

Social media engagement and organic post effectiveness: A roadmap for increasing the effectiveness of social media use in hospitality industry

The present study assessed the social media use behavior of luxury hospitality facilities and offers suggestions to improve organic post effectiveness. All five-star tourism facilities operating in Turkey were incorporated into the study and publicly available post data on Facebook accounts of 441 facilities (out of a total of 612) were examined in the high tourist season (August) for one month. Data on 2,012 Facebook posts were obtained manually and filtered down to 1,847. The collected post data were subsequently coded using a content analysis form and analyzed via ordinal regression. The results highlighted the positive effects of interactive content and vivid content as well as the significance of the content type in achieving higher interaction among followers. The facility location and category (hotel, holiday village, thermal hotel) also emerged as significant factors affecting follower interactions.

Keywords: social media, Facebook marketing, customer engagement, social media performance, digital marketing, organic reach

Introduction

Over the course of the last decade, social media has emerged as a viable and critical marketing tool. New platforms utilizing Web 2.0 technologies offer superior interaction and communication between brands and consumers. This interaction may take place by way of a variety of methods such as liking, commenting on or sharing the content posted by brands with friends and followers. In addition to representing a new communication platform for brands, social media can be used to trigger word of mouth and also collect market data and customer feedback (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015). The effective use of social media may help in improving brand awareness, brand image (Godey et al., 2016) and even in achieving better financial performance (Kim & Chae, 2018). Furthermore, social media platforms allow hospitality companies to engage

customers online (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). However, the opportunities offered by social media haven't been fully utilized by all companies in the tourism sector alike (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Wagner, Baccarella, & Voigt, 2017). Irrespective of their social media presence, hotel activity levels and engagement with consumers are low (O'Connor, 2011). This is to a certain extent related to the scarcity of scientific research providing a roadmap for digital marketing managers on the most beneficial use of social media in the hospitality sector. As indicated by Lu, Chen, and Law (2018) in a comprehensive literature review, approximately half of the studies on the tourism industry on social media focus on online reviews, whereas those on marketing are limited to 11% of all studies. Similarly, Alves, Fernandes, and Raposo (2016) highlighted the need for further research on companies' effective use of social media in their systematic literature review. Thus, the present study attempted to fill this research gap and to provide marketing managers of tourism and hospitality companies with actionable insights, by assessing the performance of relevant social media posts. Facebook was chosen as a proxy for social media sites in general as it is the most popular platform globally and in Turkey, the setting of this study. Turkey caters to a variety of tourist types, ranking eighth worldwide with an excess of 35 million incoming international visitors (World Tourism Organization, 2018) signifying tourism as a considerable source of foreign currency income (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2018).

Within this context, a study covering all five-star tourism facilities in Turkey was carried out to understand the social media use and related performance of posts in the hospitality sector catering to middle and upper socio-economic consumers. The possible relationships between the content type and format of posts shared on Facebook and their popularity in terms of total interaction were analyzed and assessed to provide insights for hospitality managers, luxury tourism marketers and related stakeholders. The factors assumed to affect user interaction were

derived from the existing literature on tourism and social media marketing and are presented in the following section.

Literature Review: Social Media & Online Engagement

The mode of one-way communication provided by internet technologies in the 1990s was superseded by the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, which led to a two-way interaction among related parties. Simultaneously, the emergence of several online social media platforms led to a rapid increase in information flow between consumers and brands, who have sought to utilize this new media to provide and collect information instantly through interactions (Dimitriu & Guesalaga, 2017). Within this context, social media is defined as: “a group of internet-based applications that were built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

On social media, users can easily contribute to the content and communication generated by brands and other users, or they can easily start a communication themselves. In this way of interacting with brands, contributing to on-going communication with different brands and other users is possible. This interaction between brands and users is regarded as the “online engagement” concept within relevant literature. Online engagement is considered to have three elements – cognitive, affective and behavioral – that can be activated by users’ interactions with content on social media (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016). The users’ engagement and thoughts are reflected back onto the online media in the form of liking or disliking a post, commenting to express a users’ disposition to a post or sharing existing posts to reach out to others, such as friends and like-minded people (Pino et al., 2019).

A significant line of research focuses on user generated content and the so-called “Big Data” on the internet and social media that can be used to arrive at insights, offer superior value to visitors and gain a competitive edge in the market (Brandt, Bendler, & Neumann, 2017; Del Vecchio, Mele, Ndou, & Secundo, 2018). Moreover, use of available data online, coupled with sensor and mobile data is expected to lead to smart tourism, which can offer a superior experience to guests within the tourism industry (Del Vecchio et al., 2018).

Considering that effective social media use is associated with superior financial performance as evidenced by Kim and Chae (2018) in a study analyzing the Twitter accounts of hotels, focus on social media is not limited to a single line of research. Another research vein focusing on marketing communications tries to offer insights into the ways to establish or improve the two-way communication offered by social media. Albeit the ability to interact with others, motivating users to contribute to brand communication is not straightforward. The overcrowding of popular social media platforms and the emergence of new ones have led to a rapid increase in the amount of content available to members. Consequently, attracting users’ attention is becoming harder as the information load increases (Xu, Yang, Cheng, & Lim, 2014).

Despite the difficulties involved, taking into consideration the fact that the Internet has proven to be a significant and convenient channel to reach consumers that subsequently affect customer satisfaction and the success of destinations (Buhalis & Law, 2008), social media can offer similar positive prospects (Leung et al., 2013). As is the norm in other industries, the tourism sector has capitalized on the possibilities offered by the Internet and social media technologies (Chan & Guillet, 2011) and luxury brands’ interest in social media has also increased significantly over the past decade (Gautam & Sharma, 2017; Martín-Consuegra, Díaz, Gómez, & Molina, 2018). Considering the clientele of five-star hotels – the focus of this study –

overall expectations are relatively high compared to those of two- or three-star hotels. This is evidenced in the hospitality management research into online user-generated content (Fernandes & Fernandes, 2018). Consequently, the management of online channels should be handled with care to satisfy these relatively high expectations.

Academic studies on the social media activity of tourism services brands have reached several conclusions. First of all, it has been shown that social media use affects consumers' decision journeys, including reservation and purchase behaviors (Hudson & Thal, 2013; D. Leung et al., 2013). Social media posts, such as those on Facebook, attract users and assist them in planning their upcoming vacations (White, 2010). Moreover, social media use has been found to positively affect brand relationship quality (Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2016). Information and experience shared by and between users over social media has been shown to lead to positive brand image, brand value and visitor recommendations (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006). In addition, followers' positive comments regarding brands' social media posts are accepted to have a supplementary effect, enhancing the value and attractiveness of posts (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010).

In spite of the benefits of social media communications, consumers must be motivated to interact with the content shared by brands in order to establish two-way interaction. It is only possible to achieve this and to create bonds between brands and consumers by using social media effectively (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Given that potential tourists rely more on digital channels with each passing year during their decision journey (from planning to making reservations and purchases), the significance of social media for the tourism sector is increasing (Milano, Baggio, & Piattelli, 2011; Zeng, 2013). It is apparent that consumers interact with each other as well as with companies on social media over the course of their decision-making journey

(Dewnarain, Ramkissoon, & Mavondo, 2019). In this sense, low-level or a complete lack of interaction by users indicates low engagement and, therefore, low performance of social media marketing. Several performance indicators adopted in social media marketing are related to different forms of interaction, such as the total number of likes/favorites, comments and shares (Chan & Guillet, 2011).

Firstly, relevant studies on other forms of digital marketing communication were evaluated to understand the factors that affect users' interaction with shared content. Notwithstanding differences in certain characteristics, social media posts and paid online advertisements have several common properties. Consequently, the factors that attract consumers' attention to online advertisements have been found to be relevant to brand posts on social media as well. For instance, the vividness of advertisements affected interaction with web advertising posts in several studies (Fennis & Stroebe, 2010, p. 51), a finding that is applicable to social media posts (Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, & Lebherz, 2014; Tafesse, 2015). The type of content shared, interactivity and available languages were also found to affect customers' engagement levels on digital media (Hsu, 2012; Luarn, Lin, & Chiu, 2015; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

One advantage of social media use and subsequent engagement is the superior credibility of user-generated content compared to one-way communication (e.g. advertising) carried out by brands (Akehurst, 2009). Followers of brands can easily express their attitudes and sentiments towards brands by interacting with posts (e.g. liking or commenting). Given the capabilities of social networks, possible interactions are not limited to brands' posts but may also be in the form of users' own posts, which lead to positive or negative word of mouth (WOM). Research into online WOM is currently a major area of focus in the hospitality and tourism sectors (Leung,

Sun, & Bai, 2017; Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015). Among numerous other benefits, WOM interactions generated on digital channels are thought to have a significant effect on destination images (Huang, 2012). Not surprisingly, social media has been found to have a greater impact on destination image than an organization's own website (Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015). Studies related to brand posts and the WOM they create have adopted various types of interaction as performance indicators. Facebook officially started providing "total interaction" as a major performance indicator in its campaign/page management module (Facebook, 2018). Total interaction is accepted as the short-term return on investment of social media activities (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010), and is further acknowledged as representing the brand engagement created by social media sites (Strauss & Frost, 2013). Reviews and comments on these platforms, which have increased substantially over the last few years (Fernandes & Fernandes, 2018) have been found to lead to positive outcomes such as affective brand commitment in the tourism sector (Šerić & Praničević, 2018). Furthermore, utilizing social media to create brand loyalty is among the hot topics in the hospitality industry (Dewnarain et al., 2019). Despite being late adopters, luxury goods and services companies have also embraced social media as a viable and credible two-way communication and marketing tool (Dauriz, Remy, & Sandri, 2014; Gautam & Sharma, 2017; Pentina, Guilloux, & Micu, 2018). Thus, stakeholders of luxury travel institutions are interested in understanding and improving social media interactions.

The results of academic studies have led researchers to believe there are several significant factors that affect brand post interactions (number of likes, comments, and shares). These factors are based on distinct perspectives and theoretical models such as the following (Leung & Tanford, 2016):

- the technology acceptance model that considers the ease of use and usefulness of technologies;
- user motives and values (i.e. hedonic, functional, social);
- psychological factors and attitudes (e.g. brand identification, congruence);
- post characteristics (e.g. content, interactivity, vividness).

This study acknowledged technology acceptance, innovation diffusion and motivational theories to be good indicators of new system use such as Facebook, but not relevant in explaining user behavior regarding specific interactions with brand posts. The related constructs of these models focus on the platform/system itself or on users' motives for interacting with the system, but not on specific content (e.g. brand pages or shared post content). Consequently, within the scope of this study, relevant post characteristics were incorporated into the research model as predecessors of interaction and are provided in detail in the following section.

Factors Affecting the Popularity of Posts

The factors affecting the popularity of social media posts and subsequent engagement were found to be dependent on several elements including the post's vividness, the type of shared content, format, interactivity offered and certain situational variables.

Post Vividness

Content shared on social media may be in a variety of formats, such as text, static or dynamic visuals (e.g. photos or videos) or a combination of all these. "Vividness" is referred to in marketing communication literature as a means of assessing the level of stimulation expected to be achieved by different message formats. Fundamentally, vividness reflects the extent to which a post stimulates several senses (Steuer, 1992). Incorporating sound, movement, and visual

elements into a message is expected to grab the attention of a greater number of people who are exposed to it (Coyle & Thorson, 2001). Therefore, a video is considered more vivid than an image since it stimulates both the aural and visual senses. Predictably, use of photos, animation and videos have been found to attract more attention than text-only posts in digital marketing communications research (Drèze & Hussherr, 2003; Fortin & Dholakia, 2005; Lohtia, Donthu, & Hershberger, 2003). Studies on web advertising have illustrated that highly vivid banners have higher click-through rates, and are thus more effective at grabbing attention and leading to action (Lohtia et al., 2003). Similarly, studies on social media have observed positive effects of vividness on increasing interactions (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012; Luarn et al., 2015; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). In a Facebook study covering a multitude of industries in Singapore, vivid brand posts were found to earn more likes, shares, and comments than less vivid brand posts (Chua & Banerjee, 2015). In further research on the fashion industry by (Gutiérrez-Cillán, Camarero-Izquierdo, & San José-Cabezudo, 2017), it was revealed that images and videos posted on Facebook received more consumer engagement than text-only posts. Similar results highlighted the significance of vividness on interaction and engagement in several studies on tourism sector (Pino et al., 2019; Sabate et al., 2014). For instance, Mariani et al. (2018) revealed that photos and videos resulted in a higher number of comments in an extensive study on the Facebook accounts of the national tourism organizations of the top ten most-visited countries.

In the scope of this study, three levels of vividness were initially considered: plain text, static visuals (photos, illustrations, diagrams) and dynamic visuals (animations, videos etc.) in ascending order. However, given that research findings have revealed images as even more powerful sources of engagement than videos, and that the number of videos among the posts analyzed was low (~1%), these two types of content were combined in one “high-vividness”

category (Sabate et al., 2014; Schultz, 2017). Text-based content is considered to have low vividness and visual content to have high. Thus, the following hypothesis was devised:

H1: Higher vividness in brand posts will lead to higher total interaction

Post Content

The content in a brand post may be of several types and offer value in various ways to attract followers. A significant motive for individuals to use online services is to access information; thus, the search for information is one of the principal reasons digital media, such as websites, are used for (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Peffers, 2001). Functional elements have been found to affect consumer attitudes towards hospitality brand websites (Leung & Tanford, 2016) and, similarly, acquiring information via social media sites carries a utilitarian motive, which is accepted as one of the main reasons behind social media use (Hicks et al., 2012; Lin & Lu, 2011; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Comparably, consumers like and follow brand pages they are interested in, so as to receive timely information on new developments, products, and announcements rapidly and conveniently (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). Offering value to followers in this way is a method of increasing the popularity of posts and generating interaction (Luarn et al., 2015; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). These findings are valid in the tourism and hospitality industries as well, where the type of content has been found to affect engagement levels (Pino et al., 2019). In a quasi-experimental study, Cervellon and Galipienzo (2015) noted that informational appeal was more effective in improving attitudes towards hotels than emotional appeal. In a similar vein, “cognitive images” created by providing information online were found to be more significant in influencing overall destination image indirectly, leading to higher intentions to visit (Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sánchez, & Buhalis,

2018).

Apart from providing information on facilities and services, another similar avenue is to offer information on special events, occasions, and promotional campaigns to followers conveniently and exclusively. Studies on digital marketing communications have demonstrated the positive influence of promotional campaigns and tangible rewards offered on consumers' interaction with the content (Kim & Han, 2014; Luarn et al., 2015; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

Another proven way to offer value and attract follower interest is by offering entertaining content. Entertaining websites provide higher satisfaction (Luo, 2002) and entertaining content in digital marketing communication leads to positive attitudes and intentions (Aydin & Karamehmet, 2017; Choi, Hwang, & McMillan, 2008). Similarly, research on internet use has revealed that entertainment gratification is among the most significant factors affecting attitudes (Hausman & Siekpe, 2009). Unsurprisingly, entertaining posts on social media have been found to lead to higher impressions and positive attitudes towards the brand promoting the post and result in higher interaction (Gutiérrez-Cillán et al., 2017; Muntinga et al., 2011; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011). As such, the ability to entertainment is a feature that is expected of the Internet, social media, and virtual communities (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011; Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004; Lin & Lu, 2011).

In accordance with the aforementioned findings, the type of content provided in a post is expected to have a significant effect on consumer interactions. Post content can create value in several ways (e.g. utilitarian or hedonic); however, as to which type of content leads to superior interaction is an important question yet to be answered conclusively in the hospitality sector. In line with the findings and discussion provided, it was hypothesized that:

H2: Post content type will have a significant effect on total interaction.

The coding of content categories is provided in detail in “Data Coding” section.

Post Interactivity

Social media sites offer the ability to post various types of content with differing levels of interactivity. Interactivity in this context is defined in the literature as “the degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, on the communication medium, and on the messages and the degree to which such influences are synchronized” (Liu & Shrum, 2002, p. 54). Simple two-way interaction (the basic premise of social media) can be established more effectively via the provision of interactive content. Essentially, post content that is interactive in nature is expected to increase the level of follower interaction (e.g. likes and comments), which has been supported by several studies in a variety of settings (Chua & Banerjee, 2015; de Vries et al., 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Luarn et al., 2015; Tafesse, 2015). Consequently, interactive content can increase consumer involvement (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005) and engagement (Chua & Banerjee, 2015; de Vries et al., 2012; Gutiérrez-Cillán et al., 2017; Luarn et al., 2015). Interactivity can be offered in several forms such as sweepstakes, competitions, questions, and polls, in addition to providing links to websites. Indeed, followers are required to write comments to answer questions or to enter competitions; therefore, studies in this field have indicated that these varying forms of interactive content lead followers to engage with the post. Depending on the content, the level of interactivity may differ, thus the data on interactivity in this study were initially coded to signify the type of interactivity offered (links, competitions, questions and answers etc.). In line with these arguments, it was hypothesized that:

H3: Higher interactivity offered in brand posts will lead to higher total interaction.

Control variables

Total Number of Followers

The total number of followers that a facility has on its social media page is accepted as a significant indicator of the number of likes and comments a new post may obtain (Schultz, 2017). This indicator roughly represents the widest audience that a brand can access organically through its own posts. Given several alterations to Facebook's post display algorithm in recent years, the content shared by a brand is displayed only to a limited percentage of its total followers. It should be noted that this particular percentage of followers that can be reached by a brand's organic posts shows a diminishing trend (BI Intelligence, 2016; Sloane, 2015). Nevertheless, the number of followers still displays the maximum number of people that may be reached and is thus a reliable indicator of the total interaction potential of each post. Subsequently, it was incorporated into the study as a control variable with the following hypothesis:

H4: A higher total number of followers will lead to higher total interaction.

Situational Factors

Those hospitality facilities that are considered to be "five-star" have been further divided into three sub-categories – hotels, holiday villages, and thermal hotels – by the Culture and Tourism Ministry of Turkey. This classification is related to the type of services offered and was considered a significant factor that may affect user social media interaction in this study.

Similarly, a facility's location in Turkey may be used to a certain extent to deduce the type of tourism services provided by the facility. Given that Turkey typically offers sea-sun-sand tourism in the Mediterranean and Aegean region, as well as cultural and business-related tourism in the

rest of the country, the location of the facility can be used with an acceptable level of precision as an indicator of the type of tourists that the facility hosts. Consequently, the potential effects of these two situational factors were tested via the following hypotheses:

H5: The type of facility will have a significant effect on the total interaction.

H6: The location of the facility will have a significant effect on the total interaction.

Context: Tourism Sector & Facebook Use in Turkey

Turkey caters to a variety of international tourists and ranks eighth worldwide in terms of annual incoming international visitors, which exceed 35 million (World Tourism Organization, 2018). Tourism is a major service industry and has the power to generate the sought-after foreign exchange revenue to off-set the chronic foreign trade imbalance in the country. National tourism revenues fluctuated around 30 billion USD between 2013 and 2017, highlighting the significance of this industry for Turkey (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2018).

Facebook is currently the most popular social media platform in the world with around two billion monthly active members, 85% of whom are from outside the U.S. (Socialbakers, 2018). Facebook offers its members the ability to connect, communicate, interact, and stay in touch with friends, family and the brands they are interested in. High adoption rates in emerging markets make it a unique and valuable medium to reach consumers in a wide range of countries across the globe. There are over 35 million Facebook accounts in Turkey corresponding to almost 90% of the country's connected population (Statista, 2017). Moreover, Facebook is the second most visited website after google.com in Turkey (IAB Turkey, 2017).

Methodology

In the hospitality sector, five-star hotels' social media activities were assessed within the scope of the present study. It was anticipated that lower star categories would be managed with fewer resources and may not offer comparable performance to that of five-star facilities. Considering the higher number of resources available to five-star facilities, they were expected to be among the most effective users of social media among all hotel categories.

All five-star licensed hospitality facilities operating in Turkey were incorporated into the present study. A list of all tourism facilities operating in Turkey was obtained from the Turkish Ministry of Tourism and Culture's database and information on the location of each facility and its category (hotel, holiday village or thermal hotel) was acquired from this database. The Facebook pages of all five-star hospitality facilities were searched and accessed manually through an anonymous Chrome browser running on a PC. Out of the 612 registered five-star facilities in Turkey, only 441 were observed to have an active Facebook page. The remaining facilities either didn't have a Facebook account, their page was inaccessible, or it was inactive (no posts in the last three months). The study herein adopted a manual content analysis approach to assess post characteristics from a qualitative perspective. Taking into consideration the high number of hotels to be analyzed and the time/budget constraints, the data collection interval was set at one month. August was selected due to its being the high season for tourism in Turkey, excluding winter sports destinations. This provided the opportunity to compare almost all the facilities at their busiest time and overcome any bias related to seasonality. Moreover, a higher number and variety of posts and interactions were expected to be encountered in the high season. The following information on facilities' Facebook brand pages was collected manually using a content analysis form:

- total number of followers,
- content category (informative, entertaining, campaign announcement, celebratory/ congratulatory),
- vividness of the shared content (text, fixed visual, video),
- interactivity offered in the post (questions, contests, clickable links, etc.) ,
- total number of likes for each post,
- total number of comments on each post.

Posts evaluated per facility were capped at ten to keep the data at a manageable volume and to prevent a bias towards exceptionally active facilities. A total of ten posts were selected by choosing every second or third post for facilities that posted more than ten times during the research interval, depending on the total number of posts.

A total of 2,012 posts were collected and filtered down to 1,847. In the filtering stage, hotel chains that managed their Facebook accounts centrally (i.e. they didn't offer a particular page for each hotel) were excluded from the study. The data were assigned to the relevant categories manually by two researchers. Intercoder reliability was calculated by implementation of the formula devised by Perreault and Leigh (1989). The obtained intercoder reliability figure of 0.90 was within the accepted range (0.8-1.0). Discrepancies observed in the coding were solved by the researchers through reviewing the related content simultaneously for a second time. The data collected were coded, as detailed in the "Data Coding" section of this paper and analyzed using ordered regression analysis in SPSS 22.0 software.

Data Coding

The collected data were sorted into the following categories for ordinal regression analysis:

- The facility locations were grouped into either the Aegean and Mediterranean category, catering mostly to sea-sun-sand tourists, or into the Marmara and Anatolia region category, catering mostly to cultural, thermal, or corporate tourism.
- The facility types were categorized as hotel, holiday village or thermal hotel, based on the Ministry of Tourism and Culture’s license information.
- The total number of followers was divided into three categories based on percentiles; given the high variance of this factor, this approach helped to distinguish those facilities with large follower databases from those with small databases. Half the facilities were considered to have a moderate number of followers while one quarter each represented smaller and larger follower bases. Consequently, category Q1 comprised a “low # of followers”, Q4 a “high # of followers”, and Q2-Q3 a “medium # of followers”.
- The original coding was carried out on five different types of interactivity: questions, polls, links to company pages, links to other pages, competitions/sweepstakes. However, due to the lower quantity of higher interactive content (competition/sweepstakes, polls and questions) this variable was assessed according to two categories, regardless of whether any type of interactivity was offered in the post or not.
- The post content was originally divided into three categories: facility/service related, informative or entertaining content, and promotion/event announcements. Nonetheless, in the process of coding the data, “general news” and “celebrative” posts appeared as significant categories with a high number of observations. Considering that these two categories differed significantly from other content categories, they were treated as distinct and coded separately, resulting in a total of five content categories.

- The vividness of a post was assessed according to whether it was text-based or whether it catered to other senses, also containing visual and audio content. The original coding was based on three classes: 1) text; 2) still visuals (photo/image/drawing); and 3: dynamic visuals (video, animation). The latter two categories were then combined into one category due to a low number of observations in the dynamic visual category (~1%). Text-based posts were considered to have low vividness whereas visual posts including photos, images, drawings, animations and videos were considered to have high vividness.
- Total interaction was the dependent variable, calculated by adding the total number of likes, comments and shares, and was divided into four classes, each with virtually the same number of data-points, based on quartiles (Q1: very low, Q2: low, Q3: high, and Q4: very high). This approach enabled the total interaction variable (which had a relatively high variance) to be categorized in a manageable way.

The number of observations within each category and their marginal share among all observations as percentages are provided in Table 1.

Analysis & Discussion

Prior to the regression analysis, the tabulated frequency data provided in Table 1 were assessed. Interestingly, only 72% of the five-star facilities (the luxury hospitality sector) in Turkey were found to have active Facebook accounts. Among these active users, only 42% posted once during the highest tourism season, August. It is a known fact that luxury companies adopted digital marketing social media later than comparable sectors (Dauriz et al., 2014; Pentina et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the 72% adoption rate and low post frequencies indicated room for significant growth in terms of social media marketing in the luxury tourism industry. Among the possible

reasons for low use may be above-average expectations of the relevant facilities' clientele. Luxury hospitality facilities may be reluctant to use social media, in order to avoid potential criticism and backlash for poorly managed accounts and unprofessional posts. In this context, they may have opted to not use social media in the short-run.

[Table 1 around here]

According to the tabulated frequency data, only 9% of the active Facebook brand pages shared interactive content, most of which (81%) was in the form of a link to a page. Content that offered higher interactivity such as contests, questionnaires, and question-and-answer activities comprised 17% of all the interactive content shared, which corresponded to a mere 2% of the total posts analyzed. In terms of post content type, the most popular (48%) was informative content regarding the facility and services offered. The second most popular category of posts (23%) was promotion/event announcements. In terms of vividness, still images (photos, pictures, drawings etc.) were found to be the most popular format, totaling 85% of all shares. Interestingly, the share of videos among all posts was exceptionally limited (1%). The remaining 14% of posts were text-only; thus, they did not contain any visuals and were considered to have low vividness. One reason for the low number of videos may be the relatively high investment required for producing such content in the luxury industry.

As the second and major step of the analysis, ordinal regression was conducted on the data. The significance of the model was assessed through several model-fit criteria. Firstly, the assumption of proportional odds was tested. The test of parallel lines was not significant (chi-squared 29.240, df:24 sig. 0.211), which confirmed the proportional odds assumption. The model fit statistics revealed a significant reduction in the chi-square statistics (chi-squared 502,896,

df:12, $p < .001$) over the baseline-intercept-only model, indicating a noteworthy improvement. The Nagelkerke R^2 value of 0.255 indicated that the model was able to explain 25.5% of the variance in the total interaction on Facebook pages. However, another goodness-of-fit statistic provided by the software, the Pearson and Deviance chi-square, was significant at $p < .001$, suggesting the model did not fit the data well. To test whether this was due to the absence of any interaction terms in the model, another regression analysis incorporating potential interaction effects was carried out. All possible two-way and three-way interactions were incorporated into a new model in addition to the main effects. No significant interaction effects were observed as a result of this analysis and consequently no modifications were made to the original model.

In the ordinal regression technique, one value (category) of the independent variables is set as the base case and the relative effect of the other values (categories) is presented as compared to the base case. To assess the findings more effectively, the odds ratios were calculated by taking the exponentials of the estimates. The results of the regression analysis and odds ratios are provided in Table 2 below.

[Table 2 around here]

The hypotheses regarding the content type, total number of followers, facility location and interactivity were all accepted, as illustrated in Table 2. However, the hypothesis regarding the effect of vividness on the total interaction was rejected at a significance level of 0.05 but accepted at the 0.10 level. The interpretation of each variable was carried out in accordance with statistical significance and odds ratios and is outlined in the following paragraphs.

First of all, according to the findings, the type of shared content affected the total interaction. Using “entertaining content” as the base case, offering informative content increased the probability of getting a higher level of total interaction. Taking the odds ratios into account, informative posts were 1.76 times more likely to attain higher interaction compared to entertaining posts. This finding is in accordance with previous studies where information emerged as the dominant factor affecting attitudes (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015) but contradicted certain other studies where entertainment was revealed to be a more significant factor (e.g. Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). A plausible reason for this may have been the research context, as the contradictory studies mentioned were carried out on the consumer goods industry. Entertaining content offered by such companies may be perceived more positively compared to informative content, which can be accessed easily through websites. Considering the complexity of service products offered in the hospitality industry, which is even more pronounced in luxury hospitality in its efforts to provide its guests with a unique experience, accessing informative content through other means may be harder than in the consumer goods industry. Conversely, providing entertainment capable of increasing engagement within relatively limited budgets may be more difficult to accomplish in the luxury hospitality sector compared to the consumer goods sector. Therefore, communication content promoting luxury services needs to be curated and produced carefully to present an attractive, luxurious yet deliverable experience. This indicates that a significant amount of financial resources or professional manpower must be devoted to the preparation of entertaining content.

The regression coefficient for the post category “promotion and event announcements” was statistically insignificant. Thus, this category did not offer any superiority in terms of interactions over entertaining posts; the base case. This is possibly because the booking of five-

star hotels, especially internationally, is carried out well in advance of the actual visit date. Assuming followers are past or present users of a related facility, promotions and special events posted on brand pages may be of little significance to most. Giving away free content or providing specific discounts to brand followers on social media – a strategy employed effectively by fast-moving consumer goods companies – did not translate well to the luxury hospitality sector. The primary objectives and expectations of luxury hotel guests may not be the promotions offered. According to the analyzed data, the content shared regarding events is mostly centered on special restaurant offerings (for example, a certain type of cuisine for a limited period), a performance by a local band, or similar local events. Event announcements in themselves may not be sufficient to attract the interests of a large number of followers and lead them to interact with the shared content in the hospitality context, as opposed to in the consumer goods context (Luarn et al., 2015). Prospective patrons of five-star hotels expect a complete, seamless experience and may not be interested in isolated events.

The celebrative posts category, predominantly related to national and religious holidays, proved to be a significant content category that could affect the total number of interactions. A noteworthy share of the total posts analyzed (19%) were of this particular content type. Celebrative posts were 1.67 times more likely to gain higher interaction levels than entertaining content, according to the odds ratios. This positive effect may have been due to the fact that culturally significant events such as Republic Day or Ramadan are celebrated by the majority of the Turkish population and these messages, therefore, offer sentimental value to followers. Thus, relevant celebrative posts are liked and shared by social media users frequently. This holds true even in the luxury hospitality industry as, according to the results of the present study, followers interacted with celebrative posts. A practical implication of this finding is that social

media/digital marketing managers ought to be able to use these opportunities to generate interest and engagement on their Facebook pages. Relevant content unique to the brand could be prepared with little help from creative advertising agencies, in-house designers, or similar sources.

In contrast, the findings on celebrative content and the sharing of general news (on current developments, politics, public opinion etc.) were found to be insignificant in increasing total interaction. Information on recent developments in a country can easily be accessed through traditional and digital news media (e.g. TV, digital and traditional newspapers, news channels), thus followers do not interact to a greater extent with these posts. Moreover, these developments may not be relevant to the followers of luxury hotel Facebook pages, as the nature of these services is more hedonistic than utilitarian, promising an escape from daily life and its burdens. As such, posting general news on social media contradicts these values. The results consequently warn against posting this type of content on the brand pages of hospitality facilities.

Another significant criterion that was found to affect the total interactions was the offering of various interactive content (links, competitions, Q&As etc.). The likelihood of obtaining higher interaction levels due to the interactivity provided by these posts was 1.37 times greater than for non-interactive content. This finding was consistent with those cited in the existing literature (Gutiérrez-Cillán et al., 2017). Different forms of interactivity offered in a post led followers to click, comment or like the content, which resulted in higher interaction. As such, it appears to be an effective strategy to post content that is inherently interactive in order to achieve superior interaction. This phenomenon is further supported by several related studies (Chua & Banerjee, 2015; Luarn et al., 2015). The study herein supports the notion that offering high interactivity such as polls, questions, and contests increases the number of comments, which may, in turn, lead to positive word of mouth dissemination.

Aside from the type of content and interactivity offered, the vividness of posts emerged as significant at the 90-% level. This finding indicated that text-only posts were 1.25 times less likely to attain high interaction rates. Consequently, posts with low vividness led to lower interaction among followers, which accorded with the findings in the relevant literature (Chua & Banerjee, 2015; Sabate et al., 2014). Posting images or short videos instead of text-only content was evidenced to be a better means of increasing user interaction and engagement.

The findings on location indicated that facilities situated in the Mediterranean and Aegean region were 4.08 times more likely to attain higher total interaction levels compared to facilities located in the Marmara and Anatolia region. Given that sea-sun-sand tourism dominates the Mediterranean and Aegean region, followers of these facilities showed significantly higher engagement than those of facilities located elsewhere, a finding which has important practical implications. First, the nature of the tourism dictates the level of interaction a particular facility's social media posts create. A possible explanation is that visitors of luxurious sea-sun-sand hotels have more hedonistic motives, are more interested in social media, and have more leisure time to devote to social media as opposed to visitors of facilities catering to cultural or business tourism. Another important conclusion drawn is that proprietors or managers of chain/multiple tourism facilities would be wise to set digital marketing targets and performance appraisal criteria, considering that the Mediterranean and Aegean region attracts more engagement. This finding has implications for researchers as well. Nonetheless, comparing the performances of different type of facilities catering to varying types of tourists may lead to misdirected conclusions. A similar finding emerged in terms of the type of facility in the analysis. Five-star hotels and holiday villages attained superior levels of interaction compared to thermal hotels – but as the

target consumer segment of the latter is older than that of holiday villages, this finding may be related to follower demographics.

Predictably, the findings on the control variable “number of Facebook page followers” indicated that it was a significant predictor of attaining higher interaction. Facilities with a low number of followers were approximately 11.6 times less likely to achieve higher interaction (to be in a higher interaction category). A similar relationship was evident for facilities with a medium number of followers as these were approximately 3.1 times less likely to receive higher interaction compared to facilities with a high number of Facebook followers. This was expected, as the user base organically grows as the facility’s brand page grows, which leads to higher interaction. This implies that facility managers should engage in activities to expand their social media following in order to obtain a larger customer base that can be communicated to in future posts. This can be done by following other users, giving incentives to new followers, posting relevant and up-to-date content, engaging with others, and utilizing influencers.

Conclusions

This large-scale study conducted in the popular international tourist destination country of Turkey has significant implications for academicians and practitioners of tourism management and marketing worldwide. In contrast to the existing literature on social media use in the tourism sector, this study utilized ordinal regression and considered post content as a single variable. Offering several types of content in a single post was not feasible due to the limited space each post occupied. In this way, carrying out comparative analysis between post content types and arriving at applicable suggestions was made possible.

First, it was evident that not all members of the luxury hospitality sector had adopted social media as an effective marketing instrument yet. A significant ratio of brands (28% of all

those analyzed) did not actively use Facebook (the most popular social media platform). Considering that all five-star hotels (the entire luxury hospitality industry) in Turkey were analyzed, the lack of professional management and inactivity of a high number of social media accounts was an unanticipated finding. The tourism industry in Turkey is among the primary service industries that create employment, providing foreign exchange to offset the country's chronic negative trade balance. This situation is reflected well in numerous other countries relying on revenue from tourism (such as the North African nations and Greece). Consequently, the strategies and tactics suggested could most likely be applied to similar contexts, as well.

Several factors affected the success of social media posts (measured in terms of total interactions) according to the findings. Depending on situational factors and the type of content shared, brands can to a certain extent predict the success of their organic posts. Given the critical role of social media in the tourism and luxury travel industries, the findings suggested that these sectors have not fully utilized the potential of this new medium.

Compared to studies on other industries and countries, the use of vivid and interactive content among the analyzed brands was particularly low. The share of video and similar animated content among all posts was roughly 1%. Compared to related studies on the consumer goods industry (Luarn et al., 2015) where video content was found to represent 10% of all posts, this was an astonishingly low number. Text or static visual post content was favored instead by the five-star facilities assessed in this study, leading to another recommendation for practitioners: to make use of dynamic and visual content instead of static text to cater to more of the senses and generate higher interaction. Ideally, professional help should be procured to prepare visuals and videos in the luxury tourism industry so as to strengthen (not damage) brand equity.

In addition, a great majority of the content (89%) shared was non-interactive in nature. In contrast to a similar study on the travel industry in Spain, in which the interactive content offered by brands was 54% of all posts analyzed (Sabate et al., 2014), interactive posts were quite low in Turkey. Providing interactive content through question and answers, sweepstakes, competitions and similar tools increases the likelihood of achieving higher total interaction and customer engagement.

Another significant finding was the emergence of celebrative messages as a content type that leads to higher interaction. Digital marketing managers may capitalize on this phenomenon by posting celebrative content in observance of significant dates in their cultural calendar. According to the results of the analysis, this type of content was better in terms of creating interaction compared to promotions and event announcements and the sharing of general news or entertaining content. Considering the relatively low resource/production requirements of this type of content, incorporating it into digital marketing plans could lead to higher levels of interaction with relatively low expenditures.

Lastly, the sharing of general news did not create higher interaction compared to other types of content. Taking into account polarizing political environments throughout significant parts of the world that are becoming less tolerable to opposing views, sharing news that may challenge others' points of view or which may be open to misinterpretation is not the best means of utilizing social media accounts. Furthermore, considering that the basic premises of luxury hospitality facilities are hedonism, escapism, and adventure, the sharing of general news contradicts with the nature of the services offered. Thus, this study does not recommend sharing general news on hospitality facilities' accounts.

Limitations & Further Studies

There were several limitations in the present study that should be highlighted so that future studies may develop upon these shortcomings. First of all, only five-star facilities catering to the upper socio-economic segment were considered in the scope of the study; thus, factoring in lower-star facilities that accommodate consumers of differing socio-economic statuses in future research would provide a clearer overall picture of social media behavior. Moreover, facility ownership data may provide valuable insights into social media use in the hospitality industry by different owner-profile types (individual, local chain, international chain etc.).

Another issue that might be considered a limitation is the choice of a single month (August) as the time interval of the study. Even though August is the high season for tourism in Turkey, a study covering an entire year may provide more solid and representative conclusions. This said, although the research was limited to just one month due to time and budget constraints related to manual data collection, this nevertheless resulted in more than 2,000 unique data points. Therefore, repeating the study over a different time-frame, ideally for one full year via the allocation of more resources, emerged as another avenue for further research.

In terms of the social media analyzed, the present study was limited to a single platform, which could be extended to other social media platforms such as Twitter or Instagram in future research. Due to the changing preferences of consumers, especially the younger generations, Instagram is becoming a major platform that threatens to rival Facebook in the near future. Lastly, the cap of ten posts per facility may be extended to encompass a larger number of posts. Nonetheless, manual data collection is time-consuming and costly; thus, data retrieval via bots or similar methods may prove a more feasible means of generating larger data sets.

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Table 1: Facility and Post Data – Frequencies

Variable	Categories	N	Marginal %
Total	Very Low	442	24,9%
Interaction	Low	438	24,6%
	High	454	25,5%
	Very High	443	24,9%
Content Type	Promotion/event	401	22,6%
	Congratulations/condolences	337	19,0%
	Informative (facilities & services)	855	48,1%
	News sharing	34	1,9%
	Entertaining content	150	8,4%
Interactivity	No	1644	89,1%
	Yes (Low: Links)	162	8,8%
	Yes (High: Q&As, competitions etc.)	39	2,1
Location	Mediterranean & Aegean	1327	72,2%
	Marmara & Anatolia	510	27,8%
Facility Type	Hotel	1523	82,9%
	Holiday Village	210	11,4%
	Thermal Hotel	104	5,7%
Vividness	Low (Text)	262	14,3%
	High (Visual: Photo & Video)	1575	85,7%
Number of	Low	439	24,7%
Followers	Medium	891	50,1%
	High	447	25,2%
Total		1846	

Table 2: Regression Analysis Results and Odds Ratios

Variable	Category	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	Sig.	Odds Ratios
Threshold	Very Low	-.904	.269	11.316	.001	0.405
	Low	.417	.268	2.413	.120	1.517
	High	1.773	.271	42.901	.000	
Facility Type	Hotel	.436	.196	4.948	.026	1.547
	Holiday Village	.591	.230	6.596	.010	1.806
	Thermal Hotel	0 ^a	-	-	-	
Number of Followers	Low	-2.459 ^{***}	.140	310.359	.000	0.086
	Medium	-1.145 ^{***}	.111	106.879	.000	0.318
	High	0 ^a	-	-	-	
Facility Location	Mediterranean & Aegean	1.407 ^{***}	.108	170.805	.000	4.084
Content Type	Anatolia & Marmara	0 ^a	-	-	-	-
	General News sharing	.435	.354	1.504	.220	1.545
	Congratulative	.514 ^{**}	.186	7.650	.006	1.672
	Informative (facilities & services)	.568 ^{***}	.167	11.596	.001	1.765
	Promotion/event announcement	.235	.176	1.768	.184	1.265
	Entertaining content	0 ^a	-	-	-	-
Vividness	Low (Text)	-.222	.129	2.943	.086	0.801
	High (Visual)	0 ^a	-	-	-	-
Interactivity	Interactive Content	.315 [*]	.145	4.690	.030	1.370
	Non-interactive Content	0 ^a	-	-	-	-

Notes: Link function: Logit. a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.