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ADVANCES IN GLOBAL SERVICES AND RETAIL MANAGEMENT

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Marketing a Destination on Social Media: Case of Three Municipalities of İzmir, Turkey

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Abstract

Social media, which emerged as a result of rapid developments in information and communication technologies, is known all over the world. Social media and Web 2.0 systems provide huge benefits to its users when compared with conventional media tools such as newspapers, televisions and radio. Destinations from all over the world utilize social media liberally to compete with each other to grab bigger market shares in an overly-saturated market. Aware of the benefits it provides, municipalities use social media for various reasons such as mass announcements, information dissemination and self-promotion. Within this context, main aim of this study is to determine how municipalities of Bornova, Konak and Karşıyaka effectively utilize social media in their destination marketing activities. To achieve this goal, Instagram accounts of these municipalities examined and posts that were shared between 01.02.2021 and 28.02.2021 were analyzed through content analysis method. Findings revealed that municipalities promote and market their destinations insufficiently on their Instagram accounts. In accordance with this, findings also revealed that social media is not being exploited and utilized effectively by the municipalities on their destination marketing efforts.

Introduction

Identified as the modus operandi of this century (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012), social media can be defined as the bundle of applications with internet orientation in which the main content consists of posts generated by customer as a media impression (photos, videos) which can be shared and archived easily (Gulbahar & Yildirim, 2015). The importance of social media has been increasing continuously since the middle of the first decade of 21st century, when it started to enter our lives gradually. Since the social media's introduction to the daily life of people, concept of communication has gained a new meaning. Nowadays, social media is being used as a new tool for faster communication, information sharing and entertainment (Tosyalı & Öksüz, 2020). Moreover, as Mangold & Faulds (2009) states, social media has become a prevalent source of information. Not only individuals, but various other organizations use this "tool" as well, including companies, NGO's and even administrative bodies such as national governments and municipalities. Aside from the individual use, utilization of social media is becoming more and more common in both private and public sectors (Sayılganoğlu, 2018). Different actors use social

media for various reasons. Individuals may utilize social media's entertainment capabilities or information sharing ability whereas the main reasons of social media usage for businesses is to market themselves or their goods and services. Similarly, non-governmental organizations use social media to market their activities, or to attract new volunteers. Social media is utilized by local governments as well, for various reasons. Many local governments utilize social media to make public announcements, to increase their transparency, to inform people about future planned projects and activities, to ensure the public participation in decision making processes and lastly, to market their touristic attractions by engaging in destination marketing activities (Tarhan, 2012; Sezgin & Kara, 2020; Sayılganoğlu, 2018). Nonetheless, most of the public institutions still maintain their own websites as well, aside from their social media accounts.

Integration of social media apparatus into the administrative bodies and bureaucracies' communication channels has led to changes in communication mediums. Nowadays many WEB 2.0 tools have been adopted and utilized by municipalities, such as microblogs, wikis, crowdsourcing sites, blogs, multi-media sharing websites and even virtual worlds (Criado et al., 2013). Those municipalities who embraces social media to its full extent can engage in dialogue with local people, build public relations and even take part in destination marketing and destination branding campaigns (Çevik, 2016; Gümüş, 2016; Tosyalı & Öksüz, 2020).

Destination marketing is one of the sub-fields of marketing that were positively affected by the rise of social media. Municipalities took full advantage of this phenomenon since social media usage became common between individuals. Municipalities that engage in destination marketing activities on social media can communicate with potential visitors and tourists by presenting their touristic attractions, points-of-interests and even public enterprises. Social media is unique in a way that it allows visual aids to be used while communicating with their "followers". 3D worlds, augmented realities, virtual reality programs can be utilized (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). Ability to share images has increased the importance of social media usage even further. If we consider the huge tourism market and bitter competition between destinations, this opportunity provided by social media is significant (Gümüş, 2016), which must be exploited by municipalities (and other administrative bodies) if they want to market their destination effectively.

Within this context, goal of this study is to determine how three municipalities of İzmir effectively utilize social media in their destination marketing activities. Considering that İzmir is the third biggest city of Turkey with more than 4 million population, marketing activities of its municipalities holds significant importance. To achieve this goal, content analysis will be conducted on Bornova, Karşıyaka and Konak Municipalities' Instagram accounts. Throughout this study, firstly, a literature review on various topics such as social media, use of social media on destination marketing activities and relationship between social media and public administrative bodies will be conducted. After that, methodology of the study will be described, followed by the presentation of the findings. Lastly, inferences will be derived from the said findings, which will be compiled in the conclusion section.

Literature Review

Social media can be identified as a couple of websites that has been built on the technological foundations which provides users to generate and share their content with other users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It may be shortly described as the usage of popular social networks like Facebook,

Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Foursquare, Instagram, MySpace, WAYN, YouTube and personal Web Blogs where online communication takes place among a group of people who gather to create and exchange user generated content like information, criticism, complaints and opinions (Thevenot, 2007; Safko, 2010; Pırnar, 2014). Social media has become so influential in people's life, that it can completely change the perception of a potential customer. According to Merigo, Acosta and Marques (2015), social media has become a considerable source of data and information for individual at an extent that it may even influence potential customers. In another terms, Kaygısız & Sarı (2015) defines social media as a highly accessible and scalable communication tools within a social interaction and sharing environment. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), social media is an encompassing term for many websites such as user blogs (Blogspot, Tumblr), social and business networking sites (Linkedin, Facebook), microblogs (Twitter), content sharing websites (Instagram, Pinterest, Youtube) and even websites whose main feature is commerce.

Instagram is one of the most famous photo-sharing application/websites on the internet. Being a social networking application, Instagram allows its users to share photos and videos from their mobile phones. Users can both share photos/videos and see the posts of other users. Instagram is utilized by various actors such as individuals, companies, administrative bodies and even brands (Bennett & Manoharan, 2017). Instagram has different features embedded within which can make photos aesthetically more pleasing, more artistic and even innovative in some cases (Purnomoet al., 2020). Destinations from all over the world liberally use Instagram on their destination marketing activities due to the fact that Instagram is a quite effective social media application in "changing the viewers' perceptions and influencing viewers' behavioral intentions" even before the visitation happen (Shuqair & Cragg, 2017)

Social media has grown rapidly in recent years. Nowadays, social media is a part of everyday life of most people. There are numerous activities that social media can offer its users such as direct communication with other users, uploading pictures, videos and other multimedia aspects, group chats etc. (Rapp et al, 2013; Önder et.al, 2020).

As of January 2021, it was estimated that there are 3.6 billion social media network users where the forecast shows that the numbers are going to increase (Tankovska, 2021). In Turkey, the number of active social media users is roughly 60 million where in January 2020 it was stated that there were 54 million social media users (Datareportal, 2020). Considering the total population of Turkey, which is 84.69 million, we can say that %70.8 of the population of Turkey is actively using social media. From January 2020 to January 2021, almost 6 million people started to use social media actively, which means an astonishing growth rate of %11.1. On average, almost 3 hours are spent using social media in an average day, which further shows us the importance of social media. Within the context of Turkey, most used social media websites are YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2021).

As it was stated previously social media is a set of online websites that can be utilized by not only individuals but also companies, destinations and even public institutions (Bennett & Manoharan, 2017). In this sense, we can list public institutions as the administrative bodies, governments, ministries and municipalities. Effectiveness and efficiency of social media within the communication context is also recognized by these public institutions, mainly municipalities. From the perspective of the public / governmental institutions, social media can be very beneficial due

to the fact that there is high amount of data available from the interactions with the citizens, businesses and other institutions. Study of Bertot et al., (2010) suggests that social media helps to improve the capacity in the public institutions to increase co-production of the public policies and provide solutions to potential social problems through the two-way dialog about those issues.

Like it was stated previously, municipalities utilize social media in various different ways such as disseminating information, marketing the destination, interacting with its citizens etc. In their study which examines the social media usage of Italian municipalities, Solito & Materassi (2020) remarks that information-based use of social media and its info dissemination role has a crucial role in increasing the quality of life of its citizens. Moreover, municipalities may undertake the role of "hub of information", which allows its citizens to utilize public services more effectively. Moreover, authors state that the origin of the information that will be disseminated to the masses is not important, info from official channels or stakeholders have the same effect when push comes to shove. However, not always municipalities use social media for disseminating the information. Study by Svidroňová, Kaščáková and Vrbičanová (2018) showed that Slovak municipalities utilize Facebook mainly for ex-ante informing. Encouraging citizens to be included in the decision-making process is rare. One of the most common reason for using social media is for asking citizens to vote in various competitions which municipality is also participate. Study also shows that for Slovak municipalities, social media strategy is almost non-existent. Municipalities can use social media for economic development as well.

According to Yağmurlu (2011), municipalities utilize social media for various reasons such as engaging in a dialogue with local people, developing mutual goodwill between institution and local people, improving the services that municipalities provide and conducting public relation activities. In his study, Tarhan (2012) examined the usage of social media of municipalities from the public relations point-of-view. Study, which reviewed the social media accounts of 9 municipalities, revealed that contents of the posts on the municipalities' official social media accounts are mostly related to transportation, service, infrastructure, activities and social activities. Moreover, most of the posts on the metropolitan municipalities' official social media accounts are public announcements.

In another study, Sayılganoğlu (2018) analyzed Twitter accounts of 3 different municipalities (Esenyurt, Küçükçekmece and Bağcılar). In his study, which utilizes content analysis, findings revealed that official Twitter accounts of municipalities embraces a communication approach that effectively conveys information and various public demands. However, findings of the study also explain that when the follower number of these accounts are taken into account, it is observed that communication level stays limited.

The dialog culture between administrative bodies and individuals are an interesting subject. Interaction between municipalities and individuals are limited. Although getting constructive feedback from its citizens help municipalities, achieving this is quite hard. Study of Gu, Harrison & Zhu (2020) shows that Chinese cities and municipalities cannot construct a healthy, concrete two-way relationship on social media with its followers. Optimizing the content based on the user needs and wants will generate positive outcome. Furthermore, study also shows that social media strategies of municipalities often result in different levels of interaction on web.

In her research, Çalışır (2015) examined the social media usage of municipalities within the context of public relations. One unique aspect of the research is that what actually analyzed in the study is not the official social media account of the municipality. Rather, authors examined the Facebook account of the mayor, Kazım Kurt. Findings of the study reveal that   mayor actually uses its social media accounts as a public relations channel, which is a unique example among his contemporaries. Moreover, announcements with various nature such as new municipality services, concerts, cultural activities are also made through the mayor's social media accounts; which allows bi-directional communication between mayor and local people.

As it was stated previously, municipalities may use social media for various purposes. Destination marketing, branding and communication with potential tourists, visitors are some of them. Before the world-wide introduction of the social media into our lives, destinations had promoted themselves through magazines, newspapers and presentations videos. However, these methods were costly and getting feedback from the target audience were limited most of the times (Yang & Wang, 2015). Social media granted the ability to provide instant feedback between destinations and target audience. Municipalities can communicate with their target audience (both domestic and foreign) through visual items as well as written items. Not only fast communication and instant feedback, but municipalities are able to engage in discussions which then provide them with opinions of the target audiences (Howard, 2012). Of course, this means that users of social media can also reach the opinions of others and their suggestions about a destination provided that that destination have an official social media account (Mossberger et al, 2013).

In their article, Tosyalı and Öksüz (2020) examined the usage of social media and its importance within the context of city branding. In their study, which utilizes qualitative research methods such as interviews and content analysis, findings revealed that importance of social media in tourism sector is obvious in theory, yet in practice this importance is not exploited effectively. Authors also explain that some innovative actions were taken to provide interaction, nevertheless most directorates do not have an official strategy or guideline for social media to foster their city branding activities.

In another research, Çevik (2016) analyzed the cittaslow destinations usage of social media in their destination marketing activities. Findings of the study revealed that only 7 of the 11 cittaslow destinations have an official social media account. Furthermore, author mentions that among all of the cittaslow destinations, municipality of Seferihisar utilize social media more effectively than other cittaslow destinations. In addition, Küçükaltan & Pırnar (2016) also mentioned that effective social media usage of Seferihisar municipality improved the competitiveness factors of the tourism destination and positively impacted the residents' quality of life. Nevertheless, one of the most important aspects of social media, which is interactivity, is not heeded by any of the destinations. Similarly, Gümüş (2016) investigated the social media accounts of 30 metropolitan municipalities of Turkey, and their city marketing activities. Results show that most commonly used social media platform is Facebook with only 2 of the municipalities lacking a Facebook account whereas the Twitter usage is worse with 4 of the municipalities lacking an official Twitter account. In terms of other social media platforms, usage is even worse. 19 of the 30 municipalities lack an official Instagram account whereas the 17 of the municipalities do not use YouTube. However, considering that this research was conducted back in 2016, this numbers are surely changed since then. Nonetheless, study shows us that municipalities' usage rate of various social media platforms were not adequate even back in 2016, a year that social media is known globally.

Effective social media usage affects the citizens' perspective on various aspects of the municipality. Utilizing social media effectively and promoting the destination successfully affects the individual's perception on how livable the destination is. Moreover, social media is a valuable tool for interaction and co-creation between municipality and its citizen. All in all, generating a well-structured social media strategy is immensely beneficial for not only administrative bodies but for also people living in them (Gellerstedt et al., 2020).

Review of the literature shows that most studies considers social media as a valuable tool for municipalities. Especially for marketing activities, two-way interactions, constructive feedback generation and information dissemination, social media provides advantages that cannot be ignored by municipalities. However, the literature shows that among all these reasons, destination marketing activities benefits the most from social media usage. Therefore, study is aimed at examining the destination marketing activities of municipalities in social media.

Methods

In this section, data collection, data source and research methods will be discussed. Nature of this study will be exploratory; authors aim to reveal how municipalities utilize Instagram in their destination marketing activities. Throughout this study, content analysis will be utilized to process gathered data. Content analysis is commonly utilized and applied research method in social sciences (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). According to Berelson (1952), content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of manifest content of communication". Content of the Instagram posts of three municipalities, Karşıyaka, Bornova and Konak will be analyzed. Due to the fact that this study focuses on the destination marketing activities of the said municipalities, only the posts that promotes a destination will be taken into consideration. Thus, content relevant to historical, naturalistic settings of a destination as well as content that involves touristic attractions, artistic & sporting events and general promotional messages will be analyzed. Quantitative expressions about these contents will be provided at the findings part.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data of the study were collected from the official Instagram accounts of Bornova, Karşıyaka and Konak Municipalities. To reach these official accounts, authors accessed the official websites of these municipalities. If available, social media accounts were accessed from the shortcuts within the official websites in order to ensure the account that has been accessed is official. If a shortcut is not available from the website, authors took the initiative of searching the municipalities account within the application of Instagram. Accounts of the municipalities were accessed through personal computers of authors.

Analysis were conducted on Instagram accounts of Karşıyaka, Bornova and Konak municipalities and only the posts that has been posted between 1.2.2021 and 28.02.2021 were considered. Authors scrutinized every post of municipalities on Instagram between those dates and recorded them via screenshotting for further examination.
Data were collected from the Instagram accounts of the municipalities due to the fact that main purpose of Instagram is to share photos and videos; which is quite useful for destination marketing activities. Aside from that, authors choose to examine the Instagram accounts of the municipalities

rather than the other social media platforms due to the advantages of Instagram, which were stated on the literature review part.

Analysis of the collected data were conducted in couple steps. Throughout the analysis, authors embraced a data-driven approach to analyze data in which the data on the hand reviewed time and time again, which allowed themes between posts to emerge After collecting all the data, authors examined the data in hand and reviewed all the posts that have been screenshotted. Photos were examined and the caption attached to the photos were analyzed thoroughly. A crude classification has already emerged after the first overlook on the posts. Destination marketing and non-destination marketing posts were clearly identified but for further refinement of the posts required continuation. After posts were scrutinized and analyzed couple of times, authors were able to identify and classify screenshotted posts into sub-categories of destination marketing content and non-destination marketing content which was the end of the analysis process.

Data Source

As it was stated previously, data of the study were collected from the official Instagram accounts of Bornova, Karşıyaka and Konak municipalities. Official Instagram accounts links and their follower numbers as of 28 February 2021 can be seen on the Table 1.

Table 1. Links of the Instagram Accounts and Follower Numbers

Municipality	Links of the Instagram Accounts	No of Followers
Bornova Municipality	https://www.instagram.com/bornovabld/	56.450
Karşıyaka Municipality	https://www.instagram.com/karsiyakabelediyesi/	59.723
Konak Municipality	https://www.instagram.com/konakbelediyesi/	24.127

Findings

Throughout this section, total numbers of Instagram posts and posts with promotional content on the Bornova, Karşıyaka and Konak Municipalities' official Instagram accounts between the dates 01.02.2021 and 28.02.2021 will be inspected and scrutinized. Posts with promotional content will be separated into different columns based on the nature and characteristics of the post.
Table 2 shows the statues of the Instagram accounts of Bornova, Karşıyaka and Konak municipalities.

Table 2. General Information of Municipalities' Instagram Accounts

Municipality	Username of the Account	No. of Followers	Total Posts Shared (as of 4.03.2021)
Bornova Municipality	@bornovabld	56.450	1561
Karşıyaka Municipality	@karsiyakabelediyesi	59.723	6867
Konak Municipality	@konakbelediyesi	24.127	1531

Table 2 shows that among those 3 municipalities, Karşıyaka Municipality has the biggest follower base with 59.723 following accounts, followed by the Bornova Municipality, with 56.450 followers. Konak Municipality, on the other hand, has 24.127 followers, which is less than half of the follower numbers of the other two municipalities. Number of total posts shared by the accounts show us a different picture. While Bornova and Konak shared almost equal number of posts, which is 1561 and 1531 respectively, Karşıyaka Municipality shared 6867 posts up until 04.03.2021, which is more than 4 times the other two municipalities shared.

As you can see on the following tables, two exclusive categories are generated to classify the content on the municipalities' accounts, destination marketing content and other content. As its name suggests, destination marketing content includes any shared posts that is related with destination marketing activities such as historical posts about the destination, posts with naturalistic elements, posts that promote the touristic attraction in the destination, posts about the sporting and artistic events performed in the destination and lastly, general promotion posts about a destination which may involve any aesthetic photos, videos of the destination or any combination of the marketing content stated previously.

As its name suggests, non-marketing content involves any posts that has little or no marketing value. These posts include any news or weather information posted on the account, services provided by the municipality, posts shared to commemorate birthday, death anniversary of important individuals, special days and weeks, media sharings (such as Newspapers, Television programs etc.), public service ads (Tobacco discouragement ads, awareness campaigns etc.), announcements and any other posts.

Table 3. Instagram Sharings of Bornova Municipality

	Characteristic of the Post	Quantity
Destination Marketing Content	Historical Posts	4
	Nature-related posts	1
	Touristic attraction posts	1
	Artistic event posts	1
	Sporting event posts	0
	General promotional posts	3
	Total Destination Marketing Posts	10
Non-Marketing Content	News / Weather Info	5
	Municipality services	10
	Commemorations	6
	Special days	4
	Media sharings	2
	Public service ads	2
	Announcements	3
	Other	7
	Total Non-Marketing Posts	39
	Total No. of Posts	49

Table 3 shows the Instagram posts of Bornova Municipality between 01.02.2021 and 28.02.2021. Examination of the table reveal that Bornova Municipality shared total of 49 posts in February, which is the lowest number of posts shared among the 3 municipalities. Of these 49 posts shared by Bornova Municipality, 10 of them are classified as destination marketing posts: 4 historical posts,1 nature-related post, 1 post about the tourism attractions in the destination, 1 post about the artistic events and lastly 3 posts that promote a destination without any specific context. Quantitative expression of these posts reveals that %20.4 of the posts of Bornova Municipality are associated with the marketing of Bornova, which is an astonishing percentage. Furthermore, it is observed that there are no posts related with sporting events in the destination, which is normal due to the measures implemented against the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4 shows the Instagram posts shared by the Karşıyaka Municipality between 01.02.2021 and 28.02.2021. Examination of the table reveal that Karşıyaka Municipality shared total of 176 posts, which is the highest number of posts shared among 3 municipalities. However, although Karşıyaka has shared 176 posts, only 9 of them can be considered as a destination marketing content. Of these 9 photos, 1 post is associated with the touristic attractions in Karşıyaka, 4 of the posts are about the artistic events in the destination, 2 of the posts are about the sporting events and lastly, 2 posts

involve general promotion of the destination. Quantitative expression of the table reveals that only %5.11 of the posts are associated with the destination marketing of Karşıyaka. It is observed that there are no historical posts or nature-related posts shared in February.

Table 4. Instagram Sharings of Karşıyaka Municipality

	Characteristic of the Post	Quantity
Destination Marketing Content	Historical Posts	0
	Nature-related posts	0
	Touristic attraction posts	1
	Artistic event posts	4
	Sporting event posts	2
	General promotional posts	2
	Total Destination Marketing Posts	9
Non-Marketing Content	News / Weather Info	29
	Municipality services	28
	Commemorations	16
	Special days	8
	Media sharings	7
	Public service ads	48
	Announcements	15
	Other	16
	Total Non-Marketing Posts	135
	Total No. of Posts	176

Table 5. Instagram Sharings of Konak Municipality

	Characteristic of the Post	Quantity
Destination Marketing Content	Historical Posts	1
	Nature-related posts	0
	Touristic attraction posts	2
	Artistic event posts	0
	Sporting event posts	0
	General promotional posts	5
	Total Destination Marketing Posts	8
Non-Marketing Content	News / Weather Info	7
	Municipality services	22
	Commemorations	7
	Special days	2
	Media sharings	0
	Public service ads	1
	Announcements	2
	Other	10
	Total Non-Marketing Posts	51
	Total No. of Posts	59

Table 5 shows the Instagram posts shared by the Konak Municipality between 01.02.2021 and 28.02.2021. Examination of the table reveal that Konak Municipality shared total of 59 posts. Of these 59 posts shared by Konak Municipality, 8 of them can be considered as a destination marketing content: 1 historical post, 2 posts about the touristic attractions in Konak, 5 posts that promote Konak in general. Quantitative expression of the table reveals that of the 59 posts shared by Konak Municipality, %13.56 of the posts are associated with the destination marketing of Konak. Table also reveal that no posts about the sporting and artistic events in the district were shared. Moreover, lack of nature-related posts in their Instagram account is also worth mentioning.

Conclusion

Throughout the 2010's, social media's ability to support marketing campaigns on virtual worlds has been proven. With its ability to reach huge number of people, low-cost promotion options, ability to get feedback from users (Gümüş, 2016), social media is considered as one of the most important tools for marketing activities (Çevik, 2016). As a part of daily life of most people, social

media is utilized by many different actors such as individuals, companies, firms, brands and even administrative bodies such as governments, ministries and municipalities of all sizes (Bennett & Manoharan, 2017). Within this context, this study aimed to determine how three municipalities of İzmir effectively utilize social media in their destination marketing activities. Study contributes to the literature by providing an insight about how Bornova, Karşıyaka and Konak municipalities engage in destination marketing on their Instagram accounts.

Content analysis revealed that among the three municipalities, Karşıyaka Municipality has shared the highest number of posts with 176 posts, followed by Konak Municipality with 59 posts, followed by the Bornova Municipality with 49 posts. Thus, it is safe to say to say that Karşıyaka Municipality has the highest post sharing percentage; almost 6 posts in a day. However, when we examine the destination marketing content of the municipalities, Bornova takes the lead. Among their 49 sharings, 10 of them are destination marketing posts; %20.4 of the total posts. Bornova is followed by the Konak, with %13.56 of their total posts consist of content that can be used in destination marketing activities. Karşıyaka Municipality's post number is high, yet the percentage of destination marketing content among these posts is only %5.11.

In order to effectively market their destination on social networks, municipalities should frequently post videos and photos in order to communicate with potential visitors. These posts should contain historical, cultural values of a destination as well as various events that is conducted in a destination (Gümüş, 2016). Among the three municipalities, Bornova shares the most destination marketing content, both in terms of percentage and number; almost 1 of every 5 posts. However, although the percentage looks high (%20.4), in terms of numbers, this percentage represents only 10 posts, which is not enough. Bornova, a district with rich historical background, aesthetically pleasing Levantine Mansions and well-preserved nature reserves can market itself more effectively on social media by sharing more destination marketing content such as photos, videos; preferably including previously mentioned attractions. Same situation applies for Konak as well. Konak, which is the central district of İzmir city, shares a destination marketing related post in 1 of every 6 posts on their account. This number should definitely be higher, considering the fact that Konak possesses most of the internationally known touristic attractions of İzmir such as Clock Tower of İzmir, Kordon, Kemeraltı, Agora Ancient City and Pagos Castle (Otherwise known as Kadifekale). For Karşıyaka, only 1 of every 20 posts can be considered as a destination marketing content, which is the lowest among all municipalities. Karşıyaka, a destination with sea connection, Levantine Mansions and other touristic attractions, should definitely improve its efforts to market itself on social media.

To sum up, a conclusion can be derived from the findings: municipalities that are taken into consideration in this study should improve their social media activities in order to effectively and efficiently market their destination in both national and international scale. Content analysis reveal that municipalities don't use social media to its full extent in their destination marketing efforts. Considering the intense competition between destinations in an overly-saturated market, social media can be a quite effective tool in destination marketing campaigns; which the municipalities in our study does not utilize.

Theoretical Contributions

Overall, study embraces a descriptive approach to understand the usage of social media in marketing activities of municipalities in İzmir, Turkey. Two main contributions are provided to the literature throughout this study. Firstly, study showed that municipalities are not utilizing social media effectively in their destination marketing activities. Some suggestions and guidelines are presented to remedy this shortcoming. Furthermore, a fresh perspective which involves destination marketing aspects was brought to the social media usage patterns of the municipalities by examining their posts with a critical outlook.

Municipalities in this study shown to under-utilize social media in their destination marketing endeavors. Similar results were found in previous studies in the literature, whose reviews were embedded into the literature review part of this paper. Thus, findings of the study act as a contemporary proof for the stillness of the shortcoming of social media usage by municipalities in their destination marketing endeavor.

Practical Implications

Marketing is one of the most important concepts for both private and public sector due to the benefits it presents. Promoting a destination effectively often yields immense contributions to destinations. Not only economic, but also social advantages are experienced as a result of effective marketing activities. Therefore, some suggestions are provided for municipalities who wish to use social media more successfully.
The suggestions for better utilization of social media in destination marketing by municipalities are stated below. Suggestions are derived from the literature and generated based on the analysis of this paper.

- Co-marketing and partnership for destination marketing with other firms in social media
- Utilizing other neglected social media tools and platforms,
- Designing the municipalities' blogs professionally,
- Specialized training for the related staff for expert usage,
- Integrating social media apps to destination marketing plans,
- Being authentic and creating compelling content in destination marketing message,
- Being active, fully engage in social media for 24 hrs in 7 days
- Repackaging destinations' offerings according to social media utilization,
- Combining social media with offline in-person events to solidify relationships.

Limitations of Direction for Future Studies

This study is conducted in order to have a clear idea about the İzmir's three municipality's destination marketing activities on social media. Analysis were conducted on only Instagram and only the posts between 01.02.2021 and 28.02.2021 were taken into consideration due to the time restriction of authors. Moreover, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, authors were not be able to conduct interviews with media departments of these municipalities. Therefore, in future studies, researchers can conduct a similar study with longer time-spans, on various different social media platforms which may provide new insights. Furthermore, both qualitative and quantitative studies can be conducted which examines the follower reactions on the posts of municipalities.

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