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THE EVALUATION OF INTERACTIVE TWITTER USAGE BY DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATIONS OF COUNTRIES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN BELT: TURKEY, GREECE, ITALIA, SPAIN AND FRANCE

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EXTENSIVE SUMMARY

Today, the tourism sector, which is exposed to fierce competition, is using powerful and low-cost social media platforms as a marketing tool, adding new digital tools to traditional marketing applications, influencing tourists. In this direction, marketers aim to develop traditional marketing methods through social media in order to strengthen and encourage communication. The increased use of social media applications is pushing destination marketing organizations to respond by adopting new technologies and processes to better communicate with online target groups. Destination marketing organizations are beginning to understand the power of social media use and adapt their strategies to technological innovations, thereby shifting their strategies to social media-focused strategies.

Twitter, used as a marketing tool, is a microblogging website launched on July 13, 2006. Twitter's monthly active users reached 288 million at the end of 2014, 305 million at the end of 2015, and 317 million in the third quarter of 2016. In 2015, Twitter has 1.3 billion twitter accounts. As of June 30, 2016, it has been serving with the mission of 'To give everyone the power to share and create ideas and information without any barrier' with more than 40 language options.

The study evaluates the effectiveness of profiles by using indices such as the number of followers in Twitter profiles of Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain and France located in the Mediterranean zone, the number of tweets, the number of retweets and likes, and the number of visual content shares important for destinations. These indices show both the amount of users who follow accounts and the amount of information read and spread in these profiles. In addition to the extent to which the destination marketing organizations use these profiles, the extent to which followers respond to transmissions from these profiles and how they refer to these profiles is also examined. By using content analysis (Weber, 1990), which provides for the analysis of codes, cues or themes,

and the use of a number of procedures to make valid conclusions from the text, Twitter accounts of the countries of the Mediterranean belt are included in August (1 August 2016-19 September 2016) examined.

In this age called the Internet age, countries can not imagine marketing tourism products without internet and therefore social media. Countries play an active role in social media and try to attract more tourists. Tourists get information about travel destinations through internet resources, social media users and destination marketing organizations as sources. The use of social media is easy for the parties concerned and more costly in terms of access to other sources. Since returns are fast, users are able to interact with each other and communicate with each other very easily. In this respect, every destination that wants to get a share from tourism pavilion needs to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the use of social media to turn potential tourists into actual tourists and attract them to their destinations.

In this study, the activities of Turkey on twitter.com website were examined and the activities were compared with Spain, Italy, France and Greece. Although Turkey is the latest participating country on twitter.com, it has more followers than all these countries. However, it is seen that Spain, which has a follower 3 times less than Turkey, uses Twitter more effectively than Turkey with its share and interaction. Spain is in front of Turkey in all statistics, except for the number of followers. This can be regarded as a demonstration of Turkey's inability to use Twitter effectively. Since the internet environment, which is an important marketing area for destinations, is important for destination marketing organizations as it creates a more costless and more active way of reaching tourists, it should be acted in a planned way and its interaction should be increased. In other words, in order to use these accounts more actively in the direction of tourism and destination marketing, it is important to make activities to make contact with the experts in the field of social media and create interaction.