THE ROLE OF MARKETING IN THE PROMOTION OF THE ISTANBUL BRAND

İSTANBUL MARKASININ TUTUNDURULMASINDA
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Abstract

In our globalizing world increased competition between cities has resulted in expanding investments in marketing activities. In order to promote tourism and reinvestments, the cities have been using marketing activities to create more attractive sites and make use of their resources more efficiently. In becoming a brand city, marketing plays a major role in building brand value, which in turn results in the attraction of newcomers; causes revisits, settlements, reinvestments and leads to the development of the city. This paper focuses on the Istanbul brand, which carries an important role in the promotion of Turkey as being its cultural, economic and financial center. As one of the most historical and appealing metropolitans in the world with the legacy of ancient civilizations, Istanbul has been chosen as the “European Culture Capital” in the year 2010 by the European Union Council. Furthermore, in the year 2015, Istanbul has been named as “Europe’s Best Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) Destination” (ICVB, 2016). Istanbul has attracted 12 million 414 thousand 677 tourists in 2015 (Turizm Aktuel, 2016) rising on a 4.8 percent rate compared to 2014. Increasing number of marketing activities developed by numerous actors of private and public sector are among the reasons why tourists prefer Istanbul. These aforementioned reasons include the increasing number of hotels, developed infrastructure and better transportation, modern shopping malls, international festivals, exportation of Turkish TV series, gastronomy investments, congress tourism, health tourism, student exchange programs, expatriation opportunities, recreational activities and new tourism destinations. In this paper the marketing activities in Istanbul are explored in order to make the city one of the most visited metropolitans in the world. Decisions making tourism executives, professionals in the tourism sector and academicians in the tourism department have been interviewed using in-depth interview method to provide better insight to the addressed topics.

Keywords: City Branding, Istanbul, Marketing, Tourism, Tourism Marketing

Öz

Küreselleşen dünyamızda şehirler arasındaki çoğalan rekabet pazarlama çalışmalarına giderek artan bir oranda yatırım yapılmasına sebep olmaktadır. Turizmi geliştirmek ve yeni yatırımları artırmak amacıyla şehirler daha çekici yerler yaratmak ihtiyacı duymaktadır ve kaynaklarını daha etkin kullanmak için pazarlama çalışmalarından yararlanmaktadır. Marka bir şehir olma yolunda pazarlama marka değeri yaratma açısından önemli bir rol oynar. Zira pazarlama çalışmaları sayesinde şehirlerde yeni ziyaretçiler gelir; tekrarlayan ziyaretler, yerleşimler ve yatırımlar
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Anahtar Kelimeler: İstanbul, Pazarlama, Şehir Markalaması, Turizm, Turizm Pazarlaması

INTRODUCTION
Today developing effective marketing aims, targets and strategies; making a strategic marketing analysis; developing a strategic marketing plan and executing this marketing plan have an important role in the promotion of a city and in becoming a popular destination. Due to globalization the competition between the cities has increased and this fact has led the tourism experts and governments to work on extensive city branding activities.

Destination management is defined as developing a certain tourism strategy and plan and coordinating and integrating all the elements of marketing mix in particular geographic area in accordance with this strategy and plan (Mill and Morrison, 2012). In addition destination management is based on competitive positioning and involves making decisions about branding and image making and the marketing mix in order to bring the producers and the customers together.

City branding requires a strong brand image developed through extensive strategic image management and positioning activities along with the execution of marketing plans which includes the improvement of social services, city reconstruction and economic developments.

In tourism marketing it is not possible to have total control over the tourism product. A mix of companies of different sizes, public agencies as well as non-profit organizations is involved in the process (Buhalis, 2000:98-99). However in many countries the Destination Marketing Organizations are in charge of promoting the destination and creating its image (Longaric, Basan and Markovic, 2013).

Besides travel agencies and tour operators, various different private companies contribute to the promotion of Istanbul like universities that support international student exchange programs, hospitals that reinforce health tourism, film production companies that publicize Istanbul, famous hotels that host renowned politicians and actors as well as organizations like Istanbul shopping-festival and culture and art activities like international music, film and dance festivals. A number of different local and governmental authorities are in charge of positioning Istanbul such as the Culture and Tourism Ministry, Istanbul City Culture and Tourism Office, Istanbul Municipality, Turkish Istanbul Congress and Visitors Bureau, Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TURSAB), and Tourist Hotels and Investors Association(TUROB).

In this paper city branding and tourism marketing strategies are overviewed through literary research and the conducted field work of semi structured in-depth interviews with in charge authorities, tourism professionals and academicians are analyzed in order to highlight the importance of marketing activities in promoting the Istanbul brand. Furthermore the existing strategies are reexamined in order to offer insights to new studies in the field.

1. City Branding
In one form or the other, urban tourism concept goes back to Mesopotamia and Sumeria.
ages and has become an area of interest since the 1980s when more research and publications began to be produced (UNWTO, 2012:8). Although some researchers simply define urban tourism as tourism in urban areas, we can state that urban tourism is a complex phenomenon in which ‘urban’ does not only refer to the destination of tourism but a set of activities. It is a special type of tourism, including inner-city visits such as visiting places of historical and architectural value, participating in cultural and art events such as festivals, concerts, exhibitions and conventions and associating oneself in different ways of life (Uysal, 2015).

City branding, on the other hand, is of excessive importance for the cities to attract tourist, revisits, settlements and the development of the city business. In order to become a brand city the cities need to be well developed. Four main approaches exist for the development of the cities (Ilguner and Asplund, 2011: 185).

The first of these main approaches is the improvement of social services. The aim in the development of the social services is to provide a well-maintained environment for the people residing and working in the city, for the possible settlers and for the tourists. Good schools, health services in adequate quality and a simple system of bureaucracy are among the social services that are recommended by the social service experts (Ilguner and Asplund, 2011: 185). For instance the portals like e-devlet (e-government), e-belediye (e-municipality), the advances in health sector leading to health tourism, international student exchange programs like Erasmus are examples of implementations that serve the development of social services in Istanbul.

Secondly, city reconstruction and planning should be considered. In the last years Istanbul is in a race of becoming one of the world metropolitans together with its urban renewal projects. The urban renewal projects not only cover the shanty towns outside the city center, but also the old settlement areas within the city center. In this context, the investment partnerships of private sector, municipalities and the government offer the districts to go through a process of gentrification through the urban renewal projects for the admiration of the newcomers and tourists (Sakarya, 2010:3).

Economic developments are also one of the main pillars of city development. Istanbul’s economic development plans and programs are monitored by the government, and local authorities like Istanbul governorship, Istanbul Municipality (IBB) and Istanbul Development Agency (IKA). Besides being one of the major metropolitans the world with its 14.654.434 population (TRT HABER, 2016) Istanbul is the sixth city in the world with its economic growth rate according to the Brooking Institution 2012 world report after Ankara, Turkey’s capital (Ankara Kalkınma Ajansı, 2012).

Lastly when we consider the strategic marketing plan step, we can see that Istanbul has a successful economic development plan until 2023 covering main strategies like being a strategic actor in global economy through evolution in the industry, increasing R&D and innovation, creating rivalry in value, supporting qualified entrepreneurship, increasing recruitment, developing city image and providing efficient publicity as well as executing strategies like creating fairly sharing, holistic and learning society and developing city regeneration strategy for a sustainable environment that offers a joyous life (IKA, 2014-2013 Istanbul Bolge Plani, 2014).

The second important issue in city branding is brand image. The cities and settlement areas mainly receive their branding from the public opinion. For this reason Paris means fashion, Rio de Janeiro means carnival and soccer, Toscana a good life, Japan means technology and Switzerland richness. Most of the cities communicate with the outside world and create their own images in the minds. These natural communication channels are tourism, brands, politics, investments, culture and people (Anholt, 2014: 296-299).

Tourism not only covers tourism management, but also the visiting tourists’ insights. Brands cover the export of products and services that draw attention. The government policy is one of the main channels of communication which is getting more and more close to the mainstream media’s projections. Investments that are made in a country or foreign invest-
ments that are drawn to the country increase the publicity of the city (Anholt, 2014:298). Culture covers historical heritage and how well this heritage is preserved and exhibited as well as literary, fine arts, crafts and sports activities within the city. Finally people refer to the residents of the city and how welcoming they are as well as the renowned and fore coming people residing in the city.

Brand image, which is the meaning the tourists associate with the city also develop by the marketing program (Roth, 1992). For a strategic image management in tourism the marketing mix of product, price, place and promotion have an important role in satisfying the needs of the tourists and to promote the city.

A strong positioning of the city as well as strategic image management can create a desired and unified brand image for the cities. According to Ries and Kotler being the first is the strongest positioning strategy. The potential customer usually supports the first brand that comes to mind (Ries and Kotler, 2013:37). Through using unique selling proposition strategy, that is by emphasizing a unique attribution Turkey has started a successful new positioning campaign by slogans like ‘Home of Two Continents,’ ‘Home of the Silk Road,’ ‘Home of Ancient Gods,’ ‘Home of Cappadocia,’ ‘Home of the Blue Mosque,’ ‘Home of Turquoise,’ ‘Home of Troy,’ and ‘Home of Golden Horn’ and this new positioning strategy has a strong impact in promoting the Istanbul Brand.

2. Tourism Marketing

Tourism marketing is comprised of the activities related to the moving of the touristic products and services directly or indirectly through tourism distributors to the consumer (the tourist) or the activities related to the identification of the new touristic consumption needs and how they are met (Barutcugil, 1989:17). The basics of tourism marketing are the activities regarding the production of the product; and its pricing, distribution and promotion by the tourism facilities in a systematic way (Aygun, 2008: 18).

2.1 Product

The tourism product consists of different integrated physical resources and services including travel, transportation, accommodation, food and drink companies, retail stores, non-profit organizations and various activities. The tourists do not evaluate this product as bought from individual companies, but as an entire experience (Ozkok, 2014:109-111). The tourism product is comprised of five components: destination attractions and environment, destination accessibility, destination facilities and services, destination image and price (Middleton and Clarke, 2001).

Destination attractions and environment refer to the natural, historical, built and social resources of a city, which draw the tourists’ attention and interest. Destination accessibility refers to the cost, speed and infrastructure of transportation to and within the destination place. Destination facilities and services are the key components, which enable the tourists to enjoy their vacation such as accommodation, food and drink companies, sports and interest activities and others like information service (Al-Ababneh, 2013). Destination image is the brand image of the tourists regarding the destination place depending on what they have heard, read, seen or experienced previously (San Martin and Rodriguez, 2008). Destination image is one of the key factors that make the customers to decide to travel to the destination (Moutinho, 1984). Cost, which will be discussed in detail below, is the sum of total tourism expenditure for the vacation.

2.2 Price

In tourism marketing, when companies configure the price, they take into consideration both the internal factors and the external factors that determine the price. While they can control the internal factors, it is not possible for them to take control of the external factors. The internal factors are comprised of costs, pricing aims and the qualities of the product, whereas external factors are comprised of competitors, distributors, legal restrictions, supply and demand, market structure, rivalry, customer behavior and the economic condition of the country (Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2003:377).

Like every other component of tourism marketing mix, pricing in tourism is a sensitive issue. While higher prices can cause a decline in sales and decrease the total income, in order to ensure a profit the price has to include production costs to provide a profit. In pricing a tou-
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The role of marketing in promoting the Istanbul brand is crucial. A company can choose to maximize short-term profits if there is a favorable demand for the product. If a company chooses a low initial cost strategy, then the company needs to ensure high market participation. Among other factors, the price elasticity of the product depends on the consumers' perception towards the product value. In general, it can be concluded that the price depends on the distribution of resources as well as how the company positions itself (Crikovic, 2014).

2.3 Place

In tourism marketing, place is a system comprised of internal and external units that includes information, reservation, and social and economic efforts like sales and transportation as a whole. In order for the customer to reach the tourism product (Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2003:453). In general, distribution is described as a series of companies which enable the customer to reach the products offered by the companies (Donnelly, 1976). Tourism operators can distribute the services to the customers directly or through indirect distribution channels. For instance, a hotel room or an airline ticket can be sold by the service provider directly to the customer. Indirect distribution channels are travel intermediaries, which include wholesale and retail travel agents, tour operators, and specialty channels. While a wholesale travel agent may not operate the tours it sells, they can market them through a network of retail agents. A retail agent, on the other hand, places direct sales to the customer. Tour operators give services that are specially designed in a tour package. Specialty channels on the other hand are intermediaries that specialize in a particular type of travel like meetings and incentive travel (Cruz, 1977: 97-102).

2.4 Promotion

Promotion has an important role in the sales increasing efforts. In tourism the marketing communication means include advertising, public relations and publicity, personal selling, sales promotions, fairs and exhibitions and interactive marketing. The main aims of advertising are informing the customers about the product, persuading them and reminding them which leads to action. Through advertising we can make the customers notice their needs, draw their attention, create the desired interest and motivate them to buy the tourism product. The aim of public relations on the other hand, is to inform the customers develop a positive image and attitude towards the destination in order to create the desired change in behavior. Personal selling is face-to-face sales actions in between the customer and the travelling agency. These efforts have an important role in providing detailed information to the customers and convincing them. Sales promotions are sales development activities like the employed installments and the discounts given in a certain period of time in order to increase the sales. Fairs and exhibitions include the publicity efforts of the destination and interactive marketing are online marketing activities that provide further detailed information to the customers, which enable the companies to continue their marketing and sales increasing efforts online.

3. Aim and Method

This research aims to identify the role of marketing mix in the promotion of the Istanbul brand as well as to identify new methods and strategies in order to better promote and position the brand. For this reason qualitative research methods have been used. The research is conducted through a literary review of secondary resources that are recommended by Istanbul Culture and Tourism Office and other literary resources as well as semi-structured in-depth interviews with key decision makers who take active roles in the promotion of Istanbul, professionals from the tourism sector and academicians in tourism department. The 10 participants who have been interviewed for the research have been selected according to the purposeful sampling method since this method covers individuals or groups, who are chosen based on a certain criteria or qualification (Black, 2002:61).

4. Findings

The questions directed to the participants for the in-depth interviews were prepared in the light of literary research and they refer to the marketing mix of Istanbul as well as its destination attractions. Furthermore, participants were
encouraged to state their opinions regarding branding strategies and new marketing strategies in the context of positioning the Istanbul brand. The data obtained through this qualitative research was then divided under five themes: “The Distinctive Resources of Istanbul”, “Tourism Services in Istanbul”, “Pricing Policy in Istanbul”, “The Promotion of Istanbul” and “New Marketing and Branding Strategy Recommendations.”

4.1 The Distinctive Resources of Istanbul

Istanbul means history witnessing great empires of the world, ancient civilizations and thousands of years of cultural accumulation. The city has an exquisite geopolitical location in the world, where European and Asian continents meet through Bosphorus and the Bosphorus Bridge that extends over it. Having been chosen as the “European Culture Capital” by the EU Council in 2010, Istanbul has been attracting more and more visitors each year. Istanbul is a social attraction center for the tourists with its dance, film, theater and other culture-art festivals; art exhibitions and Istanbul Biennial; fine hotels, restaurants and coffee houses to eat, drink and accommodate; restaurants and buffets offering various local tastes from Turkey; retail shops and modern shopping centers as well as famous districts like Sultanahmet, Eminonu, Beyoğlu, Pierre Loti, Cadddebostan, Moda, Kadıköy, Bebek, Ortaköy, Emirgan, Uskudar, Kanlica, Sarayburnu, Anadolu Kavagi, Rumeli Kavagi. Istanbul is a lively city that lives 24 hours a day and unlike many other brand cities, it is also renowned with its nightlife. Furthermore besides being a cultural center, Istanbul is also a finance center with its fast developing economy. In the last years Istanbul has been referred to as one of the most developed cities in the world.

B.U.: “Istanbul is also a city which unites East and West, Asia and Europe, not only in geographical terms, but also in terms of civilizations, beliefs, religions and culture and it blends and makes them reach new syntheses. At the same time it is a place, where three divine religions live in peace; where synagogues, churches, mosques race in architecture and esthetics; kulliyes, almshouses, foundations are deep rooted like a plane tree, where social justice and public spirit peaks. Istanbul is history. A history which lives and makes others live; whatever has been made yesterday, has reached up to present times. Anything made by anyone has been appropriated and preserved. Beauty, esthetics, architecture have been valued (…)”

O.O.: “There is no other city in the world, which has been a capital city for such a long period of time like Istanbul, except Rome.”

B.U.: “Istanbul, which possesses the inheritance of three empires, stands at a different point compared to all the cities in the world with its cuisine culture that have accumulated through this historical process. Besides the beauty of the Bosphorus, the richness it offers in terms of sea food, also makes Istanbul special in terms of gastronomy tourism.”

O.O. talks about the dynamic nature of Istanbul as follows:

“Another side of Istanbul is its cosmopolitan nature throughout history. This cosmopolitan nature adds Istanbul a very big energy. (…) Not only the night life, but its young, passionate, cosmopolitan, multicultural nature; the fact that it is a finance center—the head office of 22.000 international companies are here; all these makes this city energetic. (…) People feel that energy and feel good, feel happy. (…) That is why they want to come.”

As the participants underline, Istanbul has been a center to many ancient civilizations. Having been a capital city for many years has enriched Istanbul with more and more cultural and historical monuments to discover. Possessing bridges extending over the Bosphorus, Istanbul also brings together the cultures of the East and West not only in historical terms, but still today. Definitely the cultural, social, economic
and financial capital of Turkey, Istanbul has distinctive resources and a “dynamic nature” offering various richness like cultural heritage, history and a world cuisine.

5.3 Tourism Services in Istanbul

The tourism services offered in Istanbul are comprised of accommodation investments; food and drink, entertainment and shopping investments, travel agencies, tourist guiding services as well as transportation.

According to the 2015 Istanbul City Culture and Tourism Office Istanbul Tourism statistics report, Istanbul has 489 accommodation facilities licensed by Tourism Ministry, and the bed capacity of all these facilities are 98,498 (Istanbul Turizm Istatistikleri Ocak-Aralik 2015: 15). Furthermore there are also municipality licensed accommodation facilities with approximate bed capacity around 70,000 (Turizm Dunyasi, 2015) as well as 207 new facilities that are under construction with a bed capacity of 47. 407 (Istanbul Turizm Istatistikleri Ocak-Aralik 2015: 15). Therefore we can state that the bed capacity in Istanbul is above 160,000.

Transportation is among the other resources offered to the city visitors. In general many recent transportation projects have been introduced to the city in the last years. For instance the new airport will be the biggest airport in the EU, Middle-East and North Africa zone with its 150 million passenger capacity, which will later be extended to 200 million (The Turkish Perspective, 2015, 31-32).

D.T. talks about accommodation facilities in Istanbul as follows:

“(…) the executives of the international five star hotels in Istanbul are 90 percent foreign. That is they are American, British... The cooks, the chiefs are Italian, Swedish... Both in terms of the cuisine and in terms of management and service understanding, to be more global, this is important. Therefore the facilities in Istanbul easily address a wide selection of people in different status both in terms of the hotels and pensions in the Sultanahmet and Aksaray region that serve to lower income people and in terms of tourists, who have culture tourism in mind and want to accommodate in five star hotels.”

A.Y.: “Around the year 2000 the accommodation sector was not developed much. I am talking about Istanbul. Not in terms of Antalya. The entrepreneurship that started in those days have brought their results today. (…) A lot of incentives were given in order to host the Olympics. Especially the chain hotels showed a lot of interest to these regions. They made investments. (…) I think our bed capacity is very very sufficient.”

B.U.: “Today 606 facilities with facility and investment license, 768 tourism facility and investment licensed food & drink and entertainment centers and including the centers and branches 2974 travel agencies operate within the city borders of Istanbul. Without any doubt every facility, each company that gives service in tourism field have undertaken important roles in the promotion of Istanbul Brand. As long as the quality of the service they provide increase, the Istanbul Brand will continue its rise in international arena.”

E.G. draws attention to the improper planning of the hotels:

E.G.: “When you consider the facilities, they are problematic, because they are built wrong. I mean not everyone should be able to build hotels to anywhere they like. There should be plans for these in the municipalities. (…) It is very easy to change the plans. (…) I think we don’t need any more hotels in Istanbul right now.”

P.P. draws attention to the dense airport traffic in Atatürk Airport and states importance of the third airport project as follows:

“(…) I mean, now the planes are wai-
In general all the research participants agree on the fact that Istanbul has sufficient number of tourism resources like hotels, coffees, restaurants and entertainment centers even enough to host the Olympics after the new incentives made by the government and the investments of the private sector following these incentives. One participant draws attention to the improper planning of the hotel locations, whereas four participants also note that Istanbul has “sufficient” number of hotels. The participants also agree that the new airport project, which will be the biggest in the EU, Middle East and North Africa region, will be able to serve the increasing needs of the tourists. On the other hand the participants complain about the heavy traffic within the city despite the new improvements like the extension of metro line, the construction of metrobuses lines and the new Marmaray tunnel under Bosphorus sea in between Uskudar and Yenikapi.

5.4 Pricing Policy in Istanbul

When we take pricing policy in terms of branding first we need consider that brand is initially an economic asset (Moon and Millison, 2004: 31). On the other hand brand enables the consumers to make pricing-value comparisons in between similar products. The tourism demand is directly proportional with the prices of tourism products and services. The pricing strategies should be developed in accordance with the rival facilities and regions (Ozguner and Ucar, 2015). In this way the consumers can choose the right product for them and the producers or distributers can develop an appropriate pricing policy (Huddleson and Csaill, 1990). This fact is especially true for hotels, restaurants, entertainment centers and other producers offering luxurious tourism resources. On the other hand, as stated by Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2003:77) the price differentiation can depend on various internal factors such as costs and pricing aims as well as external factors such as rivals, distributors, legal restrictions, supply and demand, the structure of the market, customer behavior and the country’s economic condition.

D.T. refers to the use of tour operators and early reservations in receiving more economic prices regarding accommodation:

“There is already a general high price implementation in Istanbul. However this can be turned into an advantage in this way: Since the tour operators that bring tourists to Istanbul make their reservations much earlier and book their places, at the moment when for one night they can charge you 100-150€, in a six months earlier period they can give you a discount up to 50-60 €. Here the tourists’ advantage is when they come to Istanbul with tour operators rather than making personal visits to Istanbul and coming to Istanbul on their own. This will be more advantageous for them.”

On the other hand B.U. evaluates the price differences in Istanbul from a different perspective:

“With the different variety of its values, Istanbul hosts tourists from many different segments with different expectations. While Istanbul can host weddings in the hotels by the Bosphorus that cost millions of dollars with the attendance of people from different places in the world, it can also offer options like weekends trips to couples who want to have a city tour with much more modest budgets. Therefore rather than talking about a one type of pricing in Istanbul, we can define it as a destination where different segments of visitors can find options according to their own budget.”

Although some participants’ refer to the high prices in Istanbul compared to many other cities in Europe, they all state that there is a proportional balance between quality of the
services given and the prices charged. For instance one participant underlines that "Istanbul is a destination where a visitor from any segment can find choices according to his/her budget." Participants also point out to the supply and demand factor that determines the price differentiations in Istanbul. Instead of individual trips and late reservations, the tourists are advised to make early reservations and visit the city by making bookings from travel agencies.

5.5 The Promotion of Istanbul

The marketing communications mix is comprised of advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, point of purchasing communications and direct marketing as well as word of mouth communication. Marketing communications has three main aims: informing the potential customers about the qualities of the product, persuading them to buy the product and reminding them to buy the product. As a marketing mix element, promotion provides support for the placement of product in the tourism market and increases the brand awareness, while creating the brand image and positioning the product in the market (Crkovic, 2014). The Turkish government and private sector undertake various different roles in promoting the Istanbul brand with various promotion activities.

P.P: “Culture and Tourism Ministry has an official website for Turkey. And City Culture and Tourism Office has a website for Istanbul. There is a website called gototurkey.co.uk through which tourists can be informed. (…) Istanbul is of course a very live city. Because it has a much more ancient history compared to many other cities, especially in terms of culture tourism, archeology tourism, in terms of museums, gastronomy, food and drink, shopping, I mean all these are described in their own websites already. (…)Besides these, of course, Istanbul is promoted through the fairs. In the EBİTT fair that was organized in here, the City Culture and Tourism Managers went and gave information about themselves to the tour operators. This, of course, is a means of promotion.”

M.E.B. refers to the sales promotion premium program of the Turkish Culture and Tourism Ministry for the foreign tour operators between 1 April-31 May within the 2016 Tourism Action Plan:

“Recently last week the Culture and Tourism Ministry declared a package of nine items. The Prime Minister announced it. (…) One of them foresees a 6000 USD support for every flight that the foreign tour operators bring here from abroad.”

D.T. talks about the importance of advertising activities of the Turkish Culture and Tourism Ministry:

“Culture Ministry already works in this field with films, Istanbul’s promotions very well (…) They use high quality films in the promotion of Istanbul.”

B.U.: “The promotion of Istanbul brand is executed by many government offices and by private sector though different media. (…) The general promotion of Istanbul is made through www.howtoistanbul.com website. As TURSAB (Assosication of Turkish Travel Agencies) we support the activities of many organizations, in which we are an executing member of like TUGEV (Tourism Development and Education Foundation), ICVB (Istanbul DMO), shopping fest and we promote Istanbul in many international fairs. Furthermore we give support to Istanbul brand through many different other organizations.”

B.U further emphasizes the importance of shopping fest for the promotion of Istanbul:

B.U.: “One of the most important organizations in the promotion of Istanbul brand is the ’Istanbul Shopping Fest’”. 
Through the Istanbul Shopping Fest, which brings Istanbul’s rich history, culture, cuisine art together with shopping and entertainment, world famous brands are offered to the attraction of the tourists with very extraordinary discounts."

D.T.: "(...) There is a website called conferencealert.com, from which you can follow the international conferences. In this site, you’ll see if you enter, there are many conferences listed in Istanbul for the near future, for the following months. First of all people who want to attend these conferences for business tourism and conference tourism see Istanbul’s name quite often in these conference sites and they can follow the conferences organized in Istanbul."

E.G.: “Agreements are made with hotel marketing systems, with sites like booking.com, travelclick and the like. They have brochures printed besides these and send them to the fairs. There are emailing lists, they make emailing. They show themselves in some way. There is no problem in this, it is easy now, it’s not like how it was before.”

P.P also draws attention to importance of the point of purchase communication activities of the foreign travel agencies and tour operators:

“Also when we consider the private sector, in fact, who will take us to the tourists are the tour operators. The more information or pictures, brochures, promotion that is the promotion of 4p they give place, the more they reinforce the perception over there. (...) It is the agency, the tour operator that will give access to that information over there. Therefore the tour operators have to keep that vivid; they need to give that information.”

T.S. refers to the film industry and the film and TV series projects that take place in place, which have and important role in the promotion of Istanbul internationally:

“(...) In the projects we make, we especially give priority to Turkey. But when the subject is Turkey because Istanbul is the most beautiful city that will best reflect this, Istanbul takes the leading role in our projects. This is also because it really embodies everything in itself both in terms of geography and human vividness and in terms of history.”

T.S. further refers to the promotion of Istanbul in foreign countries by the TV series industry and in which countries these series are mostly popular:

“I think of course in the first place there is Middle East and Russia. Especially if I refer to it in terms of TV series, our best customers or visitors are Middle East and Russia. But, of course this is developing more and more. I think Eastern Europe and a section of Africa have a lot of interest. I think when Muhteşem Yüzyıl (The Magnificent Decade) will be broadcasted; many people from China who are curious about Istanbul will arrive.”

Promotion is one of the most important elements of the marketing mix, which provides the communication between the consumers and the producers. As the participants state, among the government’s promotion activities are the tourism support programs such as sales promotion premiums for tour operators and credit usage opportunities for travel agencies, advertising films, which are distributed internationally as well as the international fairs and exhibitions and international organizations like the shopping fest and congress tourism. On the other hand, the private sector’s promotion activities include building direct contact with tour operators, sales promotion activities, point of purchase communications, direct marketing activities as well as the film induce effect of the Turkish film industry.

5.6 New Marketing and Branding Strategy Recommendations

In today’s global world, it is very im-
important to execute an integrated marketing approach in order to create a unified and strong brand image of a destination and to position a destination brand. Integrated marketing communications also has a vital role in city branding. Istanbul is a city with high brand awareness due to its ancient history, its historical and cultural richness as well as its strategic geopolitical location. However, in branding raising high brand awareness is only the initial step. The potential consumers need to have clear ideas and images about the destination in their minds and strong feelings towards the brand. The goal of the promotion is to position the product so that it becomes the first choice of the consumers.

P.P refers to the organic image of Istanbul and the need to strengthen this organic image in terms of perception management:

“Every city has an image of its own. One of them is organic image and the other is the created image. There are artificial, artificially created images. Now, Istanbul really doesn’t need an artificial or the induced image as it is termed. (...) In fact maybe because there are a lot of things, maybe because Istanbul is very rich in these terms, it is hard to create that clear that exact image, perception in the minds of the people for this reason. (...) In order to develop this maybe more research or maybe more idea search conferences can be made. Istanbul is a very colorful city; I think it needs to be better marketed.”

P.P. also emphasizes on the new trend of specialized tourism such as culture tourism, gastronomy to urism, faith tourism and weekend breaks as a solution to meet the individualized needs of the changing customers.

“The people in the world want to get rid of that cliché tourism concept. There is such a trend. (...) They want to travel, see, live that culture and the duration of their trips get shorter. I mean when we look at Europe the trend is short trips. (...) Istanbul is a very good city for this. In the promotion of Turkey, we maybe should not only focus on South, but we should also underline Istanbul’s culture tourism, shopping tourism and gastronomy tourism.”

Three participants also refer to the necessity of integrated marketing activities that needs to be taken by both the government and the private sector:

B.U.: “As a result of the promotion activities in the recent years, Istanbul has arrived at an important point in terms of acknowledgment and awareness. Due to these activities Istanbul has become one of the most visited cities in the world and has arrived at an important position in terms of the amount of congresses that are organized. Of course, the way to advance this success is through increasing the service quality and continuing the promotion activities. Therefore the official and private organizations need to continue their work together.”

O.O.: “(...) Because we don’t have integrated marketing, because we don’t identify a budget, there is an coordination lack, a miscommunication. Everybody markets something. There isn’t a total quality, a total concept. Think for a moment that all those people, all those issues bring their power together, what a big Istanbul brand will emerge.”

P.P.: “(...) Maybe in the marketing of Istanbul the DMOs give some professional support. Because advertising, marketing needs professionalism. It would be better if there was an integrated understanding. I told you about idea search conferences. Maybe the Ministry might seek for ideas or their getting together with a professional advertising company can bring more fruitful results.”

Istanbul has an organic brand image
due to its historical, natural cultural and built destination attractions. However, as one participant states the Istanbul brand doesn’t have a clear organic brand image, partly because of the richness of its natural and cultural resources and partly because of the lack of a strong positioning campaign. In order to create a clear organic image on the other hand, one participant offers more idea seeking conferences to be held as well as the professional support of the DMO along with the professional support of an advertising agency. On the other hand as one participant suggests weekend trips and short trips with specialized concepts like culture tourism, gastronomy tourism and faith tourism can be organized more heavily following the tourism trends in Europe in order to better meet the needs of the tourists. Another very important solution on the other hand as stated by four participants, is a need for an integrated marketing communications approach. In many European countries the DMOs are responsible from leading the marketing activities of a destination and an integrated marketing communications approach is applied. However in Turkey this is not the case. Furthermore as the participants state the government and the private sector’s marketing communications activities should be unified in order to create a unified brand image.

CONCLUSION

In tourism marketing the main focus is on making the destination an attraction site for the tourists through drawing attention towards destination attractions and implemented strategies and winning the customers. In order for the destination to become an attraction site, it needs to involve natural, historical, built and social resources such as historical monuments and artifacts, culture and arts exhibition centers, museums, accommodation facilities, food and drink facilities as well as transportation and infrastructure. In tourism marketing the strategies used are comprised of the improvement of social services, city reconstruction and planning, economic developments and the implementation of a strategic marketing plan. City brand image, on the other hand, is another important aspect that draws the tourists to the destination. City brand image refers to how the tourists perceive the city that is the image that comes to mind when the potential customers think of the city. The brand image of a city can be organic, or induced, but in each case the brand needs to be well positioned in order to create strong connotations regarding the city in the minds of the consumers. Tourism marketing elements consist of destination as the tourism product, the price of the tourism services, the distribution that is the function of the agencies and travel operators in marketing the product and promotion which consists of marketing communications elements.

In this research the role of tourism marketing in the promotion of the Istanbul brand is studied and semi structured in-depth interviews are carried out in order to highlight the tourism marketing activities of the government and the private sector for the Istanbul brand. The conducted in-depth interviews findings include remarks under five themes including ‘the Distinctive Resources of Istanbul’, ‘Tourism Services in Istanbul’, ‘Pricing Policy in Istanbul’, ‘the Promotion of Istanbul’, and ‘New Marketing and Branding Strategy Recommendations.’

According to these findings Istanbul is a rich city in terms of natural, historical and cultural destination attractions due to its ancient history, strategic geopolitical location and its cosmopolitan nature. Furthermore the fact that Istanbul is the cultural, social, economic and financial capital of Turkey and offers distinctive resources like cultural heritage, history, natural wonders and a world cuisine are among the distinctive characteristics of Istanbul. The tourism services in Istanbul consist of accommodation facilities, food and drink facilities and transportation services and along with the recent projects that are under construction such as the third airport project. The tourism services in Istanbul are quite sufficient in number. However despite the recent transportation projects made available such as the new extended metro line, metro buses and the Marmaray, the inner city traffic is still problematic due to the high population of the city. Although some participants refer to pricing policy in Istanbul as high, as stated by other participants this pricing policy is related to the extent of the service quality given and the pricing policy can be easily turned into an advantage when the intended vacation is planned through a travel agency beforehand. For the promotion of the city the government’s promotion activities include sales promotions.
given to foreign tour operators and credit usage opportunities for travel agencies, advertising campaigns and attendance to international tourism fairs. The advertising and PR activities in mainstream media, sales promotion activities and point of purchase communications are among the promotion activities of the private sector. Furthermore, today the tourism sector actors have more means in promoting themselves and their activities through the use of information technologies, which are one of the most important factors in tourism marketing (Tekeoglu, 2015). The government and public sector make efficient use of online promotion activities such as website advertising, direct mailing and online PR in order to promote themselves and their activities. Regarding the new branding and marketing strategies one participant states since the city is quite rich in natural, historical and cultural resources, in order to create a clear organic image ‘more research’ and ‘more idea search conferences’ can be done in order to develop the city image. According to the Culture and Tourism Ministry statistics the time the tourists spend in Istanbul is around two nights (IKA, 2014, Turkiye ve İstanbul Bolgesi’nde Turizim) and therefore since the tourists inclination is towards short trips, weekend tourism as well as specialized tourism such as culture, gastronomy, and faith tourism can be supported more strongly in order to meet the diversified needs of the tourists. Finally among the new marketing and branding strategy recommendations is the addressed need for a necessary integrated marketing communications approach in order to create to create a strong brand image.

REFERENCES


