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### A Research on Determining the Touristic Destination Image of Turkey in Iran

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#### Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to examine Iranians' opinions on Turkey's destination image and to understand what kind of channels they use to get the information. Within this context, the students studying in the faculty of economics, management and business administration in Iran-Tabriz University were interviewed face to face and 384 acceptable questionnaires were subjected to the analysis. The questionnaire scale was adopted from the studies of Echtner& Ritchie and Taşçı et al. The descriptive statistics, the factor analysis, t-Test and ANOVA test were performed on the data. As a result of the analyses, it was seen that Turkey's destination image was very positive in Iran. Although positive opinions were observed in some of the previous researches on Turkey's destination image in the eye of Iranians, the negative results regarding the overall image of Turkey were obtained in almost all studies. In the light of the positive image found out in the present study, it is recommended to consider Iran as an important touristic target market, to make remarkable investments in this market and to increase both the market share and customer share through the appropriate strategies.

**Keywords:** Touristic Destination Image, Turkey, Iran

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## INTRODUCTION

Turkey is a natural bridge between Asia and Europe continents which unite in the Bosphorus. Many civilizations dating back to 8000 B.C have left behind numerous archaeological and cultural treasures in Anatolia. Besides its rich historical and cultural inheritance, Turkey has a great variety of natural resources. Well known hospitality of its people as well as its natural and cultural variety makes Turkey a very attractive touristic destination (Sönmez & Sırakaya, 2002: 186).

According to data of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, there exist religion based places in 43 provinces in Turkey. These places and historical artifacts increase international competitiveness of Turkey in tourism sector. Besides its historical and cultural background, Turkey is one of the most preferred international holiday destinations due to its beautiful seas, beaches and sunny weather (Republic of Turkey ministry of culture and tourism, 2015).

According to distribution of the number of tourists visiting Turkey, Turkey hosts German, Russian and English tourists at most. Also, it is seen that Iran has a significant touristic demand on Turkey. This demand was very close to two millions in 2011; however, a breakage was observed in 2012 due to economical crisis and increase in exchange rates in Iran. The number of visitors from Iran reached 1.6 million in 2014 and it maintained its raise in 2015. The number of tourists coming from Iran to visit Turkey has shown a significant increase at last two years. On the other hand, the number of those visiting Iran was about 163.500 in 2015 (AKTOB, 2015:6).

In 2023 Tourism Strategies Report furnished by The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, it is targeted to increase market share through organizing regional-focused special promotion campaigns for Middle-Eastern countries, Iran and Turkish Republics in Middle Asia (Tourism Strategy of Turkey, 2015:24). Examination of nations' perceptual differences regarding a country with different cultural characteristics than themselves is of crucial importance so as to understand potential tourists' image/perception as to the country and develop correct tourism marketing strategies for the target market. This empirical study measures Turkey's image as an international destination on Iranian tourists. Any research on Turkey's tourism image for Iranian tourists could not be found in literature review. Therefore this research is expected to make a significant contribution to literature.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual Framework on Destination Image

As a tourism product, touristic destinations are places containing natural beauties and different characteristics which are quite attractive for tourists. Having a specific image, becoming a brand and containing significant touristic attractions are very important for destinations to be preferred by tourists (Kozak, 2008: 139). Destination image is defined as total of individuals' beliefs, opinions and impressions of a destination, and the effectiveness of this image is associated with its reliability, credibility, simplicity, attractiveness and uniqueness (Yükselen & Güler, 2009: 23).

It is claimed that destination image could be formed through information sources and even in the absence of any commercial information (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996: 77). Besides such individual factors as demographics and previous experience, destination image can be shaped by commercial information and other independent information sources such as school material and the media (Gartner, 1993:191). It is also indicated that the image of a destination depends on the context of the inquiry. In addition, destination's having a brand affects the preferences of individuals (Qu et al., 2011:465).

Gunn (1972: 15) is one of the first researchers who have conceptualized the formation process of image and defines the destination image as an indicator of personal preferences about a place. Hunt's (1975:2) emphasis on the fact that destination image is much more effective than physical factors in the increase of the number of tourists visiting the region is quite important in terms of revealing the importance of destination image.

### Touristic Destination Image of Turkey and Related Studies

Ger carried out an experiment with 119 European college students to reveal the image of Turkey in comparison with 10 Mediterranean countries. Turkey was associated with European, African and Middle Eastern countries, including Greece, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Israel, Iraq, Iran, and Syria (1991:392). The content analysis also revealed that respondents' opinions mainly focused on "physical characteristics and perspectives", "history and culture", and "the economic, political and social situation", 60% of which were judged as positive by them, as well. However, Turkey was also perceived as a non-European country with a Muslim and Arabic culture influenced by Eastern, Western, North African and Middle Eastern effects. Ger found that respondents with personal

experience and higher levels of knowledge had more thoughts about and also better ratings of Turkey. In another quantitative study, Ger (1997:392) utilized a similar questionnaire with additional free elicitation items. The 660 Western college students, Americans and Europeans yielded similar results; however, they also described Turkish people with negative words.

As stated before, the image of a country is supposed to be dependent on the context (Ger, 1997: 393). Besides the studies on Turkey's general image, a few researchers have attempted to measure its images as a travel destination. Baloğlu and Brinberg (1997: 11) asked 60 American college students to compare Turkey with the same 10 Mediterranean countries mentioned previously. They found that Turkey, besides Israel and Algeria, had a rather unpleasant and distressing affective image.

In his study, Anastasopoulos (1992:629) investigated the image of Turkey through 97 Greek tourists who preferred Mediterranean region as a travel destination. A sample composed of 97 Greek first-time travelers completed a structured questionnaire measuring attitudes towards Turkey before and after their visit. Questionnaire results showed that traveling to Turkey had a negative impact on Greek tourists' perceptions about the hosting population. This was particularly true considering such aspects as the quality of life in Turkey, Turkish institutions and the cultural aspects of its people. The Greek travelers changed their attitudes and opinions related to the Turkish people and their institutions within 33 of 36 (92%) variables. Nevertheless, out of these 33 changes, only 1 was in the positive direction, while the remaining 32 were in the negative direction.

In another study, Baloğlu and McCleary (1999: 146) carried out a research on 448 potential international pleasure travelers who requested information about Turkey. Only three other Mediterranean countries (Italy, Greece, and Egypt). They found a relatively more positive image of Turkey; however it could cause some bias because the incentive offered to increase the participation rate included free package tours to Turkey.

So as to investigate the role of destination image in decision making processes of potential tourists, Sönmez and Sırakaya (2002:188) prepared a self-administered survey and mailed it to a random sample of 552 individuals in US, Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands who were either interested or experienced in international travel but had never visited Turkey. It was found out Turkey's overall appeal, safe and hospitable environment, general mood and vacation atmosphere, travel experience, relaxing effect, local attractions

and hospitality, authenticity of experience, social and personal communication channels, comfort/safety, and tourist facilitation were positive aspects of Turkey in order of importance.

Emphasizing the influential role of travel intermediaries such as information sources, distribution channels, and image creators, Baloğlu and Mangaloğlu (2001:7) repeated the study of Baloğlu and McCleary's (1999:144) on US focused tour operators and travel agents who did business with any of the study destinations: Turkey, Italy, Greece, and Egypt. Turkey's rating was significantly higher than that of Greece and Italy in terms of value for Money, higher than Egypt in terms of local cuisine, but lower than Greece in terms of nightlife and entertainment, and lower than Italy in terms of Standard hygiene and cleanliness. Responses to the open-ended question revealed that Turkey had association with ancient, historic, old ruins and archeology, as well as mystic, intriguing, and mysterious destination environment.

Sussmann and Ünel (1999: 220) measured the image of Turkey on 296 British tourists and its modification after travel; however, it was necessary to conduct a review of the available techniques. The dimensions were determined as a result of an extensive library research. It was also tried to include topical issues that had been subject to recent media coverage, so as to determine the extent to which they had affected the holidaymakers. After-travel images were slightly more positive than pre-travel images and at least a little importance was attached to most of the attributes. The two extreme age groups (18-25 and 55-64) showed more negative changes than the 26-55 age group.

Kozak (2001: 790) carried out a research on 976 British tourists traveling to Mallorca and Turkey. Chi-square, independent t-test, factor analysis and multiple regression analysis were utilized as statistical tools. Mallorca was a mature destination which has a higher proportion of repeat tourists than Turkey; however, it was realized that British tourists had a more positive perceptions of Turkey on hospitality, prices, entertainment opportunities and customer satisfaction dimensions compared to Spain.

Kozak (2003: 143) measured the image of Turkey through 350 travel agents in Australia and New Zealand using the image items from Baloğlu and Mangaloğlu (2001:2) as well as a few other items provided by practitioners in the Turkish tourism industry. He found that Turkey's historical and cultural assets are better known rather than its richness in hot springs, flora and fauna. Also, the respondents did not have a clear conception of Turkey as a Western country.

In her study, Tunç (2003:3) adapted Echter and Ritchie (1993:4) model on Turkey and surveyed the image of Turkey through 252 German, Swedish, British, Australian, Norwegian, Netherlander and Belgian tourists who had preferred Antalya region as a travel destination. As a result of the study, it was found out Turkey had a cheap country image. Among the problems tourists face with, hygiene and deceit come to forefront respectively. In addition, negative and manipulative information provided via news and newspapers created anxiety on foreign tourists in Antalya region. Nevertheless, 86,1% of tourists indicated they would like to revisit Turkey.

In their study, Taşçı et al., (2006: 83) measured the image of Turkey as an international touristic destination through a student population in the United States. A questionnaire was developed in the light of Echter and Ritchie (1993: 4) model. Research findings support previous studies (Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002: 195) in terms of negative image of Turkey shaped by biases rather than information based on facts.

Based on three groups of students' answers, Tasci et al., (2006: 89) found out in their study that tourists had negative bias in the perception of both attractions and basic factors of Turkey as a tourism destination brand. Tasci et al., (2007: 1539) in addition, claim that destination image has a significant effect on supply and demand factors in marketing, therefore, destination image is a crucial factor in order to achieve a successful tourism development and destination marketing.

Martinez and Alvarez (2010: 752) carried out a survey on Spanish college students visiting Turkey before. In this study, country and tourism images of Turkey were examined. In the light of research findings, it was concluded that Turkey has a positive tourism destination image despite negative country image. Spanish students considered Turkey as a third world country.

In order to ascertain the image of Turkey, Alaeddinoğlu and Can (2010: 343) sent questionnaires to 134 tour operators they chose out of a list included in the official website of Turkish Culture and Tourism Office in London. According to questionnaire results, cultural, historical and natural beauties, hospitality of its people, its attractive cuisine and untouched nature were determined as the most powerful aspects of Turkey. However, general politic and economic instability and weak safety and security, cleanliness and infrastructure of Turkey create a negative image.

Altıntaş et al., (2010: 230) examined the image of Turkey on 264 visitors from Germany, 331 from United Arab Emirates and 94 from Russia who attended at Expo

fair. As a result, a relationship between demographical features and destination image was found and it was observed there was a significant difference between answers of female and male respondents. Other different opinions were observed among other age groups. However, it was found out female and male respondents have a common sense that Turkey has historical richness, natural beauty and hospitable people and precious archaeological assets.

Having examined the studies on Turkey's touristic destination image, it was observed that the studies were carried out on the samples that were not geographically close to Turkey and did not have common cultural values. Furthermore, it was also seen that negative results, in general, were obtained in the researches on Turkey's touristic destination image, and that any research has not yet been carried out in Iran which is the neighbor of Turkey. The common cultural values and the establishment of a regional foreign trade system could strengthen the tourism movement between two countries. Based on the findings in the present study, it is considered to suggest Turkey a preventive approach for the possible crises periods for tourism activities.

## METHODOLOGY

### Population and Sample

Researches examining the opinions of students as to destination image are quite common in academic field (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Taşçı et al., 2006). Research population in this study is composed of 705 students studying at Faculty of Economics, Management, and Business in Tabriz University. Within the scope of research sample, 384 out of 705 questionnaires were considered acceptable and analyzed. Considering the research population, it can be indicated in accordance with the sample formula assumptions that this number is sufficient to generalize the sample over the population (Özdamar, 2001: 257).

Because of the geographical location and cultural structure, students studying in Tabriz are in closer relationship with Turkey. Young Iranians who want to enroll in study abroad programs prefer universities in Turkey, as well (Ministry of Science, Research and Technology of Iran, 2016). Study abroad programs, as a special segment of international tourism, are likely to both affect and affected by destination image. Based on their impression about destination, students will choose a destination that seem to best suit for their needs and interests. Although the young can take more risk than the elder, it is logical to assume that they will be drawn to destinations with a positive rather than negative image. After visiting the destinations, students

will confirm or change their previous image depending on their experiences. Because destination image is very resistant to change (Martinez & Alvarez, 2010: 748), the image that students form about a country may still be the same in adulthood, as well. Briefly, students are quite important for studies in terms of current visit rate, future visit potential, and image development of an international destination.

In terms of development level, Tabriz, among other the cities of Iran. The city is located at 619 km west of Tehran and built on Turkey-Iran transit road and Silk Road reaching out to Erzurum over Tabriz during Crusades time (Elibüyük, 2003: 145). Because of its geographical location, Tabriz is considered as western entrance of Iran and many modern structures were built and important events were organized for the first time in Tabriz, Iran. Therefore, Tabriz is called as the first city that has adopted contemporary life in Iran.

Iran is located in south-western Asia and covers an area of more than 1,648,000 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 74 million. The country possesses one of the world's oldest major civilizations dating back to earlier than 5000 BC. Iran is among the top 10 countries in terms of cultural and historical tourism attractions (UNESCO, 2016).

### Data Collection and Data Analysis

Because of the purpose of the research and the research problem, the quantitative research methods were used in the present study. In this regard, the quantitative data were required to explain the research problem and therefore the questionnaire form was prepared. In the data collection tool, the items for measuring the touristic destination image of Turkey were adopted from the studies of Echtner & Ritchie (1993) and Taşçı et al., (2006). These items were translated into Persian. As a result of the translation check, it was observed that the translations were consistent. Lastly, the items translated into Persian and measuring the touristic destination image of Turkey were placed into the questionnaire. In order to test the comprehensibility and the face validity of the questionnaire items, a pilot study was performed on 50 individuals from the research population, and thus, the unclear items were edited. As a result, the questionnaires were performed and collected within the classes and 384 acceptable questionnaires were analyzed.

The survey instrument contained 21 7-point Likert-type image measurement items including the commonly known touristic attributes of Turkey. Also, four open-ended questions were included to prompt free descriptions of general images and atmosphere as well as known activities and attraction of Turkey.

Respondents were asked to list the first three things that come to their minds as they think of Turkey in terms of: 1) general images or characteristics, 2) the atmosphere or mood that they would expect to experience, 3) tourist attractions that are unique to Turkey, and 4) popular tourist activities. In addition, one Likert-type item was developed to measure the holistic image of Turkey. The purpose of designing such a comprehensive instrument was to determine the multi-component (common unique and attribute-holistic components) nature of destination image, including its cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. Respondents were asked to answer the questions considering Turkey as an international travel destination. The questionnaire also contained items to measure the socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, native language and ethnic origin) of the respondents which were assumed to influence destination image in previous studies.

In the next stage, the questionnaires were checked. In order to be able to analyze the data more easily, it was benefitted from SPSS program. At first, it was checked whether the data did show a normal distribution or not. In general, it is assumed that the normal distribution is observed in the researches with large sample size (Jobson, 1991: 61). Nevertheless, various indicators were also examined. At first, Q-Q plot graphics were checked and it was observed that the distribution was symmetrical. In addition, the skewness and kurtosis values were checked and it was determined that the distribution was within an acceptable range. According to Hair et al. (2010), the range of -1 and +1 is acceptable for the normal distribution. In accordance with the normal distribution of the research data, parametric tests were performed. The respondents' demographical and descriptive features were specified at first. Later, the exploratory factor analysis was used in order to ensure the construct validity for the data. In this regard, it was assessed via Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sample adequacy test whether the data set was suitable for the factor analysis (Kalaycı, 2010). Kaiser – Meyer – Olkin (KMO) value was found 0.80, which confirms that the factor analysis can be performed on the data set. Another condition for the factor analysis is the lack of multicollinearity among the items (Tabachnick&Fidell, 2011; Kalaycı, 2010). As a result of the evaluations, it was observed there existed no multicollinearity problem among the variables. For the exploratory factor analysis, Varimax principal component analysis was used. In order to obtain a stronger factor structure, item 9 (Value for Money=0,301) factor loading of which was below 0.40 (Netemeyer, Bearden & Sharma, 2003) was excluded from the analysis. For the reliability, the Alpha( $\alpha$ ) which is the internal consistency coefficient was checked. Cronbach's Alpha

coefficient model (1951) is the most preferred one for the evaluation of the internal consistency (Netemeyer, Bearden & Sharma, 2003). The fact that Cronbach's Alpha for 20 items used for measuring the touristic destination image of Turkey is 0.90 indicates the items' reliability. In order to see whether the data obtained from the questionnaires differed in accordance with the demographical variables, it was benefitted from t-test (Independent sample t-Test) for two-category variables and from one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the variables with more than two categories. In addition, it was benefitted from Post Hoc tests and Sheffe and Dunnett C tests so as to determine the categories under which the differences occurred as a result of the one-way analysis of variance.

## RESULTS

### Profile of Participants

The results as to frequency and percentage distributions of demographical features of respondents are briefly as following: 48,7% and 47,1% of students are female and male respectively. 45,8% of them are at 29 age and over, 28,9% are within 21-24 age group and 18,2% are within 25-28 age group. Mother tongue of 86,7% of respondents is Turkish and that of 11,5% is Persian. 91,4% of respondents are born in a Turkish region in Iran. 54,4% of respondents are single and 45,6% of them are married.

### Destination Image

Questions as to travel behaviors of respondents were also included in the research. Accordingly, it was understood that, 45% of respondents indicated that as they hear the word "Turk", the term "development" come into their minds.

via TV and similar communication tools; previous visits; family and friends; and Internet, respectively. It was realized that newspapers/ magazines/travel books considered as effective on the introduction of Turkey (4.7%) had the lowest rate. It was found out the most important information resource for Iranian respondents were TV shows and movies. This is a quite important result. In the event that the most used and attracting information resource by tourists in target market is known, that resource could be used as an effective communication tool. Movies and TV shows are among important information resources which are quite influential on raising awareness on destinations and for decision making processes. Turkish TV shows and movies are considered as significant information and communication channels by Iranian respondents.

According to factor analysis results of image items in the research it was found out the items showed a good correlation and could easily be comprehended by respondents. After the examination of 4 factors, Factor I was named as "Attractions" because of including the features that people, in general sense, expect to see in touristic places. Because of including the dimensions related to basic humanitarian needs to be satisfied in a touristic place, Factor II was named as "Basics". Factor III indicating less attractive features was named as "Comfort" because of including dimensions referring to comfort that tourists expect to experience during a trip. Lastly, as dimensions in Factor IV have cultural content, it was called as "Culture". Analyses are provided in Table 3. As is seen, four factors were determined based on significant loadings of 20 image dimensions without taking cross loadings into consideration. As a result of measurement of internal consistency, it was observed Cronbach's Alpha coefficient had high values. These values are  $\alpha = 0,83$  for Factor I,  $\alpha = 0,79$  for Factor II,  $\alpha = 0,80$  for Factor III and  $\alpha = 0,81$  for Factor

**Table 1.** Distribution of Respondents' Opinions on Convenience of Holiday Conditions in Turkey (very good=1, very bad =10, n=384)

Point	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Frequency	88	92	105	33	36	5	11	6	2	6
Percentage	22.9	24.0	27.3	8.6	9.4	1.3	2.9	1.6	0.5	1.6

In Table 1, 27.3% of respondents gave 3 points to "Turkey has good conditions for holiday", 24% gave 2 points and 22.9% gave 1 point and thus they indicated Turkey has "good" conditions for holiday. As the average of respondents' answers to this question is 2.95, it is seen that their common belief on holiday conditions in Turkey is "good".

According to Table 2, 73.4%, 44.8%, 36.2% and 35.2% of respondents obtain information about Turkey

IV. As Cronbach Alpha of 0.70 is accepted considerably consistent, (Hair et al. 2010), these high coefficient values indicate that factors are highly consistent. Kaiser – Meyer – Olkin (KMO) sample adequacy value was found 0,80. High mean values are 2,25 for Factor I, 3.09 for Factor II and 2,48 for Factor III and 2,65 for Factor IV. These are relatively high values on a 7-point scale (1= Excellent 7= Extremely poor). Factors, in order of importance, is composed of "attractions",

**Table 2.** Distributions of Information Resources Used by Tourists (n= 384)

Channel	Yes %	No %
Movies or TV shows	73.4	26.6
Prior visit	44.8	55.2
Friends and relatives	36.2	63.8
Internet	35.2	64.8
People from Turkey	20.3	79.7
Travel agency	15.9	84.1
Other (please explain)	9.9	90.1
General knowledge from school	5.2	94.8
Newspapers/ magazines/ travel books	4.7	95.3

“comfort”, “basics” and “culture”. Although Turkey is rated as “good” over all factors, it is at medium scale in terms of basics and cultural perceptions, attractions and comfort. As a travel destination, Turkey has a good-level of attractions and comfort; however, respondents’ perception levels related to culture and basics dimensions are a bit lower.

20 items measuring image qualifications of Turkey and arithmetic mean and standard deviation values related to overall and general image of the country are provided in Table 4. High mean values indicate good results on a 7-point scale (1=Excellent, 7=Extremely Poor), and within the scope of scaling quality perceptions of

**Table 3.** Factors Found out as a Result of Factor Analysis on General Image of the Country

Image Dimensions & Factors	Factor loadings	% of variance explained	Cumulative % of variance explained	Factor grand mean	Cronbach’s alpha value
<b>Factor I: Attractions</b>		43.60	43.60	2.25	0.83
Scenic beauty	0.822				
Beaches / water resources	0.845				
Variety of natural resources	0.736				
Variety of outdoor activities	0.814				
Exciting features	0.705				
Nightlife opportunities	0.815				
<b>Factor II: Basics</b>		8.32	51.93	3.09	0.79
Safety and security	0.770				
Quality of infrastructure	0.775				
Cleanliness	0.753				
Quality of accommodation facilities	0.879				
Modernity of lifestyle	0.704				
Peoples’ ability to speak English	0.712				
<b>Factor III: Comfort</b>		5.21	57.15	2.48	0.80
Cuisine	0.762				
Quality of restaurants	0.735				
Availability of tourist information	0.777				
Quality of services	0.751				
Local transportation	0.786				
<b>Factor IV: Culture</b>		4.78	61.93	2.65	0.81
Unique culture/customs	0.728				
Amount of cultural/heritage attraction	0.825				
Peoples’ friendliness/ hospitality	0.805				

attractions, comfort, culture and basics, the averages were found 2.25, 2.48, 2.65 and 3.09, respectively. Thus, Turkey is scaled as “good” in all factors; however, perceptions regarding the attractions and comfort are a bit better than those of culture and basics.

destination and do not know Turkish, Iranian respondents perceive Turkish people’s ability to speak English low. As the arithmetic mean value is close to 4, the item is regarded as “fair”.

**Table 4.** Mean and Standard Deviation Distributions Regarding Image Components of Respondents (n=384)

Component no	Component	n	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	SD (standard deviation)	Faktor load
3	Beaches/Water resources	384	1	7	1.93	1.680	0,845
2	Scenic beauty	384	1	7	2.02	1.503	0,822
7	Variety of outdoor activities	384	1	7	2.17	1.583	0,814
15	Quality of accommodation facilities	384	1	7	2.27	1.475	0,879
20	Nightlife opportunities	384	1	7	2.30	1.800	0,815
5	Quality of restaurants	384	1	7	2.33	1.556	0,735
6	Amount of cultural/ heritage attractions	384	1	7	2.39	1.710	0,825
11	Cuisine	384	1	7	2.44	1.631	0,762
8	Quality of services	384	1	7	2.49	1.498	0,751
19	Exciting features	384	1	7	2.47	1.503	0,705
10	Local transportation	384	1	7	2.64	1.580	0,756
4	Availability of tourist information	384	1	7	2.67	1.572	0,777
1	Variety of natural resources	384	1	7	2.67	1.692	0,736
12	Cleanliness	384	1	7	2.68	1.486	0,753
17	Peoples’ friendliness/hospitality	384	1	7	2.72	1.598	0,805
18	Unique culture/customs	384	1	7	2.84	1.516	0,728
21	Modernity of lifestyle	384	1	7	2.94	1.592	0,704
14	Quality of infrastructure	384	1	7	3.01	1.406	0,775
13	Safety and security	384	1	7	3.49	1.715	0,770
16	Peoples’ ability to speak English	384	1	7	3.89	1.772	0,712
22	<b>Overall impressions of Turkey</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.72</b>	<b>1.577</b>	<b>0,763</b>

**Note:** The items are ranged in line with increasing mean values. (1= Excellent, 2= Very Good, 3= Good, 4= Fair, 5= Poor, 6= Very Poor, 7= Extremely Poor).

As seen in Table 4, “Beaches/Water Resources” is the best perceived image dimension with the scale of “very good” (1.93) It is seen that distribution of arithmetic means are between “very good” (2) and “good”(3).

The item with the lowest arithmetic mean (3.89) is “People’s ability to English”. In addition, it was also realized that mother tongue of 11.5% of respondents is Persian and because English is the communicative language for those who prefer Turkey as a travel

Possessing the ability to communicate with tourists in good way is a prerequisite for success in tourism sector.

Relatively high standard deviations show that there exists no consensus among respondents regarding to qualities of features related to image of Turkey. The fact that arithmetic mean of 20 items is 2.62 and regarded as “good” can be considered as overall image of Turkey is perceived positively; however, the mean of items measuring general impressions as to Turkey was



found 2.72 and it is a bit higher than arithmetic mean of 20 items. Despite the small difference, Turkey was regarded as more positive than total of all its pieces.

As seen in Table 5, the relationship among marital statuses of respondents and 4 factors related to image was examined through t-test and a significant

**Table 5.** Comparison of Marital Statuses of Respondents and 4 Factor Dimensions Indicating General Image of Turkey Through t-test (n=384)

Factors	Marital Status	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Attractions	Single	209	2.2065	1.22497	-.945	.345
	Married	175	2.3286	1.30017		
Main features	Single	209	3.0096	1.08181	-.788	.431
	Married	175	3.0933	.98156		
Comfort	Single	209	2.5053	1.23086	-.181	.857
	Married	175	2.5280	1.22468		
Culture	Single	209	2.7703	1.33949	2.002	.046
	Married	175	2.5048	1.23944		

So as to reveal the relationship among demographical features of respondents and 4 factor dimensions regarding the image of Turkey, a set of analyses were conducted and any significant difference could not be observed among gender, language and birth factors and attractions, basic components, comfort and culture dimensions. The significant relationship was only observed between marital status and age.

difference with culture dimension was found ( $t=2.002$ ;  $p=0.046<0.05$ ). It is seen that culture dimension influential on general image of Turkey has a positive effect on married respondents. For married respondents, Turkey has a positive image in terms of traditions, unique culture and hospitality. Taking advantage of the positive image on these dimensions,

**Table 6.** Comparison of Ages of Respondents and 4 Factor Dimensions Indicating General Image of Turkey Through ANOVA Test (N=384)

Factors	Age	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P
Attractions	17-20 Age Group	27	2.2037	1.40537	2.702	.045
	21-24 Age Group	111	2.3333	1.26930		
	25-28	70	1.8881	.96381		
	29 Ages and over	176	2.3750	1.31433		
	Total	384	2.2622	1.25960		
Basics	17-20 Age Group	27	3.1049	1.26774	1.397	.243
	21-24 Age Group	111	3.0736	1.00446		
	25-28	70	2.8214	1.03960		
	29 Ages and over	176	3.1127	1.01391		
	Total	384	3.0477	1.03684		
Comfort	17-20 Age Group	27	2.6593	1.29593	1.499	.214
	21-24 Age Group	111	2.6577	1.21188		
	25-28	70	2.2800	1.15590		
	29 Ages and over	176	2.4977	1.24671		
	Total	384	2.5156	1.22650		
Culture	17-20 Age Group	27	3.0988	1.77787	5.826	.001
	21-24 Age Group	111	2.9850	1.24104		
	25-28	70	2.3714	1.20859		
	29 Ages and over	176	2.4792	1.23374		
	Total	384	2.6493	1.29995		

special programs should be organized for married and single people in Iran and culture-themed programs should especially be offered to married couples.

Examining Table 6, it is seen that there is no significant difference between respondents in 25-28 age groups and attractions ( $F= 2,702$ ,  $p=0.046<0.05$ ) and culture ( $F=5,826$ ,  $p=0.001<0.05$ ) dimensions. Respondents within 25- 28 age group have more positive perceptions than those in other age groups in terms of attraction and culture dimensions. Accordingly, it is recommended for Turkey to consider age groups while developing promotion and marketing strategies for Iran and to carry out separate marketing programs for each group.

Open-ended questions were provided and respondents were asked to tell first three of unique touristic

attractions and popular tourism activities that come into their minds. Obtained results were provided in Table 7. Although unique and personal answers were given to all open-ended questions, the answers given by 5% and over of respondents were accepted as common. This is a standard employed by Reilly (1990: 21). This operation revealed the 5-most-frequent-answers for every single one of three options provided to each open-ended question. Having examined the answers frequently given to open-ended questions, it was found out respondents had positive perceptions of Turkey.

It is seen in Table 7 that such terms as “Club/Disco/Entertainment” (92.96%), “freedom” (45.05%), “shopping” (37.76%), “sea” (34.1%) and “nice” (32.55%) come to respondents’ minds as they think of Turkey.

**Table 7.** Distribution of Answers of Respondents to Open-ended Questions (n=384)

Answers to open-ended questions	The number of first mention	The number of second mention	The number of third mention	Total number of mentions	Total mentioning average
<b>General image or characteristics</b>					
Nice	81	24	20	125	32.55%
Tourist	54	23	23	100	26.04%
Development	26	31	27	84	21.81%
Trade	12	34	36	82	21.35%
Culture	16	14	19	49	12.76%
Modern	12	15	20	47	12.23%
Education	5	19	20	44	11.45%
Joy	9	12	18	39	10.15%
Religion	6	6	6	18	9.68%
<b>Expected Atmosphere</b>					
Freedom	84	49	40	173	45.05%
Hospitable	31	30	50	111	28.90%
Entertainment	16	28	34	78	20.31%
Relaxing	32	15	18	65	16.92%
Aura	22	15	19	56	14.58%
<b>Unique Touristic Attractions</b>					
Sea	56	41	34	131	34.11%
Anıtkabir	25	14	56	95	24.73%
Bosporus	29	30	21	80	20.83%
Hagia Sophia	38	12	8	58	15.10%
<b>Popular Touristic Activities</b>					
Club/Disco/Entertainment	112	113	132	357	92.96%
Shopping	52	47	46	145	37.76%
Historical buildings and Sites	17	25	35	77	20.05%
Beautiful hotels	20	18	16	54	14.06%

These items can be regarded as the reasons why Iranian respondents prefer Turkey as a travel destination. Similar to results of this research, it was concluded in the study of Alaeddinoglu and Selcuk Can (2010:348) that British tourists visiting Turkey had a positive image of Turkey. Turkey with its beautiful and unique natural and historical structure is perceived as a international touristic destination that offers precious attractions for tourists.

Among the answers given by respondents to the open-ended item "popular touristic attractions", one of the prominent terms is "shopping" with the rate of 37.76% For firms that market their products especially in developing countries, country image is of very importance for achieving success via analyzing product-based perceptions of consumers. Therefore, information about country image and the image related to the products produced in the country provide significant clues for the firms. In a study, Nagashima (1970: 68) found out the country image is affected by promotion of products produced within the country, accessibility of products and cliches in the country. John and Brady (2010: 41), on the other hand, claim that products in prestigious countries are perceived as prestigious, as well. In both studies, it was observed there was a positive correlation between country image and the products produced within the country. The fact that respondents in this research prefer Turkey for shopping purposes at most assures the findings of previous studies. Considering the findings in the present study, it can be indicated Iranian respondents have positive images of Turkey and Turkish products.

Among the answers given by respondents to open-ended questions, "hospitable" nature of Turkish people is perceived significantly with the rate of %28.9. Similarly, among the items related to "unique touristic attractions", "Sea" "Anıtkabir", "Bosporus", "Hagia Sophia" come to forefront with the rates of %34.11, %24.73, %20.83, %15.10 respectively. In their study, Tosun et al. (2006: 271) reveal that the most positively perceived attraction by tourists in Turkey is "Beaches/Water Sources". Besides, Sahin and Baloglu (2011: 78) emphasize in their study that Hagia Sophia and historical sites are considered by tourists as unique touristic attractions of Turkey and they make a significant contribution to formation of Turkey-Istanbul image.

Among the terms used by respondents for general image or characteristics, "development" ranked among the top three (%21.81). Unlike previous studies (Ger, 1991; Taşçı et al., 2006) the term "development" is indicated by respondents for the first time. This term shows that Iranian respondents have quite positive perceptions of the country and the products produced

within the country.

Although findings of particular studies show that tourists have positive opinions about destination image of Turkey (Kozak, 2001; Kozak, 2003; Tunç, 2003; Taşçı et al., 2006; Tasci et al., 2007; Kozak, 2008; Martinez & Alvarez, 2010; Alaeddinoglu & Can, 2010; Altıntas et al., 2010), it is seen that general country image of Turkey is negative in all studies. Nevertheless, this study unlike previous ones reveals that Turkey has a positive image in terms of both general touristic image and sub-dimensions. In other words, Iranian respondents perceive general touristic destination image of Turkey positively. It is quite possible that such factors as geographical proximity and similar cultural patterns are influential on this outcome. In this regard, Turkey can determine Iran as a touristic target market and increase its market share through developing appropriate strategies for this market.

Similar to independent connotation answers covered in the research of Baloglu and Mangaloğlu (2001:6), this study provides significant references to be based on such as "Culture" (12.76%) referring to characteristic features and "Historical Buildings and Sites" (20.05%) referring to popular touristic attractions and historical and cultural heritage. Besides positive answers to questions about general image and atmosphere/aura, such negative answers as "Crowded" (2.8%), "Insincerity" (1.3%) and "Self-conceit" (8%) exist, as well. As is seen, percentages of negative answers are quite low. Nevertheless, they should be taken into consideration and necessary steps to eliminate these negative impressions should be taken.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

### Conclusion

In the present study, it was aimed at determining the touristic destination image of Turkey in the eye of Iranians. Unlike the previous researches in this field, positive results regarding the image of Turkey were found out in the present study where a comprehensive measurement technique was used. Since any study in this field has not been conducted on Iranians, it is considered that this study will make significant contributions to the literature.

Examining the distribution of information resources in Turkey, it is realized that television and radio channels among general communication tools are important information and communication resources with the percentage of 73.4. That respondents' mother tongue is Turkish facilitates to watch TV programs broadcasted in Turkey. Similar to findings included in the studies

of Dündar and Güçer (2015: 18), it is observed in this research that the most important variables affecting the country image are socio-demographical features (especially nationality). In addition, socio-demographical features are influential on destination loyalty (Chi, 2011: 195). Unlike previous studies, it is seen in this research that (Sonmez & Sırakaya, 2002: 194) respondents obtain positive information about Turkey via media. Movies and TV shows are important factors and information resources for ensuring the promotion of a destination and influencing the decision-making processes on that destination. In this regard, media sector in Turkey has a significant role. Considering TV shows, movies and similar programs as planned promotion setting and tools and developing strategies accordingly will facilitate to position and sustain the destination image.

In line with the results of ANOVA analysis carried out on the relationship between demographical variables and four factors related to touristic image of Turkey, it was observed there was a significant relationship only with age and marital status components. Having examined the relationship between age groups and four factors, it was found out attractions ( $p=0.046<0.05$ ) and culture ( $p=0.001<0.05$ )-related perceptions of those within 25-28 age group were more positive than those within other age groups. Special promotion and marketing strategies targeting at all age groups in Iran should be developed and implemented. Especially, package tours specifically set up for student groups may contribute to increase market share. The destinations that determine characteristics of target market and develop and implement appropriate strategies accordingly will be successful.

The relationship between marital statuses of respondents and four factors was examined through T-test and the significant difference was only observed with culture dimension ( $t=2.002$ ;  $p=0.046<0.05$ ). In this regard, it is seen that married respondents have more positive perceptions of culture dimension which is influential on general image of Turkey. Married respondents pay more attention on tradition, unique culture and hospitality terms in Turkey. In the event that a country is perceived by families as a precious tourism destination with unique features, it will be the most prominent option for both family holidays and educational and touristic visits of their children. This result should be taken into consideration by Turkey, and also separate marketing strategies should be developed for single visitors and families.

The respondents' perceptions of their previous experiences in Turkey and of the touristic image of the country are the main reasons underlying their re-visiting intention. It is stated in the research by

Baloglu et al. (2014: 1067) that there must not be any factors that might create prejudice on "trust" regarding the destination so that the visitors can re-visit the destination. Therefore, in the present study, Turkey as a destination is integrated with the term "trust" for the Iranian respondents. Depending on their experiences at these destinations, students keep or change their perceptions of image. As destination image is so resistant to change (Bojanic, 1991: 354), the image of a country that students have shaped in their minds could stay the same in their adulthood. In brief, students are an important research segment for current visiting rates, future visit potential and image development of destinations at abroad (Taşçı et al., 2006: 84). Within this context, the Iranian young should be considered as an important target market and alternative touristic tours to different regions should be offered to them during a whole year. Thus, the number of tourists visiting the destination can be increased in a short time.

Findings in the study show that Turkey can appeal to different pleasures of tourists and this condition makes positive contribution to country image, as well. As a matter of fact, within the scope of touristic activities, some respondents preferred sea, sand and sun whereas others were in the opinion that shopping places, historical and cultural buildings and sites should be visited. In his study, Tunç (2003: 10) found out that tourists visit Alanya mostly for sea, sand and sun; however, Turkey had a negative overall country image. Martínez and Alvarez (2010:760) and Alvarez and Korzay (2011: 435) emphasize in their studies that Turkey has a positive image as a cultural destination in the eye of tourists that are aware of its rich historical and cultural heritage.

Besides Turkey possesses a positive image as a touristic destination for Iranian tourists, positive perception on its products is observed, as well. In this regard, it can be stated that Turkish products create positive impressions on customers and consumer loyalty positively affect the image of Turkey as the country of origin. Thus, it is possible for future studies on country image to focus on country products as well as characteristics of the country itself. Effective results related to country image can be obtained through product image. In their studies, Sırakaya-Turk et al. (2015: 6) revealed the importance of the shopping value's effectiveness on predicting and enhancing target visitor loyalty. The importance of shopping for Iranian tourists should be noticed. In this regard, special tours such as shopping festival tours can be offered.

The fact that respondents obtain information about Turkey from their relatives and friends reveals that satisfaction affects recommendation intention in a

positive manner. In their research, Bigane et al. (2001: 614) indicates that visitors recommend the destination in the event that their expectations are satisfied in sub-dimensions determining the destination image, and this finding supports the results of the present study.

71.9% of respondents have visited Turkey; however, Turkey possesses similar touristic characteristics with many countries in Mediterranean region (Kotler & Gertner, 2002: 249). Considering intense competitive environment among Mediterranean countries in tourism market, it is emphasized that Turkey should consider and revise tourist attractive activities in order to increase re-visiting intentions of tourists. As a matter of fact, Baloğlu and Mangaloğlu (2001: 7) found out in their studies that Turkey was cheaper than Greece and Italy, and had better local cuisine than Egypt; nevertheless, nightlife in Turkey was worse than in Greece and Italy was better than Turkey in terms of cleanliness and hygiene (Baloğlu & Mangaloğlu, 2001). So that Turkey positions its destination image through a strategic move in Iran market, it has to analyze touristic activities offered in other Mediterranean countries. Facilitative and preventive factors influential on tourists' perceptions of Turkey as a travel destination should absolutely be determined, and it should be attempted to enhance facilitative aspects and decrease the preventive ones. Possessing positive perceptions of particular features could not be sufficient for people to prefer that destination.

Facilities hosting Iranian customers can increase customer loyalty and market share through training the personnel on Iran and culture, history and traditions of Iranians, communicating well during providing services and so, affecting their satisfaction levels in a positive way. On the other hand, human resources department can strengthen the marketing strategies of the facilities through ensuring that target group can easily access to publications, new activities, exhibitions, sportive or cultural activities. In addition, effective use of organizational advertisements, designing attractive brochures for Iranian customers and including internal and external architectural designs into marketing strategies can contribute to enhance customer loyalty. Nisco et al (2015: 313) conclude in their study that there is a positive relationship among country image, customer loyalty and re-visiting intention and recommend to considering factors influential on psychological and demographical features of customers during developing their destination marketing strategies for international tourism.

At every single stage of deciding to purchase a touristic product, consumers are influenced by particular internal and external factors. These factors either lead consumers

to purchasing behavior or to give up purchasing at all. Experiences, personality, recommendations by friends, living style, recommendations by travel agencies, media promotion and advertising activities and destination image can be regarded as internal and external factors that affect purchasing processes of tourists. As holiday destination choices of consumers do not, in essence, depend on physical components, they are subject to more external factors compared to other purchasing processes. Especially while trying to decide on holiday at a country they will visit for the first time, they need references of that country. And these references refer to country image perceived by tourists during a purchasing process. Country image is of quite importance in terms of determining the number and quality of tourists. Attempts for creating positive country image and brand country image require special attention. Considering their contribution to country economy and increase in tourism income, it is foreseen that these kinds of researches are worth of these attempts. Studies on country image should be revised regularly. Results to be obtained via these studies will not only contribute to marketing activities of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism at macro level but also lead businesses to determine promotion objectives and strategies at micro level.

As a result, it is seen in this study that Turkey is perceived by Iranian tourists as an important travel destination. As stated in Turkey's 2023 strategic plan (2007:24), especially Iran should be considered as an important touristic target market and correct marketing strategies should be developed and implemented in this regard. Promotion tools as computer games and TV shows and movies that introduce historical, cultural and natural characteristics of Turkey should be effectively utilized for Iranian market. As a matter of fact, Baloğlu et al. (2010: 76) indicates in his study that computer games stimulate familiarity as to touristic destinations in users' minds and therefore they can be used as an effective stimulant tool for the promotion and branding of the destination. Like all information resources, digital communication becomes more important every day. In destination context, utilization of Internet and social networks as information resources is increasing significantly. Therefore, the importance of digital channels on destination communication as well as other tools and channels should be understood, and positioning and sustainability of destination image should be ensured.

### **Suggestions for Future Studies**

The fact that this study was carried out on only those living in Turkish region of Iran is an important

limitation. Data in the present study were collected in February and March, 2016 and therefore, it is thought that it would be beneficial to carry out the same research by taking the recent negative incidents in Turkey into consideration. It is suggested to conduct the same research on different populations in different regions of Iran through different data collection and sampling methods. In addition, touristic destination image of Turkey can be examined through comparison with competitive countries.

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