



USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN DESTINATION PROMOTION

SOSYAL MEDYANIN DESTİNASYON TANITIMINDA KULLANIMI

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Abstract

With the increasing importance of communication in human life, the importance of this field has increased. On the other hand, communication is equally important for destinations with high competition. The destination needs effective communication resources to maintain its current existence and development. In this context, the aim of this research is to reveal the effect of the use of communication tools that are frequently used today, such as social media, on the promotion of the destination. Within the scope of the research, the social media accounts of the top organizations that play a key role in the promotion of the destination were examined by content analysis, one of the qualitative analysis methods. The research findings were limited to the province of Şanlıurfa and were obtained from the social media accounts of the organizations that are effective in the promotion of the destination. In the light of these data, it is seen that although the promotion of the destination is tried to be conducted well in Instagram and Twitter accounts, other social media accounts are insufficient in this regard. In addition to developing a different approach to the related field, this research provides original information since such a study related to the destination has not been conducted before.

Keywords: Destination, Social Media, Communication, Şanlıurfa

Öz

İletişimin insan hayatındaki yerinin giderek yoğunlaşmasıyla birlikte bu alana yönelik önemin arttığı görülmektedir. Bir diğer yandan yüksek rekabet durumunda olan destinasyonlar için de iletişim aynı düzeyde önem taşımaktadır. Destinasyon, mevcut varlığını sürdürebilmek ve gelişim göstermek için etkili iletişim kaynaklarına ihtiyaç duymaktadır. Bu bağlamda bu araştırmanın amacı, sosyal medya gibi günümüzde sıklıkla kullanılan iletişim araçlarının kullanımının destinasyonun tanıtımındaki etkisini ortaya koymaktır. Araştırma kapsamında destinasyon tanıtımında kilit rol oynayan üst kuruluşların sosyal medya hesapları nitel analiz yöntemlerinden içerik analizi ile incelenmiştir. Araştırma bulguları, Şanlıurfa ili özelinde sınırlandırılmış olup, destinasyonun tanıtımında etkili olan kuruluşların sosyal medya hesaplarından elde edilmiştir. Bu veriler ışığında, Instagram ve Twitter hesaplarında destinasyona ait tanıtımın iyi bir şekilde yapılmaya çalışıldığı görüldüğü de diğer sosyal medya hesaplarının bu konuda geri planda kaldığı anlaşılmaktadır. Araştırma, ilgili alana farklı bir yaklaşım geliştirmenin yanı sıra destinasyona yönelik böyle bir çalışmanın daha önceden yapılmamış olması nedeniyle özgün bilgiler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Destinasyon, Sosyal Medya, İletişim, Şanlıurfa

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1. Introduction

In line with technological developments, digital media tools have been reaching more people in recent years. In particular, the number of mobile service users has increased in parallel, drawing attention to the technological change process. Mobile services offer opportunities to fulfill the communication applications, banking transactions and other requests that people need (Uğur & Türkmen, 2014: 568). In this context, one of the most frequently used applications is social media communication tools such as Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and etc. Social media communication applications are becoming more and more common both in terms of communication and for commercial purposes. Tourism activities are at the forefront of the areas where these communication resources are used. Because photos, videos and information shared on social media arouse curiosity and interest among tourists. Destinations need effective promotional efforts to stand out more than their competitors. The use of all mass media, as well as written and verbal media, is extremely important for destinations. In particular, communication resources are emphasized in order to ensure that the opportunities offered by the destination are met by the tourists and arouse mutual interest. In cases where the values of the destination are not announced and explained with promotion, it is not possible to talk about branding, promotion and marketing. In addition, the use of social media communication tools offers serious opportunities to destinations in terms of making the promotion in the fastest way and at low cost. In this context, destinations want to be competitive in the face of the increasing number of tourists in the world by making the best use of fast and cost-effective social media opportunities. Destinations such as Paris and Barcelona present successful examples of how social media applications can contribute to city branding and promotion. They transfer their existing cultural heritage resources and physical opportunities through this platform. In Türkiye, there are regions that promote their destinations well, especially Istanbul, Izmir and Antalya. The situation is slightly different in Şanlıurfa. Because the province of Şanlıurfa, which hosts many historical and cultural artifacts due to its location in the Mesopotamia region, the level of promotion has aroused curiosity. As a matter of fact, this research tries to reveal the effect of social media communication tools on the destination promotion of Şanlıurfa province.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media as a Communication

Since the first human, communication has been a part of life and has developed continuously (Akgöz et al., 2021: 44). With the invention of writing and the invention of paper, it gains a different dimension and brings its evolutionary process to the present day. After the 21st century, it has become an indispensable tool for people by reaching large masses thanks to its technological infrastructure. Because, by nature, people who have to communicate can quickly adapt to every communication channel. This trend, which started with the letter, Radio and Television, started to spread all over the world with the emergence of the internet. As a matter of fact, according to the 2020 report; the number of internet users on a global scale has reached 4.388 billion people worldwide (Marangoz & Kırılı Özen, 2021: 58). This situation shows the point reached by the concepts of technology and communication.

Social media tools, which are one of the forms of communication and put into service to increase the level of socialization, initially aimed to communicate with close friends, relatives and people in the external environment, but over time, they turned into a giant platform where commercial activities and the agenda are followed (Jones et al. 2015: 614).

Social media platforms at various levels, from Web 1.0 to Web 3.0, were put into use during the Internet-based development process (Hiremath & Kenchakkanavar, 2016: 705). These virtual platforms allow individuals to share their personalization features through private accounts. In addition, it is one of the most frequently used communication tools to obtain information, socialize and communicate. Thanks to social media communication tools, unlike traditional media, users can become passive consumers and interact and contribute to related fields as content producers (Yıldırım & İpek, 2020: 72). Again, unlike traditional media, individuals who can communicate with each other have achieved the transition process from one-way communication to two-way communication thanks to social media (Akyol et al., 2015: 75).

Based on online social media tools, users can continue existing communication or reveal information about completely different possibilities (Andrić & De Alwis, 2016: 122). In this respect, they use all kinds of social media communication tools in line with their goals and they want to reach these tools they need. In order to meet this need of people, many IT-based organizations are developing various social media tools. The most frequently used social media applications worldwide are summarized in figure 1 (Conversation Prism, 2021).



Figure 1: Social Media Tools

We are Social organization, which publishes statistics on internet and digitalization, publishes social media usage rates nationally and regionally across the world (Kesici, 2019: 317). Considering the level of social media usage in Turkey in 2021; it is seen that approximately 80% of the population uses the internet and close to 60 million users interact on active social media accounts. 95% of users use social media applications such as Youtube, 89.5% Instagram, 79% Facebook and 72.5% Twitter as digital communication and information tools. However, although other social media tools are used at various levels, the impact rate is not as high as these four applications (We are Social Report, 2021).

YouTube

YouTube is a virtual video sharing site where information and ideas communicate with other people. It is a social media tool used for many purposes, especially for purposes such as interacting and having fun (Arklan & Kartal, 2018: 934). YouTube has the most popular 20%, with most professionally produced commercial content. It covers 97% of video views and allows about 1.5 billion users to share videos online per month (Budzinski et al., 2021: 116). It is stated that Youtube is used by tourists in their destination decision-making processes and they see it as an important source of information. Tourism boards with a Youtube account frequently use this social media tool as a promotional tool (Sugar, 2017: 2).

Instagram

Instagram is one of the fastest growing online social media platforms after 2010 and has more than 1.2 billion users. It is a platform where shares are exhibited both audio and video. Due to its visual appeal and global trends, Instagram is visited more than other similar social media platforms. It allows sharing photos, pictures and videos from online mobile devices and technological tools. In addition, content distribution on Instagram can be cross posted simultaneously in conjunction with other applications such as Facebook and Twitter. One of the most important features of Instagram is that it allows potential users or followers to reach accounts quickly. In this way, it is easy to reach the target audience. On the other hand, content in the form of photos or videos with story shares can be viewed for 24 hours. Commercial accounts using these features; informs consumers about sales and giveaways. It is aimed to reach large masses by using these opportunities of Instagram effectively in destination promotions (Mahmoud et al., 2021: 528).

Facebook

One of the world's largest social networking sites, Facebook has an average of 3.9 million visitors each month and approximately 1.3 billion Facebook users (Borg et al., 2021: 5). Facebook stands out in social media applications because it has features that facilitate interaction such as quick friend list, wall information, poke, status, events, photos, video, messages, chat, groups and likes (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012: 243). Accounts promoting the destination also use these features of Facebook to interact with consumers in a social and commercial way. In particular, it announces the photos, videos and information of the values of the destination to the relevant people through this platform.

Twitter

Twitter is a social media communication tool where users publish messages known as "tweets" (restricted to 280 characters) and interact with each other (Mislove et al., 2011: 554). Twitter is one of the most popular social media platforms with an average of 330 million monthly active users (Gao et al., 2011: 2021). The main reasons why Twitter is used by large masses are summarized in the following items: (Cambridge, 2021);

- Creating an account that reflects personal characteristics.
- To identify and follow politicians, writers, academics or well-known people.
- To share on related topics in order to increase recognition by the target audience.
- Since tweets are limited to 280 characters, making summarized and original posts about the field.
- Contributing to the sharing of the agenda.

- Supporting the most liked posts for effective communication with followers and followers.

2.2. Destination Promotion and Social Media

Promotional elements, which is one of the promotional activities, are at the forefront of the methods and tools used in the branding and marketing of the destination. In other words, promotional activities are needed for the destination to be accepted and demanded. This is accepted as the most general principle in terms of the sustainability of the destination and the preservation of its current existence (Dirik, 2012: 21).

Destinations are required to create promotion policies within a specific plan and program. In this context, the following titles have been developed to create the international promotion activities of destinations in line with a common purpose (Geçikli, 2001:32);

- To protect the national interests of the destination and to improve the service quality by keeping its prestige at the highest level.
- To realize two-way communication with people from other cultures by mutually providing information and culture exchange.
- To mutually develop feelings of empathy and respect in a climate of understanding and tolerance.
- Providing correct and impartial communication channels for everyone
- To teach and adopt the cultural values, belief, artistic perspective and local language of the destination to the visitors.
- To exhibit exemplary behavior with promotional activities in international media and broadcasting organs.
- To consider the public opinion, political, economic, social and cultural sensitivities of the countries from which the visitors come.
- To fully fulfill the environmental and foreign policies by planning the promotional objectives well.

Social media are online platforms where people share their personal information, interests and tendencies through mobile or technological tools. Social media gives messages to consumers with various online shopping portals, promotions and promotional images (Veer et al., 2019: 225). Especially within the scope of promotional activities, destinations want to activate their curiosity and purchasing motivations by aiming to position their strengths well in the minds of consumers. In terms of touristic destinations, social media are digital services that enable mutual information exchange by bringing together destinations and touristic consumers on this virtual platform (Ünal & Bayar, 2020). Social media applications such as facebook, instagram, twitter and youtube are observed as the most frequently used services in the promotion of destinations. It is stated that people who decide to travel are motivated to experience many attractions such as the cultural values, traditions and unique dishes of the touristic destinations they encounter in the social media and internet environment. Especially within the scope of social media, posts, comments and evaluations of destinations give positive and negative directions to travel motivation (Başarangil, 2019: 841).

Until the 21st century, all information about destinations was provided by travel agencies. After this date, information about the destination began to be easily obtained in social media and the internet. Thanks to social media, consumers have a direct idea about the destination, they have started to plan their travel plans more accurately in line with their wishes and have minimized the risks (Eşitti & Işık, 2015: 18).

Destinations have recently shown great interest in social media tools that will help their branding goals due to increasing digitalization and changing technological consumption trends. In this context, promotional films highlight advertisements and social media posts by well-known people. Destinations such as London, Paris, Dubai and Turkey, which have corporate social media accounts in international tourism promotions, use this platform seriously (Poursaeed et al., 2021: 474). As the level of interaction of tourists with social media increases, touristic destinations carry their promotions to the social media platform at the same level (Kumar et al., 2021).

Destinations have to develop continuously because they have a complex structure as well as being an activity focused on community welfare. In this respect, public and private organizations are trying to promote the urban destination in order to make it a competitive touristic city. Social media tools are used effectively to integrate promotion into the strategic development and planning of the destination (Paskaleva-Shapira, 2007: 113). Although there is no definitive proof that the social media tools used for promotion will be successful in terms of destinations and encourage consumers completely, it is stated that their positive effects are high (Getz & Fairley, 2004: 138).

Most of the studies on destination-oriented social media are based on consumers' perspective (Munar, 2012), purchasing effects (Mack et al., 2008), social media usage levels (Huang et al., 2010), and marketers' strategies (Xiang & Gretzel, 2008). 2010) is done on the axis. However, with this research, it is revealed to what extent the organizations that play a key role in destination management can promote their destinations with social media tools. However, it contributes to the related field by developing a different approach.

3. Methodology

The main purpose of this research is to reveal the extent to which social media is used in the promotion of destinations in Şanlıurfa. For this purpose, social media accounts such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter of 5 organizations that are active in the promotion of the destination are discussed. Şanlıurfa has a very special place in terms of destination branding due to its geographical location and hosting many historical touristic elements. However, there is no study in the literature on how social media accounts, which are one of the promotional efforts and digital marketing tools, affect promotion. With this study, it is thought that a great lack of information in the related field will be eliminated in the literature. While the universe of the research consists of all social media accounts that promote the destination, the sample consists of the social media accounts of the five largest organizations with the most interaction. Within the scope of the research, the relevant social media accounts were examined by content analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, and the data obtained between January 2021 and December 2021 were evaluated.

4. Findings

When the social media movements of the organizations that share the historical and touristic values of the destination and coded by the researchers are examined, the following information is reached;

When the Facebook accounts of the organizations for the promotion of the destination (Table 1) are examined; Organization 'Establishment1' has the most followers and posts. 'Establishment4' has the most picture sharing and likes. 'Establishment5' appears as the organization with the lowest percentages. It is possible to say that this is due to the fact that this organization has a new social media account.

Table 1. Facebook Posts to Promote the Destination

	<i>Share</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Picture</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Like</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Followers</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Establishment1</i>	1993	33,85%	293	12,72%	1128	14%	44000	79%
<i>Establishment2</i>	1544	26,23%	223	9,68%	689	9%	5783	10%
<i>Establishment3</i>	967	16,43%	653	28,35%	679	9%	715	1%
<i>Establishment4</i>	1334	22,66%	1090	47,33%	5101	66%	5305	9%
<i>Establishment5</i>	49	0,83%	44	1,91%	185	2%	210	1%
<i>Total</i>	5887	100,00%	2303	100,00%	7782	100%	56013	100%

When the YouTube accounts of the organizations for the promotion of the destination (Table 2) are examined 'Establishment5' does not have even YouTube account. Although other organizations have YouTube accounts, it is understood that they have a very low level of viewing and video sharing. Again, it is seen that the number of likes and comments is very low. Insufficient information about the destination in YouTube, which is among the social media where the world's most videos are shared, is one of the most striking findings.

Table 2. YouTube Shares to Promote Destination

	<i>Members</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Video Share</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Like</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Establishment1</i>	3905	82,21%	52	39,10%	158	50%	102	63%
<i>Establishment2</i>	696	14,65%	24	18,05%	48	15%	16	10%
<i>Establishment3</i>	88	1,85%	34	25,56%	96	30%	36	22%
<i>Establishment4</i>	61	1,28%	23	17,29%	17	5%	9	6%
<i>Total</i>	4750	100,00%	133	100,00%	319	100%	163	100%

Looking at the posts on Twitter about the destination (Table 3); It is seen that organizations whose main task is culture and tourism make introductory posts intensively. It is understood that touristic promotions remain in the background by frequently sharing current developments and different information with other organizations on Twitter. In addition, it is seen that the interaction is mostly done through likes and comments are avoided in the destination promotion posts made on twitter.

Table 3. Twitter Shares to Promote the Destination

	<i>Followers</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Share</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Like</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Comment</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Establishment1</i>	64300	60,94%	113	13,75%	785	12%	45	7%
<i>Establishment2</i>	34000	32,22%	72	8,76%	399	6%	21	3%
<i>Establishment3</i>	1424	1,35%	288	35,04%	2641	40%	156	23%
<i>Establishment4</i>	2446	2,32%	145	17,64%	909	14%	203	30%
<i>Establishment5</i>	3350	3,17%	204	24,82%	1845	28%	248	37%
<i>Total</i>	105520	100,00%	822	100,00%	6579	100%	673	100%

When the Instagram accounts of the organizations for the promotion of the destination (Table 4) are examined; While 'Establishment1' has the highest number of followers, it shares a significant amount in the promotion of the destination. In addition, 'Establishment3', 'Establishment4' and 'Establishment5' also share introductory posts about the destination on Instagram. However, 'Establishment2' destination introductory information is almost non-existent.

Table 4. Number of Instagram Followers to Promote the Destination

	<i>Followers</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Establishment1</i>	44200	62,64%
<i>Establishment2</i>	5083	7,20%
<i>Establishment3</i>	6233	8,83%
<i>Establishment4</i>	2149	3,05%
<i>Establishment5</i>	12900	18,28%
<i>Total</i>	70565	100,00%

The hashtag functions as a management tool on the subject, helping users to classify photos and express their feelings. For example, a destination runs a widespread hashtag effort to highlight its touristic values, using hashtags such as #bali or #ubud. Again, via Instagram, it has become a tool that plays an important role in the destination decision-making process of tourists. The following features stand out regarding hashtags on Instagram; There are examples such as following, commenting, liking, updating functions, users sharing their feelings, sharing their thoughts, following the awareness and popularity of individuals or organizations (Zhang Ye et al., Ye, 2018). In this context, the prominent values of Şanlıurfa province with hashtag tags are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Use of “Hashtag” to Advertise the Destination

# “Hashtag” Using		
	N	%
<i>#Gobeklitepe</i>	202818	13,25%
<i>#Harran</i>	280611	18,34%
<i>#Halfeti</i>	428935	28,03%
<i>#Balikligol</i>	348403	22,77%
<i>#urfamüze</i>	1049	0,07%
<i>#haleplibahce</i>	3236	0,21%
<i>#urfakalesi</i>	19369	1,27%
<i>#gumrukhan</i>	9357	0,61%
<i>#ulucami</i>	137501	8,99%
<i>#rejikilisesi</i>	230	0,02%
<i>#İsot</i>	83580	5,46%
<i>#Urfafistiği</i>	3002	0,20%
<i>#borani</i>	12123	0,79%
Total	1530214	100,00%

Looking at Table 5, it is understood that the most prominent touristic value of Şanlıurfa with the hashtag tag on Instagram is 'Halfeti'. In addition, it is seen that the elements of 'Balikligol' and 'Harran' are frequently labeled and made the subject of destination promotion. On the other hand, it is seen that the labels 'rejikilisesi' and 'Urfafışık' are used at the lowest level.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

It is stated that after the evolution of Web 1.0 and 2.0, there have been differences in the decision-making process of consumers. Social media, which is one of the main reasons for this, shows that user requests come to the fore by reducing the authority of travel agencies and intermediaries. In terms of tourism destinations, traditional marketers and institutions no longer have ultimate control over the image of destinations or products. Tourists, who are social media users, have taken an active role in the decision process by starting to do information, cooperation, communication, interaction and transactions easily (Hays et al., 2013: 212). In this context, the organizations that direct the destination accelerate their promotional efforts by using social media tools effectively.

It has been determined that Şanlıurfa, which has many diversities such as culture, gastronomy and alternative tourism types, cannot reach the desired level in destination

promotion. Because, apart from certain organizations, it is seen that social media accounts that will promote the relevant destination are not actively used. However, apart from the leading social media tools such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, it is observed that social media applications are almost never used and these tools cannot be benefited from.

It is seen that the promotional activities about the destination made through social media mostly take place on Instagram, Facebook and. Introductory shares on YouTube remained at a very insufficient level. In addition, it is understood that the shares are far from the digital knowledge of social media experts. While it is seen that the shares are concentrated in Göbeklitepe and Balıklıgöl, it has been observed that there is not much detail about Urfa culture, food and traditions. However, Şanlıurfa, which has very rich heritage resources and touristic values, should be better promoted and positioned as a destination. Hoppen et al. (2014) stated in their study that destinations with cultural and touristic opportunities have serious opportunities in terms of marketing. In this context, while the advantage of the contribution of the promotion to the destination is revealed, it is stated that it is supported in a sustainable way by social media tools (Marc Lim et al. 2021: 138).

Interactions with social media tools draw attention to commercial enterprises, local products and unique values as well as destination promotions. In addition, it provides important service to the image efforts carried out for the destination to achieve a positive position. Although there are similar situations in Şanlıurfa, more use of social media tools is needed to arouse curiosity and create attraction. However, the lack of cooperation among organizations in Şanlıurfa, the sharing of individual efforts, the lack of planning in line with common strategic goals, and the constant repetition of a few prominent sources instead of all touristic elements are some of the obstacles to destination promotion.

In the light of the findings obtained from the research, it is understood that while Instagram stands out visually in promoting the destination, it is understood that Twitter provides better information about the destination. Shu and Scott (2014) support the research findings by stating that social media mediates the promotional efforts for the destination in terms of visual and informational aspects. However, it is understood that the promotional videos shared on YouTube are very insufficient and the necessary sharing about the destination is not made.

Since this study is limited to social media tools in the promotion of destinations, it is recommended to conduct research that examines the effects of other promotional tools. On the other hand, it is revealed that the social media accounts of the relevant organizations should be carried out by professional people. In addition, it is thought that a common promotion strategy should be established by better planning of stakeholder cooperation.

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