

Social Media and City Branding: A Case Study of Instagram Project @cityofizmir

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Abstract

Because social media is being used by more people every day and has an impact on consumer preferences, brands are now actively participating in social media and using it as a communication tool. In this context, social media plays an important role in branding and is also being used for city branding as a result of media convergence. This study investigates social media use in the context of urban branding handled over Instagram. The purpose of the study is to determine the use of social media in an urban branding context in order to reach both locals and potential visitors. For this purpose, the account @cityofizmir, an Instagram-focused project created by İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, was considered as a case study and was examined over the course of 2016. This study has a quantitative research design, and content analysis was chosen as a research technique. The results indicate that most of the content is produced in the “places to see” category, and most of the content shared on the account is geo-tagged. Photo content is the most numerous content on the account. Followers prefer to “like” the content instead of commenting on it. In conclusion, the @cityofizmir Instagram project is a successful tool for the city branding of İzmir.

Key words: city branding, social media, media convergence, Instagram, @cityofizmir

Sosyal Medya ve Kent Markalaması: ‘@cityofizmir’ Instagram Projesi Örneđi

Özet

Sosyal medyanın her geçen gün daha çok kiři tarafından kullanılması ve tüketici tercihleri üzerinde de bir etki sahibi olması nedeniyle markalar, sosyal medyada etkin bir biçimde yer almakta ve sosyal medyayı tüketiciler ile iletişim kurmak için deđerlendirmektedirler. Bu bağlamda sosyal medya, markalamada önemli bir rol üstlenmektedir. Medya yakınsaması sonucunda, marka kent olgusunun yaratımında da sosyal medyanın önemli bir unsur olduđu görülmektedir. Bu çalışmada kent markalaması çerçevesinde sosyal medya kullanımı Instagram özelinde ele alınmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı, kent markalaması çerçevesinde sosyal medyanın kullanımını ve gerek yerel halk gerek potansiyel ziyaretçiler ile etkileşim düzeyini belirlemektir. Bu amaçla İzmir Büyükşehir Belediyesi tarafından gerçekleştirilen Instagram odaklı bir proje olan “@cityofizmir” Instagram hesabı örnek olay incelemesi olarak ele alınarak hesap üzerinde 2016 boyunca üretilen olan içerik incelenmiştir. Nicel bir araştırma tasarımına

sahip olan alıřmada ierik analizi tekniđinden yararlanılmıřtır. Arařtırma sonucunda en ok ieriđin ‘Görülecek yerler’ kategorisinde üretildiđi, ieriklerin ođunluđunda cođrafi etiketlemelerin kullanıldıđı, en ok paylařılan ierik türünün fotoğraf olduđu görülmektedir. Takipiler ieriklere yorum yapmaktansa beđenmeyi tercih etmektedirler. Arařtırma sonularına göre; “@cityofizmir” Instagram projesinin kent markalaması aısından bařarılı bir ara olduđu söylenebilmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kent markalaması, sosyal medya, medya yakınlařması, Instagram, @cityofizmir

Introduction

Kotler, Burton, Deans, Brown and Armstrong (2015, p.285, 298) define brand concept as a name, a sign, a design, or a combination of all that helps identify and distinguish a product from its competitors. However, a brand is beyond all of its concrete items. Countries, cities, villages, local places, or destinations in general can be included in the branding process and can be regarded as brands (Tek, 2009, p.169). Place branding (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Allen, 2011; Giovanardi, 2014; Messely, Dessein and Rogge 2014); urban branding (Parkerson ve Saunders, 2005; Kavartzis ve Ashworth, 2006; Gaggiotti Cheng ve Yunak, 2008; Tek, 2009; Heeley, 2011; Northover, 2010; Brandt ve De Mortanges, 2011; Cozmiuc, 2011; Kavartzis, 2011; Cop ve Akpınar, 2014; řarkaya İelliođlu, 2014; Anttiroiko, 2015); destination branding (Pike, 2005; İpar, 2011; Kavacık, Zafer ve İnal, 2012; eri, 2013) concepts can be seen in the literature.

Destination branding is an important concept that city branding is also a part of it. Destination branding can be described as a process which distinguishes a place from its competitors regardless of how big a place is, and ensures continuity of this differentiation (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2011; Govers and Go, 2016). For this reason, city branding and destination branding concepts and processes are intertwined. This study is based on the assumption that social media is used within the framework of urban branding. The aim of the research is to determine the use of social media in the context of urban branding and to determine the level of potential interaction between social media users that contains both local people and potential visitors. For this purpose, ‘@cityofizmir’ account, which is an Instagram project of İzmir Metropolitan Municipality and EGIAD, will be examined as a case study.

In this study, @cityofizmir Instagram account will be examined by content analysis technique. As stated by Erdođan (2012, p.117-118) content analysis is based on the use of codes (texts targeted by the communication process with many sources of communication, such as

print media, computer-mediated content, radio or television programs). In this context, web content analysis technique will be used. The analysis unit to be considered in the research is @cityofizmir Instagram account, and the coding unit is the content on the account which was produced during 2016. All relevant content was collected and recorded on March 1, 2017. The following questions are prepared for the research to be carried out:

RQ1: How is the distribution of content categories on @cityofizmir Instagram account?

RQ2: How is the distribution of content types on @cityofizmir Instagram account?

RQ3: How is the distribution of user interactions on @cityofizmir Instagram account?

The branding process can ensure that a city attracts both local and foreign tourists to pay a visit (Tek, 2009, p.171). Those who visit a destination or a city can plan their journey in order to attend certain events. Nevertheless, they prefer to travel for different activities (Şarkaya İçellođlu, 2014, p.42). Ipar (2011, p.43) expresses the attraction of objects and events that are shaped by humans. Having geographical, and cultural features, and hosting various events can effect the brand image of the city in a positive way (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). A city's branding process provides a sense of the past (Allen, 2011). Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006, p.184-185) state that not only the visitors' but also local people's evaluations about the city are important too.

Pike (2005) states that there are many factors in the destination branding. There are many different dimensions for a destination when compared to a product or other services. The destination has different stakeholders and these stakeholders have different interests in the market environment. While a political milieu is important for marketing a place, marketing activities that are tried to be applied from top to bottom fail because those activities may be inconsistent with the experiences of local people and other individuals. Gover and Go (2016, p.5) mention that it is important to gain experience for those people who will visit a place. Köker, Alemdar and Gözta (2013, p.55) mention three important components for the marketing process of a destination. These are 'Places to be seen'; such as natural or historical places, 'Activities to be attended'; such as festivals, ceremonies, fairs, and 'Experiences to be gained' such as shopping, sporting events, foods. Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006, p.190-191) state that there are three types of branding when it comes to branding a place. These are: geographical naming, product-place cooperation, ground management. Bourdeaux wines can be an example of geographical naming. Swiss watches can be an example of product-place cooperation.

Finally, branding as a place management can be described as the creation of a distinguishable identity for a city.

According to the theoretical approach adopted in this study, media convergence of social media is being used for urban branding. As a result, city managers are carrying out a branding effort for both local residents and potential visitors.

According to the report published by the Marketing Agency We Are Social in January 2016, the number of active web users in Turkey is 46.28 million while the number of active social media users is 42 million. In Turkey, 32% of social media users are actively using Facebook and Facebook has the highest usage level compared to other platforms (Kemp, 2016, from <http://wearesocial.com/uk/special-reports/digital-in-2016>). On the other hand, the usage of Instagram is rising day by day, and while the usage of Instagram increases, Facebook usage is decreasing (Mander, 2015). Social media, born with the Web 2.0 technologies, are evaluated by brand managers in the context of branding activities and marketing communications. The concepts of Web 2.0, are defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.61) as the technological basis of social media, was first used by Darcy DiNucci in 1999, while MediaLive International gave its popularity. ‘Sociality’ in the concept of social media is related to the ability of individuals to communicate and interact with each other (Trottier and Fuchs, 2014, p.5). In this context, it can be said that social media allows for the possibility of two-way communication, which gives sociality to itself.

Another important feature of social media is that social media users are not only consumers of content but also producers of it. So then, social media users are defined as prosumers (Singh, Bebi and Gulati, 2011, p.148). Web 2.0 technologies help people to create different platforms and produce content without having any technological knowledge. Marketing specialists are using those platforms in order to utilise branding and marketing communications activities. Along with this, social media is also being used for urban and destination branding and becomes an important digital space for those activities.

There are various studies related to use of web and social media in the context of urban branding in the literature (such as Sarı and Kozak, 2005, Gonzales, 2011, Schroeter, 2012, Antoniadis, Vrana and Zafiroopoulos, 2014, Vanderleeuw and Sides, 2014, Uzunođlu, 2017). When we look at the digital media and the studies related to the use of social media in the context of urban branding, Sarı and Kocak (2005) formulate a model proposal for web sites that can be used for tourism regions. The researchers define the main attributes for those web sites.

They mention that the related web sites should consist of all kinds information related to the whole of the region, local governments should control the design and organization of the website, and the web site should be promoted on national and international basis. In another study which deals with city branding in the context of web sites, Gonzales (2011) examines the municipal and tourism websites of seven cities in Spain-Galicia with content analysis technique. In this study, Gonzales (2011, p.299) explores graphic brand category, functional brand category, and emotional conceptual brand category. In the graphic brand category he examines the presence of logos that are created for the city, the appropriateness of the logos, the availability of the web site, the explanations of the logos and the compability of the design of the web page with the logo. In the functional brand category, the functional characteristics of the website, especially the main pages are examined. Finally, the emotional conceptual brand category examines the emotional characteristics of the web page.

Schroeter (2012) points out the experience that local people will have through digital technologies as a way to change the hierarchical and remote relationships existing between local governments and the local people of the cities. Vanderleeuw and Sides (2014) examine the web sites of 345 cities in Texas, United States of America using content analysis technique to investigate whether urban sites are being used for strategic purposes. As a result of the study, it is seen that most of the city websites are not being used for any strategic purposes. Antoniadis, Vrana and Zafiroopoulos (2014) examine the images of destinations advertised on Twitter by European countries. Research findings show that countries' performances on Twitter accounts are related to tourism performances in real life, indicating that countries can provide information to promote destination images. Researchers, however, underline the fact that Twitter alone can not be effective in this matter. Uzunođlu (2017) evaluates city branding in social media in the context of partipatory culture over '@cityofizmir', an Instagram project for İzmir. In this context, the researcher underlines that social media users play an active role in city branding processes.

Participatory culture refers to a culture which supports the production of media content by non-traditional way. This non-traditional way refers to content production by audiences. So, the media content becomes a product of collective intelligence (Jenkins, 2016, p.19-20). On the other hand, Fuchs (2016, p.96) mentions that participatory culture is cultural reductionist and it ignores ownership relations. According to him a participatory culture approach to social media is an illusion. Although it is seen as a support for participatory democracy, it does not create a real participatory democracy due to ownership relations and unpaid digital labor. Media

convergence is the phenomenon which changes the production, distribution, and consumption of media, content and creates the participatory culture (Jenkins, 2016, p.36).

Using social media as a brand communication tool is heavily related to media convergence. In the past, brand communication activities such as advertising, public relations, event management etc. was conducted in traditional media channels. But today 'new media' have a role in brand communication activities. Flew (2016) defines media convergence as a phenomenon which involves interconnection of different information and communication technologies, computer networks and media content. He mentions three C's which are computing, communication, and content, and adds that media convergence is a consequence of the digitization of media content, and internet. Drula (2015, p.134) defines media convergence as the unification of different technologies and different content types. Jenkins (2016, p.38-39) offers corporate convergence and root convergence. Corporate convergence represents a downwards convergence. Such convergence is associated with media companies, brand production, and marketing processes. Root convergence focuses on consumer side of the convergence. Such convergence is associated with the consumers' control over media content and their interaction with other consumers. Sometimes these two types of convergence may act together. New media technologies have decreased costs and expanded available media channels and by doing so it enables consumers to access media content, archive and recirculate those contents (Jenkins, 2004, p.33). Murdock (2000, p.36) says that the media convergence is determined by the digital evolution and there are three levels of media convergence. These levels are; technological level which means communication systems, content level which means cultural forms and finally economical level which means companies, and media market. Drula (2015) mentions that media convergence is mostly associated with journalism although journalism is not the only discipline that convergence occurs.

As media convergence changes communication culture, building and managing brands also changes. Brand managers prefer social media platforms to build and manage brands and also try to follow user-generated content about the brand. Media convergence makes brand building and brand management as a common product of brand-based media content and consumer-based media content. Media convergence helps brands to create a positive and emotional atmosphere and to create a resource that consumers can get information in brand communication process (Lagner, Brune, and Fischer, 2013, p.142-153).

Findings

As it was mentioned earlier ‘@cityofizmir’ account, which is an Instagram project of İzmir Metropolitan Municipality and EGIAD, will be examined as a case study, and content analysis technique will be used. Within the scope of the ‘@cityofizmir’ project which was initiated in 2015, visuals from İzmir are being shared. Those visuals are followers’ contents most of the time. At the beginning of the project both domestic and international social media users who has lots of followers (who may also called as social media celebrities) were invited to İzmir. By doing so, it was aimed to reach a wide audience who might be interested in ‘@cityofizmir’ account. As of 01.03.2017, the total number of followers of the account is 102.254 and the total number of content is 773.

Distribution of Content Categories on @cityofizmir Instagram Account

Within the scope of the research, the question of ‘*How is the distribution of content categories on @cityofizmir Instagram account?*’ examined. While the content of the account was being analyzed, the categorization of Köker, et al. (2013, p.55) was utilized. In this context, the content is divided into 3 categories. These categories include; ‘Places to be seen’, ‘Activities to be attended’, and ‘Experiences to be gained’. The ‘Other’ category has been added to the relevant categories in the study.

Table 1. Frequency Table of Content Categories

Content Category	Frequency	Percent
Places to be seen	150	67.0
Activities to be attended	15	6.7
Experiences to be gained	32	14.3
Other	27	12.1
Total	224	100

A total of 224 posts were made in 2016 on @cityofizmir. On @cityofizmir Instagram account the most shared content is ‘Places to be seen’ by the percentage of 67% and 150 individual content. This content is being followed by ‘Experiences to be gained’ (14.3%), ‘Other’ (12.1%) and ‘Activities to be attended’ (6.7%). The category of ‘Other’ consist of celebrations for special days and commemorations.

Table 2. Frequency Table of Content Categories According to Seasons

Content Category	Season	Total
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	Winter	Spring	Summer	Autumn	
Places to be seen	54	46	33	17	150
Activities to be attended	2	5	2	6	15
Experiences to be gained	10	10	9	3	32
Other	5	9	6	7	27
Total	71	70	50	33	224

It is seen that the most posts were made in winter and this season is followed by spring, summer, autumn in order. In winter the content category that the most posts were made is 'Places to be seen' (N=54), and this category is being followed in order by 'Experiences to be gained' (N=10), 'Other' (N=5), and 'Activities to be attended' (N=2) categories. In spring the content category that the most posts were made is 'Places to be seen' (N=46) and this category is being followed in order by 'Experiences to be gained' (N=10), 'Other' (N=9), and 'Activities to be attended' (N=5) categories. In summer the content category that the most posts were made is 'Places to be seen' (N=33), and this category is being followed in order by 'Experiences to be gained' (N=9), 'Other' (N=6), and 'Activities to be attended' (N=2) categories. In autumn the content category that the most posts were made is 'Places to be seen' (N=17), and this category is being followed in order by 'Other' (N=7), 'Activities to be attended' (N=6), and 'Experiences to be gained' (N=3) categories. It is seen that the most shared content category is 'Places to be seen' for each four seasons.

Table 3. Frequency Table of Geo-Tags

Geo-Tag	Frequency	Percent
Tagged	218	97.3
Not Tagged	6	2.7
Total	224	100

Instagram offers geographical tagging to account holders. It is determined that 218 posts (97.3%) has geotagging out of 224 posts on '@cityofizmir' Instagram account.

Distribution of Content Types on @cityofizmir Instagram Account

Within the scope of the research, the question of 'How is the distribution of content types on @cityofizmir Instagram account?' examined.

Table 4. Frequency Table of Content Types

Content Type	Frequency	Percent
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Photo	210	94
Video	14	6
Total	224	100

On @cityofizmir Instagram account the most shared content type is photos in 2016. In 2016, a total of 210 photos (94%) were shared and 14 videos (6%) were shared on @cityofizmir Instagram account.

Table 5. Frequency Table of Content Types According to Content Categories

Content Category	Content Type		Total
	Photo	Video	
Places to be seen	145	5	150
Activities to be attended	13	2	15
Experiences to be gained	27	5	32
Other	25	2	27
Total	210	14	224

When the distribution of content types is examined according to content categories, it is seen that the content type of photos is mostly shared in the category of ‘Places to be seen’ (N=145) this category is being followed by ‘Experiences to be gained’ (N=27), ‘Other’ (N=25) and ‘Activities to be Attended’ (N=13) categories. When the video content is examined according to content categories, it seen that the most shared content categories are ‘Places to be seen’ (N=5) and ‘Experiences to be gained’ (N=5). Those categories are being followed by the categories of ‘Activities to be attended’ (N=2), and ‘Other’ (N=2).

Table 6. Frequency Table of Content Types According to Seasons

		Season				Total
		Winter	Spring	Summer	Autumn	
Content Type	Photo	68	68	45	29	210
	Video	3	2	5	4	14
Total		71	70	50	33	224

When the distribution of content types according to seasons is examined, it is seen that photo content shared mostly in each seasons. The content type of photo is shared mostly in winter (N=68), and spring (N=68). Those seasons are followed in order by summer (N=45) and autumn (N=29). The content type of video is shared mostly in summer (N=5), and this season is followed in order by autumn (N=4), winter (N=3), and spring (N=2).

Distribution of User Interactions on @cityofizmir Instagram Account

Within the scope of the research, the question of ‘How is the distribution of user interactions on @cityofizmir Instagram account?’ examined.

Table 7. Mean Table of User Interactions

Content Category		Like	Comment
Places to be seen	Mean	3524.75	38.07
	N	150	150
Activities to be attended	Mean	2542.40	22.33
	N	15	15
Experiences to be gained	Mean	2906.22	63.72
	N	32	32
Other	Mean	3560.63	34.33
	N	27	27
Total	Mean	3374.93	40.23
	N	224	224

To answer the question of ‘How is the distribution of user interactions on @cityofizmir Instagram account?’ likes and comments of the Instagram users were examined. It is seen that Instagram users prefer to like rather than comment. On @cityofizmir Instagram account users liked mostly the content in the category of ‘Places to be seen’ (M=3524.75), and this category is followed in order by ‘Other’ (M=3560.63), ‘Experiences to be gained’ (M=2906.22), ‘Activities to be attended’ (M=2542.40) categories. On @cityofizmir Instagram account users commented mostly on ‘Experiences to be gained’ (M=63.72) category and this category is followed by ‘Places to be seen’ (M=38.07), ‘Other’ (M=34.33), and ‘Activities to be attended’ (M=22.33) categories.

Table 8. Mean Table of User Interactions According to Seasons

Season		Like	Comment
Winter	Mean	3347.34	51.17
	N	71	71
Spring	Mean	3500.17	45.86
	N	70	70
Summer	Mean	2902.24	22.94
	N	50	50
Autumn	Mean	3884.82	30.94
	N	33	33
Total	Mean	3374.93	40.23
	N	224	224

When means of user interactions according to seasons are examined it can be seen that both likes and comments have the highest mean in winter season. When the mean of likes is examined according to seasons it can be seen that the highest mean of likes appears in winter and this season is followed by autumn, spring, and summer in that order. When the means of comments is examined according to seasons, it can be seen that the highest mean of comments appears in winter, and this season is followed by spring, autumn, and summer in that order. So, it can be seen that there is no constant relationship between likes and comments according to seasons.

Discussion and Conclusion

Social media has become a part of everyday life, and this reveals that marketers also use social media platforms to reach their target audience. Marketing specialists and advertisers use social media in their brand communication activities. So then, social media platforms are also an important tool for city and destination branding. City branding is a process that creates a distinction between a city and other cities. This process is important for both locals and tourists. Locals may feel attachment by this branding process and the branding process must be consistent with images of locals.

Social media users are both producers and consumers of content. For this reason, social media users are called prosumers. The concept of prosumer is related to participatory culture. Participatory culture refers to a media content production process that audiences also contribute to. On the one hand it is seen as an democratic process that allows individuals have a say, on the other hand it seen as cultural reductionist and illusional due to ownership relations. Participatory culture is associated with media convergence that creates a new hybrid way of media content production, distribution, and consumption.

This study which is based on the assumption that social media is used within the framework of urban branding as a result of media convergence, aims to determine the use of social media in the context of urban branding and to determine the level of potential interaction between social media users that contains both local people and potential visitors. For this purpose, @cityofizmir account, which is an Instagram project of İzmir Metropolitan Municipality and EGIAD is examined as a case study. Content analysis technique is used for data collection. The analysis unit to be considered in the research is @cityofizmir Instagram account, and the coding unit is the content on the account which was produced during 2016. All relevant content was collected and recorded on March 1, 2017.

According to the results, on the Instagram account of '@cityofizmir' photo content is shared mostly, and these photos are mostly on 'Places to be seen' category, and occur in winter. Photo content is shared mostly in winter and spring. Most of the content that is shared on '@cityofizmir' are geo-tagged. Followers prefer to like the content instead of commenting to it, and the category which has the most likes is 'Others'. Most likes are in autumn, and most comments are made in winter. User interactions are increasing in each seasons but this can be related to the increasing number of followers.

Media convergence helps brand managers to create and manage brands. Social media allows the construction and management of brands with a combination of brand-based content and consumer-based content, and this is done through media convergence (Lagner, et al., 2013, p.142-153). But of course, which one of the content that is produced by consumers who are users of Instagram, and how many of them will be shared on '@cityofizmir' account is determined by the account managers. Although media convergence allows participatory culture and helps users to present a collective intelligence, there is an inequality between users who participate into participatory culture. Brands and users who have more followers, comments, and, likes have more power on social media (Fuchs, 2014; Jenkins, 2016, p.20). At the beginning of the project both domestic and international social media users who have lots of followers were invited to İzmir, in order to use their power to represent the project, gain followers, and finally to manage İzmir as a city brand.

Instagram offers geographical tagging to account holders. Instagram users are thus able to produce content related to where they are or where they are photographed. This situation can also be associated with the participatory culture. In this way, information about a certain place can be produced and shared by social media users. These tags can point to real geographical locations as well as to location of 'City of İzmir' which was created by the project managers. Hopkins, Hare, Donaghey and Abbott (2015) mentions that geo-tagging creates metadata for photos, videos, etc., and helps to organize, search and present data while being a product of participatory culture. This also shows the importance of participatory culture for creating content on social media platforms.

Social media helps brands to reduce their brand communication costs. It also increases the diversity of available media channels and consumers' media access (Jenkins, 2004, p.33). Lagner, et al. (2013) mentions that social media platforms help brands to create an emotional and informational space. While analyzing the content of @cityofizmir account, 'Places to be

seen', 'Activities to be attended', 'Experiences to be gained', and 'Other' categories were handled. As a result of the analysis, it is determined that the account managers, who can be called as brand managers of İzmir, are using the @cityofizmir account in order to create an emotional and informational space between social media users and the city. They are making announcements about the events that will take place in the city, although it is a low content category when compared to other categories. An emotional space and bond is created through the account by shared contents, especially by photos which show peaceful and happy environments.

According to content analysis, it can be said that by creating '@cityofizmir' Instagram project İzmir Metropolitan Municipality successfully achieved brand communication via the city branding process. Of course determining how successful the city branding through Instagram project of '@cityofizmir', and a content analysis isn't enough. Within the scope of the research, a descriptive study was carried out by considering '@cityofizmir' Instagram account as a case study. However, in order to measure the effect of the project, which is an urban branding activity for İzmir, it would be considered useful to carry out in-depth interviews or focus groups with page followers in order to build on the 'Findings' outlined in this case study.

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