IN THE CONTEXT OF TOURISM MARKETING G20 COUNTRIES’ INSTAGRAM ACTIVITIES

Kübra ÖZARSLAN* - Bahtiyar Ahu ALPASLAN**

ABSTRACT

Today, social media is used as an effective tool in many aspects such as tourism marketing, destination marketing, country branding, country image creation etc. and virtual cultural contents associated with countries are produced through these platforms. In this study, whether the Instagram, which is today a quite popular social media platforms in promoting Turkey as an important world tourism destination, was used as an effective tool or not was investigated. To find answer to this question, the performance of Turkey’s official tourism website in Instagram platforms was compared with the performance of official tourism pages of other leading countries of the world. Thus, it was tried to determine the place of Turkey in the World rankings. In the research, the Instagram performances of forty three countries- the members of the EU and G20- (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Cyprus, Croatia, Netherlands, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Greece, United States, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Indonesia, South Africa, South Korea, India, Japan, Canada, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey) were examined. The Instagram performance in this study was the number of posts that were shared through Instagram and called virtual cultural content. According to the result of the research, Turkey takes its place in the second rank in the sampling of the countries, which share the contents via Instagram. It is observed that Australia, which is the first in ranking, created twice as much visual cultural content compared with Turkey.

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Social media in today’s digital world, is becoming a part of everyday life and it is becoming more widespread day by day (Erdoğdu & Tanrıkulu, 2015, p.276). Social media is a concept used to express web-based communication tools that offer on-line interaction in the 1990s. One of the definitions of social media is as “social media is a social environment where we can have fun, communicate and participate” (Bercovici, 2010). “Social media can be described as a term which presents its users mutual sharing and as a general name given to the networks that have a remarkable place in the internet.” (Bülbül Öğuz, 2012, p. 1157). Social media, which is a product of social technology, has five fundamental elements besides its unique features. Mayfield (2008, p.6) explains these five elements particularly through arranging them as participants, openness, conversation, community and connectedness. Social media is specifically significant in terms of influencing the behaviour of society (Kirschenbaum, 2004, p.99). In other words, social media has the characteristics to influence other people’s behaviours and has many surplus values in this regard. The feedback obtained very fast, especially for users can be given as examples for this case (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009, p.2) It is possible to categorize social media platforms as social networking sites, blogs, microblogs, content sharing sites, social mark-up sites, wiki, podcasts, RSS and forums.

Instagram, which is one of the most commonly used tools of the social media, is a video sharing application. Instagram, developed by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, was bought by the social media giant Facebook with one billion dollars in 2012. With 30 million users before being sold to Facebook, Instagram has over one billion users in July 2018 (Çağala, 2018).

Today, Instagram application takes its place especially among teenagers and middle-aged people categories that most frequently use social media applications. Instagram emerged with the combination of the English words, “instant”, which means momentary and “telegram” which means telegraph. One of the basic reasons of why Instagram application is so popular and preferred originates from the opportunity it enables to individuals, communities, companies and even the countries share their life styles with photos or videos with enjoyable and quick way that the photos can be liked and commented on under them, having “tagging” feature, and even sharing messages can be re-posted by other users in their own personal accounts are of the most important features of Instagram. Users can share photos or videos by adding hashtag(#) and they can have a situation reached by more people. Clicking on the hashtag in the mobile application enables the user to receive the flow of all sends added to the hashtag related to the topic. Instagram users can share the share the location in which they take photos. This enables to create links of all the photos taken in a definite location. Thus, this is a quick way to reach the photos got or taken in or around that area (Tekulve & Kelly 2013, p.8).

In the research, the ‘Instagram performances’ of the countries, which are the members of the G20, were measured. Instagram performance was associated with the quantities of the posts shared in the Instagram profile in the study. It is possible to reach the number of
posts, followers and follow-ups from countries’ Instagram accounts and investigate the posts. In this study, only the accounts of countries, which have been approved or the ‘official Instagram account’ expressions, or the number of posts of the Instagram profiles in which the official web pages of countries have been included in the profile information, will be taken into consideration. Although the profiles that the tour agencies manage are approved, these profiles are not evaluated. Because, the aim of the research is to find out whether Instagram is used effectively or not. According to this purpose, the best method that would be followed was thought to be the investigation of the number of posts. Investigating the number of follower will not be an appropriate method to the purpose of the research. Because, that the Instagram page of a country has high or low number of followers may originate from various reasons. For instance, there are also cases where many people follow the Instagram page of any country, but the number of posts of this account is insufficient. In this case, the number of followers may not originate from the success of the country’s Instagram performance, but due to other reasons. Furthermore, there may also be cases to purchase followers to increase follow-up status for the Instagram profile. Therefore, a successful Instagram performance should not be evaluated through taking the number of followers into consideration. The criterion of the successful Instagram performance should not be evaluated within the scope of follow number because there may be cases in which Instagram profiles have regular quality content input and extremely high number of followers but low follow-up. This case may be related to the developing strategy of Instagram account depended on various reasons. A successful Instagram performance is more related to the regular and quality of the content. The quality of the contents produced in social media is related to many criteria such as being curious about the content, being useful to the person or society, being understandable or creative. In this respect, the measurement of quality content can be difficult and subjective. For this reason, Instagram profiles of the countries investigated in our research will be evaluated only in terms of the number of posts. The number of posts or the number of content produced demonstrates the great effort and initiative for the promotion of countries on social media. Whether these posts are of high quality or not may vary according to the individuals, communities and date. However, the number of content is not relative and is rationally precise and, in the last instance, indicates a promotional effort. In this respect, it is appropriate to the question and purpose of the research. For this reason, Instagram profiles of the countries in the sample will only be evaluated in terms of the number of content. Since the number of content changes every day, the research was tried to be completed in a short period and finished on 31st August 2018 in order to make a reliable comparison. Considering that the corporate Instagram profiles are generally shared with one, two or three posts per day, there is no situation that could change the order in the ranking as a result of the research. There is the name of each country, the number of content (written in brackets), the name of the page, and the name of ‘official page’ expression, if it is referred, in the Instagram profile.

According to the result of the research, Turkey takes its place in the second rank in the sampling of the countries, which share the contents via Instagram. This case creates highly advantageous situation
in terms of the promotion of Turkey, branding and outlook. It is observed that Australia, which is the first in ranking, created twice as much visual cultural content compared with Turkey, which is the second. It is clearly noticed that Australia demonstrated a great deal of struggle for a good promotion via Instagram surpassing Turkey, which is the closest country in using Instagram. In today’s digital world, social media is an important source of information for potential tourist destinations. In particular, Instagram has the top priority in travel planning where video and visual content is frequently shared. For this reason, social media should be taken into account when tourism-marketing strategies of countries and investments should be made on this issue. According to the result of the research, the Republic of Turkey is a pretty good position in the rankings.

Keywords: New Media, Marketing Communication, Digital Marketing, Country Marketing, G20.

1. Introduction

Social media in today’s digital world, is becoming a part of everyday life and it is becoming more widespread day by day (Erdoğan & Tanırkulu, 2015, p.276). Social media is a concept used to
express web-based communication tools that offer on-line interaction in the 1990s. One of the
definitions of social media is as “social media is a social environment where we can have fun,
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presents its users mutual sharing and as a general name given to the networks that have a remarkable
place in the internet.” (Bülbül Oğuz, 2012, p. 1157). Social media, which is a product of social
technology, has five fundamental elements besides its unique features. Mayfield (2008, p.6) explains
these five elements particularly through arranging them as participants, openness, conversation,
community and connectedness:

- **Participants**: Participants constitutes the basic element of social media. Without
  participants, or users with other definition, sharing and interaction cannot be possible. Participants in
  the social media are encouraged and receive feedback on the shares.

- **Openness**: Social media services are open to direct feedback and interaction. Users can
  make comments and share content through these services without any tools or person. Barriers related
to the access can be accommodated in some cases. These barriers are created by the participants who
  share more content.

- **Conversation**: While there is a one-way flow of content in the traditional media, bi-
directional or multiple transfer can be actualised on social media. The content transfer consists of not
only objects but also electronic texts.

- **Community**: Community formation can be actualised quickly and effectively in social
  media. In these groups called social groups, members can share their favourite photos, contents and
  music pieces mutually without any obstacles.

- **Connectedness**: The greatest advantage of the social media is that it allows site
  connectors. That is, links can be given about any subject based on the human element such as news,
  researches, reviews, etc. in the websites covered by social media.

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to the hashtag related to the topic. Instagram users can share the share the location in which they take
photos. This enables to create links of all the photos taken in a definite location. Thus, this is a quick way to reach the photos got or taken in or around that area (Tekulve & Kelly 2013, p.8).

In addition to all these, Instagram has some specific features. These features can be expressed as follows:

- Instagram enables to take and edit photo. External content can be used during taking and editing the photos.
- Instagram can also be expressed as a virtual meeting platform.
- The basic way to reach the users in Instagram is to use hashtag. Among the popular hashtags #like, #Instagram, #photooftheday, #me, #instagood, #tweegram come forth.
- In addition, that the users can share their own photos and videos, they can also like other's photos and videos, write comment under them.
- Users can follow the accounts they want and interact with others through writing comment in the content.
- Instagram has a specific universal language.
- Instagram has a constantly renewable and changeable structure (Özutku et al., 2014, p.138-140).

The Instagram platform also allows you to share certain stories with a certain amount of time through the story feature. These shares remain in the person’s account for a certain period and are automatically deleted when the time is up. The tag feature can also be used for stories made over the story feature. The tagged person's notification is displayed his Instagram account and the tagged person can access that content. It is also possible to refer that the tagging feature is enabled in various sharing areas via Instagram, so that the Instagram platform represents not only a photography and video sharing space but also a digital common space where the corporate culture, identity and image culture are shared. Simultaneous sharing of billions of people, regardless of race, religion, language, gender, education, lifestyle and status, social media tools that they can set network with their own environments and other environments have become an important mass communication tool especially in terms of marketing, public relations and advertising (Ali kılıç, 2011, p.5).

“The emerging "social media networks " that appeared after the developments in Internet technology, opened up new horizons for the tourism industry representatives beyond their imaginations and started to promote them to people in distant lands and in a short time have become an integral part of tourism.” (Yeşil, 2013, pp.734-735). “The press’ power of influencing the masses and building public opinion is a known fact.” (İnce & Koçak, 2018, p.38). Thus, social media is a very important tool for tourism marketing.

Countries can spread their basic values, cultures, principles and visions through social media channels and have the opportunity to express themselves in a more accurate and efficient way, thus have the opportunity to create the image they want in the minds of their users. Nowadays, many countries are applying advertisements for their countries by using Instagram in order to promote their tourism potential. On Instagram, where the visual elements are the main tools of sharing, many elements such as natural and cultural beauties, virus, living environments, traditional foods etc. are shared visually on Instagram. The ministry of tourism of promotion offices generally carries out the management of Instagram pages of the countries and ‘official Instagram account’ expression takes place in the Instagram pages. Instagram, which is a free social media platform, is an extremely useful platform for developing countries’ tourism potentials and promoting their countries quickly and interactively with the whole world. At this point, the question of whether countries use this platform effectively taking into
consideration or not comes forth. With this purpose, the Instagram accounts of the countries which are the G20 members were investigated.

2. Method

In the research, the 'Instagram performances' of the countries, which are the members of the G20, were measured. Instagram performance was associated with the quantities of the posts shared in the Instagram profile in the study. It is possible to reach the number of posts, followers and follow-ups from countries' Instagram accounts and investigate the posts. In this study, only the accounts of countries, which have been approved or the 'official Instagram account' expressions, or the number of posts of the Instagram profiles in which the official web pages of countries have been included in the profile information, will be taken into consideration. Although the profiles that the tour agencies manage are approved, these profiles are not evaluated. Because, the aim of the research is to find out whether Instagram is used effectively or not. According to this purpose, the best method that would be followed was thought to be the investigation of the number of posts. Investigating the number of follower will not be an appropriate method to the purpose of the research. Because, that the Instagram page of a country has high or low number of followers may originate from various reasons. For instance, there are also cases where many people follow the Instagram page of any country, but the number of posts of this account is insufficient. In this case, the number of followers may not originate from the success of the country's Instagram performance, but due to other reasons. Furthermore, there may also be cases to purchase followers to increase follow-up status for the Instagram profile. Therefore, a successful Instagram performance should not be evaluated through taking the number of followers into consideration. The criterion of the successful Instagram performance should not be evaluated within the scope of follow number because there may be cases in which Instagram profiles have regular quality content input and extremely high number of followers but low follow-up. This case may be related to the developing strategy of Instagram account depended on various reasons. A successful Instagram performance is more related to the regular and quality of the content. The quality of the contents produced in social media is related to many criteria such as being curious about the content, being useful to the person or society, being understandable or creative. In this respect, the measurement of quality content can be difficult and subjective. For this reason, Instagram profiles of the countries investigated in our research will be evaluated only in terms of the number of posts. The number of posts or the number of content produced demonstrates the great effort and initiative for the promotion of countries on social media. Whether these posts are of high quality or not may vary according to the individuals, communities and date. However, the number of content is not relative and is rationally precise and, in the last instance, indicates a promotional effort. In this respect, it is appropriate to the question and purpose of the research. For this reason, Instagram profiles of the countries in the sample will only be evaluated in terms of the number of content. Since the number of content changes every day, the research was tried to be completed in a short period and finished on 31st August 2018 in order to make a reliable comparison. Considering that the corporate Instagram profiles are generally shared with one, two or three posts per day, there is no situation that could change the order in the ranking as a result of the research. There is the name of each country, the number of content (written in brackets), the name of the page, and the name of ‘official page’ expression, if it is referred, in the Instagram profile. At the end of the research, conclusions and developing recommendations on the social media policy and strategies of the countries were presented.

3. Results

- Germany: (1,951 post). (germanytourism, n.d.). (Official Instagram Account of the German National Tourist Board!)

- United States of America: (1888 post). (visittheusa, n.d.). (Welcome to the USA’s official travel & tourism organization.)
- Argentina: (1684 post). (visitargentina, n.d.). (Official Tourism account.)
- Australia: (8376 post). (australia, n.d.). (Tourism Australia's official account.)
- Belgium: (0 post).
- Brazil: (0 post).
- Bulgaria: (0 post).
- Czechia: (1761 post). (visitcz, n.d.). (The official Instagram travel account of the Czech Republic)
- China: (0 post).
- Denmark: (542 post). (denmarkdotdk, n.d.). (Welcome to Denmark's official Instagram profile. Managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark editors of denmark.dk)
- Indonesia: (0 post).
- Finland: (1238 post). (ourfinland, n.d.). (Official Travel Site of Finland.)
- France: (0 post).
- South Cyprus Administration: (1550 post). (visitcypruscom, n.d.). (Cyprus Tourism Organisation official account.)
- Croatia: (0 post).
- India: (811 post). (visitindia.official, n.d.). (Welcome to the official Ig feed of Visit India Tourism Dept.)
- Netherlands: (0 post).
- Ireland: (1128 post). (tourismireland, n.d.). (Tourism Ireland's official Instagram account.)
- Spain: (2237 post). (spain, n.d.). (Official Instagram of Tourism in Spain.)
- Sweden: (1573 post). (visitsweden, n.d.). (The official Instagram account of Visit Sweden.)
- Italy: (0 post).
- Japan: (337 post). (visitjapanjp, n.d.). (Visit Japan's official account.)
- Canada: (0 post).
- South Korea: (0 post).
• Latvia: (0 post).
• Lithuanian: (0 post).
• Luxembourg: (998 post). (visit_luxembourg, n.d.). (Official page of Luxembourg for Tourism.).
• Hungary: (290 post). (visithungaryhu, n.d.). (The official Instagram account of Visit Hungary.).
• Malta: (783 post). (visitmalta, n.d.). (Welcome to the official Instagram account for The Maltese Islands.).
• Mexico: (1575 post). (visitmexico, n.d.). (Mexico Tourism Board's official account.).
• Poland: (0 post).
• Portugal: (2035 post). (visitportugal, n.d.). (Official web resource for travel and tourism in Portugal.).
• Romania: (0 post).
• Russia: (0 post).
• Slovakia: (0 post).
• Slovenia: (0 post).
• Suudi Arabia: (0 post).
• Turkey: (3215 post). (turkey_home, n.d.). (The official Instagram page of "Turkey Home").
• Greece: (2108 post). (visitgreecegr, n.d.). (This is the official Visit Greece page, created by the Greek National Tourism Organisation web team.)

4. Statistical Analysis
1. Australia: 8376
2. Turkey: 3215
3. Spain: 2237
4. Estonia: 2180
5. Greece: 2108
6. Portugal: 2035
7. Austria: 1965
8. Germany: 1951
9. United States of America: 1888
10. Czechia: 1761
11. Argentina: 1684
12. Mexico: 1575
13. South Cyprus Administration: 1550
5. Discussions and Suggestions

Turkey takes its place in the second rank in the sampling of the countries, which share the contents via Instagram. This case creates highly advantageous situation in terms of the promotion of Turkey, branding and outlook. It is observed that Australia, which is the first in ranking, created twice as much visual cultural content compared with Turkey, which is the second. It is clearly noticed that Australia demonstrated a great deal of struggle for a good promotion via Instagram surpassing Turkey, which is the closest country in using Instagram. In today’s digital world, social media is an important source of information for potential tourist destinations. In particular, Instagram has the top priority in travel planning where video and visual content is frequently shared. For this reason, social media should be taken into account when tourism-marketing strategies of countries and investments should be made on this issue. According to the result of the research, the Republic of Turkey is a pretty good position in the rankings.

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**Turkish Studies**

**Volume 13/29, Fall 2018**


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