DESTINATION PERSONALITY AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DESTINATION: AN EXAMPLE FROM TWO SIMILAR TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

No studies have yet compared similar touristic destinations in terms of brand personality perceptions and attitudes towards destination. For this reason, this study aims to compare Safranbolu and Beypazarı, which are similar touristic destinations located in Turkey. Accordingly, destination personality scale (Ekinci and Hosany 2006), as the measure of destination personality perception was used. Data were collected from 209 tourists visiting Safranbolu (n=101) and Beypazarı (n=108). Results show that although destination personality perceptions among tourists visiting Safranbolu and Beypazarı did not differ significantly, attitudes towards destination differed. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed in the conclusion.

Keywords: Destination personality, Attitude towards destination, Travelers, Tourists, Cultural tourism, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the economic, social and cultural drivers of a country's development. Tourism works best when it is possible to produce a unique and marketable experience with several features that differ from those of competitors. Therefore, features such as heritage and culture should put forth a unique and marketable experience in the tourism industry (Prideaux et al., 2013). The process of competition happening all around the world also exists among tourism destinations. Destination marketers compete hard to attract tourists' attention. Today, the biggest struggle for destination marketers is to develop an effective marketing strategy (Upadhyaya, 2012).

Safranbolu, one of the symbols of cultural tourism in Turkey, has been home tomany civilizations over the past 3000 years, thus endowing the region with important cultural riches (Çakmak and Kök, 2012). One of the most well-protected examples of Turkish urban history, Safranbolu is one of the rare settlements in Turkey to be declared as a whole an archaeological site, with its houses looking like mansions, mosques, fountains, baths built with wood, stone and mud brick material and traditional city structure (Özdemir, 2011). The historical houses in the traditional Turkish architectural style are the most fundamental feature that makes Safranbolu stand out in Turkey and the world. Introducing itself to the world with these houses that promote the unique beauty of Ottoman-Turkish architecture, Safranbolu has also taken important steps for tourism diversification by adding new tourism products to its range. The fact that Safranbolu has become an important touristic destination with its cultural heritage also set an example to some settlements with similar features such as Beypazarı. Although Safranbolu leads cultural tourism with its historical houses and long-established history, Beypazarı, by taking Safranbolu as an example, has become a serious rival to Safranbolu (Özdemir, 2011). Due to being the home of many civilizations, having a unique urban structure and architecture, rich historical architecture, regional cuisine and natural beauties, Beypazarı has become an attractive tourism area. The county has progressed significantly in tourism with its promotional and tourism attractions over the past few years in particular (Kurt, 2009). This study aims to probe perceptions of the destination's personality and attitudes of visitors regarding these two destinations with similar features in terms of cultural tourism.

LITERATURE REVİEW

Aaker (1997: 347) defines a brand personality in the consumer behavior literature as "associating the human characteristics with a brand". In other words, brand personality is a consumer perception that a brand possesses several personality characteristics generally associated with humans. Brand personality is an important factor for a brand in terms of

consumer preferences and choices. The study most commonly cited in terms of brand personality is that by Aaker (1997) who developed the brand personality scale. The researcher stated in the scale he developed that a brand personality consists of these following five general dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Following the study by Aaker (1997), other applications with different arrangements for different cultures regarding the brand personality scale in the literature have been conducted (Aaker et al., 2001; Sigauw et al., 1999; Supphellen and Gronhaug, 2003).

Similar to brand personality research in the marketing literature, the concept of destination personality is increasingly accepted within the tourism literature. Destination personality is generally studied through perceived destination image and behaviors/attitudes of tourists (Crockett and Wood, 2002). Following Ekinci and Hosany's (2006) study, more studies on destination personality have started to manifest within the tourism literature (Prayag, 2007; Murphy et al., 2007; Forristal and Lehto 2009; Lee and Suh 2011; Usaklı and Baloglu 2011; Kim and Lehto 2013). Ekinci and Hosany (2006) define destination personality as the perception of human characteristics regarding a destination in terms of a tourist rather than a local individual. Ekici and Hosany (2006) note in their study that destination personality is an applicable metaphor to understand the destination perceptions of the visitors, build destination brands and create a unique identity for tourism destinations. The researchers state that destination personality consists of the following three brand personality dimensions; sincerity, excitement and conviviality rather than the dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness determined by Aaker (1997).

An examination of the destination personality literature reveals that various studies have been conducted on the subject matter in different cities and countries by researchers. It can be noted that the studies conducted in Turkey have generally focused on big metropoles and holiday resorts in the coastal regions. Ekinci et al. (2007) revealed in their studies conducted into German tourists in the Mediterranean region that destination personality consists of three dimensions, sincerity, excitement and conviviality. They concluded that these dimensions had a positive effect on the intention to revisit and word-of-mouth communication. Şahin and Baloğlu (2011) measured the destination image and brand personality of Istanbul in their studies and compared the perceived image and personality features in terms of different nations. They determined that there were differences among different nations in terms of image, brand personality perceptions and behavioral intentions. Sop et al. (2012) determined in their research conducted in local tourists visiting Bodrum that Bodrum's destination personality consisted of the dynamism, sincerity, competence and sophistication dimensions. They concluded that dynamism, among these dimensions, was the most effective characteristic in destination

satisfaction. Artuğer and Çetinsöz (2014) examined the relationship between destination image and destination personality in research conducted into tourists visiting Alanya. They determined that there was a negative and weak relationship between emotional image and destination personality and a positive and strong relationship between cognitive image and destination personality. In addition, they concluded that the destination personality of Alanya consists of four dimensions, excitement, ruggedness, competence and sincerity. Artuğer and Ercan (2015) aimed to define the destination personality of Marmaris during their research conducted into foreign tourists visiting Marmaris. In this sense, they concluded that the destination personality of Marmaris consisted of four dimensions, competence, sincerity, excitement and ruggedness.

Examinations of the literature revealed that the studies conducted in the destination personality were generally performed towards one city, region or country. Some of the limited number of studies investigating different regions or countries together and the results they concluded are as follows: Lee, Soutar and Quintal (2010) compared China, France and America in terms of destination personality. Compared to other destinations within the scope of the research, they determined that France was more sophisticated, America more rugged and lively, China more trendy, lively and genuine. Pitt et al. (2007) examined 10 African countries in terms of destination personality, which was approached within five dimensions. They determined Kenya and Zimbabwe were closer to ruggedness, South Africa and Angola to competence, Zambia and Ghana to sincerity, Swaziland and Morocco to sophistication and Botswana to excitement and sincerity dimensions.

Many researchers, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) in particular, pointed out that destination personality influenced behavioral intentions. Similarly, Ekinci et al. (2007) ascertained significant relationships between the destination personality and the intention to revisit the destination personality and recommend the destination to other people. Papadimitriou et al. (2013) concluded that destination personality influenced the general image and therefore the intention to suggest it to other people and visit it.

This study examines the visitors' destination personality perceptions and their attitudes towards the destination in terms of Safranbolu and Beypazarı, which possess similar historical and cultural characteristics. Scanning the literature did not reveal any studies within international and national literature in which destinations with similar characteristics are compared in terms of the visitors' destination personality perceptions and attitudes towards the destination personality. Therefore, this study is considered to make a unique contribution to this point.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to compare the destination personalities and visitor attitudes towards two different tourist destinations. For this, a descriptive survey design was applied. The questionnaire adopted as a means of data collection for this purpose consists of 3 sections. The first section of the data collection included questions oriented to determine the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second section utilizes the "Destination Personality Scale" revised by Ekinci and Hosany (2006) in line with previous studies to measure the tourist destination personality, which consists of 12 statements and 3 dimensions. The third section of the data collection instrument utilizes a scale consisting of one dimension and three statements with the purpose of measuring visitor attitudes towards Safranbolu and Beypazarı. The scale statements used by Gamble et al. (2009) and Lee (2009) were utilized while establishing the attitude scale. The respondents' agreement levels towards the statements were rated by using a 5-point Likert scale of "1 (Definitely disagree) – 5 (Definitely agree)".

A pilot study of 30 individuals was performed prior to the research in order to test the applicability of the measurements used in the study. In this sense, the aim was to probe whether the items in the questionnaire meet the required criteria in terms of face validity. This preliminary pilot study revealed that the questionnaire was applicable and the final questionnaire was prepared for the application.

The data was collected by distributing the tested questionnaire personally with the tourists visiting Safranbolu old bazaar and Beypazarı city center June-July 2015. 125 questionnaires were distributed in each of the two regions and 209 in total obtained and deemed suitable for evaluation were assessed. 41 questionnaires were eliminated before analysis because they included missing values. At this point, visitors' participation was emphasized and locals living in the destination in question were excluded from the research.

Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis was used in order to test the reliability of the internal consistency of the destination personality scale. Descriptive statistics viz. percentage analysis and frequency analyses were utilized to test the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Exploratory factor analysis was used in order to test the factor structure of the destination personality scale used in the study. In addition, an independent sample t-test was used for comparing destination personality perceptions and visitor attitudes towards Safranbolu and Beypazarı.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents is presented in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

Demographic Indicators		Safranbolu n = 101	Beypazarı n = 108	Total n = 209	%
Age	20-30	17	23	40	19.1
	31-40	50	40	90	43.1
	41-50	25	34	59	28.2
	51+	9	11	20	9.6
Gender	Female	45	58	103	49.3
	Male	56	50	106	50.7
Education	Some high school and below	12	8	20	9.6
	High school	22	29	51	24.4
	College	10	21	31	14.9
	Bachelor's	44	40	84	40.1
	Postgraduate	13	10	23	11.0
Marital Status	Married	81	71	152	72.7
	Single	20	37	57	27.3
Income	1000 TL and below	28	24	52	24.9
	1001-1500 TL	8	17	25	11.9
	1501-2000 TL	18	15	33	15.8
	2001-2500 TL	10	7	17	8.1
	2501 TL and above	37	45	82	39.3

As observed in the table, 49.3% of the respondents are female while 50.7% are male. Considering the respondents' ratio in terms of marital status, it is observed that 72.7% of them are married while 27.3% of them are single.

The majority of the respondents are in the age bracket between 31-40 years of age (43.1%) and 41-50 years of age (28.2%). The sample in terms of education levels indicates that the highest percentage (40.1%) are respondents with post-graduate education. The sample in terms of income status reveals that the ratio of respondents with an income of 2501 TL and above is higher (39.3%) compared to the individuals belonging to other income ranges.

Table 2: Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factors	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1: Sincerity		1,36	11,39	0,74
Sincere	0,91			
Wholesome	0,85			
Reliable	0,53			
Successful	0,48			
Intelligent	0,40			
Factor 2: Excitement		4,56	38,03	0,74
Original	0,83			
Exciting	0,79			
Spirited	0,68			
Daring	0,62			
Factor 3: Conviviality		1,53	12,77	0,88
Friendly	0,95			
Family oriented	0,90			
Charming	0,81			
Total Variance Explained: 62,19				
KMO: 0,81		**Bartlett's Test of Significance: 0,00**		

The results of the explanatory factor analysis and reliability analysis are shown in Table 2. The principal factor analysis revealed three factors (eigen values >1) which accounted for 62% of the variance. Meanwhile, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value, which indicates that the sample size is sufficient in terms of implementing factor analysis to the data, was above the critical value (0.5) as shown in the Table 2.

A factor loading lower than 0.40 is determined as low in the literature (Hair et al., 2009). As shown in the table, all factor loadings are higher than the cut-off value. A general assessment of the loadings indicates that the factor loading for each items of "Conviviality" dimension are higher than the factor loadings of the items in other dimensions. Meanwhile, the results of the explanatory factor analysis indicate that the original factor structure of the destination personality scale, developed by Aaker (1997) is preserved. The assessment of the reliability analysis results regarding destination personality scale indicates that Cronbach's Alpha value is higher than the critical value of 0.70 for each dimension in the scale. In this sense, the scale used in the research may be deemed to be reliable.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Brand Personality Perceptions

Factors	Items	Safranbolu		Beypazarı		Total	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Sincerity	Sincere	2,00	0,84	1,68	0,94	1,84	0,90
	Wholesome	2,40	1,05	2,12	1,21	2,25	1,14
	Reliable	2,86	1,18	2,58	1,20	2,71	1,20
	Successful	2,63	1,10	2,22	1,21	2,42	1,17
	Intelligent	3,28	1,04	3,15	1,22	3,22	1,13
Excitement	Exciting	3,01	1,19	2,64	1,27	2,82	1,25
	Daring	3,02	1,09	2,99	1,24	3,00	1,16
	Original	3,07	1,14	3,12	1,22	3,10	1,19
	Spirited	3,14	1,08	3,13	1,14	3,14	1,11
Conviviality	Friendly	3,61	1,11	3,67	1,02	3,64	1,06
	Family oriented	3,63	0,96	3,69	1,00	3,66	0,98
	Charming	3,32	0,98	3,27	1,00	3,30	0,99

Notes: SD= Standard Deviation

Table 3 shows the mean values regarding the visitors' destination personality perceptions. The assessment of the mean values in terms of dimensions indicate that the "Conviviality" dimension has the highest mean values for both destinations. Therefore, it can be stated that the tourists visiting Safranbolu and Beypazarı perceive both destinations as "friendly", "family oriented" and "charming". It is observed that the dimension with the lowest averages for destination personality for both destinations is "sincerity".

Table 4: Mean scores and independent samples t-test for equality of means

	Safranbolu		Beypazarı		t-value / significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Brand Personality	3.00	0.71	2.85	0.64	Ns
Attitudes towards destination	4.03	0.69	3.59	0.70	-4.59*

Notes: *p<0.01, SD = Standard Deviation, ns = non-significant

In this study, an independent t-test analysis was applied to the data obtained in order to assess whether Safranbolu and Beypazarı are similar in terms of destination personality and attitudes towards the destinations. Table 4 shows the independent sample t-test results that include the comparisons of visitors' destination personality perceptions and attitudes towards the destination for each destination.

As can be seen from the table, destination personality mean scores regarding Safranbolu and Beypazarı do not statistically differ. In this sense, it can be stated that Safranbolu and Beypazarı has similar characteristics in terms of destination personality. In addition, the results show that mean score of tourist attitudes for Safranbolu (Mean=4.03; $p<0.01$) was significantly different from mean score of tourists visited Beypazarı (Mean=3.59; $p<0.01$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Issues such as service quality, visitor motivations and visitor satisfaction are frequently assessed in tourism marketing literature. In this sense, the studies that have aimed to make comparisons so far have focused on these issues and ignored destination personality. Destination personality, which is based on the concept of brand personality that holds a very important position in marketing literature, stands out as a promising and new field of research in tourism marketing literature. This study has aimed to measure visitor perceptions towards destination personality and visitor attitudes towards Safranbolu and Beypazarı, which are among the pioneers in Turkey for cultural tourism. The results of the research indicate that the perception of destination personality does not differ among the tourists visiting Safranbolu and those visiting Beypazarı; however, visitor attitudes towards the destination differ. Meanwhile, results also show that the destination personality scale used in this study may be used in comparing multiple destinations. This is important in terms of showing whether the destinations, assumed to include similar or different cultural values, theoretically resemble each other as well. According to the research results, the fact that visitor attitudes towards touristic destinations possessing theoretically similar destination personalities differ, allows researchers to question the factors influencing visitor attitudes. Özdemir (2011) noted that Safranbolu's advantages include the fact that it has been included on the list of world heritage sites by UNESCO as a city and that it is on the route to Amasra, an important touristic destination. Similarly, Selvi and Şahin (2012) included the existence of natural walking paths to reveal the surrounding natural beauties and attract attention to canyons and Gürbüz (2009) included the existence of antique cities and historical artifacts and cave tourism in the surrounding region among the strong points of the region. In addition, the establishment of different tourism areas and activities (microlight flights, crystal terrace etc.) in Safranbolu continues. Such features may have caused a more positive tourist attitude towards Safranbolu.

The research determined that visitors' destination personality perception does not differ but both destinations have generally low perception scores. Meanwhile, considering the fact that visitor perceptions oriented to destination personality do not vary for both destinations, a suggestion could be to prioritize several studies oriented at improving the attitudes of visitors

coming to the region, rather than improving the destination personality regarding the competition between Beypazarı and Safranbolu. Türkan (2013) listed the limitation of tourism and recreation activities within the county, tourism activities being planned daily, and facility inadequacies as the weak points of Beypazarı. In addition, the weak points of Beypazarı listed in 'Report for the Strategy for Commercializing the Regional Products of Beypazarı', prepared by the Beypazarı Municipality in 2012, include having less alternatives for long-term tourists, insufficient diversity of tourist products, deficient documentation oriented at cultural and historical riches and concept, activity, animation deficiency (Beypazarı Municipality, 2012). Therefore, in order to make visitor attitudes more positive to Beypazarı, a suggestion could be to study these weak points, aiming to improve them.

Along with the concrete economic contributions towards historical cities, cultural tourism also contributes to familiarization with societies which possess very distinct characteristics in terms of culture and economy (Ulukavak, 2007). Turkey has extremely rich values in terms of cultural tourism. However, cultural tourism has not yet reached its desired level in Turkey. One of the most important reasons for this is the fact that the promotion and marketing activities carried out by companies and government institutions have mostly focused on coastal tourism. In other words, cultural tourism is overshadowed by holiday tourism in Turkey (Çulha, 2008).

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, we measured Destination personality using a scale consisting of different adjectives. For this reason, the adjectives used in the scale may not fully reflect all the personality characteristics of destinations. Second, due to time and source constraints we could reach out to limited number of tourists and some of them was reluctant to answer the questionnaire because they had limited time. As a result our sample size was small, and so the findings cannot be generalized to the wider tourist populations. Finally, scanning the literature did not reveal any studies within international and national literature in which destinations with similar characteristics are compared in terms of visitors' destination personality perceptions and attitudes towards the destination personality. Therefore, similar studies to be made by researchers on different destinations are important in terms of basing the findings of this research theoretically on a more robust foundation.

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