluate many criteria of internet sites, such as their content, structure, usage, and visual appearance. Aside from this need for evaluation, concerns such as security and user privacy have also recently gained importance. Internet sites are being evaluated globally, regionally, and nationally based on various criteria. Awards covering both web and design topics, such as the “Golden Web Award” and the “Red Dot Design Award” are being given worldwide. In Turkey, the “Golden Spider” awards are given annually.

Many studies have evaluated websites in Turkey. However, to the best of our knowledge, content analysis has not previously been used to evaluate the websites of airline companies in the literature. This study first discusses the use of information technology for airline ticket sales and reservations; subsequently, a content analysis is performed on a sample of websites selected from these businesses.

The Use of Information Technology for Airline Ticket Sales And Reservations

Prior to the 1990s, the dominant model for airline reservation and ticket sales transactions consisted of airline reservation centers, ticket sales agencies, global distribution systems/computerized reservation systems (GDS/CRS), and telephone reservation centers. Today, this picture is different.

Figure 1 shows the distribution channels of airline companies today.

Figure 1: Distribution Channels of Airline Companies

Source: *The Global Airl. Industry. UK: Wiley*

In the mid-1990s, airlines grew increasingly interested in the opportunities offered by the Internet, and during this period, almost all airlines developed their own web pages for promotional purposes. Airline websites have become mediums for interactive communication, displaying flight times, flight frequencies, and flight fares for customers; allowing online reservations; and providing information about the services offered. During this period, progressive movements, such as the one led by Delta Airlines and followed by other US airlines, reduced agency commissions and were considered to be revolutionary. Because of these movements, there has been a significant decrease in the number of airline tickets sold by agencies, and airline websites and online travel agencies have become more popular (Rigas, 2006). During the 1990s, Lufthansa developed its own website, the first in Europe, and allowed consumers to make reservations for other airlines through this site.

The Internet benefits businesses in many ways. The global connectivity, ease of use, low cost, and multimedia opportunities of the Internet can be used for interactive applications and to develop goods and services. By using the Internet, businesses can reduce the costs of communications and transactions, improve coordination and collaboration, and accelerate information sharing. The benefits of the Internet to the airlines include the following:

- Global integration and access,
- Reduction in the business costs of airlines,
- Reflection of instant changes directly to the customer,
- Ability to provide an integrated travel organization through a single channel.

Companies that attempt to use the Internet to market in countries (Hawk, 2004). The Internet offers airlines the ability to provide services to their customers more quickly, easily, and cheaply; it also offers the opportunity to build customer loyalty, the ability to reach a global market, access to a new marketing channel and a new form of interaction (Belobaba, Odoni and Barnhart, 2009; Rigas, 2006; Shaw 2007).

Objective, Method, Limitations and Sample

The aim of this study is to evaluate the web sites of the airlines that arrange the direct flights for the Istanbul Ataturk Airport which the major airport of Europe, depending on the state and content. This research evaluates the websites of the airlines that organized direct flights to Istanbul Ataturk Airport in 2013 using content analysis. The theoretical foundations of content analysis were developed by Bernard Berelson, who offered the following description: "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications" (Berelson, 1952).

This research is composed of five steps. The first step is to determine the companies to be included in the research. For this step, the website of Tepe Akfen (TAV) Airports, which operates the Istanbul Atatürk Airport terminal was examined and found the airlines that have flights to the Istanbul Atatürk Airport. The application revealed that 73 airlines organized direct flights in 2013 through Istanbul Ataturk Airport (Table 1). For the second step, the domain addresses for all 73 airlines were identified (Table 1). In the third step, the coding criteria for the content analysis were defined, and in the fourth step, the coding process was implemented by visiting the identified websites. The criteria within each category was evaluated and marked as a yes (1) or a no (0). The data obtained were evaluated in the final step.

The study was carried out according to the scanning model. This goal of this model is to describe a current situation as it is, without changing its existing status (Karasal, 1994). The Microsoft Office 2007 Excel data analysis package was used for data analysis. In this analysis, the frequency and percentage values were used. The frequency distribution and percentage value analysis are considered as descriptive statistics (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006).

Table 1: Direct Flights to Atatürk Airport during 2013 and the Websites

AIRLINES	WEBSITES
ADRIA AIRWAYS	http://www.adria.si/
AEGEAN AIRLINES	http://www.aegeanair.com
AEROFLOT RUSSIAN AIRLINES	http://www.aeroflot.ru/cms/en/
AEROSVIT AIRLINES	http://aerosvit.ua/us/
AFRIQIYAH AIRWAYS	http://www.afriqiyah.aero
AIR ALGERIE	http://www.airalgerie.dz
AIR ASTANA	http://airastana.com/global/en-us/
AIR BALTIC	http://www.airbaltic.com/en/index
AIR BISHKEK	http://www.airbishkek.kg
AIR BOSNA LINES)	http://www.bhairlines.ba/site_v3/bh/index.php
AIR FRANCE	http://www.airfrance.com/indexCom_en.html

AIR MALTA	http://www.airmalta.com
AIR MOLDOVA	http://www.airmoldova.md/home-ro/
AIR TRANSAT	http://www.airtransat.com
AIRLINES 400 JSC(REDWINGS AIRLINES)	http://www.flyredwings.com (It is out of research due to language)
ALITALIA	http://www.alitalia.com
ARIANA AFGHAN AIRLINES	http://www.flyariana.com
ARM AVIA	http://www.armavia.com.tr
ASIANA AIRLINES	http://flyasiana.com/gateway.html
ATA AIRLINES (IRAN)	http://www.ataair.ir (It is out of research due to language)
ATLAS JET INTERNATIONAL AIRLINES	http://www.atlasglb.com/en
AUSTRIAN AIRLINES	http://www.austrian.com
AZERBAIJAN AIRLINES	http://www.azal.az
BELAVIA	http://belavia.by
BRITISH AIRWAYS	http://www.britishairways.com/travel/home/public/en_tr
BURAQ AIR	http://www.buraqhavayollari.com
CHINA SOUTHERN AIRLINES	http://www.csair.com/cn/index.shtml
CROATIA AIRLINES	http://www.croatiaairlines.com
DELTA AIRLINES	http://www.delta.com
DEUTSCHE LUFTHANSA AIRLINES	http://www.lufthansa.com/online/portal/lh/tr/homepage
DONAVIA	http://www.aeroflot-don.ru/?language=en
EGYPT AIR	http://www.egyptair.com/English/Pages/splashpage.aspx
EMIRATES	http://www.emirates.com/english/index.aspx
ETIHAD AIRWAYS	http://flights.etihad.com/en-tr/
FREE BIRD AIRLINES	http://www.freebirdairlines.com/tr/
GULF AIR COMPANY	http://www.gulfair.com/English/Pages/default.aspx
IBERIA	http://www.iberia.com
IRAN AIR	http://www.iranair.com/Portal/Home/
IRAN ASEMAN AIRLINES	http://www.iaa.ir/fa/ (It is out of research due to language)
IRAQI AIRWAYS	http://www.iraqairways.com.iq
JUGOSLOVENSKI AERO TRANSPORT	http://www.airserbia.com/en
KISH AIR	http://www.kishairlines.ir
KLM ROYAL DUTCH AIRLINES	http://www.klm.com
KOREAN AIR	https://www.koreanair.com/global/en.html
KUBAN AIRLINES	http://www.kuban.aero (It is out of research due to language)
KUWAIT AIRWAYS CORPORATION	https://www.kuwaitairways.com
LIBYAN ARAB AIRLINES	http://en.libyanairlines.aero/ (No website)
LOT-POLSKIE LINIE LOTNICZE	http://www.lot.com/tr/en/
MAHAN AIR	http://www.mahan.aero
MALAYSIA AIRLINES	http://www.malaysiaairlines.com/my/en.html
MALEV – HUNGARIAN AIRLINES	http://www.malev.hu (Website is closed)
MIDDLE EAST AIRLINES - AIRLIBAN	https://www.me.a.com.lb/english/home
OLYMPIC AIR S.A	https://www.olympicair.com
ONUR AIR	http://www.onurair.com/tr/
QATAR AIRWAYS	http://www.qatarairways.com/tr/tr/homepage.page?iid=ALL29109910
ROSSIYA AIRLINES	http://www.rossiya-airlines.com/en/
ROYAL AIR MAROC	http://www.royalairmaroc.com/tr-tr
ROYAL JORDANIAN AIRLINES	http://www.rj.com
SAUDI ARABIAN AIRLINES	http://www.saudiairlines.com/portal/saudiairlines/Welcome
SCAT AIR COMPANY	http://www.sc.a.kz/en/

SINGAPORE AIRLINES LIMITED	http://www.singaporeair.com/SAA-flow.form
SOMON AIR	http://www.somonair.com
SWISS INTERNATIONAL AIR	http://www.swiss.com/us/en
TABAN AIRLINES	http://taban.aero/en/
TAJIKISTAN AIR	http://www.tajikair.tj/ru/index.php
TAROM ROMANIAN AIRLINES	http://www.tarom.ro
TATARSTAN AIR	http://www.tatarstan.aero/en (Website does not operate)
TUNIS AIR	http://www.tunisair.com
TURKMENISTAN AIRLINES	http://turkmenairlines.com (Website does not operate)
TURKISH AIRLINES	http://www.turkishairlines.com
UNITED AIRLINES	https://www.united.com/web/en-US/default.aspx?root=1
UZBEKISTAN AIRWAYS	https://www.uzairways.com
ZAGROS AIRLINES	http://www.zagrosairways.com

Source: <http://www.ataturkairport.com/en-EN/preflight/Pages/Airlines.aspx>

Criteria for The Content Analysis Of Airline Websites

Many studies in the literature have evaluated Internet sources using the content analysis method. Several academic studies provide information about how to develop a website (e.g., design, flow, and content), both generally and in the field of e-commerce. Several studies have stressed the importance of various performance criteria in determining customer retention and loyalty and ultimately the success of firms (Ramanathan, 2010).

In a number of studies evaluating the features of websites, similar criteria were identified. These studies are described below in chronological order. According to Hamill and Gregory, for a website to be considered successful, there must be information richness, regular updating, clear information paths, interactivity, and responsiveness to user feedback (Hamill and Gregory, 1997). According to Scanlon et al., content, searching, links, navigation, graphics, and reliability are website design factors (Bayram, Yayla, 2009). Bell and Tang analyzed the features of websites from the perspective of consumers and named ten features; accessibility to the site, content, and structure of the site were among the most important features (Bell and Tang, 1998). Jeong and Lambert considered information veracity, integrality, relativity, legibility, ease of use and navigation as criteria for assessing the quality of websites (Jeong, Lambert, 2001). For the evaluation of e-commerce websites, the criteria identified by Liu and Arnett included information and service quality, system use, playfulness, and system design quality (Liu, Arnett, 2000). Kaynama and Black determined that content and purpose, navigation, accessibility, design and presentation, compliance with customer expectations, personalization, and responsiveness content, accessibility, navigation, design and presentation, responsiveness and feedback, background information, and personalization / customization are criteria for evaluating the service quality of websites (Kaynama, Black, 2000). Cox and Dale identified eight factors for the evaluation of websites, including accessibility, communication, reliability, creditability, appearance, availability, functionality, and integrity (Cox, Dale, 2002). In their evaluation of online shopping sites, Yoo and Donthu identified ease of use, design, speed, and security as quality criteria (Yoo, Donyhu, 2001). In his study, Perdue adopted the criteria of

accessibility, navigation, visual appeal, and information content (Perdue, 2001). In their study that evaluated e-services, Van Riel, Liljander, and Jurriens examined ease of use, design, security, assurance, and playfulness as criteria (Riel, Liljander, Jurriens, 2001). The criteria of access, security, and information were used by Janda, Trocchia, and Gwinner (Janda, Trocchia, Gwinner, 2002). Li, Tan, and Xie identified tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, quality of information, and communication as criteria in their measurement of web-based service quality (Li, Tan, Xie, 2002). The criteria determined by Loiacono, Watson, and Goodhue included ease of understanding, information quality, interactivity, trust, response time, visual appeal, innovativeness, and flow (Loiacono, Watson, Goodhue, 2002). In their study, Madu and Madu examined the criteria of performance, structure, aesthetics, reliability, storage capability, usability, security and system integrity, responsiveness, product/service differentiation, trust, web store policies, reputation, and assurance (Madu, Madu, 2002). Efficiency, reliability, privacy/confidentiality, and customer services were the criteria identified by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra for website service quality (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Malhotra, 2002). In their study, Muylle, Moenaert, and Despontin determined appearance, information, communication, and multiple language options to be their criteria (Muylle, Moenaert, Despontin, 2004). Zafiropoulos and Vrana used facilities information, guest contact information, reservation and price information, surrounding area information, website management, and the company profile as criteria in their study (Zafiropoulos, Vrana, 2006). The checklist developed by Yeung and Law included dimensions of language, layout and graphics, information architecture, user interface, and navigation (Yeung, Law, 2006). In their criteria used for e-travel service quality, Ho and Lee found website functionality, responsiveness, customer relationships, information quality, and usability to be important (Ho, Lee, 2007). In the study of Lim, Widdows, and Hooker, product information quality, customer service quality, and e-business quality were the topics identified for the content analysis (Lim, Widdows, Hooker, 2009). The ease of use, design, navigation, content, customer services, institutional information, and security were identified as the important criteria in the study conducted by Bayram and Yayla in 2009 (Bayram, Yayla, 2009).

As a result of all these studies, 27 statements within five topics were included in the evaluation form for this study. These five topics will be addressed in their respective order in the subsequent sections. With the explanation for each topic, the reasons for including these statements in the study will be explained based on the information obtained from literature review.

Results and Comments

In the study, there are 8 airlines that their websites have some problems to access and evaluate the websites as, language problems or closed websites. Although they have these problems, they were included to the study to protect the homogeneous results. Table 2 presents the data related to the S1.1, S1.2, S1.3, and S1.4 statements for the airlines that organized direct flights to Istanbul Ataturk Airport in 2013 under the topic of "Purpose of Developing a Website".

Table 2: Purpose of Developing a Website

Purpose of Developing a Website	YES (N)	NO (N)	YES (%)	NO (%)
S1.1 To advertise the company	64	9	87.7	12.3
S1.2 To make reservations	56	17	76.7	23.3
S1.3 To provide schedule information	61	12	83.6	16.4
S1.4 To sell tickets	57	16	78.1	21.9

87.7% of the airlines included in the study provided a corporate advertise in their website. Although it is possible to make reservations through 76.7% of these websites, only 78.1% of them offer ticket sales. In 83.6% of the included websites, information is provided about the schedules of past and future flights. These results indicated that even today, when e-commerce is widely used, there are still airlines that do not allow reservations and ticket sales to be made through their websites.

Table 3 shows the data regarding the S2.1, S2.2, S2.3, S2.4, S2.5, S2.6, S2.7, S2.8, S2.9, S2.10 and S2.11 statements, listed under the topic of "Compliance with Basic Design Principles and Ease of Use," which is the second section on the evaluation form.

Table 3: Compliance with Basic Design Principles and Ease of Use

Compliance with Basic Design Principles and Ease of Use	YES (N)	NO (N)	YES (%)	NO (%)
S2.1 Page titles and text that are easy to understand	59	14	80.8	19.2
S2.2 Site map	36	37	49.3	50.7
S2.3 Pages and graphics that do not load slowly	55	18	75.34	24.66
S2.4 Frequently asked questions section	43	30	58.9	41.1
S2.5 Internal search capability	43	30	58.9	41.1
S2.6 Design simplicity	51	22	69.86	30.14
S2.7 Functional web connections and applications	60	13	82.19	17.81
S2.8 An easy-to-remember site name	57	16	78.08	21.92
S2.9 Site design in multiple languages	43	30	58.9	41.1
S2.10 Easy access within the website through search engines	63	10	86.3	13.7
S2.11 Functional links when clicked	62	11	84.93	15.07

Whereas 80.8% of the websites in the study have easy-to-understand page titles and text, it is difficult to understand the page titles and text in the other 19.2% of the websites. For the websites included in the study, 49.3% include site maps; yet, a site map could not be found in 50.7% of them. As for pages and graphics that do not load slowly, an essential criterion for the airline, over 24.66% of the websites were found to contain pages and graphics that loaded slowly. The proportion of websites that do not provide a FAQs section is 41.1%. An internal search engine is not available in 41.1% of the websites included in the study. The website designs of 30.14% of the examined

websites are not simple. Regarding the functional web connections and applications, 82.19% of the websites have functional web connections and applications. 78.08% of them have easy-to-remember names. Among the airlines that are competing in a global market, 41.1% of them still do not offer translations into multiple languages on their websites. Of the websites included in the study, 86.3% can be accessed easily through search engines, and 84.93% of them have functional links when clicked.

Table 4 shows the data regarding the S3.1, S3.2 and S3.3 statements listed under the topic of “Information about Reservations and Ticket Sales”, which is the third topic of the evaluation form.

Table 4: Information about Reservations and Ticket Sales

Information about Reservations and Ticket Sales	YES (N)	NO (N)	YES (%)	NO (%)
S3.1 Security of reservation information and for payments in ticket sales	55	18	75.34	24.66
S3.2 Flexibility in start and end dates of reservation	48	25	65.75	34.25
S3.3 Examples of the content of the ticket to be sold	36	37	49.32	50.68

While the ability to make secure payments is provided by 75.34% of the airline websites included in the study, this ability was not found in 24.66% of them. In the study, the proportion of websites without flexibility in reservation dates is 34.25%. Sample tickets were offered on 49.32% of the websites. Flexibility in reservations is necessary to travelers for both business and tourism purposes. Tourists may be sensitive to ticket prices and aircraft occupancy and therefore willing to look at alternative dates, whereas business travelers may have changing business schedules and need to change their reservations.

In Table 5, the data regarding the S4.1, S4.2, S4.3, S4.4, S4.5 and S4.6 statements listed under the topic of “Methods for Reservation and Ticket Sales” are shown as the fourth topic of the evaluation form.

Table 5: Methods for Reservation and Ticket Sales

Methods for Reservations and Ticket Sales	YES (N)	NO (N)	YES (%)	NO (%)
S4.1 Detailed information about reservations and tickets	39	34	53.42	46.58
S4.2 Allowing global reservations and ticket sales	31	42	42.47	57.53
S4.3 Concurrent help about reservations and ticket sales	28	45	38.36	61.64
S4.4 Simultaneous reservations and ticket sales	53	20	72.6	27.4
S4.5 Online news catalog for the airline and research sources	57	16	78.08	21.92
S4.6 Detailed information about other connections and prices	31	42	42.47	57.53

Among the websites included in the study, 53.42% provide detailed information about reservations and tickets, 42.47% allows global reservations and ticket sales, 38.36% gives the service about concurrent help during reservations and ticket sales, 72.6%

allows simultaneous reservations and ticket sales, 21.92% of the websites still do not have an online news catalog and research sources and 42.47% provide information about other connections and prices.

The last topic of the evaluation form is “Customer Service”. Data regarding the S5.1, S5.2, and S5.3 statements under this topic are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Customer Service

Customer Service	YES (N)	NO (N)	YES (%)	NO (%)
S5.1 Simultaneous consulting before and after company selection	30	43	41.1	58.9
S5.2 Call center telephone number provided in the website	50	23	68.49	31.51
S5.3 Help screen provided in the website	10	63	13.7	86.3

41.1% of the websites in the study offer consulting services before or after company selection. Although 68.49% of the websites provide the telephone number for a call center, 86.3% of them do not include a help screen. In the current environment, it is possible for more airline companies to offer consulting services. This type of consulting could help eliminate customer concerns regarding a high-cost reservation. Although a help screen is a service that is widely used by many online shopping websites, over half of the airlines included in the study do not provide one.

Conclusion

Despite the global increase in the use of the Internet today, it is thought provoking that some of the airlines included in this study still do not provide online reservations and ticket sales or do not comply with basic design principles. In addition, the managers of the examined airlines which fail to offer global reservation services and ticket sales need to address this issue. It is widely known that there are several instant communication systems available over the Internet that is free. Despite the availability of this free software, companies still disregard this issue. Consumers must question this lapse.

In the future, this study and other similar research will further contribute to the airline industry and assist airline managers to create competitive websites.

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