


Visual destination image from online perspective: The case of "GoTürkiye"

On-line perspektiften görsel destinasyon imajı: "GoTürkiye" örneği

Hüseyin Keleş¹ 

Gözde Seval Ergün² 

Betül Taşpınar³ 

¹ Lecturer Phd, Akdeniz University, Manavgat Tourism Faculty, Manavgat, Antalya, Türkiye, hkeles@akdeniz.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0003-1469-0017

² Associate Prof., Akdeniz University, Manavgat Tourism Faculty, Manavgat, Antalya, Türkiye, gates@akdeniz.edu.tr

ORCID: 0000-0002-5697-626X

³ MA Graduate, Akdeniz University, Manavgat Tourism Faculty, Manavgat, Antalya, Türkiye, gvenbetl@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-1070-2562

Abstract

This study has analysed the visuals of the website "goturkiye.com", which contains information about travelling to Türkiye through the ten destinations attracting the most tourists within the country. The data source used in the study includes the images of the ten most visited destinations in Türkiye on the website "goturkiye.com". In the research, the relevant images were analysed through content analysis, a qualitative research method. The study demonstrates that the images of the ten destinations with the most visitors to Türkiye on the website "goturkiye.com" are not constrictedly positioned. The images highlight these destinations as strong geographical and historical-cultural sites. Content-wise, the visuals of the most visited destinations on the website cater to market segments that are aligned with the travel interests of visitors. There is a need for various studies in the literature to analyse Türkiye's marketing approach. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the literature by evaluating Türkiye's destination image in the online environment from a visual perspective. It seeks to provide unique insights and reach significant marketing conclusions through its analysis.

Keywords: Visual Destination Image, GoTürkiye, Destination Marketing, Content Analysis

Jel Codes: Z30, Z33, Z39

Öz

Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'ye seyahatle ilgili bilgilerin yer aldığı "goturkiye.com" sitesinde yer alan ve turistik talebin yoğun olduğu 10 destinasyona ait görseller analiz edilmiştir. Türkiye'de en çok ziyaret eden 10 destinasyona ait görsellerin analizinde, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden içerik analizi tercih edilmiştir. Çalışma, araştırmaya dâhil edilen destinasyonların "goturkiye.com" sitesinde dar bir şekilde konumlandırılmadığını açıkça ortaya koymaktadır. Görüntüler bu destinasyonları güçlü coğrafi ve tarihi-kültürel alanlar olarak vurgulamaktadır. İçerik açısından, web sitesinde en çok ziyaret edilen destinasyonların görselleri, ziyaretçilerin seyahat ilgi alanlarına uygun pazar segmentlerine hitap etmektedir. Literatürde Türkiye'nin pazarlama yaklaşımını analiz eden çalışmalara ihtiyaç vardır. Araştırma sonucunda, ilgili destinasyonların görselleri Tarihi/Kültürel Miras, Doğa, Etkinlik, Dini Unsurlar, Gastronomi adı altında beş boyutta incelenmiştir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma Türkiye'nin çevrim içi ortamdaki destinasyon imajını görsel açıdan değerlendirerek literatüre katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Analizi yoluyla benzersiz iç görüler sağlamayı ve önemli pazarlama sonuçlarına ulaşmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Görsel Destinasyon İmajı, GoTürkiye, Destinasyon Pazarlaması, İçerik Analizi

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Corresponding Author:

Hüseyin Keleş,

Akdeniz University, Manavgat Tourism Faculty, Manavgat, Antalya, Türkiye, hkeles@akdeniz.edu.tr

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Introduction

Tourism, one of the world's fastest-growing and most significant sectors, has been highly regarded by many countries due to its economic impact and ability to create new employment opportunities throughout history. Tourism, which is constantly evolving, fulfils people's physical, socio-cultural and emotional needs through activities in which they can directly or indirectly participate. Moreover, it is crucial in developing international relations, facilitating global residents' closeness and embracing universal peace. However, it is essential to note the sensitivity of tourism activities to various factors, such as countries' economic and social agendas, pandemics, regional conflicts, and other emergencies, which can negatively affect tourism mobility (Türker, 2020).

Even though tourism in Türkiye started to gain pace after the 1990s, it has managed to enter the top ten countries in the world tourism rankings (Bulut, 2022). According to the data in the report published by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), 963 million people made touristic trips worldwide in 2022 (Türsab, 2022). In the report, Türkiye is recognised as the fourth country hosting the highest number of tourists in the world. In addition, it is seen that it has risen in the ranking and maintained its place when compared to 2019. In this respect, Türkiye is in an important position among the world's leading countries regarding tourist visits. As can be concluded, Türkiye, which has significant potential in tourism, could be considered a destination with significant advantages compared to the countries ranked below it. For instance, unlike many other countries in the global tourism sector, Türkiye has major destinations in terms of natural, cultural and historical richness (Duman & Kozak, 2010). Therefore, it is a fact that Türkiye has an important share in the tourism sector (Gokovali, 2010). Considering this potential, paying attention to this sector is very important. As clearly shown in Bulut's (2022) study, the tourism sector plays a critical role in the country's economy, particularly regarding the balance of payments. Therefore, for developing countries like Türkiye with significant tourism potential, it is a priority to stand out in tourism. Consequently, as stated by Sancar (2015), the private and public sectors in Türkiye have been working to promote the country's assets and create a strong tourism image.

In this study, the top ten most visited tourism destinations in Türkiye were identified for analysis by considering the data of the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TÜRSAB, 2022). The destinations, including İstanbul, Antalya and Nevşehir, were selected by considering their high visitor volume and popularity according to TÜRSAB (2022) data. Furthermore, while determining the cities, Köşker, Albuz & Ercan (2019) also researched the brand identities of destinations. These cities represent a wide range of Türkiye's tourism opportunities, from cultural and historical sites to seaside resorts, and reflect the country's attractiveness. Türkiye's official tourism portal highlights that they are central to the national tourism strategy. Analysing the promotional images of these destinations provides important insights into tourist preferences and the effectiveness of destination branding, and the ten cities identified constitute a suitable and comprehensive sample for the study. The analysis of these destination images is intriguing from at least two perspectives. Firstly, it provides insights into what tourists are looking for while travelling. Therefore, understanding how these destinations are presented on the official promotion portal will benefit those travelling to these places and those considering travel, enhancing understanding of the demand for tourism products. Secondly, gaining more information about destinations in Türkiye and identifying their regional attractions will benefit visitors by providing more comprehensive insights into the destinations. Therefore, the primary objectives of this study;

- Identifying the images of the most visited destinations presented by "goturkiye.com". Analysing the relevant photographs will shed light on the awareness levels of Türkiye's attractions and places of interest.
- Determining the most meaningful visual emerges as a common theme when Türkiye is presented as a target through the official promotion portal.

Destination image

It is challenging to define the term destination image precisely (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). However, given the importance of image in developing a destination (Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio & Nazzareno, 2017), it has emerged as one of the most investigated notions in tourism literature (Xu & Ye, 2018). Scholars generally agree that a destination is a multifaceted, composite entity of intertwined cognitive and affective assessments embedded in overall impressions (Assael, 1992; Gartner, 1994; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Some investigators have indicated the impact of the three-component attitude model from psychology, including cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements, on destination choice (Pike & Ryan, 2004; White, 2004). For instance, Echtner & Ritchie (1991) stated that the structure of the destination image is composed of three dimensions: quality-holistic, functional-

psychological, and common-unique. The images of a destination encompass various components of the destination (Jenkins, 1999). According to Echtner & Ritchie (1991), "holistic and unique images are vital in determining how a particular destination can be categorised and differentiated in the minds of target markets". A destination can be a continent, a country, or a region (Rızaoğlu, 2004) and refers to a region, island, village, etc. within a country. What is meant by the term destination is the unique aura that the destination has.

The destination image is formed by processing information from various sources (Gartner, 1994). Some of these sources aim directly to promote the destination (e.g., the Internet, travel brochures, advertisements, posters, specially prepared videos, etc.), while others may indirectly promote the destination through books, films, news, and actual visits. The messages conveyed by these sources contribute to the formation of the destination image, as a holiday trip to a distant place often follows an extensive information search (Prebensen, 2007; Lojo, Li & Xu, 2020; Kilipiri, Papaioannou & Kotzaivazolou 2023; Wang, Mou, Zhu, Yang, Zhang & Zhang, 2024; Mou & Brito, 2024).

Internet as a tourism marketing tool

The Internet has become an important part of media planning with the introduction of Internet technologies. As for the tourism industry, the Internet helps tourism destinations create a unique identity, increase awareness and develop value-added services. On the other hand, it is a worldwide information source widely used in all fields. Therefore, organisations operating in every field of tourism use the Internet effectively. It is actively used by destination marketing organisations such as hotels, airlines, travel agencies, and congresses (Chu, 2001; Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003; Oh, Kim, & Shin, 2004; Özturan & Roney, 2004; Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006). The impact of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) on tourism has been discussed in various ways in the literature (Cooper, 2005; Law & Leung, 2000; Park, 2002; Ma, Buhalis & Song, 2003). On the demand side, more and more people prefer the Internet as the cheapest and fastest source of information (Heung, 2003). Moreover, destinations and organisations can be quickly promoted on the Internet. For this reason, it is clear that the studies in the relevant literature mainly analyse the content of websites and Internet users.

It can be stated that the characteristics of traditional distribution channels in tourism have changed with the widespread use of the Internet as a marketing tool. For example, the Internet has made it possible to provide content to many people simultaneously in an unlimited time compared to traditional distribution channels (Güven, 2020). Moreover, the Internet plays an invaluable role as a tourism marketing tool, particularly in reaching long distances quickly (Lee & Gretzel, 2012; Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang & Chen, 2015; Labanauskaitė, Fiore & Stašys, 2020; Berestetska, Iankovets, Orozova, Voitovych, Parmanasova & Medvedieva, 2023; Upe, 2023; Khanom, 2023; Smith & Zook, 2024).

Touristic attractions are one of the main elements that bring a destination prominence (Özer, 2012). The visibility of the unique attractions of a destination also turns them into reasons to visit the destination. Tourism activities, therefore, concentrate on destinations with these attractions. Thus, to generate and increase tourism demand, destinations need to develop the right strategies and convey them through effective channels (Almeida-García, Domínguez-Azcue, Mercadé-Melé & Pérez-Tapia, 2020). In this context, especially in the digital age, the development of the tourism industry depends on its adaptation to digital advancements (Adekuajo, Fakeyede, Udeh & Daraojimba, 2023). Consequently, promotional and positioning efforts regarding Turkish tourism on official platforms must be well-organised. In this way, it can be stated that Türkiye can become more visible in tourism through more types of tourism options (Goyal & Sharma, 2013; Civelek & Türkay, 2021; Ergün, 2022; Üstün & Uslu, 2022).

Studies focusing on visual destination image

In the literature, several studies focusing on visual media in the context of tourism can be encountered. Xiao, Fang, Lin & Chen (2022) examined the visual content of tourist photographs, suggesting that photographs are an effective way to explore destination images. MacKay & Fesenmaier (2000) examined intercultural image perception, providing an example of how image dimensions, quantity, and interpretation can differ between cultures. Shao, Wang & Hao (2019) analysed visual destination images through short video content shot by users. Nixon, Popova & Önder (2017) used Instagram, a photo-sharing website, to determine which types of photos are most effective in positively promoting a destination and how consumers' previous images can influence this. Terzidou, Styliadis & Terzidis (2021) examined the role of television news and documentaries in religious tourists' destination image, preference and on-site experiences within the context of faith tourism. Hunter (2012) examined the photographs in tourism brochures using content analysis. Thus, he aimed to understand the explicit and implicit messages conveyed in promotional photographs and concluded the connection between the representation of the city and its physical reality. Xiao, Fang & Lin (2020) tried to understand tourism

destination images by applying visual content mining to travel photos. Furthermore, a limited number of studies were identified in which visual images were evaluated within the context of the destination, with Türkiye selected as a sample. In order to determine Türkiye's destination image connection, studies have been found that examine the official Twitter account of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Uner, Karatepe, Cavusgil & Kucukergin, 2023), photos shared by travel bloggers (Bical & Ozturk, 2021); photos on the official Instagram account of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Çakici, Kuhzady, & Benli, 2017); postcards representing the destination (Milman, 2011); visual information taken from movies (Tasci, 2009); gastronomic products shared on GoTürkiye Instagram page (Ercan, 2021); the destination image of Türkiye in promotional tourism brochures (Ulama, 2015), and Türkiye promotional videos by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Alvarez & Campo, 2011). In the studies conducted, it is observed that Türkiye is generally approached as a whole. However, within the scope of destination marketing, it is well known that each destination has its unique attractiveness, and strategic planning should be made based on this finding. In this sense, the study reveals its originality as it focuses on the top ten most travelled destinations in Türkiye, and there is no other study examining the "goturkiye.com" website within the context of a visual destination image.

The previous studies mentioned a lack of differentiated marketing strategies that connect and unite tourists and destinations (Xiao et al., 2022). In this respect, analysing tourism destination images based on the visual content of photographs will provide a different perspective on existing marketing strategies. Visual images guide visitors on how to experience, see, and remember a city (Hunter, 2012). Nevertheless, the motivation behind developing this envisioned visual destination image and the extent to which it achieves the intended effects on potential buyers have become important.

Türkiye's official promotion platform: "goturkiye.com"

Promotion in tourism can be defined as informing, enlightening, and creating an image of the target country through the effective and coordinated use of information, techniques, and methods (Karasu, 1990). In this context, with the objective presentation of promotional activities to consumers, it will be possible to create demand to visit the target country and ensure the continuity of this demand. GoTürkiye.com, the global tourism information platform of Türkiye, will provide Türkiye with a competitive advantage with its modern design and state-of-the-art technology infrastructure, focusing on all cultural and touristic values of the country for those who want to get information about Türkiye or plan their next visit. Designed by the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye with the latest technology and design trends, the platform aims to provide a superior user experience (GoTürkiye, 2024).

The official promotional platform focuses on the experience-oriented promotion of Türkiye's tourism destinations. The website's rich content, emphasising different activities such as gastronomy tourism, faith tourism, fashion and shopping, golf, skiing, camping, blue cruises, and cycling, is also significant for tourism.

Method

The primary purpose of this study is to evaluate the visuals of the ten most visited destinations in Türkiye in the scope of the destination image. Visuals are important materials that have the power to represent a place. It is observed that research on destination image has focused on the visuals of destinations on various social platforms (Choi, Lehto & Morrison, 2007; Law, Qi & Buhalis, 2010; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Song & Kim, 2016; Hunter, 2016). In addition to being easily accessible, the ability of researchers to conduct qualitative evaluations such as content analysis has increased the interest in studies using visual content (Cakmak & Isaac, 2012; Hao, Wu, Morrison & Wang, 2016; Strähle, 2017; Leung, Dickinger & Nixon, 2017). Therefore, the field of study in which visual data are analysed can be considered a highly intriguing, up-to-date and popular field of study. In this study, the visuals on the official website were examined and evaluated using the content analysis method. Qualitative content analysis involves examining text data, whether in oral, printed, or electronic form, by categorising it into categories with similar meanings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this sense, initially, the following questions were addressed;

- What are the visuals of the ten most visited destinations by tourists in Türkiye on Türkiye's official promotion platform?
- Under which themes are the visuals of the ten most visited destinations in Türkiye categorised?
- What are the engaging visuals and themes of the ten most visited destinations by tourists in Türkiye?

In this context, the data source used in the study consists of the photographs shared on Türkiye's official

promotion platform. As Garrod (2008) argues, visuals constitute an underutilised data set in tourism research. Content analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study, and it is anticipated that it will become a widespread method in qualitative research, especially in the form of visual content analysis. The study is also significant in revealing the features that tourism websites should have, especially considering the changing preferences of domestic and foreign tourists due to increased digitalisation. In this regard, the study contributes to the literature and tourism stakeholders. The findings of this study were obtained through website analysis. Therefore, no ethics committee approval was required for the study.

Findings

The data for the study were collected by accessing the photographs in the ten related destination promotions on the website "goTurkiye.com" between 21.04.2023 and 05.05.2023. During this phase, the following steps were followed;

- The visuals of the relevant cities (İstanbul, Antalya, Muğla, İzmir, Ankara, Nevşehir, Aydın, Denizli, Gaziantep and Hatay) were obtained from the official website.
- A content analysis was conducted using these visuals.

In the study, image classification elements such as "symbol, heritage, nature, entertainment (activity), service, people, location, culture" used in visual destination image classification studies were taken into consideration (Jenkins, 2003; Mercille, 2005; Govers & Go, 2005; Galí & Donaire, 2005; Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005; Camprubí, Guia & Comas, 2014; Hao et al., 2016; Song & Kim, 2016). Six thousand five hundred ninety-five photographs of the ten most visited tourism destinations in Türkiye on the website "goturkiye.com" were analysed. In this context, the visual data used in the study were thematised based on the visual data reflecting the destination image in the relevant studies. The determined themes and the number of analysed images are expressed as frequencies in Table 1. As a result of the analysis, it was revealed that 45,85% of the 6595 photographs reflected the "historical/cultural heritage" image, 25,34% reflected the "nature" image, 21,29% reflected the "activities" image, 4% reflected the "faith" image and 3,52% reflected the "gastronomy" image. In this context, the themes created by including 6595 images in the study are as follows: 1. Historical/Cultural Heritage, 2. Nature, 3. Events, 4. Faith, 5. Gastronomy.

Table 1: Frequency of Themes Formed by the Images Reflected by Destinations

Theme	Historical/Cultural Heritage	Nature	Event	Faith	Gastronomy
Frequency	3024	1671	1404	264	232
Total	6595				

As a consequence of the visual analysis regarding the first question of the study, the theme of Historical/Cultural Heritage ranks first among the generated themes with 3024 images. The historical and cultural richness of the ten destinations are included in the relevant theme. In the nature theme category, it is observed that there are 1671 images of natural beauties. However, the sea and the sun are at the forefront of the visuals. On the other hand, the event theme consists of 1404 images of sports, art, fashion, shopping, etc., that include experiences accompanied by historical/cultural and natural beauties. On the other hand, it was determined that İstanbul, Gaziantep and Hatay destinations emphasised the gastronomy image with 232 images, while religious elements were reflected in the images of İstanbul, Muğla, Nevşehir and Hatay destinations with 264 images. Table 2 presents the images of the top ten most visited tourism destinations in Türkiye. It is seen that historical and cultural values are present in all of the images reflected by the relevant destinations.

Table 2: Images Reflected by Destinations

Destinations	Reflected Images
İstanbul	Historical/Cultural Heritage, Events, Religious Elements, Gastronomy
Antalya	Nature, Historical/Cultural Heritage, Event
Muğla	Nature, Historical/Cultural Heritage, Religious Elements
İzmir	Historical/Cultural Heritage, Nature, Event
Ankara	Historical/Cultural Heritage, Event
Nevşehir	Nature, Historical/Cultural Heritage, Religious Elements
Aydın	Nature, Historical/Cultural Heritage
Denizli	Nature, Historical/Cultural Heritage
Gaziantep	Gastronomy, Historical/Cultural Heritage
Hatay	Gastronomy, Historical/Cultural Heritage, Religious Elements

The frequency of the images for each destination was determined based on the themes created for the images reflected for the relevant destinations, and the prominent cities can be found in Table 3 depending on the rate of their presence in the relevant theme.

Table 3: Prominent Destinations According to Reflected Images

Theme	Destination	Frequency	%
Historical/Cultural Heritage	İstanbul	1076	35,58
	İzmir	982	32,47
	Antalya	662	21,89
Nature	Antalya	645	38,59
	Muğla	498	29,80
	Nevşehir	434	25,97
	Aydın	429	25,67
	Denizli	342	20,46
Event	İstanbul	356	25,36
	Antalya	297	21,15
	İzmir	286	20,37
Religious Elements	İstanbul	95	35,98
	Muğla	88	33,33
	Nevşehir	72	27,27
	Hatay	65	24,62
Gastronomy	Gaziantep	115	49,57
	Hatay	95	40,95
	İstanbul	52	22,41

The analysis of the images reflected by the top ten most visited destinations, based on the evaluation of 6,595 visuals, has been displayed using "Microsoft Power BI". The data from the analysed visuals highlight the prominent cities that stand out in the images they reflect (Figure 1).

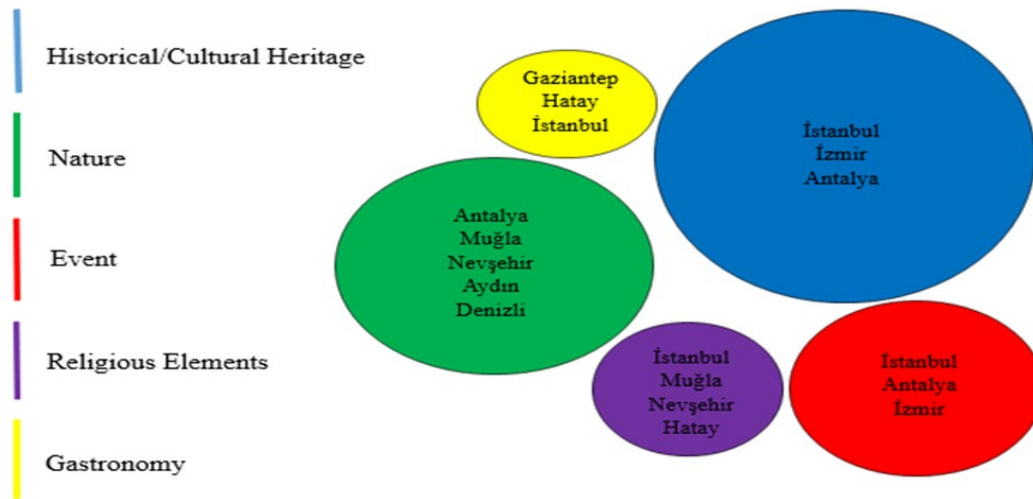


Figure 1: The Distribution of Images Reflected by Destinations

Conclusion and discussion

The results of this study are expected to provide implications for the actors responsible for developing and projecting the destination image. In this way, producing the ideal image envisioned for the destination will be possible. The positive definition of a visual destination image raises the question of whether it is a random collection of haphazardly published photographs circulating endlessly among institutions and organisations or a purposeful and carefully organised destination marketing strategy (Hunter, 2012). In this context, the visual images and associations reflected on the goturkiye platform are memorable and, at the same time, accurately represent the destination. In this way, it can be stated that it has become possible to produce the ideal image envisaged for the destination.

Tourists often prefer to experience an unfamiliar environment when choosing a destination. Therefore, visual elements play an important role in tourists' decision-making and destination choices (Xiao et al., 2022). The GoTürkiye platform, a part of the official promotion program of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, provides an idea about the experience they will have along with the image they want to project about the destinations in Türkiye.

This study reveals the current situation regarding the visual promotion of Türkiye's major destinations. According to the study results, a destination is associated with more than one theme. Accordingly, the destination image should be created in a structure that allows change. Choosing a single theme for a destination will hinder any change and limit the promotion. Therefore, drawing a balanced image portrait within reasonable limits but allowing for diversity is important. In addition, it was found that platform destinations use visuals that include seasonal differences and geographical advantages. The image of a destination is a combination of various attractions that form a common impression. The perception of destination promotional images may draw attention to or exclude certain destination features (Mackay & Fesenmaier, 2000). In this way, it is thought that the goal of diversifying tourism and spreading it to four seasons will be supported.

Until recent years, Türkiye has taken a relative share in the mass tourism market and has come to the forefront with sea-sand-sun tourism. The current study revealed that Anatolia, which has hosted many civilisations from the past to the present, is more at the forefront with its most historical and cultural values in visual elements due to its historical and cultural heritage. Therefore, the visuals of the ten destinations identified within the scope of the study presented by the "goturkiye.com" website, which is the official promotional portal of Türkiye, align with the alternative tourism types suitable for Türkiye's tourism strategy. On the other hand, the visually projected and perceived target image should often be emphasised as an important component of the target's success and reputation (Hunter, 2016; Song & Who, 2016; Zhou, 2014). In this context, the visuals on the platform continue to maintain the current sea-sand-sun understanding within the scope of the nature image, especially with the emphasis on the sea.

The visually reflected destination image is an important source and guide for understanding the destination (Donaire, Camprubí, & Galí, 2014). The destination image is dynamic and evolving. It is

essential and valuable to reflect the historical and cultural heritage, religious elements and, undoubtedly, the gastronomic image. However, the fact that art, fashion, and events are included in the analysed visuals ensures that the destinations are introduced with an experience-oriented approach; in other words, they attract attention by bringing a holistic approach to tourism. The integration of the visuals of the tourism destinations with the events will expand the destination image. Therefore, using images that reflect tourism resources correctly can be stated as a strategy to strengthen the destination image and diversify tourism. The study analysed Türkiye's visual destination image on an official and online platform and contributed to and guided the efforts to improve the destination's marketing strategy and destination images.

Implications, limitations and future research directions

Practical implications

The results of this study have important implications for the effective promotion of tourism destinations in Türkiye on digital platforms. Digital marketing has become an important tool in shaping destination image in the tourism sector today (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013a; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013b). Official promotion portals such as 'GoTürkiye' increase the attractiveness of destinations through strong visual content and directly influence the travel preferences of tourists. Studies show that visual content in digital promotion can leave more permanent traces in users' perceptions and is a determining factor in their decision-making processes (Stylidis, 2016). In this respect, destination management should attach importance to effectively using visual content in their digital marketing strategies.

It has been found that diversified visual materials, especially photos and videos reflecting the cultural and natural richness of destinations, positively strengthen visitors' perceptions (Michaelidou, Siamagka, Moraes & Micevski, 2013). Rich visual content highlighting Türkiye's cultural heritage, historic buildings, local cuisine and natural beauties can draw potential visitors' attention and strengthen the destination's perception. Social media platforms play an important role in conveying these visuals to large audiences and reinforce destination image in the digital environment by supporting the 'word-of-mouth marketing' effect through users' content sharing (Abbasi, Tsiotsou, Hussain, Rather & Ting, 2023).

Focusing on the visual presentation of alternative tourism types is also essential to promote Türkiye's tourism diversity. This strategy can move beyond Türkiye's image as solely a sun-sea-sand destination by highlighting alternative forms such as cultural tourism, nature tourism, health tourism, and gastronomy tourism. This diversity appeals to tourist groups seeking unique and cultural experiences beyond traditional vacation options (Ei & Karamanis, 2017). Therefore, integrating visuals that reflect the multifaceted appeal of Turkish destinations into digital marketing strategies will enhance the country's tourism marketing and create a positive differentiation in the perception of Türkiye.

Theoretical implications

This study has provided several theoretical implications that have the potential to contribute to the destination image literature. The method of presentation of Türkiye's prominent tourism destinations on the 'GoTürkiye' website constitutes a valuable example of destination image studies. The visual image created by destination management greatly influences tourists' perception of the destination and decision-making processes (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). In this context, research on the impact of visual content presented on digital platforms on tourists' travel decisions and perceptual satisfaction is becoming increasingly important (Cruz & Lacap, 2023).

The research also contributes to the theoretical frameworks in the tourism literature to understand the perceptual effects of online destination promotion and visual images by examining how destination image is constructed on digital platforms. Visual materials, mainly photographs and videos, profoundly affect how tourists perceive the destination image, and the decisive role of this image in destination choice is supported by research (Das, Bajaj & Gupta, 2024). Therefore, theoretical studies should focus on the role of visual elements in creating digital promotion strategies for tourist destinations.

Additionally, in the cultural and socio-economic context of destination image, it is important to understand how it reflects cultural elements in highly culturally diverse destinations such as Türkiye (Pike, 2002; Selby, 2003). Specifically, there is an increasing need for theoretical studies addressing the effects of images shared on online platforms on tourists' destination preferences and satisfaction (Makian, 2022). This study has provided an example that examines cultural and perceptual dimensions in depth and may contribute to expanding the theoretical analyses in destination image research.

Limitations and future research directions

Considering the limitations encountered in this study, the following suggestions have been developed for future research to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of destination image. First, the images used in the study were taken only from Türkiye's official promotional website, 'GoTürkiye', and no other online sources were used. This limitation ensured that Türkiye's tourism destinations were analysed only from an official perspective. Including user-generated images from different digital platforms, such as social media sites (Instagram, Facebook) and travel review sites (TripAdvisor), would allow for a multidimensional analysis of destination images. Since these user-shared contents reflect how destinations are perceived and experienced by tourists more naturally, a more realistic and extensive analysis of destination images can be conducted.

Secondly, the method used in this study was qualitative content analysis, which merely examined the visuals thematically. In future studies, using quantitative methods to analyse visual data could be an option for more objective and measurable results. For example, colour analysis, which examines the psychological effects of colour in visuals, or statistical analysis of the photographic composition, could reveal the impact of visual elements on tourist perception in more detail (Jenkins, 2003). Quantitative analysis methods can provide more concrete results for tourism marketing by measuring the impact of specific visual elements (such as colour, composition, and lighting) on tourists' perceptions of destinations.

In conclusion, only a content analysis of the visuals was carried out in this study, and the visual language (such as colour, layout, and photographic techniques) was not examined in depth. The role of photographic techniques and visual language in the destination image could be explored in more detail in future studies. In particular, exploring how photographic components such as layout design, use of colour, visual contrast, and perspective shape the image of a tourist destination may lead to a better understanding of how images are perceived. Furthermore, the impact of visual aesthetics on tourist satisfaction and destination choice could be explored. Such studies would contribute significantly to the development of tourism marketing strategies.

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