



THE USE OF INSTAGRAM AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL IN HEALTH TOURISM: AN ANALYSIS ON “HEALTH TOURISM TURKEY” HASHTAG

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Abstract: While new communication tools take their place among the tools used for public relations and publicity, social networks are especially notable among these tools. Today, social networks have become a source of information for many people. On the other hand, health tourism, which means traveling to a different country for access to health services, is also increasing. Therefore, people need information in order to find solutions to their health problems. The aim of this study is to analyze the role of social networks in health tourism through Instagram. In order to access to the related shares to health tourism in Turkey “#healthtourismturkey” hashtag is selected. All shares published with this hashtag during 2018 included in the sample of the study. The total number of shares is 534. The results indicated that the share of health tourism in Instagram, which can be seen as a public relations and publicity tool, has increased in the second half -as of June/July- of 2018. The results also indicated that the most share in health tourism was made in the category of “medical tourism”, most of the share is about “dental health”, and the most share is made by “health tourism service providers-agencies” and “private clinics”.

Keywords: Instagram, Health Tourism, Public Relations, Hashtag, Content Analysis

1.Introduction

Today, new communication technologies, social media and social networks have become available in every field. In contrast to traditional media tools, the impact of these tools on the masses is controversial, enabling dialogue-based and two-way symmetrical communication. On the other hand, it is generally accepted that internet and social networks become an important need for individuals. For many people, social networks are one of the main channels where they spend long periods of time, follows people, communities, celebrities and organizations. It is also accepted that social media has an important function in terms of dissemination of information. Today, many brands, institutions and organizations have started to prefer social networks in order to promote their products, services or activities, to make announcements or to reach their stakeholders. In this context, it is possible to say that social media and especially social networks have become an important tool for public relations, advertising and marketing.

Although everyone has a right to receive health care, it is known that there are many social, regional or economic dynamics in terms of access to these services. In addition to be a fundamental human right, health is becoming more commercialized today. For this reason, health economics is being seen as a development tool for countries. Health tourism practices, which define patients' travels to a different country in order to get better service at more affordable prices, are seen as a source of income for countries on the one hand, and on the other hand they offer people the choice in terms of access to health services. In this sense, it is possible to say that health tourism has become a major industry and market and Turkey has an important place in this sector. One of the most basic ways to reach more patients in this sector, where economic competition is observed, is publicity and public relations activities.

It is important to use the right communication tools in the publicity process. Keeping up with the needs of the age and the expectations of the consumers is the primary condition for the institutions to sustain their existence. In this direction, it is an important element for the institutions to take part in the channels in which the consumer searches for information. Today, social media is seen as an important source of information by many people. In this context, it is possible to say that an element of the development of health tourism is also related to the publicity and information activities carried out in social networks.

In the light of all these explanations, the purpose of this study is to understand how social media and especially social networks are used in terms of health tourism publicities. For this purpose, Instagram has been chosen as a social network which provides a high level of dialogic

communication in order to present many elements, such as photography, writing and video, and which are preferred for more and more people in recent years. In this study, it is aimed to explain and examine how health tourism is handled in social networks through using content analysis. The main aim of the study is to provide a descriptive analysis. For this purpose, the data included in “*Health Tourism Turkey*” hashtag (#healthtourismturkey) is selected as a sample of the study and all shares made in 2018 with this hashtag are taken into consideration.

2. Social Media as a Public Relations Tool

As in every field, public relations practices and activities should follow innovations and developments in the field of communication in order to meet the needs of its stakeholders. Institutions and organizations try to maintain their assets by keeping up with changes and trying to maintain or improve their current position. Communication technologies, while developing and advancing with each day, being outside of these developments, contrasts with the existence objectives of organizations. For this reason, internet and social networks have become an important tool in public relations and publicity activities.

Public relations practices have been affected by new technologies in recent years (Ifigeneia and Dimitrios, 2017). After 2000s, public relations field started to use web-based tools increasingly in addition to traditional media tools (Yıldırım, 2018: 258). These new communication tool provides new opportunities for public relations and also communication activities. There are many studies in the literature that shed light on the relationship between social media and public relations. The common point of these studies is that social media facilitates communication with the target audience, which is the primary aim of public relations, and strengthens the dialogue. As stated by DiStaso and McCorkindale (2012: 76); in today’s digital world, social media has become an important communication tool to establish link between companies and the public. Kent and Taylor (2014: 11) says that; social media offers organizations important opportunities to communicate with the public and they also emphasize that social media is a useful tool in public relations. It is possible to say that in addition to the traditional tools, the greatest contribution of social media to the communication process is to allow interaction between stakeholders. As clearly stated; social networks are seen as an important public relations tool that enables two-way symmetrical communication when the correct feedback process can be run (Alikılıç, 2011: 39).

At this point, it is necessary to briefly define the concepts of “social media” and “social network”. As Peltekoğlu (2018: 331-332) explain the concept of social media defined as; “applications, activities and behaviors that are carried out to share knowledge and ideas through the interactive media that enables the creation and sharing of words, pictures, videos and sound among online groups”. On the other hand, the concept of social networking is defined as Web sites that have appeared in the late 1990s with many different online communities (Alikılıç, 2011: 35). In another definition, Kaplan and Haenlein define social networks as;

Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information, including photos, video, audio files, and blogs (2010: 63).

When it comes to social media, it is not possible to talk about a single tool or application. Today, it includes many different social networks that institutions and society actively use for many purposes. Institutions and organizations use social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram not only to inform the public about their events or products, but also to get public opinion about the organization, their events or their products (Ifigeneia and Dimitrios, 2017). Especially in recent years, Instagram becomes one of the most popular social network applications. The interactive structure of Instagram, offers many elements together, is seen as an effective tool in terms of public relations. There are also studies in the literature that describes Instagram as a public relations tool (Yeniçıktı, 2016; Akar, 2018; Yıldırım, 2018). In this respect, it is important to understand how Instagram is used as a public relations tool.

3. Health Tourism and Health Tourism in Turkey

In addition to increased level of travel opportunities for people nowadays, the innovations and opportunities brought by technology enables many elements to get into circulation in the global market. On the other hand, people who travel for their health and who are on the move in order to reach the best or the most appropriate treatment opportunity for their health. Therefore, health tourism, has become an important sector, and is an area that needs to be examined.

As Reisman (2010) says “health tourism is old” and in every period of history people have traveled to “heal”. Hall (2011: 4) also quotes that, health tourism, which is a rapidly growing area, is not something new and it has long been known that those traveling for health and those who go to thermal resources and coasts. However, as mentioned “many visitors to modern day

health and wellness centers are often unaware of the cultural origins of the treatments they enjoy” (Smith and Puczko, 2009: 21). According to this today, unlike the traditional periods, it is possible to say that, these forms of travel have become significantly institutionalized and have become part of countries' health and tourism policies.

Health tourism is defined as the travel from the place of residence of the patient to another place to receive health care, and the person who travels is defined as health tourist (Toprak, et. al., 2014: 39). In addition, Carrera and Bridges (2006) explained the concept of health tourism as “the organized travel outside one’s local environment for the maintenance, enhancement or restoration of an individual’s wellbeing in mind and body”. In another definition;

“*health tourism* refers to travelling from the place of residence to another place for the purpose of protection and development of health and treatment of diseases, and benefiting from health and tourism opportunities by staying at the place of destination for minimum 24 hours. A person who travels for the aforementioned purposes is called *health tourist*”. (Kaya et. al., 2013: 5).

In the “*Medical Tourism*” report of the World Health Organization (WHO), the health tourist defines as a person who “elect to travel across international borders to receive some form of medical treatment” (Kelley, 2013: 3). As Connell (2006: 1093) explain; “the attempt to achieve better health while on holiday, through relaxation, exercise or visits to spas, has been taken to a new level with the emergence of a new and distinct niche in the tourist industry” that can be called medical tourism or health tourism.

Besides, in the report entitled “*What is Health Tourism?*” published by Ministry of Health/ Health Tourism Coordination Council (SATURK) it is defined as the visit of individuals to a country other than the countries where they live, in order to benefit preventive, therapeutic, rehabilitative and health promotion services (Sağlık Turizmi Nedir?, 2019). Finally, in another definition, health tourism is defined as; “to cross-border health care motivated by lower cost, avoidance of long wait times, or services not available in one’s own country” (Hopkins et. al., 2010: 185).

Health tourism could be “one of the fastest growing tourism types” (Peris-Ortiz and Alvarez-Garcia, 2015). As stated, health tourism has become a rapidly growing sector as a result of patients' choice of treatment abroad (Toprak, et. al., 2014: 38). Turkish Ministry of Health (Sağlık Turizmi Hakkında, 2019) explains that approximately 30 million people travel outside the country every year in the context of health tourism, which provides health care services with higher quality, more economic and faster, and that the health tourism expenditures worldwide

are approximately 500 billion dollars. In addition, it is said that medical/health tourism allows “the patient to make choices, provide access to treatment alternatives not available in their local communities, promote global competition, and exert pressure on expensive health facilities to lower prices” (Turner, 2007: 1639).

According to Smith and Puczko (2014: 10); as the services demanded by health tourists could be different, it is necessary to focus on the sub-sectors of health tourism. In addition, it is mentioned that because it has various components, health tourism is a “multifaceted industry” consists of “medical tourism, wellness tourism, spa tourism, and holistic and spiritual tourism” (Peris-Ortiz and Alvarez-Garcia, 2015).

Turkish Ministry of Health; General Directorate of Healthcare Services Department of Health Tourism classifies the types of health tourism as; “senior/elderly tourism & accessible/disabled tourism, thermal health tourism & SPA-Wellness and medical tourism” (Kaya et. al., 2013: 5; Types of Health Tourism, 2019). As can be seen from this classification, health tourism does not only cover surgical operations, but it also refers to a wider healthcare service. Health tourism in this case; can be defined as the sum of many components such as holiday, recreation, rehabilitation and healing. As stated by Istar (2016: 27); Turkey, where important steps have been taken to develop facilities and services for health tourism, is becoming an important place in thermal, elderly and medical tourism.

Turkey's one of the most important advantage is being a major tourist destination country. Turkey, which attracts tourists from different countries every year, is also advantageous in terms of health tourism. As “*Importance of Turkey in Health Tourism*” (Türkiye'nin Sağlık Turizmindeki Önemi, 2019) report stated; Turkey with its climate, sea, sandy beaches, thermal springs, forests, highlands and ease of transportation, is an ideal country for health tourism. In light of this disclosure, to promote Turkey's existing advantages are thought to be important to attract more health tourists.

4. The Importance of Public Relations and Publicity in Health Tourism

While public relations and publicity activities serve many purposes such as attracting public attention, creating demand and interest, raising awareness and spreading accurate information, the need for publicity activities in health tourism, which has become an important sector and market, is increasing.

In a report entitled “*What is Health Tourism?*” (Sağlık Turizmi Nedir?, 2019) is emphasized that only %0,55 at the total number of tourists coming to Turkey for health tourism. Although this rate rises over time, the primary condition for increasing this rate is to advertise about Turkey's health facilities. A study on the state of health tourism in Turkey in 2016, shows that Turkey is not at the level expected and desired yet (Kördeve, 2016: 51). As noted in the “*Importance of Turkey in Health Tourism*” (Türkiye'nin Sağlık Turizmindeki Önemi, 2019) report, Turkey received a significant share of world medical tourism pie, but this share is lower than it should be.

The emphasis on the importance of publicity in health tourism is also found in the studies of the Ministry of Health. As mentioned in the “*Health Tourism Development Program*”, one of the Turkey's program components is about having effective advertising and marketing strategies. In this regard, increasing “advertising and marketing operations in the target country and regions” and “the collaborations of public and private sectors in advertising and marketing” are among the Turkey's target (Kaya et. al., 2013: 8). From this point it is possible to say that social media is one of the tools that can be used for these purposes. In a study examining the relationship between social media and medical tourism it is stated that; social media can be seen as “an effective communication channel for both tourists and tourism providers” (John, et. al., 2018: 553).

According to “*Turofed Tourism Report*” published by Turkish Hoteliers Federation in 2017; the lack of active promotion of health tourism in the media tools of international organizations, which direct the tourism market, is defined as an important weakness (2017: 91). This explanation also shows the need for publicity activities in our own media tools. In this case, the importance of effectively promoting Turkey's own facilities in the international arena is becoming clearer.

In the Ministry of Health's “*Promotion and Branding in Health Tourism*” (Sağlık Turizminde Tanıtım ve Markalaşma, 2019) report, the concept of publicity in terms of health tourism is defined as the publicity of the opportunities such as medical experience, technological infrastructure and health facilities, and thus creating a positive image in terms of health services. The same report also defines the concept of publicity as “the use of methods such as advertising, public relations, propaganda and information in a planned and coordinated manner according to the characteristics of the target countries and communicating with the target audiences”.

In addition, it is known that social networks are an important source of information when it comes to health. Numerous studies on the subject reveal the relationship between internet, social networks and health information seeking-behaviour.

Shaw and Johnson (2011) said that; because of the widespread use of the internet, in which there is a lots of health information, leads to easier access to information about patients' health. In this point, it is generally said that the use of internet for health information increases (Zhao and Zhang, 2017: 268) and especially social media effect people's ways of seeking and sharing information about health (Li et. al., 2016). According to some research, approximately sixty percent of internet users use the internet to search for health information, which shows that social media are a potential resource for seeking health information (Atkinson et. al., 2009; Thackeray et. al., 2013). On the other hand, some studies point to the need to be careful about the sharing of health information in social networks, which are seen as a strong marketing channel in the health industry (Bhaskaran et. al., 2017: 267). At this point, the necessity to examine how public relations and publicity activities related to health tourism, which are conducted through social networks, is understood more clearly.

Instagram is among the social networks that have been on the rise in recent years. This platform can be seen as an effective social network as a means of publicity because it offers many elements such as sharing photography, video, instant story and sharing posts. As noted in the PRCA Digital PR and Communications Report 2018; although Twitter (91%), Facebook (85%) and LinkedIn (85%) are the leading platforms for agencies, Instagram also is gaining importance. In the report it is said that for agencies, Instagram's popularity in customer work has increased from 59% to 70% (PRCA, 2018).

In a study focusing on the use of digital communication channels in health tourism, Facebook and Twitter accounts that hospitals used to reach health tourists were examined, but Instagram was not included in this study. However, as a result of the study, it is seen that hospitals have been exchanging various information in digital communication channels, but it is concluded that these networks have not been used enough to interact (Öksüz and Altıntaş, 2017: 59). As a result of this study, Öksüz and Altıntaş (2017) found that digital communication channels in health tourism were used only as an information transfer tool. The results of this study indicate that both Instagram should be examined as a medium and the usage of these channels should be determined.

5. Methodology

In recent years, in addition to high costs, long waiting times and low transportation costs, new technologies played an important role in the development of medical tourism, which is a rapidly growing sector especially in the field of cosmetic surgery (Connell, 2006: 1093). This statement clearly shows us the importance of internet marketing and internet-oriented publicity and public relations activities. In addition, in the report entitled “*Promotion and Branding in Health Tourism*” (Sağlık Turizminde Tanıtım ve Markalaşma, 2019) is stated that; the importance of social media in promoting health tourism is indisputable, and also it is important to consider new formations on the internet such as YouTube, TripAdvisor, Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Instagram in advertising strategies. Based on these explanations, the study focuses on Instagram, one of the prominent social media applications in recent years.

In this study, it is aimed to analyze the role of social networks in health tourism through Instagram. Content analysis method used to analyze the obtained data. Content analysis is defined as “a systematic and repeatable technique in which some words in the text are summarized by dividing them into smaller content categories” (Büyüköztürk el. al., 2016: 250), has also been used actively in recent years to examine websites or social media accounts. (Yıldırım, 2018: 267). The data source of the study is Instagram. The most basic difficulty of doing research on social networks is the variable nature of the data. Therefore, it is necessary to systematically record and archive the data. Each share is archived for analysis after recorded.

Hashtags, which are frequently used in social platforms such as Instagram and which give an idea about posts and can be seen as keywords, have been guiding the data in this study. In this direction, which distinguishes the share of health tourism in Turkey “#healthtourismturkey” hashtag is selected. All shares during 2018 using this hashtag were included in the study. The aim of this study was to make a descriptive analysis.

The coding guideline for content analysis is based on the health tourism categories defined by the Turkish Ministry of Health. In this direction, the study will analyze which types of health tourism categories are the most common in Instagram, what types of operations are mentioned in particular, and what kind of institutions are the source of the sharing. As stated in the “*What is Health Tourism?*” (Sağlık Turizmi Nedir?, 2019) report; dental, eye, aesthetics,

cardiovascular and joint prostheses, infertility treatment, IVF¹, surgical interventions are prominent medical fields.

According to these explanations, the research questions of the study are as follows;

RQ1: What is the distribution of “#healthtourismturkey” shares according to health tourism categories?

RQ2: Which operations, health care and treatment areas are emphasized (dental treatment, aesthetic operations, etc.) and what is the distribution of these in the sharing of “#healthtourismturkey”?

RQ3: What is the source (private hospitals, public hospitals, private clinics, medical tourism agency, specialists / doctors etc.) of “#healthtourismturkey” shares?

Coding was conducted by two researchers and Holsti statistics were used to ensure research reliability (Wimmer and Dominick, 2007: 40). The reliability level calculated according to this formula is 0,97. The analysis was performed by using SPSS 22.0 program.

During the analysis, the photographs / videos, texts, and hashtags that were included in the shares, were evaluated as a whole. Text and hashtags used in sharing it may not always be compatible with the shared visual. For this reason, the shared image is taken into consideration in the study and if the images in the review are not compatible with the content, this sharing is coded “out of category”. The coding guide of the study can be seen in Table 1. The same photos published on the same day are encoded only once.

¹ In vitro fertilization or tube baby.

Table 1. Coding categories

Main category	
<i>Types/categories of health tourism</i>	senior/elderly tourism & accessible/disabled tourism (1) thermal health tourism & SPA-Wellness (2) medical tourism (3) news/event/publicity (4) : News about health tourism, events such as congresses, conferences, and publicity shares are coded in this category. out of category (5) : If there is a mismatch between the photo/visual and the text, and the photo is not directly related to the health operation, this category is coded.
<i>Health care and treatment areas</i>	dental health (1) hair transplantation (2) body aesthetic (3) : e.g.: breast implant/uplift, liposuction etc. facial aesthetic (4) : e.g.: rhinoplasty, face lift etc. fertility/women's health (5) obesity/weight loss surgery (6) medical treatment (7) : e.g.: migraine, varicosis, cancer etc. eye health (8)
<i>Source of sharing</i>	private hospital (1) government hospital (2) university hospital (3) private clinic (4) specialist/doctor (5) health tourism service provider/health tourism agency (6) not mentioned/out of category (7) : If there is no direct information about the source of the share, or if the information could not be clearly accessed, this category is coded.

6. Analysis and Findings

In 2018, a total of 534 shares were made with “#healthtourismturkey” hashtag in Instagram. It is observed that there was a little share about the subject in the first 6 months of the year, but as of June, it is seen that the frequency of sharing increased. As seen in the Table 2, it is found that the highest number of shares were in September, October and November. This finding may provide an indication that the importance given to the use of social networks in health tourism has recently increased. However, the most important issue that draws attention in this table is that the shares on the subject are generally very low.

Months	Number of shares : #healthtourismturkey
<i>January</i>	15
<i>February</i>	12
<i>March</i>	10
<i>April</i>	10
<i>May</i>	15
<i>June</i>	32
<i>July</i>	39
<i>August</i>	49
<i>September</i>	96
<i>October</i>	92
<i>November</i>	95
<i>December</i>	69
Total	534

Table 2. Distribution of shares by months

When we look at the distribution of the data obtained according to the categories of health tourism, it is seen that there is an important difference between the number of shares about the “medical tourism” and other health tourism categories (senior/elderly tourism & accessible/disabled tourism and thermal health tourism & SPA-Wellness). It is possible to say that the majority of shares belong to the category of "medical tourism" (%53,9). As could be seen from Table 3, in 2018, there was no share about the “senior/elderly&accessible/disabled tourism”, while the number of shares about the “thermal&spa-wellness” tourism was only four (%0,7).

<i>Types/categories of health tourism</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
medical tourism	288	53,9
thermal health tourism & SPA-Wellness	4	0,7
senior/elderly & accessible/disabled tourism	-	-
out of category	112	21,0
news/events/publicity	130	24,3
Total	534	100,0

Table 3. Distribution of the health tourism category

In the study since the visual/picture, text and hashtags in the shares are examined as a whole, it is noteworthy that some of the visuals were irrelevant. For example, it was noted that some of the shares contained humorous visuals like caricatures. On the other hand, some shares include visuals such as airplanes and maps representing the tourism, while others include images such as flowers, letters, cards and gifts from patients. In such cases these shares were coded as "out of category". As shown in Table 3, %21 of total shares, which is a considerable amount, are “out of category”. This result clearly shows that some of the images, photos or visuals in the content does not include any operation or health area. And also, this result shows that there is not always a relationship between the content of the sharing and the hashtags used.

It is also observed that some of the shares made with #healhtourismturkey are related to various health tourism news, events or public relations and publicity activities. Accordingly, it is possible to say that this hashtag (#healhtourismturkey) was clearly used for promotional and communicational activities.

In addition to the categories of health tourism, when an analysis is made about which health operations are emphasized in particular, it has been found that a variety of operations are mentioned under the categories “medical tourism”, “out of category” and “news/events/publicity”. Even if the visual of the share is independent of health, in some cases there is an emphasis on various operations in the text or through the hashtags, this emphasis is

coded under the appropriate treatment area. As a result of the analysis, it is determined that the most mentioned treatment area in these shares was related to “dental health”. Table 4 shows the cross-distributions of treatment areas according to categories. As can be seen in the Table 4, it is noteworthy that shares about “hair transplantation” are second and shares about “body and facial aesthetics” are third and the numbers are almost equal to each other.

<i>Types of health tourism</i>	<i>Health care and treatments areas</i>									
		Dental health	Hair transplantation	Body aesthetic	Facial aesthetic	Fertility-women's health	Medical treatment	Obesity surgery	Eye health	Total
medical tourism		161	69	18	19	6	7	5	3	288
out of category		20	1	6	1	0	0	0	0	28
news/ events/ publicity		21	12	0	3	3	2	1	3	45
Total		202	82	24	23	9	9	6	6	361

Table 4. Distribution of the health care/treatment areas according to the categories of health tourism

In addition to these categories, an evaluation was made about the source of the shares. The analysis reveals that, in 2018, the largest share of health tourism was made by “health tourism service providers or health tourism agencies” (%39,1) and “private clinics” (%37,8). While the least share was made by “private hospitals” (%0,6) it was noted that no sharing was made by “government and university hospitals”. Finally, it was seen that some experts and doctors have also made some shares. It was found that %6,7 of the shares were made by the “specialist” or the “doctor”. In Table 5, it is possible to see detailed data on the source of the shares.

<i>Source of sharing</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
health tourism service provider/health tourism agency	209	39,1
private clinic	202	37,8
not mentioned/out of category	84	15,7
specialist/doctor	36	6,7
private hospital	3	0,6
Total	534	100,0

Table 5. Distribution of the source of sharing

7. Conclusion and Discussion

Social media and especially social networks are considered as important tools for informing the public and promoting the organizations. It is evident that health tourism is a growing sector. In this direction, it is clear that the demand for health tourism, which could be seen as one of the

ways of development of the countries, should be increased. Turkey will also be required to announce its potential in the international arena through using various promotional activities. And from this point, it is possible to say that in the promotion and publicity process, effective use of social networks is one of the most important issue. This situation is more clearly understood when it is considered that social networks become a source for gathering information for majority of the people. This study, aimed to investigate how health tourism publicities happen in social networks, especially on Instagram, is based on the assumption that social networks are an important factor in the publicity activities. For this purpose, the posts that includes #healthtourismturkey hashtag were selected and examined according to the specified categories.

The number of shares made with the selected hashtag in 2018 is 534. In the current study where all the data of 2018 were analyzed, although the number of shares increased in the second half of the year, it is still not as intense as expected. The increase in shares as of the second half of the year - as of June - can be evaluated from two perspectives. Firstly, the demand for health tourism is parallel to tourism seasons. Considering that health tourism is not only a medical treatment, who want to benefit from the sea, solar and thermal resources in Turkey, could visit this country for both holiday and treatment purposes. Secondly, the use of promotional social networks has become widespread. And this might be explained by the increased awareness of the importance of social networks. However, it is clear that social networks should be used more actively in the promotion of health tourism, although an increase is observed in shares.

The results of these research showed that sharing posts is mostly used in medical tourism. There are almost no shares in other areas of health tourism, such as elderly tourism or spa tourism. This result shows that promotional activities needed to be increased in these fields. Turkey is a destination that offers thermal resources, which could be a good strength for improving spa&wellness tourism. In addition, when we look at the distribution of the shares related to medical tourism; it is seen that the most shares are related to dental health. Besides, hair transplantation and body and facial aesthetics are the other treatments that shared is mostly. These findings are indicative of the intense demand for treatment of which areas in Turkey. Increasing the promotional activities in these areas will also increase the current demand.

The selected hashtag was also used to announce events, news and for advertising or publicity purposes. This finding shows us that it is important to inform the public about using the hashtags correctly since it could be considered as a keyword. Using hashtags frequently, will facilitate

the access of the people to the information directly. In addition to these, the results of the research showed that there are many “out of category” shares. This situation may shed light on the importance of ensuring that the content is harmonious and unified in order to make the publicity accurate.

Finally, majority of the posts were shared by health tourism agencies and private clinics. This result clearly shows that health tourism, which is a commercial service, is mostly introduced by private organizations. However, it is considered that the publicity of health tourism by public institutions or governmental institutions is important for informing people.

As a result, it is possible to say that social networks should be used more effectively for publicity, governmental-based publicity activities should be increased, health tourism should not be seen only as a medical tourism but also as a promotion tool for elderly and spa&wellness tourism. Thus, it is clear that by using appropriate hashtags, more people could be reached, and more demand could be created, and health tourism could be improved.

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