A Preliminary Research for Residents' Perceptions of Socio-Cultural Impacts and Destination Branding of Education Tourism Development in Amasya: Does Gender Make a Difference?

Amasya'da Eğitim Turizminin Gelişmesinin Sosyo-Kültürel Etkileri ve Destinasyon Markalaşmasına İlişkin Bölge Sakinlerinin Algılarına Yönelik Bir Ön Araştırma: Cinsiyet Fark Yaratıyor mu?

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Abstract: Recently, many countries, regions and cities have been trying to increase the potential of educational tourism, especially for economic reasons. Along with educational tourism, sectors such as accommodation, food, transportation etc. are also affected by tourist movements. However, educational tourism can affect the regions where it is located not only economically but also socio-culturally. Amasya University has also been continuously developing in terms of both quality and quantity since it was founded in 2006. In relatively small cities like Amasya, the economic and socio-cultural impact of universities can be greater than in large cities. In cities like Amasya, where the interaction between local people and students is more intense, this interaction can have some positive and negative results for the local people. The aim of this study is to make the socio-cultural impact of educational tourism on the perceived destination branding of Amasya. The data obtained in the study were collected from 101 people residing in the city of Amasya via Google forms. SPSS 23 program was used for the analysis, descriptive and psychometric properties were analyzed, and correlation analysis and process macro analysis (modal 1) were applied. When the results are examined, it is stated that if the participants perceive the socio-cultural impact of educational tourism positively, this contributes positively to the branding and socio-cultural development of Amasya. There is no significant difference between gender groups in perceived destination branding.

Keywords: Destination Branding, Educational Tourism, Socio-Cultural Impact

JEL Classification: M3, M31, M39

Öz: Son zamanlarda birçok ülke, bölge ve şehir özellikle ekonomik nedenlerle eğitim turizminin potansiyelini artırmaya çalışmaktadır. Eğitim turizminin yanı sıra konaklama, yiyecek, ulaşım vb. sektörler de turist hareketlerinden etkilenmektedir. Ancak eğitim turizmi bulunduğu bölgeleri sadece ekonomik olarak değil sosyo-kültürel olarak da etkileyebilmektedir. Amasya Üniversitesi de 2006 yılında kurulduğu günden bu yana hem nitelik hem de nicelik açısından sürekli gelişim göstermektedir. Amasya gibi nispeten küçük şehirlerde üniversitelerin ekonomik ve sosyo-kültürel etkisi büyük şehirlere göre daha fazla olabilmektedir. Yerel halk ile öğrenciler arasındaki etkileşimin daha yoğun olduğu Amasya gibi şehirlerde bu etkileşim yerel halk için bazı olumlu ve olumsuz sonuçlar doğurabilmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı eğitim turizminin Amasya'nın algılanan destinasyon markalaşması üzerindeki sosyo-kültürel etkisini ortaya koymaktır. Çalışmada elde edilen veriler Google formlar aracılığıyla Amasya kentinde ikamet eden 101 kişiden toplanmıştır. Analizlerde SPSS 23 programı kullanılmış, betimsel ve psikometrik özellikler incelenmiş, korelasyon analizi ve process makro analizi (model 1) uygulanmıştır. Sonuçlar incelendiğinde katılımcıların eğitim turizminin sosyo-kültürel etkisini olumlu algılamaları durumunda Amasya'nın markalaşmasına ve sosyo-kültürel gelişimine olumlu katkı sağladığı ifade edilmektedir. Algılanan destinasyon markalaşmasında cinsiyet grupları arasında anlamlı bir fark bulunmamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Destinasyon Markalaşması, Eğitim Turizmi, Sosyo-Kültürel Etki

JEL Sınıflandırması: M3, M31, M39

1. Introduction

In order for destinations to attract tourists from different regions, they must first develop marketing strategies. In order for a destination to become a brand, it is necessary to determine the elements that will make it stand out from its competitors. Then, they need to try to get a share from the market among their competitors with activities that will introduce the determined differences. The basis of competing in the tourism market should be built on these strategies (Özdemir, 2008, p. 73).

The socio-cultural and economic development of cities is seen as an important step towards becoming a center of attraction in terms of tourism. However, destination marketing has started to gain more importance. Cities that understand the importance of this and try to implement it are trying to differentiate themselves from other places. For this reason, it is necessary to create the necessary conditions to be able to compete with other regions and to become a brand (Çiçek and Pala, 2017, p. 26).

In order for a region to become a destination brand, all the values of that region must come together. Examples of these can be considered as education, technology, art, sports, agriculture, nature, etc. The aim here is to present all the valuable elements of the region to the consumer as a whole. As a marketing strategy, the characteristics of all its elements should be considered one by one and presented to the consumer as a whole. In this way, branding perceived by consumers provides confidence to the consumer (Günlü and İçöz, 2004, p. 298).

The constant change in living conditions and the parallel increase in travel habits further increase the importance of tourism in terms of economies. In order to benefit more from tourism revenues, cities try to maximize the position they create in the minds of consumers and act strategically like a brand (Serçek and Hassan, 2016, p. 8). Education tourism is one of these elements.

In this study, the importance of education tourism in Amasya's perceived destination branding and socio-cultural context was tried to be revealed. In the conceptual framework; socio-cultural impact of education tourism and perceived destination branding were discussed, and then the study was completed with the methodology, findings and results.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Socio-Cultural Impacts of Educational Tourism

The tourism sector is important in terms of both industry and culture, which is growing and developing rapidly. Especially the share of different fields in tourism, i.e. alternative tourism, in this field is quite large. Educational tourism, which is one of the alternatives in the field of tourism, is constantly developing (Brumen et al., 2014).

With the shortening of distances in recent years, there have been requirements such as travelling and accommodation due to educational activities between countries, regions and cities. However, individuals have had to leave their places and go to other places. In addition, in some cases, going to different places for educational purposes within the scope of the preferences of individuals other than obligations is also considered in the field of educational tourism (Erçek, 2017, p. 669).

Although the aim of educational tourism is higher education and language learning, they also see and learn the traditions, customs, lifestyle, culture of the place where they are located and at the same time there is intercultural interaction. Travel and accommodation activities of tourists to see and understand cultural differences on site are called "Cultural Tourism" (Uygur & Baykan, 2007, p. 33). Tourists who travel for educational tourism also make visits for cultural tourism. Tourists who go somewhere for education also learn about the culture of the places they visit and contribute to cultural tourism (Gutkevych, et al., 2024). Accordingly, it is seen that the socio-cultural impact of educational tourism is also important (Heydarov and Gülmez, 2021, p. 266). The importance of educational tourism is increasing day by day thanks to advantages such as socio-cultural gains, quality of education, and improvements in communication skills (Bostrom, 2010).

2.2. Perceived Destination Branding

The word "destination" is a foreign word and has been accepted in the tourism field. When we look at the Turkish literature, the word "destination" is used as a target or destination (Öztürk, 2012, p. 42).

In the current times, the idea of looking at the concept of destination as a single country has been replaced by the understanding of highlighting regions and cities. It is becoming increasingly important to determine the identities of regions and cities that can attract the attention of tourists and to promote them (İlban, 2008, p. 122).

When we look at the main purpose of destination branding, it is seen that it is to create a tight and emotional bond between the tourists we want to come to the destination and the destination. The necessary marketing strategies should be created by considering the destination and consumers together (Çoban and Süer, 2018, p. 60).

Competition between destinations continues to increase its effect. Destinations that want to gain competitive advantage should create marketing strategies with sustainability, differentiation, communication and renewed visions. During the destination branding phase, those responsible for branding and stakeholders also have important duties in determining the strategies in destination branding (Kılıçhan and Köşker, 2015, p. 103).

Differentiation lies at the basis of branding. Whether it is the private sector or the public sector, it is necessary to be different from other competitors in at least one way in order to become a brand. Since being different is a reason for preference for consumers, businesses will gain competitive advantage. It will also be a deterrent for businesses that want to compete in the same market (Börühan, 2008, p. 37).

Every place in the world is in competition to increase its own level of welfare. The aim here is to be remembered well by consumers, to increase the number of tourists and thus to provide tourism income and awareness of that region. Branding is one of the most important issues of marketing strategies. Being a brand is one of the main elements that will increase the profits of businesses. Branding is used as equivalent to being preferred among competitors. It is very important to leave a positive image in the minds of consumers and to position the brand by encouraging them to buy (İlgüner, 2006, pp. 117-118). Branding should not be considered as a concept used only in the monopoly of businesses, but also as a concept that can be used in a broader sense that can include countries, regions, cities and people (Aydın, 2015, p. 67).

Socio-cultural perceptions of tourists about the destination can have a positive impact on their revisiting and recommending the destination and on the branding of the region. (Yuan and Vui, 2023). A destination's positive brand image is thought to greatly influence visitors' perceptions and destination branding is linked to cultural diversity. Socio-cultural influence is considered to be important in the branding of a region (Tichaawa and Hemmonsbey, 2022). It can be said that trips to cultures that visitors feel close to improve cognitive destination image and contribute significantly and positively to destination branding. (Xu, 2022). Socio-cultural influence contributes significantly to destination branding. Historical sites, festivals, etc. encourage positive tourist experiences. Therefore, cultural interaction and understanding between locals and visitors contribute positively to destination branding (Son, et. all., 2023). Gender is thought to play an important role in the impact of socio-cultural influence on destination branding (Hamdy et al., 2023). Gender may play a moderating role in the relationship between destination image and tourism experience, creating differences between genders (Seyfi et al., 2024). Visitor gender differences can have a socio-cultural impact on the way visitors connect with and perceive destinations (Pradhan et al., 2023). The following hypotheses were developed with the support of the literature above:

H0: "Socio-cultural impact doesn't affect perceived destination branding"

H1: "Socio-cultural impact affects perceived destination branding"

H3: " Gender has a moderating effect on the relationship between socio-cultural influence and perceived destination branding." branding.

3. Methodology

Educational tourism is very important for local people both economically and socio-culturally. Especially in relatively smaller cities, the interaction between locals and tourists is more intense. During the tourists' stay in the region, there may be both positive and negative interactions. The socio-cultural gains that tourists have acquired in the region can contribute to the branding of the destination. In this study, the socio-cultural impact of educational tourism on the branding of Amasya destination and whether gender has a moderating role in this relationship were investigated. The model of the research is given below.
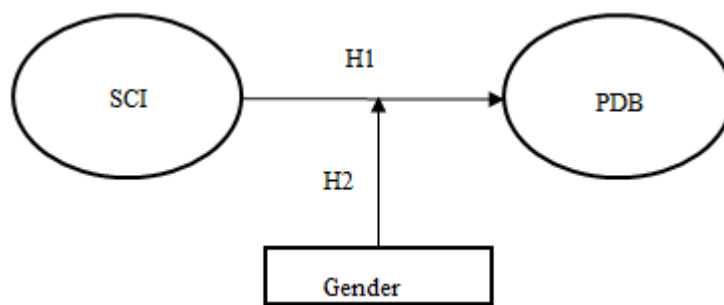
3.1. Research Method

Figure 1. Research Model

Note: SCI: Social Culturel Impact, PDB: Perceived Destination Brand,

3.2. Sampling and Data Collection

Data for the current case study was collected from people who reside in the Turkish region of Amasya. Amasya is a recently developed tourist attraction in the area that offers a variety of tourism experiences, including gastronomy, agrotourism, and cultural heritage tourism. Nearly a million tourists visited Amasya annually prior to the Covid-19 (Amasya Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2022). In addition, the University of Amasya, which has more than 20,000 students, has become an international institution. The majority of students come from all throughout Turkey, while the percentage of international students has recently hovered around 1.5%. Due to the economic and sociocultural developments provided by educational tourism, new universities have been opened in many regions and many cities are developing towards becoming a university city. Amasya city also has high potential in this regard with its many natural beauties and city security and the number of students is increasing day by day. While all these developments continue, the perception of the residents towards educational tourism is of course important and the aim of this study is to determine this.

The purpose of gathering data from the inhabitants was to ensure sustainable tourism development by involving them in the decision-making process. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the locals' attitudes about education tourism in order to comprehend its causes and consequences. Therefore, it was appropriate to carry out the present survey of the inhabitants. Non-probability, easy sampling method was used as the sampling method. In October 2024, data was collected via a Google form and online survey. To find out if the questionnaire's substance was troublesome, a pilot study was conducted with five residents. The study team tried to contact as many residents as they could, and in the end, 101 completed survey forms were gathered.

3.3. Measures and Data Analysis

The research questionnaire composed of 14 items for socio-cultural impacts of education tourism scale: 7 items for positive impacts and 7 items for negative impacts. This scale was used by Kim (2002). In addition, a 3-items scale was used to measure perceived destination branding. This scale was adopted from Daşkın et al. (2023).

All measures were on a Likert-type scale, with "5" denoting "strongly agree" and "1" denoting "strongly disagree." The research questionnaire also includes demographic questions about gender, age, occupation, and education.

SPSS Version 23 was used to analyze the data for this investigation. Together with the measures' psychometric qualities, which are shown in the findings section, descriptive statistics were conducted. The testing of the model was also carried out through the Process Macro program, model 1.

3.4. Findings

3.4.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 1. Demographic Profiles

Demographic variable	Sample composition	Percentage
Age	18-25 years	7.9
	26-35 years	14.9
	36-45 years	39.6
	Over 45	37.6
Gender	Female	31.7
	Male	68.3

Education	Secondary education	37.7
	University education	60.4
	Postgraduate	2.0
	Government	53.5
	Private sector	23.8
	Business owner	6.9
Occupation	Student	2.0
	Housewife	3.0
	Other	4.0
	Retired	6.9

3.4.2. Psychometric Properties of The Measures

A detailed list of the measurement items is provided in Table 2. Values of Reliability test (α) exceeded .60. This suggests that the items reflect latent constructs, and internal consistency was met (Hair, et al, 2010). Field (2000) states that after further investigation utilizing the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sample measurement, all these values are over the 0.50 criteria (Positive socio-cultural impacts = 0.889; Negative socio-cultural impacts = 0.802; Perceived destination branding = 0.750).

Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity shows that all the study variables have multivariate normality (p = 0.000), which is a significant value. Consequently, factor analysis can be performed using data (Hair, et al, 1998). According to Table 2's results from the Explanatory Factor Analysis, each component has convergent validity since it is over the 0.40 threshold value (Hair, et al., 2014; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

Finally, findings for the mean and standard deviation were shown in table 2. Based on the results, average mean score for positive socio-cultural impacts scale is 3.59. This shows that respondents agree with positive socio-cultural impacts of education tourism in general. However, the participants are mostly neutral about item 5 "Tourism has improved security in the area".

Secondly, average mean score for negative socio-cultural impacts scale is 2.50. This shows that respondents disagree with the negative socio-cultural impacts of education tourism in general. However, again the participants are neutral about item 4 "Tourism developments have forced local people to be relocated from their traditional settlements"; item 5 "Tourism leads to increases in the local prices of some goods and services including land"; and item 6 "Tourism has stimulated migration of people to the area in search for jobs and related tourism opportunities". Last, average mean score for perceived destination branding scale is 3.67. This

shows that the respondents agree of education tourism supports the destination branding process of Amasya.

Table 2. Factor Loadings, Reliability, Mean, and Standard Deviation Results.

Scale items	Factor Loads	Mean	SD
Social Cultural İmpact			
Positive socio-cultural impacts (α = 96)			
1. "Education tourism provides jobs for local residents"	,853	3,68	1,326
2. "Education tourism activities have improved personal income of the local people"	,869	3,75	1,389
3. "Education tourism is good because the money spent by tourists stimulates the local economy and is good for the local businesses"	,876	3,86	1,379
4. "Education tourism promotes development and better maintenance of public facilities"	,874	3,66	1,306
5. "Education tourism has improved security in the area"	,759	3,27	1,224
6. "Education tourism has rejuvenated the local culture"	,809	3,46	1,389
7. "Education tourism is conserving your cultural heritage which could have died"	,789	3,50	1,467
Negative socio-cultural impacts (α = 86)			
1. "Education tourism has increased crime in the area"	,813	2,10	,933
2. "Education tourism has increased prostitution and sex permissiveness in the area"	,813	2,30	1,100
3. "Education tourism developments have forced local people to be relocated from their traditional settlements"	,488	1,86	,749
4. "Education tourism leads to increases in the local prices of some goods and services including land"	,772	2,97	1,261
5. "Education tourism has stimulated migration of people to the area in search for jobs and related tourism opportunities"	,671	2,90	1,253
6. "Education tourism has changed the way of life of people by following the western culture in their dress, behaviour, food"	,755	2,95	1,260
7. "Education tourism has led to loss of objectivity of local traditions"	,578	2,48	1,145
Perceived destination branding (α = 97)			
1. "Education tourism plays an important role in the branding process of Amasya"	,950	3,61	1,233
2. "Education tourism increases the brand perception of Amasya city"	,969	3,61	1,257
3. "Education tourism promoted continuously during the branding process of the city of Amasya"	,925	3,76	1,218

Notes: "All items are measured on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree". "All loadings are significant at the 0.05 level or better". SD = Standard Deviation.

According to table 3, a highly positive (r= .649) and significant relationship was found between socio-cultural impact and perceived destination branding. In other words, socio-cultural impact and perceived destination branding increase together in a strong and significant way. The variance explained by the variables on each other is 42%. In other words, 42% of perceived destination branding may be due to socio-cultural impact.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis Test Results

		SCI	PBD
SCI	Pearson r	1	,649[*]
	p		,001
PBD	Pearson r		1
	p		,001

According to the correlation results in Table 3, the independent variables (SCI) explain the dependent variable (PDB) by 42% (R2=42). SCI has a positive and significant effect on PDB (p=.001). In other words, the socio-cultural impact of educational tourism positively affects perceived destination branding.

Table 4. Model Analyzed Result

Variable	b	SE	95% CI		t	p
			LL	UL		
Constant	3.6	.09	3.5	3.8	.39	.000
SCI	.73	.09	.54	.92	7.71	.000
GENDER	.11	.09	-.07	.30	1.24	.216
Int_1	-,13	.10	3.5	3.8	-1.2	.203
R^2	.43					

According to table 4 model analysis results, a positive and significant relationship was found between the socio-cultural impact of educational tourism and perceived destination branding. In other words, if the socio-cultural impact of educational tourism is perceived positively by the participants, then it also contributes to destination branding. As a result, hypothesis H1 is accepted.

In addition, it was seen that gender did not have a moderating role in the effect of socio-cultural influence on perceived destination branding. In other words, gender does not have any significant effect on the positive and significant effect of socio-cultural influence on perceived destination branding. Therefore, hypothesis H2 was rejected.
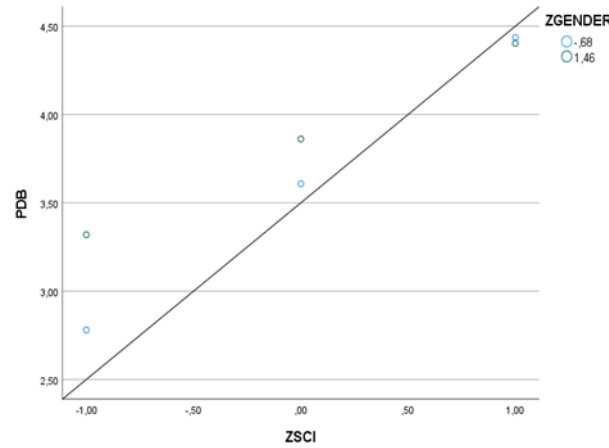
Figure 2. Moderation Effect

Figure 2 also shows that gender does not have a moderating effect on the positive and significant effect of socio-cultural influence on perceived destination branding.

4. Conclusion

Recently many countries have been trying to develop educational tourism potential to attract more and more students to their destinations. Expenses made on educational travel directly or indirectly affect many areas, including accommodation, transportation, health, communication and real estate services, as well as the education sector.

But it's also critical that an educational tourist makes use of the destination's cultural and social features, engages with the local population while there, and does more than just take part in the activities offered by the place (Lanegran, 2005). In this regard, cross-cultural interaction among students and residents will cause some positive and negative outcomes which should be investigated for better sustainable education tourism development. Also, Eroğlu, 2018; Çiçek and Pala, 2017; Serçek and Hassan, 2016; Kuvvetli, 2014; Öztürk, 2012; Aymankuy and İpar, 2011, In their studies, they have investigated the effects of socio-cultural influence on destination branding. In these studies, while the interaction of tourists with the public, food, historical and cultural structure, natural richness was stated as positive aspects, the negative aspects were emphasized as deficiencies in infrastructure and superstructure, problems in urbanization. Considering that tourists traveling for educational purposes stay in certain destinations for long periods of time, it can be said that tourists are intensely affected by the socio-cultural life of the region. Tourists from different regions can contribute to the branding of the destination by transferring the socio-cultural characteristics of that region to their own regions after their education period ends. For these reasons, it can be said that socio-cultural influence is important in terms of destination branding and can contribute to

destination branding (Surata, 2024). So, this current work aimed to investigate socio-cultural impact as well as the link between education tourism and perceived destination branding in Amasya.

When the general results of the study are evaluated, the participants have a more positive perception about educational tourism and that such educational activities have provided socio-cultural development in the city of Amasya. However, the participants are undecided about whether educational tourism provides security in the city. This may be due to the possibility that the increasing student population may cause some problems such as traffic in the future.

In addition, participants generally do not think that educational tourism has a negative sociocultural impact. However, participants expressed an undecided stance on the issue that the development of educational tourism has caused local people to move from their traditional settlements, increased local prices of some goods and services, including land in the city, and increased migration to the city for the purpose of finding jobs in the tourism sector.

As the final finding of the study, the participants generally agree that educational tourism will play an important role in the branding process of the city. This finding may be the most important result of the study; Amasya is a newly developing tourism destination, and it is extremely important for the city to reveal in which areas city branding should be done. It has been investigated whether gender acts as a moderator in the effect of socio-cultural influence on perceived destination branding, but it has been determined that gender does not have a moderating effect, and gender can be ignored in destination marketing.

Some important implications emerge in line with these results. While developing educational tourism in the city, the participation of the local people in the process will be effective in obtaining sustainable results. The relevant authorities, especially the university, should evaluate the student density problems that may occur in the future and take precautions. Because as the number of students coming from outside increases, there may be problems such as infrastructure development and new housing needs in the city. Amasya city has many cultural heritages as well as tourism offerings and should contribute to tourism without losing its traditional lifestyles and dwellings. In this context, local people should be educated and given material and moral support to protect socio-cultural values and to introduce them to tourism. Agriculture should be supported to increase local products because the increase in population with students from abroad will increase the need for fruit and vegetables, otherwise there will be price increases.

As with every study, this study also has a few limitations. Although the study targeted more participants, 101 people returned within the given period and a larger sample size could have increased the generalizability of the study. However, since this study is a preliminary

study, the purpose of the study was achieved. Secondly, applying a qualitative approach in a more extended study will also provide detailed information about cause-and-effect relationships. In addition, the research can be extended by using different variables (natural, man-made, historical and ethnic attractions, special events, health, commercial and public services, special events) that affect destination branding.

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