


# Chapter 38

## Exploring the Role of Instagram in Tourism Destination Preferences: A Turkish Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to reveal the correlation between the usage of Instagram as a social media platform and destination preferences of tourism customers from the perspective of information, utilisation, influence, buying, and intention stages that underline particularly consumer behaviour in tourism marketing. This study was conducted in Turkey and aims to shed light on the critical importance of utilising from social media in marketing management of the travel and tourism sector. Quantitative data analysis was preferred and used in this study in order to examine the factors of Instagram that have effects on tourism destination preferences. In addition to the quantitative study conducted, The Eastern Express Journey (Karsrail) case is included in the current study to gain a deeper understanding of the importance and place of social media for tourism.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-4503-7.ch038

## **INTRODUCTION**

Social communication started transforming into digital form with the first internet bulletin appearance in the late 1970s, and the first online advertisement was released around early 1990s. Contemporary marketing through digital channels had evolved tremendously after then (Deloitte, 2014).

Since the early 2000s, social media has had a dramatic impact on every sector because it has changed the way people perceive and experience the world. The rising importance and popularity of social media in marketing became a subject to many scholarly articles (Backer & Hay, 2013; Law & Xiang, 2013; Law, Fong, Koo, & Ye, 2017; Ozturk, 2017). The transformative impact of social media on the information collection as well as decision-making and tourism destination choices has been revealed by several studies (Dickinger & Mazanec, 2015; Jacobsen & Munar, 2012; Mehraliyev, Choi, & Koseoglu, 2019, Magno & Cassia, 2018; Tsiakali, 2018; Tussyadiah, Kausar, & Soesilo, 2018; Xu & Pratt, 2018).

While companies from many industries around the world have invested heavily to adopt these changes to create value and gain competitive advantage, fundamental changes have been observed in the functioning of the tourism industry. In particular, these investments have been used to reach more travellers and build a long relationship with them. On the other side, today, more and more travellers are utilising social media and digital platforms in the stages of planning their travel & vacations, during travel and post-travel (Book, Tanford, Montgomery, & Love, 2018). The rise of the Internet and social media have redesigned tourism-related behaviours of the travellers, which in return changed the structure and marketing strategies of travel companies.

Due to the fierce competition in the tourism sector and increased customer sophistication, tourism companies need to create effective marketing strategies not only to attract and acquire new customers but also to increase customer retention and loyalty for sustainable profitability. The World Travel & Tourism Council indicates that \$ 1 million of investment in the tourism sector creates a \$1.4 million change in GDP. The attractiveness of tourism revenues put countries in an effort of increasing their share of tourism which in return creates more importance on destinations. Obtaining a sustainable competitive advantage led the countries to promote their destination places through their official social media accounts (Çelik et al., 2017).

The frequency of Internet usage of travellers has attracted the attention of many tourism organisations such as travel agencies, hotels, airline companies and they started to use the power of the Internet within their marketing strategies (Buhalis & Law, 2008, p. 612). Additionally, travellers share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences via various social media platforms (Wu & Pearce, 2017). Individuals generate and share their own material on social media which makes marketing inevitable in tourism sector (Siregar et al., 2020) Social media is an amazing tool to collaborate with customers who are looking for a place to stay and alternatives (Siregar et al., 2020).

On the other hand, over than 200 countries are struggling with COVID-19 pandemic (WTO, 2020). COVID -19 situation has rocketed social media correspondence among consumers as well as social media marketing of many sectors, particularly tourism industry. When there is a pandemic, tourists are unwilling to travel to the affected destinations, at the same time destination residents try to avoid the risk of virus spread by the tourist who chooses to travel (Qiu et al., 2020). This rapidly evolving and emerging COVID-19 pandemic had negative economic contributions on tourism companies and caused them to make fierce marketing which in return increased the importance of social media marketing during this crisis.

Therefore, these organisations also have realised the importance of user generated content through social media environments. Among all other sectors, the rise of social media has presented a significant

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