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REPUTATION MANAGEMENT WITH REGARD TO DESTINATION IN ONLINE MEDIA

Abstract:

Today social media, brought masses together, formed a wide cultural and social application area on the world, even created the new legal definitions, contained with deep information, document, reviews and sharing, it became the first information source from the individual application. In particularly, due to the wide area which referenced before the trip and tourist travel vacation and shared their experiences and reviews, it motivated their attitude intention and behaviour, so it has become the most important decision making tool. This situation which is online version of WOM, continued to develop and increases the number of users. In addition to the new dimension, due to the complex organization of tourism destinations, they are creating the need to manage their organizational reputation. This study aims to explore and describe the steps of online reputation management for tourism destination. The reptrak model (developed by the reputation institute, used to measure corporate reputation) will try to adapt for destinations.

Keywords:

Online Media, Destination, Reputation Management

The Concept of Destination

This concept, which is defined as the place where one wants to reach in the dictionary of the Turkish Language Society, is interpreted and used by many fields and disciplines. Etymologically a Latin word, this concept entered our language from English, and has other meanings as well in dictionaries such as the place to go, place of arrival, direction, goal and aim. When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that there are different dimensions and approaches. Tourism and tourism planning are primary fields that use and define the concept of destination.

According to this, destination is defined as “a place that is known by significant numbers of visitors, has its ideas adopted as if it were a living being and possesses distinctive qualities. They are places that are independent and attract the attention of tourists”. In this vein, it is argued that destination is characterized by infrastructural facilities contributing to economy as well as natural and cultural attractions (Brian, 1998, p. 958).

Another definition describes destination in terms of not political borders but rather as a geographical area that is formed through clustering of tourism resources. This cluster involves activities composed of tourism resources and attractions, infrastructures, equipment, service providers, other supporting sectors and administrative organisms. These activities are integrated to provide customers with the experience that customers expect from their chosen destination to visit and coordinated structures

(Retold by: (Pike, 2008, p. 24)).

Youell (1998), on the other hand, defines destination as “an umbrella that offers facilities, social opportunities and services to all kinds of people who take a trip”. It is argued that this umbrella can be provided only if different sectors in the tourism industry cooperate (Youell, 1998). The World Tourism Organization, on the other hand, defines destination as a physical space where a tourist stays at least for one night and as tourism products such as support services, attractions and tourism resources during one night of travel (www.wto.org.tr, 2014).

Defined as “a geographical place or region where a kind of touristic society is located in ordinary society” (Tuna & Yanardağ, 2012, p. 136) sociologically, the concept of destination is defined as “a place that is real or in a form perceived in minds” psychologically (Tekeli, 2001, p. 57).

When the definitions are taken into consideration, it can be defined generally as a country, city, region or regions that possess a certain image in people’s minds, a branded national area, significant tourism attractions, centers of attraction, and various activities like festivals and carnivals, and whose management, marketing and promotion are generally implemented by an institution or an organization (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006, p. 639).

In addition to the definitions above, Morgan states in his book entitled “Destination Brands” that the most meaningful form of the term destination for marketing professionals and academics will be implemented via marketing activities. He adds that for a place to be a destination, it is necessary that communication be established through stories and images developed by tourism materials for promotion (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2011, p. 4).

The following terms have also been used in the literature related to the term destination; precinct, recreation and business centers, environmental tourism region, tourism

destination region, tourist precinct, integrated coastline facilities, tourism shopping village, tourism neighborhood, (Pike, 2008) tourism area, tourism center, tourism district, and tourism station (Ünüsan & Sezgin, 2005, p. 163).

A typical destination has a changeable nature in which commercial or non-commercial organizations operate in a successive manner. Generally, it is concerned with issues such as tourist information, services and promotional activities as well as infrastructure, construction and regulatory public dimension. In this sense, it is in a different position from the private sector, which offers such facilities to visitors as accommodation, eating-drinking services, attractions and entertainment (Youell, 1998).

Reputation Management in Destinations

A look at the relevant literature and the studies conducted so far reveal that concepts such as management, marketing, image, reputation and identity are in close relationship with the concept of destination and its dimensions. As a matter of fact, according to Morgan (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2011, p 5), the confusion about these concepts and various connections they have indicate that they have not been properly understood. Buhalis (1999) defines tourism destination as a mixture of nature and socio-cultural landscape and points out that destinations have several geopolitical levels. Therefore, he supports the idea of investigating it in terms of various aspects ranging from policies implemented there to geographical position in order to better understand the concept. In this way, destination planning aims to attain its goals such as long-term welfare of the people living in the region, ensuring the contentment of visitors by satisfying them, maximizing the profits of local entrepreneurs and striking a sustainable balance between socio-cultural and environmental costs and economic benefits (Buhalis, 1999). Formation of an effective marketing combination is extremely important to attain these goals and reach the intended target.

Branding of destination, on the other hand, involves marketing activities conducted for the purpose of creating an image in order to ensure and reinforce remembering pleasurable memories of experiences in a destination. These elements, which are designed as a name, symbol, logo, word sign or a graphic design, both define the destination and at the same time are prominent components of the value creation process, which ensures its distinctiveness. This process takes place when the brand enters into a direct relationship with its products or services or through the added value caused by the brand image which potential visitors attribute to that location. This set or cluster of images, which help promote the destination, is an image that may affect consumers' decisions to visit/consume the destination at the expense of other alternatives (www.ama.org, 2014; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998, p. 17).

A brand (Marchiori, 2012, p. 21; Hannington, 2004, p. 11; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2011);

- Is a presentation of the identity of the location (place),
- Builds positive internal and external images,
- Leads to being loved (preferred), satisfaction with the brand and brand loyalty, Increases recognition of the name of the place and enhances the perception of quality associated with it.
- Is a thing for which people are ready to pay more regardless of the material benefits of the product or the service.
- A powerful brand provides added-value, brings about a powerful brand identity, motivates consumer behaviors, affects perceptions about their

reality, opens doors, arouses feelings of trust and respect and increases expectations related to the brand.

Due to efforts aimed at investigating, building, developing, evaluating and sustaining the image of the destination, many studies have highlighted destination management organizations in recent years. In fact, almost the entire destination image has begun to be managed by destination management organizations. For example, brochures, guidebooks, postcards, advertising and promotional videos produced by DMOs and recently destination web pages and other online material serve this purpose (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013, p. 590). In a wider perspective, DMOs (Middleton, Fyall, Morgan, & Ranchhod, 2009, p. 345);

- Implement the research and development work such as determining the promotional priorities aimed at target markets and sectors and entering into dialogue with industrial partners,
- Affect their private sector partners to fulfill their priorities and act in harmony with them,
- Coordinate elements of tourism products outside of the private sector (such as tourist information, destination webpage etc.),
- Provide investment and marketing support for political objectives connected with new or developing products,
- Establish marketing facilities and develop cooperation campaigns especially for thousands of small scale companies,
- Provide counseling and leadership based on their own sources of information including intranet for businesses that operate in cooperation,
- And as a result of all of these, it fulfils its most important task, defining the image and brand of the destination.

However, the relationship between image and technology, which is getting stronger and larger, has caused destination management organizations to use technological systems as a means of creating modern, effective and dynamic image (Pender & Sharpley, 2005, p. 254). Briefly, definition, promotion and marketing of destination appear as an interrelated and changeable process. Destination management organizations have played a leading role in this process and are continuing to do so. Yet, the effect of technology and especially social media on consumer behaviors and the new state of modern consumption indicate that this situation leads to consequences that go beyond promotion, marketing and branding.

Studies indicate that destination image is in a complementary and effective position in decision making processes and as a result of travel behaviors. In fact, it has been observed that effective image components as perceived by travelers have significantly changed (Peter & Olson, 2010). This means that the process of perception in consumers may exhibit variation depending on certain factors as in the process of formation of an image. Indeed, Peter and Olsen state that online sources, especially social media, are more influential in that they lead to emotional reactions. At this point, it will be appropriate to mention the difference between image and reputation. Defined and interpreted by many different academics and experts, image can be defined briefly as an outcome of an interaction of belief, ideas, emotions and impressions about an object (Riel, 1995, p. 73). In general, the definitions in the relevant literature state that both abstract and concrete characteristics of organizations, businesses or organizations may constitute the image. Besides those who argue that it is formed before observation and experience, there are also those who claim that it is formed after observation and

experience. It is right at this point that image differs from reputation because evaluations rather than perceptions play a role in reputation.

Reputation is defined in the dictionary of The Turkish Language Society as “getting respect, the state of being reliable, respectability, prestige, the state of being reliable in paying debts and credit” (www.tdk.gov.tr, 2014). Credibility and trust are two concepts that form the roots of reputation. While credibility refers to the power of affecting people that occur as a result of information or skills possessed or supposed to be possessed, trust refers to belief/confidence based on a person’s honesty. This situation may arise when someone says to another “no matter what you say, I have full credit/confidence and trust in you”. In conclusion, reputation is a collective output of building trust and gaining credibility (Budd, 1994).

On the other hand, it can be defined in different ways institutionally and organizationally like “*an overall attraction to all components of a company; a meta-belief and evaluation that arises especially in absence of experience; extensive judgments about a brand or an organization; the whole of actions that have become symbols of trust between society and institutions; a product that presents behaviors, communication and expectations at a certain time in a mixture, and the total value obtained from all the components*” (Acar, 2012, p. 13; Kadıbeşegil, 2013, p. 34; Formbrun & Riel, 1997; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2011). A closer look at the definitions explains to us the relationship between the two concepts in that image is a mental representation of the ideas of an individual about a company whereas reputation involves a group of stakeholders’ sharing and announcing these ideas about the company. Mandelli and Cantoni (Mandelli & Cantoni, 2010, p. 64) say that reputation needs verbal expression of image. However, an experience told on an individual level is not enough to be reputation and argue that an idea or an opinion acquired needs to be shared by a group of stakeholders (partners). Especially, sharing of ideas, opinions, recommendations and experiences that are formed in social media can be considered important in terms of building reputation.

Silverman argues that the need to share, socialize and counsel are needs that arise due to the very nature of human beings. Indeed, this kind of need ranks 3rd among Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, falling within the scope of “attachment to a place or an individual-belonging and the need for loving and being loved” and he maintains that as people make friends, love and are loved, pride themselves on their existence and as a result of them are supported and share all these, they will rise to higher levels of the hierarchy (Şimşek, 1998, p. 14). This situation makes it more meaningful for individuals to choose, before they decide to buy a new product or service, to consult first their friends, acquaintances, in short people around them, get their ideas and in this way reduce the risk of making a mistake (Silverman, 2007). This meaningful situation brings to mind the concept of word of mouth communication, which is a dimension of interpersonal communication in the literature of communication.

Word of mouth communication has been known for years to be an important impact factor on what people know, feel and do as it affects awareness, perception, expectations, attitudes and behaviors. The power of its impact arises from the fact that its sources of information seem to be more reliable and honest sources. A message coming from people who are not trying to sell something satisfy consumers more than advertisements or those who sell the product do (Oyman & Odabaşı, 2005, p. 28). On the other hand, in recent years, consumers have become easily influenced by the views of those who experience the products and services (Schindler & Bickart, 2005). However, the internet has become an important source for potential travelers at the

searching stage of the travel planning process (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006). They make their final decision by evaluating the information collected from several sources in addition to their past experiences. Indeed, it has begun to be used from the inception of the idea of travel to the end of it-at different times like before, during and after the travel (Choi, Lehto, & O'Leary, 2007). Especially, with the advent of WEB 2.0 and UGC (User Generated Content), this state of affairs has improved significantly and now appears in different forms and dimensions (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009, p. 9). This information, by which consumers make their plans before a journey, holiday or a sightseeing trip and which they consult at the decision-making stage, reveals the importance of the internet at large and online or social media in particular, which are the most free environments where things are shared, recommendations are made and experiences are shared and at the same time the most extensive interpretation and questioning can be performed.

This information about destinations is provided by businesses established at the destination, intermediary organizations trying to channel the demand to that destination, destination administrators, official institutions of tourism and non-governmental organizations. In addition, information about a specific destination can be obtained from people or groups who visited it before and/or who are knowledgeable about it. These people may be the closest people around the tourists like members of a club to which they are also members, but they can also be writers of newspapers, magazines or novels, presenters of TV programs, actors admired as well as people who are within their reference group (Çakıcı & Aksu, 2007). It seems impossible for destination marketing organizations to control and manage this information, which may come from several different sources, protect and implement the marketing strategy in terms of managing bodies. Especially, qualities such as participation, user creativity and versatility, which render social media different from conventional media and which at the same time blur the line between media and audience, may reveal to what extent the variability and distinction of the information is striking.

To sum up, places, locations or destinations are in competition with one another to look attractive to tourists, new residents and businesses and in this competition the importance of their images, brands and reputations comes into prominence. A strong destination reputation should be created through a strong branding because a destination brand is strong so long as it ensures its uniqueness, persuasiveness, memorability and satisfactoriness (Morgan). Activities which organizations of destination marketing are trying to implement are intended to provide this power and make it sustainable. However, Morgan contends, taking into consideration the situation provided and brought about by online media, that reputation of a destination is created by DMOs and hence it cannot control the image and story of the destination. He attributes this to the fact that the real owner of the destination is not the DMO. Therefore, managers of tourism and destinations need to understand both the virtual and physical world dimensions and effects of online marketing campaigns. In addition, with the advent of the digital revolution, DMOs have come under great pressure with regard to costs and transportation and had to be more suitable for change and development.

When seen from this perspective, Morgan bases destination reputation on three fundamental principles (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2011);

- 1- Communication; reputation "reputation is something that can be told about and produced through storytelling.
- 2- Evaluation; "reputation is to assess something critically."
- 3- Distinction-difference; "reputation makes you different".

Related to this, he created a six-item model by which he placed reputation around a virtuous circle in terms of destinations. According to this model, the following six dimensions determine the creativity of a place.



Figure 1: The Virtuous Circle of Creative Destination Reputation

- 1- Tone involves the general ambience of a destination and the overall attitude of its people. In other words, it involves the feel and appearance of that place; it is formed by a place's character and physical fabric and conveyed physically and virtually by the tone of expression of that place.
- 2- Tradition involves a destination's traditions, stories, heritage and culture, which are conveyed effectively and sympathetically both online and offline.
- 3- Tolerance; creative destinations are open to new ideas and new people and tolerant of differences and embracing.
- 4- Talent; creative destinations attract especially the talented human capital belonging to the creative class and welcome them.
- 5- Technology; creative destinations embrace new technologies and welcome techno-entrepreneurship.
- 6- Testimonies (reference); the reputation of a destination comes from the references of the ambassadors, residents, investors and visitors of that place.

Especially, the fact that digital channels caused radical changes in consumer behaviors has made consumers' relationship with the brand obvious and they have taken more active roles in the formation of the relationship between the brand and its ultimate reputation. In other words, managers at least need to be aware of what people read and write on the internet, what they are affected by and all kinds of results and outcomes regarding the destination. The fact that people cannot restrict their own self-judgments limits their organizational skills to manage the reputation that destinations have. In addition, one needs to compete with rivals in the information world as well as real rivals in the online world (Solove, 2007, p. 39). Such realities of the virtual world urge all kinds of organizations to develop separate strategies, different points of view and innovation regarding online media.

In this sense, Electronic Destination Model, which arose when the RepTrak Model developed by Elena Marchiori was adapted to tourism destinations, was developed in order to measure the reputation of destinations. This model was formed when the 7 core dimensions included in the RepTrak model was adapted to the literature of tourism and tourism destinations. The dimensions of the model are listed as follows (Marchiori, 2012) ;

Online tourism destination reputation model (7 main dimensions and their sub-groups);

- 1- Products and services
 - High quality
 - A heartwarming environment
 - Adequate infrastructure
 - A secure environment
 - Product/service worth the money spent on it
- 2- Innovation
 - Constantly develop products/services
 - Creative tourism products/services
- 3- Environment/working atmosphere
 - Having environmental responsibility
 - Supportive of ecological innovations
 - Sustainable tourism destination
- 4- Governance
 - Cooperation between organizations
 - Acting ethically
 - Fair in performing tasks
- 5- Social Responsibility
 - Urging society to behave responsibly
 - Unveiling local cultures and traditions
 - Having hospitable local people
- 6- Leadership
 - Accuracy of information about the tourism destination
 - Accuracy of the image belonging to the tourism destination
 - Adequate use of infrastructure
- 7- Performance
 - Superior in competition
 - Meeting the expectations as a tourism destination
 - High satisfaction with the tourism experience

A Destination Reputation Research in Online Media

The Research Model

In the present study, the electronically adapted version E-TDR (Electronic Tourism Destination Reputation) of the RepTrak scale, which was developed by the reputation institute, was used to determine and describe the online reputation steps for tourism destinations. In order to determine and describe the steps, a research document was prepared where a total of 7 questions, of which 2 were closed-ended and 5 were open-ended, were asked, remaining faithful to the draft in the model. In order to include expert views in the study, academics and tourism professionals working on the topic were asked to respond to the research questions using the interview technique. As a result of the semi-structured interview, the responses of the participants were analyzed

qualitatively, their ideas and views were examined in detail and finally the following conclusions were drawn.

The first question of the study consists of ranking the 7 dimensions, which are stated to be core dimensions in the model, in order of importance. As a result of the responses given by the experts, the ranking of the reputation drivers in order of importance turned out to be as follows;

Table 1: Reputation Driving Dimensions (order of importance)

Rank	Dimensions
1	Products and services
2	Innovation
3	Performance
4	Leadership
5	Environment and working atmosphere
6	Governance
7	Social Responsibility

As a result of the responses given by the experts, the ranking given above emerged. The fact that the dimensions of “product-service, innovation, performance and leadership” as the top 4 dimensions can be an indication showing that the main drivers will be clustered around these 4 dimensions and the statements belonging to these dimensions. Moreover, the appearance of the same situation in previous studies seems to be an indication of the consistency of the experts’ views with previous studies’ findings.

The second question of the study asked the respondents to evaluate the statements driving the online reputation of the destinations, again remaining faithful to the model. In order to determine which of the statements given were more valuable, likert scale was used so as to determine the statements that stood out. After an evaluation of the responses given by the experts and the means of the outstanding statements were taken, the following table emerged.

Table 2: Worthiness in terms of driving (determining) destination reputation

Sub-statements belonging to the 7 main dimensions	Mean	S.d.
Creative tourism product service	4,6	0,54

Meeting the expectations as a tourism destination	4,6	0,54
Acting ethically	4,4	0,89
Deriving high level of satisfaction from the tourism experience	4,4	0,89
Constantly developing products and services	4,2	0,83
Supportive of ecological innovations	4,2	0,83
Ensuring sustainability	4,2	0,83
Accurate image for the tourism destination	4,2	1,3
Cooperating with other organizations	4	1
Having adequate infrastructure	4	0,7
A secure environment	4	1,22
High quality product and service	3,8	1,3
Product service worth the money spent on it	3,8	1,3
Having environmental responsibility	3,8	0,83
Adequate use of infrastructure	3,8	1,09
Superior in competition	3,8	1,3
Accurate information about the tourism destination	3,6	1,34
A pleasant environment	3,4	0,89
Urging society to act responsibly	3,2	1,09
Unveiling local cultures and traditions	3,2	1,09
Hospitable local people	2,8	1,09
Fair in performing tasks	2,8	0,83

When the participants' statements **driving** the reputation of the destination are evaluated, it is seen that the statements with the highest value were "meeting the expectations" and "creative tourism product/service". Therefore, the most important of the statements, which are thought to constitute online reputation, were these two statements according to the experts. These statements were followed by "deriving high level of satisfaction" and acting ethically". The statements with an average above 4 were "accurate image", "sustainability" "open to ecological innovation" "constantly developing products and services", "having adequate infrastructure" "a secure environment" "cooperation between organizations".

The statements which were found to have a lower value compared with the average turned out to be "High quality product and service" "product and service worth the money spent on" "having environmental responsibility" "adequate use of infrastructure" "superior in competition", "accurate information about the destination", "a pleasant environment" "Urging society to act responsibly", " promoting local culture and traditions".

The two statements with the lowest value compared with the average, on the other hand, were found to be "fair in performing tasks" and "hospitable local people".

The other questions that the experts were asked within the scope of the study were open-ended questions. The results of the interview, which was conducted in the form of mutual evaluations, will be explained below.

First of all, especially due to the fact that destinations are composed of stakeholders that are complex, varied, busy and different from one another, doing research brings about some challenges and obligations. When viewed from this perspective, one of the emerging results of the study and the common view of the experts is that a study aimed at destinations should be very comprehensive and have an interdisciplinary literature.

The responses which the experts gave to another question in which they were asked about their views concerning destination online reputation revealed as a common view of the experts that in general the sector and trade became gradually dependent on digital and online field and that in this respect online media were among the important elements that constituted reputation. They stated that social media, smart phones and mobile applications came into prominence and indeed websites like tripadvisor and booking.com, which directly target the sector, and websites targeting the social domain like facebook and instagram became extremely important in terms of both information and the decision to buy.

In particular, the experts pointed out "trust" and "interaction" as the major components that constituted reputation and stated that in addition to them, concepts such as reliability, accurate information, continuity, and the importance of local culture and traditions are important in the context of dimensions of online reputation. It was also emphasized by the experts that product and service should stand out as an important step in online reputation.

Moreover, it was observed by the experts in the sector that there were comments claiming that the price factor did not, as was expected, express the image of the destination much and that could not have a significant effect on reputation, either.

The general conclusions of the study conducted can be summarized as in above. Although the fact that study was a qualitative one allowed its results to be interpreted in

very different dimensions, the steps forming reputation and the statements were attempted to be determined as a result of expert views, as was mentioned in the purpose of the study. The reason for the small size of the sample is that it is intended to be a preliminary study for larger studies. In addition, this study will be used as data for a study that will be conducted on tourists within the scope of a doctoral dissertation about the topic, which is in the infancy stage.

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