Evaluating the Impact of Social Media and Digital Platforms on Erzurum's Historical Environment[*]

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Abstract

With the innovations brought by technology, traditional conservation methods have become insufficient; this situation raises questions regarding the role of social media and digital platforms in strengthening the interaction between the historical environment and society and how these tools can be utilized more effectively. The aim of this study is to examine and evaluate the contributions of social media and digital platforms to the promotion of Erzurum's historic environment, the preservation of cultural heritage, and its adaptive reuse. Additionally, it seeks to understand how these platforms can enhance public interest in the historic environment, expand the reach of our heritage to broader and international audiences, contribute to education and awareness, and support economic development. As the research method, a literature review was conducted alongside a survey aimed at evaluating the impact of social media and digital platforms on the historic environment in the central areas of Erzurum, where historic buildings are densely concentrated. The survey was administered via Google Forms to individuals of varying ages and educational backgrounds. The collected data were analysed via IBM SPSS Statistics software, and the results were presented through tables and graphs, followed by a comprehensive evaluation. As a result of this study, the contributions of social media and digital platforms to the promotion, conservation, adaptive reuse, and cultural heritage of Erzurum's historic environment were discussed. Furthermore, solutions have been proposed to enhance community engagement, broaden the reach of our heritage, and strengthen intercultural interaction.

Keywords: Social Media, Digital Platforms, Historical Environment and Structures, Architecture, Erzurum

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INTRODUCTION

In addition to being a regional center due to its geographical location and cultural diversity, Erzurum stands out as one of Anatolia's oldest and most authentic settlements and as a significant cultural hub, having hosted various civilizations throughout its rich historical past (Temur & Kurak Açıcı, 2022: 598--614). Owing to its rich cultural heritage, historical depth, and architectural diversity, Erzurum is one of the key cities representing Turkey's historical identity. The city is distinguished by its unique cultural heritage sites, such as Erzurum Castle, Yakutiye Madrasa, the Double Minaret Madrasa, the Three Tombs, and traditional Erzurum Houses, which draw attention not only through their aesthetic and architectural qualities but also through the historical narratives they embody ("History"). These structures, having witnessed the city's past, offer significant insights into the culture, economic conditions, social life, architectural understanding, and aesthetic values of the periods in which they were constructed (Eyüboğlu & Faiz Büyükçam, 2022: 728--739). The rich heritage bestowed upon the city by the civilizations that once inhabited it made Erzurum an important destination for cultural tourism (Kayserili, 2016: 265-729). As a result, its role in tourism continues to grow, transforming it into a cultural and touristic center for both local residents and visitors alike.

The preservation of historic buildings, which constitute significant examples of cultural heritage, is a process that involves maintaining and transmitting both their intangible and tangible values to future generations (Feilden, 2003: 1-403). The conservation of cultural heritage entails researching and analysing the specific cultural meanings of

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a region, defining and understanding its heritage, and promoting its value; it also includes identifying the distribution framework of cultures and traditions and systematically conducting promotional and awareness-raising activities (Sites, O.C.H. The ICOMOS, 2008: 377--383). Through reintegration into social life, the values embodied by historic structures are thus transmitted to the future, simultaneously promoting cultural heritage (Wang & Zeng, 2010: 1241-1249). This process is not limited to physical spaces but also supports social interaction in digital environments and online platforms, thereby contributing to cultural continuity.

Internet tools have evolved beyond being mere sources of information; they have now become platforms that offer opportunities for interaction and socialization (Ulaş, 2020: 38--49). Digital platforms, as internet-based tools, can provide community-centered means for promoting and preserving heritage. In this context, researchers have developed applications of digital platform tools such as digital archives and e-learning systems through information and communication technologies (ICTs) that enhance public participation, including augmented reality (AR), 3D modelling, virtual reality (VR), and geographic information systems (GISs) (De Filippi, et al., 2018: 127--139). These technological developments prompt inquiry into how social media and digital platforms can contribute to strengthening the relationship between historical environments and communities, raising public awareness, and transmitting traces of the past into the future. The emergence and advancement of digital platforms have facilitated the development of technology-driven alternatives for the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage (Kalay, 2008: 1--10). According to Witcomb (2007), the advancement of digital technologies is making cultural heritage increasingly accessible. Likewise, Taylor and Gibson (2016) emphasize the expanding reach of such technologies. Within this framework, digital media, including blogs, podcasts, YouTube, Facebook and other social networking tools; mobile applications designed for individual use; heritage-themed online games; virtual reality applications; and digital collections, offers heritage institutions the opportunity to engage with their audiences both onsite and remotely (Economou, 2015).

One of the most prominent examples of this transformation is social media, which has evolved from being a mere tool for communication into an interactive platform where users socialize, create content, and share information (Heinrichs, et al., 2011: 347--355). In this context, social media enables access to what Cauchi-Santoro (2016) described as 'layers of lived experience' (Van der Hoeven, 2018: 61--68). It allows both tourists and local communities to narrate urban history from their own perspectives (Aktan & Koçyiğit, 2016: 62--73). As a result, online platforms make it possible to emotionally document and map heritage (Van der Hoeven, 2018: 61-68). In this context, location-based data sharing and the archiving of images on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook enable individuals to easily document their local activities, interests, and engagement with heritage sites (Farahani, et al., 2018: 199--211). When used effectively, social media helps communities reach wider audiences and increases interaction (Çetin & Ayhan, 2020: 47-69). Moreover, digitization and social media contribute to the development and dissemination of cultural heritage by expanding access to heritage collections, encouraging the public to learn about, producing content for, and participating in the preservation of this heritage (Taylor & Gibson, 2016: 408--420). Through this approach, social media has become an effective medium for redisplaying cultural heritage transmitted across generations by making digitized heritage accessible to broader audiences (Acar & Günaydın, 2023: 167--176). Additionally, users are given the opportunity to create a digital bridge between the past and the present through these platforms. In short, digital technologies, from social media to artificial intelligence, as well as geographic information systems and personalization tools, offer a new dimension to cultural heritage by enhancing its promotion, delivering

personalized and impactful experiences, and increasing efficiency and accessibility. Ensuring the sustainability and authenticity of these advantages is crucial for institutions to adopt a visitor-oriented approach that safeguards heritage and transmits it to future generations (Sürücü & Başar, 2016: 13--26).

Social media demonstrates that individuals tend to share spatial characteristics that they value in the historic urban areas where they live or visit their social circles. While the role of social media in providing new techniques for community engagement is acknowledged, its use in the context of cultural heritage preservation remains quite limited and has not been fully explored (Ginzarly, et al., 2019: 1-11). Although they are understudied, digital platforms play a significant role in contributing to heritage from multiple perspectives. The extent to which these tools are effectively utilized and how they serve sustainability goals should be critically examined, particularly in historically and culturally rich cities in Turkey, such as Erzurum.

Human-centered digital interactive experiences are increasingly gaining importance in the fields of cultural heritage communication and conservation in Erzurum today (Lian & Xie, 2024: 1-39). Moreover, social media platforms have become a significant factor that directly influences individuals' tourism preferences; users are affected by images, experiences, and recommendations shared on social media when planning their travels (Doğan, et al., 2018: 669--683). The promotion of the values of historically rich cities such as Erzurum on digital platforms greatly contributes to the preservation of the city's cultural heritage and the enhancement of its tourism potential. Digital platforms facilitate interaction with Erzurum's historic structures, increasing their visibility; users share and disseminate cultural heritage through visual and written content in digital environments. Erzurum's digital promotion is shaped by photographs, promotional videos, and blog posts produced by social media users. These contents ensure visibility in the digital realm, allowing historic buildings to be recognized not only locally but also nationally and internationally. Applications such as virtual and augmented reality have facilitated both the documentation of historic structures and their presentation as touristic experiences (Büyükkuru, 2023: 134--150). These technologies enable digital virtual tours of significant heritage sites such as Erzurum Castle, the Three Tombs, and Yakutiye Madrasa, enhancing interest in Erzurum's history and contributing to the archiving of these heritages for future generations. New media, by preserving and revitalizing cultural heritage digitally, allows users to compare different interpretations while enabling the cultural elements to be reexperienced in various temporal and spatial forms in the digital environment (Muşkara, 2017: 89--110). Consequently, Erzurum's historic environment is continuously kept in the digital spotlight, especially sustaining the interest of younger generations and contributing to the formation of a strong digital image for the city.

Although the impacts of social media and digital platforms on cultural heritage have been previously discussed, there is a lack of sufficient academic research in this area, especially for Erzurum. The findings indicate that the potential of social media and digital platforms has not been fully utilized, and they remain inadequate in promoting, conserving, and repurposing Erzurum's historic environment and structures, as well as in safeguarding cultural heritage. More effective use of social media, increasing levels of engagement, and ensuring diversity of content are necessary. Erzurum's cultural heritage should be promoted to broader audiences in digital environments, and educational and awareness-raising initiatives should support this process. Future research could contribute to the more effective digital promotion of Erzurum's cultural heritage by examining the impact of digital content in greater detail.

In this context, a study has been conducted to examine the relationships between social media and digital

platforms and Erzurum's historic environment and structure. This research aims to evaluate the impacts of social media and digital platforms on this heritage, highlighting the advantages of these tools in promotion, conservation, and adaptive reuse. Additionally, by drawing attention to existing deficiencies in the use of digital media for cultural heritage, specifically in Erzurum, this study seeks to offer recommendations for more effective utilization of digital platforms and to provide a foundation for future research.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Materials

Study Area

The study area encompasses regions within Erzurum's Yakutiye district that are rich in cultural heritage and dense with historic structures, specifically, the vicinity of the Three Tombs (Üç Kümbetler), Erzurum Castle, and Yakutiye Madrasa (Figure 1). These sites are significant tourist attractions that draw visitors from around the world.
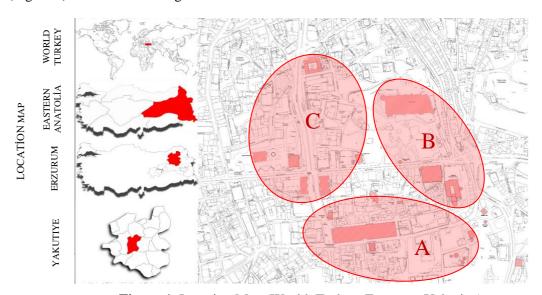

Figure 1. Location Map (World, Turkey, Erzurum, Yakutiye)

The reason for selecting this area of study lies in the fact that Yakutiye District, one of the oldest settlements in Erzurum Province, reflects the urban fabric of the city and holds a significant position owing to its symbolic structures, particularly those from the Seljuk, Ottoman, and Republican periods, which represent important works of Turkish history. Therefore, the main material of the study consists of the symbolic structures that shape the urban fabric of Erzurum's city center and contribute to the city's identity, as well as the urban furnishing elements used in the city center (Özgeriş, 2018: 561--574). The significance of these areas can be explained by the selection of environments where historical and traditional urban elements such as castles, madrasas, religious buildings, historic houses, fountains, and streets are more prominent and where cultural heritage is better preserved (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Study Area: Surroundings of Üç Kümbetler, Erzurum Castle, and Yakutiye Madrasa

In line with the survey conducted within the scope of the study, the demographic characteristics of the participants were analysed. The results indicate that male participants constituted the majority, albeit with a slight margin, accounting for 53% of the total responses, compared with 47% female participants. In terms of age distribution, the largest group was the 25–34 age range, representing 28% of the participants, followed by the 45–54 age group at 25%. The smallest age group was those aged 18 years and younger, comprising only 8% of the sample. With respect to educational background, the majority of the participants (42%) were university graduates. In terms of social media usage, 65% of the participants reported using Instagram, and the highest proportion of users (46%) reported spending 1–3 hours per day on social media. Finally, when asked about their primary source of information, 54% of the participants identified websites as their most frequently used source (Table 1).

Table 1. Table 1 Frequency distribution of demographic characteristics

		N	%	
1) What is your gender?	Female	47	47,0%	
	Male	53	53,0%	
2) What is your age?	18 and under	8	8,0%	
	18-24	17	17,0%	
	25-34	28	28,0%	
	35-44	13	13,0%	
	45-54	25	25,0%	
	55 and over	9	9,0%	
3) What is your education level?	Middle School	7	7,0%	
	High School	21	21,0%	
	Associate Degree	17	17,0%	
	Bachelor's Degree	42	42,0%	
	Master's Degree	9	9,0%	
	Doctorate (PhD)	4	4,0%	

		N	%	
1) Which social media platforms do you use most actively?	Facebook	12	12,0%	
	Instagram	65	65,0%	
	Tiwitter (X)	7	7,0%	
	TikTok	3	3,0%	
	Other	13	13,0%	
2) How much time do you spend on social media daily?	0-1 hour	20	20,0%	
	1-3 hours	46	46,0%	
	3-5 hours	27	27,0%	
	5-7 hours	4	4,0%	
	More than 7 hours	3	3,0%	
3) Which sources do you use most frequently to obtain information about historical buildings?	Social Media	14	14,0%	
	Websites	54	54,0%	
	Books	6	6,0%	
	Documentaries	24	24,0%	
	Other	2	2,0%	

2.2. Method

This study aims to examine the contributions of social media and digital platforms to the historical environment and architectural heritage of Erzurum. In line with the purpose of the research, the procedures and methods followed in the study are as follows:

- A comprehensive literature review was conducted by examining national and international sources to establish the theoretical framework of the study.
- Survey questions were developed based on the target audience to collect information and obtain data within the scope of the research.
- The prepared survey was administered to the target population to gather data.
- The collected data were analysed via SPSS software, and statistical evaluations were carried out.
- The findings obtained from the analyses were interpreted as follows:
- On the basis of the findings and the literature review, the discussion and conclusion sections were prepared.

In this study, the research methodology was carried out in three stages. In the first stage, to identify issues related to the subject and to collect information forming the foundation of the study, a comprehensive review of both national and international literature was conducted. This included the examination of information-based sources such as books, academic articles, and theses within the scope of the research.

In the second stage, an online survey (via Google Forms) was conducted. The questionnaire was administered in two parts to 100 individuals from various age groups and educational backgrounds. The first part consisted of demographic questions, whereas the second part included 17 closed-ended questions (based on the Likert scale) designed to evaluate the impact of social media and digital platforms on Erzurum's historical environment and architectural heritage.

Within this scope, to measure the internal consistency and reliability of the survey data, a Cronbach's alpha reliability test was conducted on a valid sample of 100 responses. The Cronbach's alpha value was calculated as 85.4% (>0.70), indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the scale (Table 2). The high reliability coefficient suggests a consistent relationship among the questions and supports the reliability of the subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha (Reliability) Test Table

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,857	17

In the third stage, the evaluation results of 100 participants were examined, and the collected data were transferred to IBM SPSS Statistics software for statistical analysis. During the data evaluation phase, the criteria considered included participants' demographic characteristics (gender, age, education level) and the assessment of their attitudes and behaviors according to the content of the questions. To examine and evaluate the relationships between these criteria, the following analyses were conducted: Cronbach's alpha reliability test for survey reliability, frequency distribution analysis for demographic characteristics, descriptive analysis to investigate participants' attitudes, and the Pearson correlation test to examine relationships among variables. The results of these analyses are presented in tables and graphs, and the findings were obtained. Interpretations were made on the basis of the findings derived from the analyses.

In the final stage, the obtained data were interpreted and discussed, and in the conclusion section, recommendations were proposed to address the identified problems and shortcomings.

3. FINDINGS

Within the scope of the research, the data obtained were analysed via descriptive analysis to examine the central tendency measures (mean, median) and dispersion (standard deviation, variance) of opinions regarding the promotion, preservation, and public awareness of Erzurum's historic buildings through social media. This allowed the determination of tendencies related to the questions (Table 3). While the results were evaluated, participants' attitudes and views were assessed on a 17-item scale to identify common trends in their responses.

According to the data, participants reported encountering content related to Erzurum's historic buildings on social media with moderate frequency (mean = 3.01). Furthermore, they believe that social media posts contribute to the promotion of historic structures (mean = 3.81). The vast majority of the participants expressed a desire to see more content about Erzurum's historic environment and buildings on social media (mean = 4.40). This indicates a high level of interest among social media users in cultural heritage content.

However, while the participants reported sharing content about these structures infrequently (mean = 2.55), their tendency to comment on or like such posts was greater (mean = 3.36). Additionally, they indicated that encountering these types of posts increases their interest (mean = 3.98) and their desire to visit the structures (mean = 3.97). The participants also noted that this content helped them gain more information about the historic buildings (mean = 3.97). These findings demonstrate that social media is not only a communication tool but also an interactive platform that supports cultural awareness.

The participants' tendencies to follow social media accounts or pages to obtain more information about Erzurum's cultural heritage and historic buildings are moderate (mean = 2.97), as is their rate of experiencing Erzurum's historic structures through virtual tours or digital content (mean = 2.94). The positive impact of such digital experiences on actual visits is notably high (Mean = 3.35). Most participants believed that social media was effective in preserving Erzurum's historic buildings (mean = 3.80). However, there is also awareness of the potential negative effects of commercialization or damage that could diminish the value of these historic structures (mean = 2.82).

The participants suggested that campaigns and projects aimed at supporting, preserving, and promoting

Erzurum's cultural values should be conducted on social media, and they expressed a willingness to participate in such initiatives (mean = 3.88). They believe that campaigns carried out through social media have positive effects on tourism (mean = 4.13). However, the frequency of encountering educational or informative content about the preservation of Erzurum's historic buildings in digital environments is moderate (mean = 2.69). This finding indicates that digital education related to cultural heritage is not yet sufficiently active on social media. Nevertheless, participants largely agree that more sharing should be done on digital platforms to reach wider audiences regarding Erzurum's historic structures (Mean = 4.28). This finding highlights the need for the active use of digital media in cultural promotion.

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis Table

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
1) What is your gender?	100	1	2	153	**1,53**	,050	,502
2) What is your age?	100	1	6	357	**3,57**	,146	1,458
3) What is your education level?	100	1	6	337	**3,37**	,123	1,228
1) Which social media platforms do you use most actively?	100	1	5	240	**2,40**	,115	1,155
2) How much time do you spend on social media daily?	100	1	5	224	**2,24**	,092	,922
3) Which sources do you use most frequently to obtain information about historical buildings?	100	1	5	246	**2,46**	,107	1,068
1) How often do you encounter content related to Erzurum's historical buildings on social media?	100	1	5	301	**3,01**	,089	,893
2) Do you think social media contributes to the promotion of historical buildings in Erzurum?	100	1	5	381	**3,81**	,103	1,032
3) Would you like to see more content about Erzurum's historical environment and buildings on social media?	100	2	5	440	**4,40**	,062	,620
4) Do you share information about Erzurum's historical buildings on social media? If yes, how often?	100	1	5	255	**2,55**	,098	,978
5) Do you comment on or like posts related to Erzurum's historical buildings?	100	1	5	336	**3,36**	,114	1,142
6) Does the content you see on social media increase your interest in Erzurum's historical buildings?	100	1	5	398	**3,98**	,090	,899
7) Have you visited Erzurum's historical	100	1	5	397	**3,97**	,081	,810

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
buildings based on content you saw on social media?							
8) Have social media contents you encountered provided you with more information about Erzurum's historical buildings?	100	1	5	397	**3,97**	,081	,810
9) Do you follow social media accounts or pages to obtain more information about Erzurum's cultural heritage and historical buildings?	100	1	5	297	**2,97**	,118	1,185
10) Have you experienced Erzurum's historical buildings through virtual tours or digital content?	100	1	5	294	**2,94**	,110	1,099
11) Have these digital experiences influenced your actual visits?	100	1	5	335	**3,35**	,105	1,048
12) Do you think social media is effective in the preservation of Erzurum's historical buildings?	100	1	5	380	**3,80**	,094	,943
13) Do you believe social media has negative effects, such as commercializing or devaluing Erzurum's historical buildings, or causing damage?	100	1	5	282	**2,82**	,116	1,158
14) Would you recommend organizing an activity or campaign on social media to support Erzurum's cultural values? If such a campaign is organized, would you participate?	100	1	5	388	**3,88**	,079	,795
15) Do you think social media campaigns about Erzurum's historical buildings have positively affected tourism?	100	1	5	413	**4,13**	,085	,849
16) Have you encountered educational or informational content about the preservation of Erzurum's historical buildings in digital environments?	100	1	5	269	**2,69**	,115	1,152
17) Do you think more sharing on digital platforms is necessary for Erzurum's	100	2	5	428	**4,28**	,062	,621

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
historical buildings to reach wider audiences?							
Valid N (listwise)	100						

To determine the distribution characteristics of participants' responses on the basis of the gender variable, skewness and kurtosis values were examined. The fact that the obtained values fall within the range of -2--+2 indicates that the data are consistent with a normal distribution (Table 4). The analyses revealed that the responses of both the female and the male participants largely conformed to a normal distribution; however, this threshold was exceeded for certain items (specifically questions 1, 7, and 15).

Upon examining the data, the responses of the female participants to their most frequently used social media platforms exhibited a markedly right-skewed and leptokurtic distribution (skewness = 2.214; kurtosis = 3.781). This finding indicates a concentration of preference among female participants toward specific platforms, whereas alternative options were considerably less favoured.

With respect to the female participants' responses to their willingness to visit architectural structures they encountered on social media, the negative skewness value (-1.611) indicates a left-skewed distribution, whereas the high kurtosis value (5.156) reveals a leptokurtic (peaked) distribution. These results suggest that the responses were predominantly concentrated at the higher end of the scale, indicating that the majority of the participants responded positively to this question.

When the responses of male participants regarding the positive impact of social media campaigns on tourism were examined, the distribution was found to be left skewed and notably leptokurtic, indicating a violation of the normality assumption for this variable (skewness = -1.559; kurtosis = 2.898).

These findings serve as a significant indicator for the statistical evaluation of the validity and reliability of the data obtained on the basis of the gender variable.

Table 4. Skewness and Kurtosis Analysis for Assessing the Normality of Distribution

	Gender	Type of Value	Statistic	Std. Error
2) What is your age?	Female	Skewness	0,241	0,347
		Kurtosis	-0,869	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,324	0,327
		Kurtosis	-0,920	0,644
3) What is your education level?	Female	Skewness	0,037	0,347
		Kurtosis	-0,794	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,248	0,327
		Kurtosis	0,100	0,644
1) Which social media platforms do you use most actively?	Female	Skewness	**2,214**	0,347
		Kurtosis	**3,781**	0,681
	Male	Skewness	1,010	0,327
		Kurtosis	-0,123	0,644
2) How much time do you spend on social media daily?	Female	Skewness	0,755	0,347
		Kurtosis	0,416	0,681
	Male	Skewness	0,059	0,327
		Kurtosis	-1,090	0,644

	Gender	Type of Value	Statistic	Std. Error
3) Which sources do you use most frequently to obtain information about historical buildings?	Female	Skewness	1,062	0,347
		Kurtosis	1,209	0,681
	Male	Skewness	0,162	0,327
		Kurtosis	-1,346	0,644
1) How often do you encounter content related to Erzurum's historical buildings on social media?	Female	Skewness	0,506	0,347
		Kurtosis	-0,534	0,681
	Male	Skewness	0,297	0,327
		Kurtosis	0,706	0,644
2) Do you think social media contributes to the promotion of historical buildings in Erzurum?	Female	Skewness	-0,699	0,347
		Kurtosis	-0,228	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,636	0,327
		Kurtosis	-0,238	0,644
3) Would you like to see more content about Erzurum's historical environment and buildings on social media?	Female	Skewness	-0,926	0,347
		Kurtosis	1,839	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,516	0,327
		Kurtosis	-0,683	0,644
4) Do you share information about Erzurum's historical buildings on social media? If yes, how often?	Female	Skewness	-0,125	0,347
		Kurtosis	-0,701	0,681
	Male	Skewness	0,290	0,327
		Kurtosis	0,017	0,644
5) Do you comment on or like posts related to Erzurum's historical buildings?	Female	Skewness	-0,292	0,347
		Kurtosis	-0,416	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,045	0,327
		Kurtosis	-0,742	0,644
6) Does the content you see on social media increase your interest in Erzurum's historical buildings?	Female	Skewness	-0,427	0,347
		Kurtosis	0,179	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-1,142	0,327
		Kurtosis	1,089	0,644
7) Have you visited Erzurum's historical buildings based on content you saw on social media?	Female	Skewness	-1,611	0,347
		Kurtosis	**5,156**	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,781	0,327
		Kurtosis	0,464	0,644
8)Have social media contents you encountered provided you with more information about Erzurum's historical buildings?	Female	Skewness	-0,861	0,347
		Kurtosis	1,072	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-1,098	0,327
		Kurtosis	2,192	0,644
9) Do you follow social media accounts or pages to obtain more information about Erzurum's cultural heritage and historical buildings?	Female	Skewness	0,172	0,347
		Kurtosis	-0,930	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,187	0,327
		Kurtosis	-0,417	0,644
10) Have you experienced Erzurum's historical buildings through virtual tours or digital content?	Female	Skewness	-0,104	0,347
		Kurtosis	-1,512	0,681
	Male	Skewness	0,515	0,327
		Kurtosis	-1,217	0,644
11) Have these digital experiences influenced your actual visits?	Female	Skewness	-0,697	0,347
		Kurtosis	-0,356	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,161	0,327
		Kurtosis	-0,909	0,644

	Gender	Type of Value	Statistic	Std. Error
12) Do you think social media is effective in the preservation of Erzurum's historical buildings?	Female	Skewness	-0,651	0,347
		Kurtosis	0,161	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,904	0,327
		Kurtosis	0,955	0,644
13) Do you believe social media has negative effects, such as commercializing or devaluing Erzurum's historical buildings, or causing damage?	Female	Skewness	0,498	0,347
		Kurtosis	-0,846	0,681
	Male	Skewness	0,491	0,327
		Kurtosis	-0,649	0,644
14) Would you recommend organizing an activity or campaign on social media to support Erzurum's cultural values? If such a campaign is organized, would you participate?	Female	Skewness	-0,945	0,347
		Kurtosis	1,347	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,287	0,327
		Kurtosis	0,033	0,644
15) Do you think social media campaigns about Erzurum's historical buildings have positively affected tourism?	Female	Skewness	-0,940	0,347
		Kurtosis	1,302	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-1,559	0,327
		Kurtosis	**2,898**	0,644
16) Have you encountered educational or informational content about the preservation of Erzurum's historical buildings in digital environments?	Female	Skewness	0,041	0,347
		Kurtosis	-0,633	0,681
	Male	Skewness	0,165	0,327
		Kurtosis	-0,499	0,644
17) Do you think more sharing on digital platforms is necessary for Erzurum's historical buildings to reach wider audiences?	Female	Skewness	-0,798	0,347
		Kurtosis	2,038	0,681
	Male	Skewness	-0,252	0,327
		Kurtosis	-0,564	0,644

Within the scope of the study, the Pearson correlation test was conducted to analyse and evaluate whether there was a relationship between the survey questions and the effects of social media and digital platforms on Erzurum's historic environment and structure. The obtained data were statistically analysed to examine the direction and strength of the relationships, including their positivity, negativity, and weakness. In the correlation analysis, the single asterisk (*) and double asterisk (**) symbols indicate levels of statistical significance. A correlation coefficient with $p < 0.05$ (single asterisk *) indicates that the relationship is accurate with 95% confidence, whereas a correlation coefficient with $p < 0.01$ (double asterisk **) indicates that the relationship is accurate with 99% confidence.

Accordingly, relationships marked with double asterisks (**) in the table and having a correlation coefficient (r) greater than 0.50, indicating a high strength of association, as well as negative correlations, were examined and interpreted. (0.40 - 0.59: moderate correlation; 0.60 - 0.79: strong correlation; 0.80 - 1.00: very strong correlation) (negative correlation: as one value increases, the other decreases) (Figure 3).

A low-level negative correlation was found between gender and daily social media usage time ($r = -0.321$, $p < 0.01$). An inverse relationship is observed between the variables.

A moderate negative correlation was found between age and daily social media usage time ($r = -0.433$, $p < 0.01$). As one variable increases, the other decreases.

There is a moderate positive correlation between social media posts contributing to the promotion of historical buildings in Erzurum and the content encountered on social media, enabling users to gain more information about Erzurum's historical structures ($r = 0.646$, $p < 0.01$).

A moderate positive correlation was found between social media posts contributing to the promotion of

Erzurum's historical buildings and the perceived impact of social media on the preservation of these structures (r = 0.563, p < 0.01). In other words, individuals who believe that social media posts aid in promoting historical buildings tend to follow social media accounts to obtain more information about Erzurum's cultural heritage.

Additionally, a strong positive correlation exists between social media posts contributing to the promotion of historical buildings and the frequency of sharing information about Erzurum's historical buildings seen on social media (r = 0.646, p < 0.01).

A strong positive correlation was found between commenting on and liking posts related to Erzurum's historical buildings and the increase in interest in these buildings generated by content seen on social media (r = 0.598, p < 0.01).

There is a strong positive correlation between the increased interest in Erzurum's historical buildings due to content seen on social media and visiting these historical sites (r = 0.624, p < 0.01).

Additionally, a moderate positive correlation exists between the increased interest in Erzurum's historical buildings from social media content and the acquisition of more information about Erzurum's historical buildings from such content on social media (r = 0.554, p < 0.01).

A strong positive correlation was found between experiencing Erzurum's historical buildings through virtual tours or digital content and the impact of such digital experiences on actual visits (r = 0.711, p < 0.01).

A moderate positive correlation exists between the influence of social media on the preservation of Erzurum's historical buildings and the impact of social media campaigns about Erzurum's historical buildings on tourism (r = 0.513, p < 0.01).

	Age	Education	Social Media	Hours	Source	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1) What is your gender?	.218*	0,121	0,049	-.321**	.313**	-0,080	-0,057	0,124	0,038	-0,090	-0,066	-0,135	-0,035	-0,007	-0,180	-.222*	0,034	0,027	0,110	0,098	-0,132	0,038
2) What is your age?	1	0,073	-0,071	-.433**	0,109	0,050	0,120	0,103	.245*	.233*	.248*	0,092	.220*	.314**	0,116	0,099	0,062	-0,118	-.243*	0,127	0,022	0,034
3) What is your education level?		1	0,001	-0,061	.231*	-0,188	-.215*	0,189	-0,062	-0,053	0,053	0,062	-0,151	-.242*	-0,155	-0,109	-0,119	-0,002	0,015	0,070	-0,189	0,022
1) Which social media platforms do you use most actively?			1	-0,053	0,005	-0,141	0,090	0,071	-0,134	-0,164	-0,002	0,035	0,078	-0,109	-0,100	-0,134	0,074	0,092	-0,057	-0,043	0,071	0,011
2 How much time do you spend on social media daily?				1	-0,082	0,071	0,006	-0,064	-0,013	-0,092	-0,128	-0,044	-0,125	0,025	0,164	0,069	-0,060	0,098	-0,057	-0,195	0,023	-0,136
3) Which sources do you use most frequently to obtain information about historical buildings?					1	-0,047	-0,122	0,147	0,103	-0,005	0,125	0,168	-0,171	-0,037	-0,123	-0,073	-0,038	0,010	0,113	0,156	-0,072	0,063
1) How often do you encounter content related to Erzurum's historical buildings on social media?						1	.276**	0,029	.387**	.264**	.315**	.252**	.308**	.382**	.299**	.320**	.290**	0,060	.244*	0,171	.278**	0,122
2) Do you think social media contributes to the promotion of historical buildings in Erzurum?							1	.310**	0,195	.239*	.486**	0,247	.646**	.392**	0,168	.258**	.563**	-0,105	0,194	.409**	0,162	0,163
3) Would you like to see more content about Erzurum's historical environment and buildings on social media?								1	0,167	.380**	.359**	.407**	.467**	.264**	0,036	0,093	0,156	0,059	.406**	.323**	-0,079	.310**
4) Do you share information about Erzurum's historical buildings on social media? If yes, how often?									1	.345**	.323**	.263**	.238*	.459**	.379**	.230*	0,097	.436**	0,168	.287**	.226*	
5) Do you comment on or like posts related to Erzurum's historical buildings?										1	.598**	.460**	.383**	.456**	0,194	.324**	.218*	-0,103	.449**	.306**	0,070	.284**
6) Does the content you see on social media increase your interest in Erzurum's historical buildings?											1	.624**	.554**	.464**	.265**	.436**	.436**	-0,071	.251*	.533**	0,179	.264**
7) Have you visited Erzurum's historical buildings based on content you saw on social media?												1	.445**	.336**	0,214	.334**	.363**	0,048	.402**	.388**	0,239	.338**
8) Have social media contents you encountered provided you with more information about Erzurum's historical buildings?													1	.473**	0,214	.334**	.482**	0,059	.324**	.432**	.261*	.338**
9) Do you follow social media accounts or pages to obtain more information about Erzurum's cultural heritage and historical buildings?														1	.417**	.407**	.311**	0,099	.404**	.225*	.311**	0,176
10) Have you experienced Erzurum's historical buildings through virtual tours or digital content?															1	.711**	.212*	0,039	0,119	0,128	.280**	0,128
11) Have these digital experiences influenced your actual visits?																1	.266**	0,002	.269**	.278**	0,191	0,189
12) Do you think social media is effective in the preservation of Erzurum's historical buildings?																	1	0,087	0,170	.513**	.352**	0,131
13) Do you believe social media has negative effects, such as commercializing or devaluing Erzurum's historical buildings, or causing damage?																		1	0,097	0,034	.268**	0,015
14) Would you recommend organizing an activity or campaign on social media to support Erzurum's cultural values? If such a campaign is organized, would you participate?																			1	.323**	0,080	.458**
15) Do you think social media campaigns about Erzurum's historical buildings have positively affected tourism?																				1	0,093	.256*
16) Have you encountered educational or informational content about the preservation of Erzurum's historical buildings in digital environments?																					1	0,080
17) Do you think more sharing on digital platforms is necessary for Erzurum's historical buildings to reach wider audiences?																						1

Figure 3. Pearson correlation test results

4. DISCUSSION

Erzurum is a very special city characterized by its urban fabric shaped by history, along with its historic environment and structure. However, in this technological era, the rich cultural heritage of cities has not been adequately promoted on social media and digital platforms. In particular, the opportunities offered by social media are not fully utilized. This study examines both the positive and negative contributions of social media and digital platforms to the cultural heritage of Erzurum's historic environments and structures and offers some recommendations on how these platforms can contribute more effectively and generate greater engagement.

Social media and digital platforms are tools that offer numerous positive contributions, such as raising awareness, sharing information and issues, organizing, and rapidly disseminating events. These tools can contribute to many areas, including promotion, preservation, and increased interest in cultural heritage, through various advantages, such as supporting restoration projects, providing educational materials, digital archiving, and virtual tours. Moreover, they

facilitate the acquisition of more knowledge about cultural heritage and ensure that this information reaches a broader audience. Social media and digital content also have the potential to increase visitor flow and numbers. Therefore, Erzurum should be made attractive to both domestic and international tourists through visual imagery, videos, and virtual tours. However, the promotion of such content is currently not widespread enough for Erzurum's historical environment and structures.

Virtual tours and digital excursions are crucial tools for individuals who cannot visit Erzurum in person but wish to explore the city and its cultural heritage virtually. In this context, opportunities such as the use of 3D models as highly effective and intuitive communication tools to share and visualize information collected in databases (Manferdini & Remondino, 2010: 110--124) make Erzurum's rich history more accessible on digital platforms. This enables users to view Erzurum's historic environments and structures and acquire more information about them. Additionally, social media is significant because it allows all internet users easy access to publish information and allows them to communicate, read, or broadcast content at a low cost (Magro, 2012: 148--161).

Social media and digital platforms serve as important tools to raise awareness of Erzurum's cultural heritage and to disseminate this content to a wider audience. All these opportunities present significant prospects for enhancing Erzurum's digital visibility. Therefore, increasing the promotion of digital content is essential. Social media and digital advertising can play crucial roles in this regard. However, the current use of digital platforms does not fully realize this potential. Social media accounts and pages dedicated to Erzurum are gradually increasing and becoming more active, yet content related to Erzurum's historic environments and structures is still insufficiently shared on these platforms. This limits and restricts the visibility of the city's cultural heritage on social media and digital platforms. As a result, many people do not have the opportunity to adequately explore Erzurum's historical assets in digital environments. Another issue is that content shared on social media and digital platforms generally receives very little interaction. Posts related to Erzurum's historic environments and structures fail to generate sufficient curiosity or interest and often go unnoticed. This situation hinders the promotion, experience, and wider dissemination of Erzurum's cultural heritage.

While social media and digital platforms can offer significant benefits, they can also cause harm. Restoration and adaptive reuse projects may lead to commercial exploitation, resulting in environmental and structural damage and diminishing the value of historic sites. In efforts to attract tourist attention and interest, the commercialization of buildings and the rapid spread of posts can cause negative issues such as misleading information, visual manipulation, and excessive visitor flows. Although such problematic content exists, it remains insufficiently addressed and largely unknown.

To overcome these limitations, adopting a strategic approach to social media usage focused on Erzurum is highly important. In this context, cultural sustainability, digital educational content, and awareness-raising activities can play critical roles. However, social media accounts and pages dedicated to Erzurum are still emerging and becoming active. Therefore, it is essential to manage Erzurum's social media accounts more actively and share content in a more strategic and engaging manner. Such content should capture the interests of travelers. For example, interactive maps, customizable digital guides, and mobile applications concerning Erzurum's historic structures could provide better guidance to visitors.

Producing educational content and raising awareness on social media and digital platforms is highly important. Currently, there are insufficient educational materials and awareness campaigns on social media and digital platforms

aimed at protecting Erzurum's cultural heritage. Content that creates public awareness about the historic environment and structures in Erzurum can contribute positively to tourism. Educational materials can provide informative digital content on topics such as the importance and preservation of Erzurum's cultural heritage. Education and awareness-raising are essential for the transmission and safeguarding of Erzurum's cultural values for future generations.

5. CONCLUSION

Erzurum is one of Turkey's significant cities due to its rich cultural heritage, distinctive historical fabric, and strategic location. To ensure the city's cultural continuity and foster historical awareness, the preservation and documentation of historical structures, as well as the adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings, play crucial roles (Saraç & Tanrısever, 2018: 151--163). In this context, efforts to incorporate digital platforms and social media into historical areas have been rapidly increasing.

This study evaluated the effects of social media and digital platforms on the preservation, promotion, and awareness-raising of Erzurum's historic environment and structure as part of its cultural heritage. The findings revealed that social media and digital platforms are not only communication tools but also provide significant contributions to sustaining cultural heritage, preserving historical values, and raising public awareness. Overall, the results indicate that while social media plays an important role in promoting Erzurum's historic buildings, the potential of powerful tools such as digital platforms and social media to showcase Erzurum's rich cultural heritage is not yet fully utilized. Digital platforms should be used more effectively to promote, document, and disseminate Erzurum's historic environments and structures to a broader audience.

The accurate, active, and sustainable use of digital tools will significantly contribute to the promotion, preservation, awareness, and, most importantly, cultural sustainability of Erzurum's rich cultural heritage. However, despite living in the digital age, this potential has not yet been fully realized. Therefore, the use of social media and digital platforms in the process of preserving and promoting this rich cultural heritage must be carefully and consciously managed to ensure more effective utilization.

To enhance the visibility of Erzurum's historic environment and structures on social media and digital platforms, it is necessary to increase digital engagement, diversify and develop content, and design and present it in appealing ways. In addition to promotional content, educational, informative, engaging, and participatory materials should be produced to increase interest and interaction with Erzurum's cultural heritage, thereby reaching wider audiences. Visually rich content, virtual tours, and digital educational materials can be particularly effective tools for promoting and preserving this heritage. Through these tools, Erzurum's historic environment and structures can become accessible not only to the local community but also to a global audience. This increased accessibility can contribute to greater awareness and development of Erzurum's cultural tourism. For a city to gain greater visibility, social media and digital platforms must produce more effective, active, and regular content.

For example, surveys, activities, competitions, events, or campaigns encouraging content creation related to Erzurum's historic environments and structures can increase social media engagement. Additionally, visual and video content showcasing Erzurum's historical buildings, especially virtual tours, blog posts, and story-format shares, can attract greater audience interest and raise awareness. Furthermore, the advantages of augmented reality (AR) for cultural heritage are multifaceted: it can achieve higher levels of user interaction, enable more functional and comprehensive use of cultural spaces, and provide real-time multimedia information to users, among other benefits

(Spacca, et al., 2018: 61--71). Within this framework, many mobile application developers are active, and numerous cultural heritage institutions leverage the potential of AR to offer personalized experiences to their users (Economou & Meintani, 2011: 87--101). Raising digital awareness, increasing the active use of applications such as VR and AR, and expanding educational activities are recommended. In support of the effectiveness of this recommendation, a study by Cheung and Yang (2005) revealed that VR applications used in heritage tourism increased visitor satisfaction and information retention, which contributed to more meaningful and memorable experiences (Yaralı & Özçelik Baloğlu, 2023: 245--364). Thus, the role of digital platforms in enhancing and facilitating tourism, accessibility, and conservation efforts has been examined, drawing attention to different perspectives on sustainability, education, and the visitor experience.

Therefore, enhancing the quality of promotion and visualization on digital platforms is crucial to achieve greater engagement. The continuity of ongoing efforts should be ensured through development and enrichment with innovative methods. Additionally, organizing advertisements, campaigns, and various activities to increase interest and attract attention to this content is recommended. In the preservation of cultural heritage, greater care and diligence are required during the processes of adaptive reuse and conservation. For the sustainability of these efforts, content quality, the capacity to reach target audiences, and the continuity of promotional strategies hold critical importance.

In short, the accurate promotion of Erzurum's historic environment and rich cultural heritage on social media and digital platforms will aid in the preservation of this heritage and ensure cultural continuity. To maintain this continuity, digital content must be continuously monitored, updated, and diversified. Broadening the digital exposure of Erzurum's historic environments and structures to wider audiences and increasing its tourism potential will create significant opportunities to protect the city's cultural heritage and transmit it to future generations.

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