

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The effect of government support on global branding strategies: Evidence from Turkey

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Abstract

This study investigates how government support affects branding strategies in Turkey. As the methodology, interviews were used focus group interviews to elicit the managers' thoughts. Drawing upon a focus group interview containing one Turkish carpet company that is in the TURQUALITY program from 2019 to 2022, the effect of government support on local brands to become global brands' ability has been investigated. The results show that senior management support is needed to prepare the company's plan, and the importance of increasing the use of digital sales as well as traditional channels should be included among the targets. Another important conclusion suggested by our results is that government incentives would suffice to drive internationalization and sales success. Beyond that, the most significant contributions to companies' marketing and brand performances by government support are increasing the international sales compound annual growth rate and shifting the company from a production-focused to a marketing-focused company.

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Öz

Sonuçlar, şirket planının hazırlanmasında üst yönetim desteğine ihtiyaç duyulduğunu ve geleneksel kanalların yanı sıra dijital satış kullanımının artırılmasının öneminin hedefler arasında yer alması gerektiğini göstermektedir. Sonuçlarımızın öne sürdüğü bir diğer önemli sonuç, devlet teşviklerinin uluslararasılaşma ve satış başarısı için yeterli olacaktır. Bunun ötesinde, devlet desteklerinin şirketlerin pazarlama ve marka performanslarına en önemli katkıları, uluslararası satış bileşik yıllık büyüme hızının artması ve şirketin üretim odaklı bir şirketten pazarlama odaklı bir şirkete geçmesidir. Bu çalışma, devlet desteğinin Türkiye'de markalaşma stratejilerini nasıl etkilediğini araştırmaktadır. Metodoloji olarak, yöneticilerin düşüncelerini ortaya çıkarmak için görüşmeler odak grup görüşmeleri kullanıldı. 2019-2022 yılları arasında TURQUALITY programında yer alan bir Türk halı firması ile yapılan odak grup görüşmesinden yola çıkılarak, devlet desteklerinin yerel markaların dünya markası olma becerileri üzerindeki etkisi araştırılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Küresel markalar, devlet desteği, marka stratejileri

Introduction

Brand management has become a central phenomenon discussed not only in marketing but also in economics and other social disciplines (Ashworth & Kavartzis, 2009; Kucharska et al., 2018; Ökten et al., 2019). A product, person, institution, or even country leaves a mark, through branding, in the minds of those who perceive it (Chakrawal & Goyal, 2016). Branding activities, which affect the perception of the target audience, are of great importance for companies and contribute to the country's economy. In 2022, the total value of the world's 100 most valuable brands increased by more than 22% and reached 8.7 trillion dollars. This figure was around \$5 trillion just two years ago (Statista, 2022). Brands can greatly influence countries' gross domestic product (GDP) and economic growth. The reputation of a country on a global scale is closely linked to the brands that the country owns. A country's brand matters whether it is an advanced or developing economy and creates competitive advantages. (Fetscherin, 2010). The nature of the economy is bound strongly to create "value", based on mainly intangible assets. Intangible assets increase a company's future value and could be more valuable than tangible assets. In developed economies such as the United States and European countries, investment in intangible assets is higher than in tangible assets (Brand Finance GIFT Report, 2022), and the increase in the share of intangibles was 2.8% in France and 1.9% in the United Kingdom (McKinsey, 2022).

Turkish Airlines has been named Turkey's most valuable brand for 2022, with a value of \$1.604 billion in 2022. However, the brand value of Apple ranked first among the top 500 brands in the United States, was \$947.1 billion in 2022 (brandirectory.com, 2022; Statista, 2022). This illustrates the effect of branding on countries' macroeconomic stability and competitiveness. This illustrates the effect of branding on countries' macroeconomic stability and competitiveness. For this reason, the TURQUALITY project was laid out publicly for the first time in Turkey in 2004 to sustain the Turkish economy's growth. The program was designed as a brand-building platform to support companies in corporate,

financial, and operational terms, considering the changes in global markets and the demands of program stakeholders. (Turquality.com, 2022). In the literature, there are not enough studies about the effect of this support on the private sector and brands. For this reason, the current study aims to determine the opinions of company officials regarding the contributions of the TURQUALITY program to brands. The critical factors for success for Turkish brands competing in international markets and contributing to the economic growth of the country with the help of the TURQUALITY program, the contributions of the program in terms of a particular carpet brand, and the factors required for the development of the program were made the sub-objectives of the current research. In this context, the research questions were as follows:

- RQ1. What are the views of company officials implementing the TURQUALITY program about the reasons they participate in the program and what they expect from the program?
- RQ2. What are their views about the contributions of the TURQUALITY program to the company?
- RQ3. What are their views about the development projects they have planned for the TURQUALITY program?
- RQ4. What are their views about the responsibilities of senior management and employees in the implementation of the TURQUALITY program and about the methods they follow to maintain balance?
- RQ5. What are their views about the compatibility of the TURQUALITY program with the company's objectives?
- RQ6. What are their views about the effects of the TURQUALITY program on marketing and sales performance?
- RQ7. What are their views about the design of a new brand program that they can create as an alternative to the TURQUALITY program?

Based on a focus group discussion conducted with the guidance of the above seven questions, the current study provides the views of a company implementing the TURQUALITY program in the carpet industry, its suggestions, its preparations

before the program's implementation, the effect of the program on the company's brand strategy, and the program's compatibility with the company's goals. This article is organized as follows. First, details about the TURQUALITY program and the features of the carpet industry in Gaziantep, the brand concept, and the brand strategy are given with a general framework to outline the context of the study. Then, the study method is explained, the findings of the study are provided, and the results are discussed.

Literature review

This study seeks to examine the relationships between government support and brand while focusing on the TURQUALITY program and the Carpet sector in Turkey. As such, the rationale for choosing these factors, in terms of analyzing the brand and internationalization activities of companies, is sustained the company activities by the significant number of government support in emerging markets, such as China, Brazil and India (Fu et al., 2022; Jugend et al., 2018; Jain et al., 2021) which proves that internationalization and marketing performance is critically important in driving company and the country performance.

Government support: Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, rising protectionism and economic nationalism had changed the rules of global competition. Governments were seeking ways to increase the international competitiveness of domestic companies, including providing direct support. Government support is a public tool to meet the financial obligations of companies (Macilree & Duval, 2020) and includes tax support, wage subsidies, payment delays, and access to credit (Cirera et al., 2021; Macilree & Duval, 2020).

Recent research suggests that government support has a leverage impact on brands and businesses. Kiho Trading Ltd., a Japanese food manufacturer, has created international customer awareness by promoting the brand "Kappachi" with the government's support (Kim et al., 2014). In recent years, the growth of Chinese internet companies has brought enormous financial strength to China (Li & Yang, 2022). Li et al. (2011)

revealed the significant impact of government support on the financing of high-tech enterprises in China. During the COVID-19 pandemic, companies needed government incentives in many respects. For example, research conducted in New Zealand demonstrated the importance of government incentives and strong relationships among international partners for the resilience of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) exports during COVID-19 (Fath et al., 2021). Previous studies provide evidence that companies dealing in international trade during the pandemic need more active government assistance, they also argued that government support for companies is necessary (Chabossou et al., 2022; Xia et al., 2021). These studies highlighted that government support during the COVID-19 pandemic has been the focus of research all over the world (Nguyen et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021; Nurunnabi, 2020; Lalinsky & Pal, 2022; Belghitar et al., 2020).

Government support has been provided to support SMEs, protect them against crises, encourage innovation, and protect fragile sectors. However, there are limited studies in the literature on government support that the brands become global players. Founded in Malaysia in 1996 to help SMEs be competitive in the international arena, SMECorp provides SMEs with the necessary support to take their brands to the next level, including support for branding information, market access, networking, and media exposure (SMECorp, 2022). In South Korea, the government has developed support policies to increase innovation in SMEs (Doh & Kim, 2014). The TURQUALITY program enables companies that have a competitive advantage in Turkey and sell products with a branding potential to become global players in international markets by increasing their managerial knowledge, institutionalization, and development. TURQUALITY is an accreditation system, which is planned for leveraging the beneficiary firms to the level of international benchmarks. To support companies in their brand-building efforts, TURQUALITY helps them to develop essential capabilities (Turquality.com, 2022), competencies, skills, and resources. The program supports companies in many areas such as trademark

registration, market research, advertising expenditure, international units, and office rentals. The TURQUALITY program is basically an accreditation system, which is designed not only for elevating the beneficiary companies to the level of international benchmarks but also to create awareness of the internationally accepted values like quality and novelty that are carried by these brands.

Brand Strategies

American Marketing Association (AMA), (2007) defined a brand as a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers. Lynch and De Chernatony (2007) characterized a brand as a functional and emotional value that includes the various needs of target consumers. Consumers interact with brands through values such as loyalty and attitude and share their experiences with others. (Keller, 2001). This interaction makes the brand unique by creating brand equity and transferring its distinctiveness to the target audience (Srivastava and Shocker, 1991) and can increase the competitiveness of companies by providing various marketing advantages. (Keller, 2001; Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). This statement is unquestionable in all economies, exclusively in emerging markets such as Brazil, China, and India, where brands such as Petrobras, Haier and Tata have arisen as "supreme brands" in their sectors (Abimbola, 2010). Previous studies provide evidence that human capital, technological capital, and brands have a positive impact on regional economic growth (Dettori et al., 2012; Kucharska et al., 2018; Ramos et al., 2021). Ergo, public authorities have a crucial role in supporting branding as well as the effort of private sector (EU, 2022). The literature provides a solid link regarding the relationship between government financial support and brands from different sectors. For example, the Chinese government plays an important role in promoting firms' innovation efficiency (Xu et al., 2023; Li ve Yang 2022; Zhu et al., 2019), the important role of government policies for Italian firms during the COVID-19 crisis (Fasano et al., 2022), the effects of government subsidies on green technology

investment and green marketing (Li et al, 2021; Barman et al., 2022), Australian government support, grants and funding to companies marketing and brand strategies (Business.gov.au, 2023).

In the emerging competitive environment in today's global marketplace, economies with strong brands can achieve a competitive advantage of differentiation and attain enormous financial advantage (Aaker, 1996; Matanda & Ewing, 2011). Brand strategies characterized and developed the market position to create financial value and brand loyalty (Kirdar, 2003). From this perspective, strategies applied by brands are signals that conduce to creating competitive advantage (Aaker et al., 2004). When the effect of government supports on firms in developed and developing countries is investigated, it is seen that incentives have a more important and strategic effect on firms in developing countries (Lee et al., 2022). The present study argues that the government's support of brand strategies in developing countries will contribute to the country's economy and the learning processes of companies.

Method

This study aimed to reveal the views of company officials implementing the TURQUALITY program. For this purpose, a focus group interview-based qualitative method was chosen. Basch (1987) argued that the focus group interview is a qualitative approach to obtaining information about subgroups of the population in terms of conscious, semi-conscious and unconscious psychological and sociocultural characteristics and processes. Focus group interviews, one of the most frequently used methods in qualitative research, is a series of carefully planned discussions conducted to obtain perceptions about a predetermined subject in a moderate and nonthreatening environment (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

One widely studied issue using focus groups is the broad area of marketing, including topics such as consumer research, digital marketing, and green marketing. One of the first such studies was conducted by Cox et al. (1976) who indicated that the focus group interview is an effective qualitative technique in marketing research. Welch (1985)

provided marketers with insights about implementing focus groups in the industrial environment. Catterall & Maclaran (2006) claimed that the focus group is a dynamic and highly versatile technique that still has much to offer researchers, as a stand-alone method or in tandem with other marketing research techniques. Companies and marketing research organizations first used focus group interviews to reveal and influence consumer purchasing behaviours (Basch, 1987; Kumral, 2010). This method is not limited to influencing consumers but is used for; enabling brand managers to explore the consumer experience quickly and cost-effectively, structuring surveys for consumers, developing a bridge between marketing management at the production level and the end user of the product or service (Bellenger et al., 1976; Cox et al., 1976; Nuttavuthisit, 2019). Focus groups are also often used as a way to bridge the gap between the target group and the consumer and to understand the experience of the consumer group (Axelrod, 1975).

Data collection and analysis

In the current study, the company benefiting from the TURQUALITY program is in the carpet business in Gaziantep. This is because the carpet industry is significant not only for Gaziantep but also for Turkey's total exports. In 2021, Gaziantep alone was responsible for 71% of machine-made carpet exports worth 3.9 billion dollars in the carpet industry all over the world. There are around 170 carpet manufacturers and approximately 1500 weaving machines in Gaziantep (TOBB, 2021). Although 70% of the world's machine-made carpets are produced in Gaziantep and exported to approximately 173 countries (GSO, 2021), companies in the sector work as contract manufacturers and have insufficient resources to create a brand that will reach the ultimate customer. For this reason, the current study focuses on the importance of the TURQUALITY program in terms of maintaining the worldwide success of the carpet industry by creating a global brand. There are eight interviewees, five are men and three are women. Of these, CEO has been working for seven years,

the General manager, the brand and marketing manager and the finance manager for four years, and the procurement manager and the R&D manager for six years with the company. Five of the interviewees had graduated from university and three of them had post-graduate degrees.

Table 1. Reports the summary of our focus group interview data.

Role in the Company	Sex	Years	Education
Owner	Male	20 years	University
CEO	Male	7 years	Postgraduate study
General manager	Male	4 years	Postgraduate study
Brand and marketing manager	Male	4 years	Postgraduate study
Procurement manager	Male	6 years	University
R&D manager	Female	6 years	University
Finance Manager	Female	4 years	University
Human resources manager	Female	3 years	University

Data were collected through questions created in line with the research purpose. Focus group discussions are generally conducted in four stages: research design, data collection, analysis, and reporting of results (Nyumba et al., 2018). In planning these phases, Bader and Rossi (2002) and Nyumba et al. (2018) were referred to. First stage: When formulating the research design, determining the study objectives, selecting the participants, and setting the appropriate contextual background are significant. First, the literature on the TURQUALITY program and related studies were reviewed. As a result, sub-topics related to the characteristics of the brand program and general and specific problems in the context of these sub-topics were defined. Then, the organizational context in which these problems would be discussed and the seating arrangements for participants were determined. Second stage: The data collection phase took place before and after the focus group discussion. The pre-session phase includes the seating arrangements (U-arrangement) for participants as well as the researcher's and reporter's registration preparations. The meeting room of the company implementing the TURQUALITY program was

chosen as the venue for focus group discussions. Then, the researcher and the reporter made preliminary preparations for recording the session. Introduction, discussion (via open-ended questions), complementary questions, and conclusion phases occurred during the session. In this context, first, preliminary information about the study was given, and participants were informed that their personal information and recordings would be protected in line with their rights. In the questions phase, follow-up questions allowing participants to elaborate on issues were used in addition to open- and closed-ended questions. The session, which lasted approximately 1.5 hours, concluded with a summary and thanks to the participants for their cooperation. Third stage: After the records were transferred to a Word document, the document was reviewed with the reporter to determine whether anything was missing from the data. Each bit of data obtained was first listed and then coded by the study's themes through content analysis. To ensure the reliability of coding, opinions were obtained from a field expert and an expert who had previously conducted studies using the focus group interview method. Interrater agreement was calculated through the formula Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested. The percentage of consistency between the experts was found to be 94. A consensus was reached after an additional session to clarify any inconsistencies between the codes and themes. Fourth stage: The results of focus group interviews are typically applied to a target audience of academics, study participants, and politicians. Because this study is not limited to informing participants about the final report but also aims to reveal the views of the brand program from an academic perspective, it can be considered bidirectional.

Findings

1. The reasons company officials implement the TURQUALITY program.

Participants who implemented the TURQUALITY program expressed their opinions under two themes: internationalization and integration of aims.

Table 2. Shows the sub-themes related to these themes.

Context	Theme	Sub-themes
Reasons for participation in the TURQUALITY program	Internationalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Determination of target market sizes * Preparation of research reports for target markets * Determination of customer segment in target markets * Following target market tax rate and regulations * Advertising strategies for the target market * Conducting special surveys for all customers throughout the value chain * Promotion of distribution channels * Introducing brand name to large audiences
	Integration of aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sponsorship activities * Establishment of stock strategies * Maturation of purchasing model * Improvement of ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) infrastructure * Development of information security management

Table 2. What are the reasons company officials implement the TURQUALITY program?

Participants' views are given below:

P1: This company was established with a focus on the domestic market and grew this way. When we turned our attention to abroad, we needed support because of our lack of experience. Our mission and our goals were big, but we didn't have enough internal resources to realize them. Our primary reason for joining was that we needed a guide in the process of building an international brand.

P2: As our domestic market developed, we needed international research and direction. We received very important support from the TURQUALITY program for the determination of the target market and its size, drawing a direction towards these markets, and creating a customer segment. We thought that our most important problem was the establishment of the link between the organizations established in the target countries and the city centre of Gaziantep, and we received significant support from the program to develop information security methods by creating ERP activities.

P3: In general, our company was experiencing the problems experienced by all subcontracting companies. Turkish manufacturers do not have a marketing perspective or branding strategies. Our company had

the same mindset. With the training, consultancy activities, and meetings held after participation in the program, the company has had a brand-based marketing perspective. This was the main reason we wanted to participate in the program, that is, to become a market-oriented company with a strong brand.

P4: In the target markets, the brand name was promoted to large masses for online sales during the pandemic period, especially on Instagram and Facebook, with the celebrities of that market and sponsorship activities. For example, in Kuwait, the product and brand were promoted by shooting videos in the store with social media celebrities, and we had very good returns in terms of sales.

P7: The most problematic issues for us in target markets

were customs taxes, regulations, and prohibitions on establishing a business, which we noticed later. We first received consultancy to invest in target markets and start a business with 100% capital. Later, thanks to the program, we started to act faster by employing lawyers and gaining knowledge on legal issues.

P8: Our expectation regarding the TURQUALITY program was to receive the support that would take us to the next level. We needed a guide, who fully met our expectations.

P6: Understanding customer requests and needs was one of the most important issues for us. Previously, we had no information about the demands and needs of consumers, and we did not feel the need for research, as we were only a contract company. The preparation of research reports, which is one of the requirements of the TURQUALITY program, helped us develop strategies in target markets more easily.

2. The contributions of the TURQUALITY program to the company

Participants commented that the TURQUALITY program had both positive and negative effects on the company.

Table 3. Presents the views of the participants.

Context	Theme	Sub-theme
Contributions to the TURQUALITY program	Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Establishment and dissemination of an e-commerce sales channel * Improved operational efficiency * Establishment of merchandising structure in foreign markets * Transition from a production-oriented company structure to sales- and marketing-oriented company structure
	Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Internal resistance to change * Risk of uncontrolled growth * Difficulty finding qualified personnel to support strategic plans * Difficulty determining target country and effect of consultant firm

Table 3. What the contributions of the TURQUALITY program to the company are?

Participants' views are given below:

P1: The TURQUALITY program has significantly changed our company's vision and perspective on business. It has moved us from a production and cost-oriented company to a sales and marketing-oriented company structure. However, the lack of qualified personnel and resources compatible with growing dreams and goals was the main reason for the failures we experienced in the first years.

P3: As a subcontracting company, our company used to have the least profit in the chain. The TURQUALITY program has allowed us to deliver our products to the end consumer in target markets with our brand. With this, our company has increased its profitability rates. However, trying to exercise muscles that have never worked before has harmed the entire company. Targeting a completely different audience in the company, which previously only developed relations with wholesalers without knowledge of what marketing and advertising were, became a source of resistance for the company and made it difficult to use resources.

P6: The most positive contribution was the investments in the field of e-commerce, but as other participants mentioned, we had serious problems due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure.

P2: The TURQUALITY program creates great advantages as it allows companies to choose a target country for the growth of the brand and investment. However, if the company is not ready for such a change, it faces risks.

P4: The biggest problem was the selection of the target country. Examining the target countries in depth and making investment decisions was carried out with the help of advisory companies. However, these companies had templates and they used the same template to help each one of the companies. One of the reasons for our failure was that we relied on the information provided by these advisory companies in the markets where we failed.

3. The development projects planned for the TURQUALITY program

The development projects planned for the program can be summarized under three themes: sustainable growth targets in foreign markets, development of growth-oriented operations, and maturation of the corporate structure.

Table 4. Presents the views of the participants.

Context	Theme	Sub-theme
Development projects for the TURQUALITY program	Sustainable growth targets in foreign markets	* Developing and monitoring brand strategy and performance * Creating strategies for entry into the target market and growth * Activating of CRM (Customer Relationship Management) infrastructure * Developing digital channels * Improving the marketing model
	Development of growth-oriented operations	* Ensuring integration in all planning processes * Maturation of purchasing process model * Trying to be the best in all operations * Increasing competence of human resources
	Maturation of corporate structure	* Improving ERP infrastructure * Structuring enterprise risk management and internal audit * Establishing a project management department

Table 4. What are the development projects planned for the TURQUALITY program?

Participants' views are given below:

P1: In my opinion, development projects had to focus primarily on foreign markets, so the first step was to research brand awareness and perceptions, determine brand focal points, and determine brand position.

P3: The program is for brand development, which was also our most important step to be taken. However, determining the target countries where brand development and positioning would be carried out as well as ensuring sustainable growth in customer preferences and dynamics in these countries were important parts of our strategy.

P2: Activating the CRM program in line with customer preferences, dynamics, and needs, and establishing an appropriate relationship by storing customer information was also an important step in development projects.

P5: There is a need to improve the ERP infrastructure to make decisions without personal initiatives, prevent manual entries into the system, and reach accurate customer information records. As it is not enough just to have appropriate and effective programming, efficiency has been achieved by increasing the competencies of human resources.

P8: The most important contribution of the brand support program was the development of e-commerce sales channels, which were not considered a need by the senior management, and appropriate production and marketing of the products for these markets.

1. Senior management and employee responsibility in the implementation of the TURQUALITY program and the methods they follow to establish balance.

- 2.
- 3.

Participants' views are given below:

P4: Significant problems arise if the 5-year plans and target countries are not chosen correctly, and the company's capabilities and capacity are not compatible with environmental opportunities.

P1: For an appropriate harmony of the strategies and company objectives, two people from the top management were enrolled in an MBA program at one of the most important universities in Turkey with the support of the program. As a result of the first year of the training, the desired compatibility of strategy and competency began to develop.

P6: At the end of the first year, e-commerce, new stores, and warehouses were opened in target countries with the support of the program. However, because this rapid growth was not managed properly in the first year, there was a market failure.

Table 5. Presents senior management and employees' 4. views regarding their experiences of the implementation of this program, the methods they follow, and their responsibilities.

Context	Theme	Sub-theme
Senior managements and employees' responsibilities in the TURQUALITY program	Senior management responsibilities	* Senior management support is needed to prepare the company's plan. Increasing the use of digital sales as well as traditional channels should be included among the targets. * The company's strategic plan should be prepared realistically, and sustainable growth should be ensured in foreign markets. * Realistic long-term goals to make the company and the program successful. Senior management should take responsibility for the development of strategies for entry into target markets and growth. * Key administrators should receive academic support for the sustainability of the program. *The rapid growth that comes with brand support requires strengthening the control mechanism.
	Employee responsibilities	* For the appropriate implementation of the program in the company, detailed role definitions of the human resources department, target competency model, and employee succession plan should be prepared. * Employees' embrace of the company's mission is important for the sustainability of the program.

Table 5. What is the senior management and employee responsibility in the implementation of the TURQUALITY program?

P7: Other factors that cause failure in the program are the inability to determine a suitable target market, rapid growth, as well as the inaccuracy of job descriptions, inadequacy of the personnel employed to work in the target markets, and quitting the job after a certain period when other opportunities are found.

P5: Another important problem was that the company's mission, which also supported the brand program, was not adopted by the entire company. The company's senior management tried to explain this to all employees through monthly meetings.

The compatibility of the TURQUALITY program with the company's objectives

Participants stated that they specified a set of sub-objectives for the improvement of their brands.

Table 6. Presents the views of the participants.

Context	Theme	Sub-theme
Targets of the TURQUALITY program	The TURQUALITY program compatibility with the corporate targets	* Ensuring efficiency through corporate synergy * Mission of becoming a global Turkish brand * Establishing Turkish brand sales points in target markets * Creating a successful brand strategy * ERP system efficiency required by the program has been one of the main targets for our company after the TURQUALITY program

Table 6. What is the TURQUALITY program's compatibility with the corporate targets?

Participants' views are given below:

P2: We started with the aim of being the pioneers of our product in the world by implementing the TURQUALITY program. Digital transformation and being customer-oriented were chosen as important goals of our mission. Qualified personnel are needed to actualize these and to follow the trends, which brings costs. Since the TURQUALITY program provided support in terms of engineers, qualified personnel, and designers, it gave us the chance to reach our goals more easily, work with qualified personnel and avoid high costs.

P4: We didn't have a brand strategy or even a marketing strategy before. With the TURQUALITY program, a long-term strategic plan was developed, and brand strategies were created in target countries as well.

P7: Before the TURQUALITY program, our company used a simpler program for ERP. We have become a more corporate company following the transition to a more professional ERP program and to a support system that can manage the data exchange and stock system of 9 warehouses and 30 stores in 5 countries.

P1: We know that one of the main purposes of the program is to strengthen the institutional infrastructure of companies. As my friends said, the program has made a great contribution to us as a company, but first, we made significant progress towards institutionalization with the consultancy activities we received. A stronger institutional infrastructure was already one of our important goals before the application, and I think this harmony was one of the most important factors in our success.

P3: I agree. The inconsistency of targets will cause the program to fail. If the company's goal is simply to grow and make money, the program will not be successful because the company must be willing to make serious structural changes that the program demands.

5. The effects of the TURQUALITY program on marketing and sales performance

Table 7. Presents the views of the participants.

Context	Theme	Sub-theme
Impact of the TURQUALITY program on marketing sales performance	International sales compound annual growth rate	* There was a 67% growth in the annual compound growth rate in international sales three years after joining the program. * A compound annual growth rate of 84% was achieved in target market sales three years after joining the program.
	Rate of sales increase in target markets	* The rate increased from 45% to 84% at the end of three years.
	Marketing performance improvement	To become a sales and marketing-focused company. To promote the brand. To activate the e-commerce channel. To expand the sales points of the brand in target countries.

Participants expressed their views under three themes: international sales compound annual growth rate, rate of sales increase in target markets, and marketing performance improvement.

Table 7. What is the Impact of the TURQUALITY program on marketing sales performance?

P1: Our company was a well-known company in the domestic market and developed its brand positioning and marketing strategies accordingly. Following the application process and approval to TURQUALITY, our marketing strategy focused on the foreign market,

and the share of the domestic market decreased from 95% to 20% in our total sales. We opened a total of 9 warehouses and 30 stores in 5 countries specified through the support from the program. Accordingly, we promoted our stores by using Instagram celebrities for brand positioning, especially during the pandemic period, and we achieved significant outcomes.

P2: E-commerce activities became a focal point for us, especially during the pandemic period. We tried to attract our customers to our stores after the pandemic with Click and Collect strategies.

P4: Before the TURQUALITY program, we were among the top three in the domestic market. In the 3rd year of the program, we achieved a 67% growth in our total international sales, while we increased our sales rate by 84% in the target countries.

P3: The program gave us a marketing perspective beyond the numbers. Previously, there was no brand, marketing department, or brand perception in our company. We were carrying out all marketing activities with the general manager or foreign trade manager. However, a marketing perspective developed in our company through the program. Managers with experience in marketing and branding were employed, and I think this was the beginning of this development.

7. The design of a new brand program as an alternative to the TURQUALITY program

Participants suggested an alternative brand under three themes: increase the contribution of the consulting firm, special support for corporate change, and train staff for brand support.

Table 8. What is the design of a new brand program as an alternative to the TURQUALITY program?

P4: The program met all our needs, but unlike the TURQUALITY program, I would make the requirements for application more difficult. The most important requirement was that the domestically registered trademark must be registered in at least one of the target markets in the business plan to be submitted by the company. We had a serious problem in the transformation process of the company. More efficiency can be obtained if companies apply to the program with better preparation.

P3: I also agree. The program showed us the way we needed it. However, the main problem was the preparation of the roadmap through the consulting firm. These companies are preparing only a standard roadmap and they do not know the special needs of our company and our product. This is why they had difficulty answering our questions in some cases. Therefore, I think the time given for the preparation process and support activities should be longer.

Table 8. Provides the views of participants.

Context	Theme	Sub-Theme
Alternative brand program to TURQUALITY program	Increase of contribution of consulting firm	* The applicant company must know the field of activity and its product and make recommendations specific to the company.
	Special support for corporate change	* Special support must be given for the corporate change, especially for family businesses. * It must be ensured that companies are ready before applying to the program.
	Trained staff for brand support	* Support should be provided for staff members who understand the needs of the brand program.

P1: I think the program gave us everything we needed. However, Turkish companies are expected to make serious managerial and mentality changes, especially in family businesses. First of all, it is required to have a program that will prepare the company for institutional change, which will minimize failures and resistance.

P2: Staff is needed to follow all the work and procedures within the company following the approval of the TURQUALITY program. However, the most important problem is the difficulty of finding trained personnel. Generally, companies make use of the human resources department for this. I would help companies employ professional and experienced personnel to carry out the TURQUALITY program.

Results

The proposed government brand support program framework offers an integrated view of state support in the internationalization process of a local brand, the development processes of the brands, and their managerial needs. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first research to explore the government support impacts on local brands'

internationalization strategies. This study offers a richer understanding of the brand internationalization construct, providing a theoretical foundation on which further development of the brand internationalization concept can be built. Furthermore, this study expanded the current view of the government support construct by identifying seven key labels to describe the brand internationalization process for local brands that can be used for further study.

To answer the first research question – **What are the reasons company officials implement the TURQUALITY program?** – all respondents admit that the internationalization of the brand and integration of the aims are the main implementation reasons. Managers recognise that for brand internationalization, the importance of target market sizes, customer segments, advertising strategies and sponsor activities. Beyond these, the musts of the company that needs developing such as the establishment of stock, ERP and purchasing model strategies have been determined as other reasons to apply to the program. These findings are in line with the results of several other studies (Aghdaie and Alimardani, 2015; Liu et al, 2016; Cho et all, 2015; Petersen and Welch, 2002).

In answer to the second question – **What the contributions of the TURQUALITY program to the company are?** – the finding from the study suggests that the positive contribution of the brand support program involves four pillars such as operational efficiency, the establishment of a marketing-oriented company structure and e-commerce sales channel, and new sales channels for the global market. Besides, the negative effects of the TURQUALITY program involve four pillars such as resistance to change within the organization, risk of uncontrolled growth, lack of finding qualified personnel and difficulty in determining the target country. These findings are also in line with the results of the studies by Onjewu et al, 2022; Li et al, 2021; Kohtamaki et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2022.

To answer the third question – **What are the development projects planned for the TURQUALITY program?** – all respondents articulated three development projects for the

program: sustainable growth targets in foreign markets, development of growth-oriented operations, and maturation of the corporate structure. The findings display that the TURQUALITY program appears to play a fundamental role in structural changes in companies. On the other hand, the program gives companies the direction to develop and monitor brand strategy and performance. The TURQUALITY program pushes companies to create strategies of entry into the target market and growth.

In answer to the fourth question – **What are the senior management and employee responsibility in the implementation of the TURQUALITY program?** – the finding from the study emphasised that senior management and employees' responsibilities are important in the implementation of the program. The findings reveal that senior management encouragement is needed to prepare the company's strategic marketing plan. Senior management should take responsibility for the development of strategies for entry into target markets and growth. On the other hand, Employees' embrace of the company's mission is important for the sustainability of the brand program. Researchers in marketing and management literature (Zwikael, 2008; Unger et al., 2012; Liew, 2015; Ahmed and Philbin, 2022) have broadly converged on the significance of senior managers' support on the success of the projects. The results in the literature on managers' and employers' support of the projects are in line with our findings.

In answer to the fifth question- **What is the TURQUALITY program compatibility with the corporate targets?** Corporate synergy, global brand, brand sales points and successful brand strategy are four constructs used by participants to describe the TURQUALITY program compatibility with the company targets. The result of the current research demonstrates that strategic brand management is one of the factors that contribute to the achievement of a certain product or brand (Van Gelder, 2004; Cayla and Eckhardt, 2007; Spence and Essoussi, 2008; Zhang, 2023). Scholars highlighted the need for marketing managers and researchers to consider government incentives' compatibility with corporate targets and brand

strategies in today's competitive business environment (Kim et al., 2014; Heller et al., 2020; Aisati et al., 2023). Interviewees of the focus group emphasize that the TURQUALITY program provided support in terms of digital transformation, marketing strategies, qualified personnel, and designers (Cornwell, 2023; Yu et al., 2023). This support gives the companies the chance to reach their goal more easily.

In answer to the sixth question- **What is the Impact of the TURQUALITY program on marketing sales performance?** Interviewees of the focus group emphasize global branding importance and claim that even a well-known brand in the domestic market is not enough for being global. Following the approval of the TURQUALITY program, there was a huge growth in the annual compound growth rate in international sales three years after joining the program. The importance of the TURQUALITY program in developing a holistic marketing strategy is underlined by a manager:

" The program gave us a marketing perspective beyond the numbers. Previously, there was no brand, marketing department, or brand perception in our company. We were carrying out all marketing activities with the general manager or foreign trade manager..."

The above findings are consistent with global marketing strategy literature (Matanda and Ewing, 2012; Bourdin et al, 2021; Chatzopoulou and Navazhylava, 2022).

In answer to the last question- **What is the design of a new brand program as an alternative to the TURQUALITY program?** Interviewees of the focus group approve that the necessity of special support for corporate change trained staff for brand support and the contribution of a consulting firm.

The following quotation is a good example of the managers' response to the TURQUALITY program.

I think the program gave us everything we needed. However, Turkish companies are expected to make serious managerial and mentality changes, especially in family businesses.

Theoretical Contribution

The study makes three main theoretical contributions. First, thus, by assessing the effects of government support on export or contract companies, the current study reveals the vital role of incentives such as TURQUALITY in aiding firms to achieve higher marketing and internationalization performance. Second, the study espouses government support for the brand internalization strategies of companies that help the companies enrich the sustainable growth targets in foreign markets and develop growth-oriented operations. Third, the study highlighted research gaps in existing literature through the focus group approach. Theoretically, this article addresses government support of brand strategies, including internationalization and value chain strategies, how to plan development strategies for brand globalization, and the TURQUALITY program's strengths and drawbacks. The study reveals that government supports significantly impacts the establishment and dissemination of an e-commerce sales channel. In the same light, previous studies noted the important role of government support on e-commerce (Chundakkadan and Sasidharan, 2023), green marketing (Li et. al 2021; Zolfagharinia et al., 2023), R&D support (Pan et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2023], and the COVID-19 crisis (Janzen and Radulescu, 2022; Weng and Lai, 2022). However, this study extends previous research studies by testing government support for brand internationalization strategies.

Managerial Contribution

The managerial implications of this study are tremendously precious and crucial for business. This research's managerial implications contain: first, special government support must be given for corporate change and internationalization, especially for export companies and contract manufacturers. It must be ensured that companies are ready before applying to the government support program. Second, Turkish firms are encouraged to acquire the TURQUALITY program's brand support as it signifies well for their

internalization strategies. Furthermore, the TURQUALITY program helps managers to position the 'National Brand' and promote the 'Made-in-Turkey' image. Specifically, company owners and marketers can use these findings to observe the positive chain of events utilized by government support on brand strategies, strategy creation capacity, and export performance.

Conclusion

The significance of understanding branding is that it facilitates the potential in creating "value" for the company and developing the internationalization process. This can lead to heightened operational efficiency and transition from a production-oriented company structure to sales- and marketing-oriented company structure which in turn leads to long-term opportunities for sustainable growth and being a global brand for national brands. These findings are appropriate and beneficial for decision-making at the management level to predict brand experience and could guide policymakers. Besides, senior management support is needed to prepare the company's plan and the importance of increasing the use of digital sales as well as traditional channels should be included among the targets. Another important conclusion suggested by our results is that government incentives would suffice in driving internationalization and sales success. Beyond, the most significant contributions to companies' marketing and brand performances of government support are increasing the international sales compound annual growth rate and shifting the company from a production-focused to a marketing-focused company.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study can help managers figure out the causes, and outcomes of international marketing strategy implementation in the context of government support. The findings presented here will aid businesses in recognizing components that development of the corporate vision as well as those that government support to make national brands, international. Future studies can further

improve the findings by adding participants such as consultant firm employees and government officials. Future research should test the RQs in different countries, or with companies from different sectors to see if the results are similar. Future researchers should also investigate some additional drivers, such as government incentives for the digital economy, green production, and organizational innovativeness. This study has several limitations, mostly relating to the sample and design. Firstly, it measured the managers' perceptions of government support of a local brand. Yet, considering the limitation, the current study contributes a new understanding of global branding and transformation from a local brand to a global one related to government support that otherwise would not have been captured using a quantitative approach.

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