

## THE USE OF TWITTER AS A MARKETING TOOL BY TOUR OPERATORS IN ANTALYA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Tour operators have important role in development of tourism and people participating in tourism. Especially in developing countries, tour operators have significant part in number of tourists and the increase on tourism revenue. They also have a natural effect on the development and marketing of destinations. In this context, social media accounts of incoming tour operators with biggest tourist volume in Antalya have been analyzed. Antalya which has a significant role in Turkish tourism, hosted 20% of the tourists in Turkey in 2016. In this regard, a content analysis has been applied. The twitter accounts of 10 tour operators which have the biggest tourist volume in Antalya have been analyzed. The number of tweets, the content of tweets, topics, destinations in Antalya, the percentage of tweets related both to Antalya and Turkey has been analyzed.*

**Key words:** *Antalya, social media marketing, tourism marketing, digital marketing, twitter marketing*

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### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays customers are the pioneer factors in marketing. The customers of the modern world have high demands and they want their voices to be heard. Due to their viral characteristics social networking sites are best for them. Social networking sites ensure the communication of individuals between each other and with companies. So they are crucial in terms of pervasion of information from companies, brands, recommendations and the comments of customers related to products and ideas.

Consumers are confused when they buying goods and service. The mess they are exposed to during the buying process makes decision making harder. Especially in information intense sectors like tourism, the effect of internet and social media are high because of this reason. Destinations are important in holiday planning process and consumers try to reach the right information. [2] Since the product cannot be pretested, the past experiences of others become more important. Consumers not only use social media to communicate, they also use social media to follow new products and brands, get information about various goods and services [3] this makes it an important marketing tool for companies.

The interaction and bringing people together in social networking sites is very important. The reason why the first networking site SixDegrees fell in 2000 is its inefficiency in bringing together different ethnic identities after accepting the friendship requests [6]. Today the most known social networking sites like Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, LinkedIn, Instagram developed with Web 2.0 and reached to incredible dimensions with Web 3.0. In such sites

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information spreads interactively. It is a fast and easy way of getting information about companies, brands and products both from the company and from other customers (their experiences with the product/brand/company).

The basic difference between networking sites and traditional channels is that the answers to questions can be seen by a wide population. As the information is open; benefiting, evaluating, developing and criticizing activities makes social networking sites more trustworthy. The users of such social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc. other than communicating with each other promptly, can reach brief information and tolerant to promotional messages, advertising and sales they are exposed to [4]. For frequent users of social media, the speed, visuality and entertainment level [1] of the media are significant. They want to reach the information they are interested not only fast but also with good visual quality. One of the most significant characteristics of twitter unlike other social media networking sites is “the learning process”. The users get information from their friends, relatives, role models, teachers, news groups, beloved ones [5] and companies, brands and destinations that they follow. They learn about the company, brand, new product, change in product, discounts, offers, destinations etc. Learning is important in buying behavior and learning occurs with repetition. Twitter allows its users a fast and easy way to reach their target audience.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study content analysis method have been used to reveal the relevant information to find out how the tour operators use social media. Primarily most visited web sites have been analyzed to determine the types of web sites to be examined. The alexa.com data have been used for this analyzing. Alexa.com is one of the most famous and reputable web site for research, analyze and specify web sites’ statistics. According to alexa data among the most visited 20 web sites, there is 8 social media web sites all over the world. [7]

According to surveys and business searches especially in last 10 years, number of visits of a web site is not enough for firms. Companies are also interested in how people spend their time in these firms’ web sites. Basically, the more customers spend time in a web site, the more the company gets benefits and attract new customers. Therefore, social media is one of the most important tool for firms to attract customers while they are looking for services and goods to fulfill their needs. When firms try to catch the attention of customers with their web sites especially with their social media accounts, they put some relevant or irrelevant links to make people spend time surfing in their web sites.

When a firm’s web site has plenty of links in a page, customers spend more time on that page than its components. For that reason, importance of linking root domains have become very crucial in business sector. According to linking root domains, social networking sites take the lead.[8] Facebook is the pioneer, Twitter is the second biggest social networking site in the number of linking root domains. This shows that, when people surf on internet, they spend their time in social networking other than official/other web sites. This behavior of the consumers catch the attention of companies. In regard of this change in consumer behavior, companies adopted themselves to this new position and digitalized and reorganize their marketing strategies to use social networking sites as a marketing tool.

When we look at the popularity of social media web sites, Facebook takes the lead according to number of users. Youtube is second, Instagram is the third, Twitter is the fourth most popular social networking site.[9]

To find out the social networking site and twitter usage of tour operators in Antalya a content analysis have been done. Twitter is the 12th most visited web sites all over the world. Furthermore, it is the second web site that has linking root domains. Moreover, Twitter has the fourth biggest web site user volume. These facts make Twitter crucial web site to reach to customers by every kind of companies and brands.

As Twitter has a significant importance in digital world, Twitter post shares of top ten incoming foreign tour operators that organize package tours to Antalya in the year of 2017 have been investigated. Before investigating this, top ten foreign tour operators with the most tour package to Antalya destination in 2016 has found.[10] After that, all the tweet shares have been investigated and classified between 1 October 2017 and 31 December 2017. Then these shares of tour operators are classified according to topics. After this, tweet shares about destinations are classified with regard to continents. The number of tweets have been tabulated month by month and identified by general numbers, monthly and daily averaged and standard deviation.

Tweets of these tour operators were classified as topics about general Turkey and specific about Antalya and also the content of these tweets have been classified.

## FINDINGS

As the twitter usage of top ten incoming tour operators in Antalya have been investigated, it was determined that only 4 out of 10 tour operators use twitter (have twitter address). However, only 3 of these 4 tour operators' Twitter addresses are active in 2017. This means, only 3 of 10 tour operators use Twitter actively during 2017.

When other social networking sites analyzed, 7 of 10 tour operators use Facebook, 6 of 10 use social networking other than Twitter and Facebook. Existing situation makes tweet distribution irregular. Figure 1 shows the number of Twitter information about top ten tour operators in Turkey .

<b>Tour Operators</b>	<b>Numbers of Tweets</b>	<b>Like</b>	<b>Followers</b>	<b>Following</b>
A	2057	3200	32,2 K	558
B	6	1	42	2
C	306	126	212	98
D	157	195	2255	714
E	127	12	97	167
F	-	-	-	-
G	-	-	-	-
H	-	-	-	-
J	-	-	-	-
K	6844	218	9321	22

Figure 1: Twitter Features of Tour Operators

Figure 1 shows the general twitter features of tour operators. Tour operators in all figures in this study are put in order from highest volume to lowest. Tour operator A highest tourist volume in Antalya. Tour operator K has the lowest tourist volume in 2016. Tour operators' names have not been declared due to privacy concerns.

Figure 1 shows that, according to number of tweets, tour operator K takes the lead. However, tour operator A has the most likes from users in Twitter. Moreover, tour operator A has the biggest number of followers. The number of its followers is almost about four times the tour operators K. Tour operator A uses the Twitter more active than others. It reflects to number of followers and likes. Nevertheless, all 4 tour operators do not use Twitter frequently as it is seen.

Tour Operators	Number of Tweets in 2017 Whole Year
A	655
B	0
C	1
D	46
E	58
F	0
G	0
H	0
J	0
K	0

Figure 2: Number of Tweets of Tour Operators in 2017

As mentioned in methodology, this study analyzes the tweet shares of tour operators just the year of 2017. Figure 2 shows the total number of tweet shares in 2017. Only 4 tour operators shared Tweets in 2017 figure 2 shows. Tour Operator A has a great dominance in 2017 in comparison to its competitors.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of tweets of tour operators monthly. Left side of column shows the names of tour operators, the top row shows the months. In the figure, there are two columns in every month. Left column shows the number of Tweets of tour operators in a certain month, right column shows the percentage of the total Tweets in a certain month which is in bold in figure 3. For example, in January, T.O.A posted 24 tweets. Thus, all tweets in January is 3.7% of all tweets in total posts of T.O.A.

In general T.O. A posted tweets mostly in summer months. T.O.C and D posted tweets mostly in January. T.O.C posted only 1 tweet in 2017. T.O. E posted tweets mostly in August and November. Only 4 tour operators were active in Twitter in 2017 .

The monthly tweet shares, total number of tweets and total percentages are at the bottom of the table. For example, in January, total tweets of all tour operators are 57. In the light of these results, we can conclude that tour operators posted tweets mostly in August. This means, summer has the most number of Tweets in all year .

Months / Tour Operators	January		February		March		April		May		June		July		August		September		October		November		December	
		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%
A	24	3,7	41	6,3	50	7,6	27	4,1	63	9,6	78	11,9	67	10,2	91	13,9	62	9,5	56	8,5	54	8,2	42	6,4
B	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
C	1	100,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
D	26	56,5	6	13,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	1	2,2	9	19,6	2	4,3	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	2	4,3
E	6	10,3	5	8,6	7	12,1	5	8,6	6	10,3	4	6,9	3	5,2	8	13,8	3	5,2	1	1,7	8	13,8	2	3,4
F	0	0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0	0	0,0	0	0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0	0	0,0
G	0	0	0	0	0	0,0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
H	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
J	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
K	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>7,5</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>6,8</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>4,2</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>9,2</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>12,0</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>9,5</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>13,0</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>8,6</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>8,2</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>6,1</b>

Figure 3: Monthly Distribution of Tweets

Figure 4 shows the daily and monthly mean of total number of tweets of the tour operators. T.O.A takes the lead in daily and monthly mean. T.O.E is the second, T.O.D is the third one according to daily and monthly mean in number of Tweets. T.O.A takes also the lead in standard deviation because of the number of total tweets.

Tour Operators	Daily Mean	Monthly Mean	St. Dev.	Total Number
A	1,8	54,6	19,6	655
B	0,0	0,0	0,0	0
C	0,01	0,1	0,3	1
D	0,1	3,8	7,5	46
E	0,2	4,8	2,3	58
F	0,0	0,0	0,0	0
G	0,0	0	0,0	0
H	0,0	0	0,0	0
J	0,0	0	0,0	0
K	0,0	0	0,0	0

Figure 4: Tweeter Characteristics of Top Ten Tour Operators

Figure 5 shows the continental distribution of number of tweets of tour operators. According to information in this figure, T.O. A, D and E shared tweets about Europe the most. T.O.C posted just one tweet in 2017, which was about Africa. T.O. A posted 224 tweets about a destination. The 192 tweets by all of the tour operators about Europe and it is 73.6% of all of the tweets about destinations. There are 261 total tweets about a destinations posted by tour operators in 2017. As a result, Europe takes the lead and Europe surpluses 62% of the second biggest continental is Africa. As it is seen, there is a huge gap between continents in tweeter posts by tour operators.

Continents / Tour Operators	EUROPE		ASIA		AFRICA		NORTH AMERICA		SOUTH AMERICA		ANTARCTICA		AUSTRALIA		TOTAL
A	166	73,3	20	8,9	23	10,3	12	5,4	2	0,9	1	0,4	0	0	224
B	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
C	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
D	5	66,7	0	0	2	22,2	1	11,1	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
E	21	77,4	1	3,7	4	14,8	1	3,7	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
G	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
H	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
J	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
K	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>73,6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>8,0</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>11,5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5,4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0,8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0,4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>261</b>

Figure 5 : Continental Distribution of Total Tweets of Tour Operators

Figure 6 shows the main topics of all tweets posted by tour operators in 2017. After the analysis of all the tweeter posts of ten tour operators, basically there are 11 topics that tour operators shared. In another year for example in 2016 or in 2018, there could be other topics but in 2017 there are almost 11 topics that is revealed. Some of tweets have more than one topics like destinations and hotel advertisements.

As it is seen in this figure, T.O. A has posted tweets about 11 topics. T.O.C has only destination topic. Tour operator D posted about almost every topic except accommodation, transportation and survey. T.O.E has every topic except accommodation, survey and governmental news. 6 of 10 tour operators do not have any twitter posts in 2017 as it is mentioned before.

Topics / Tour Operators	Social Responsibility	Tourism News	Destination	Corporate News	Accommodation	Tour	Business Partnership	Transporta tion	Event	Survey	Consulate - Governmental News
A	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
B											
C			X								
D	X	X	X	X		X	X		X		X
E	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		
F											
G											
H											
J											
K											

Figure 6: Tweeter Shares Topics of Top 10 Tour Operators

The tweeter posts about Turkey and Antalya, have been very low in 2017. These ten tour operators posted 760 tweets during whole year. However, only 12 of these tweets are about Turkey and only 5 of the tweets about Antalya. As figure 7 shows that, only 1.6 % of all tweets

were about Turkey. Also, only 0.7 % of all tweets are about Antalya. T.O. A posted the most tweets about Turkey and also about Antalya. For example T.O.A posted 9 tweets about Turkey and 4 of them are about Antalya. There is only 2 more tour operators that posted tweets about Turkey. However, as seen in figure 7, in general there is only 2 tour operators posted tweets about Antalya.

Tour Operators	TURKEY		ANTALYA	
A	9	4,0	4	1,8
B	0	0,0	0	0,0
C	0	0,0	0	0,0
D	1	11,1	1	11,1
E	2	7,4	0	0,0
F	0	0,0	0	0,0
G	0	0,0	0	0,0
H	0	0,0	0	0,0
J	0	0,0	0	0,0
K	0	0,0	0	0,0
Total	12	1,6	5	0,7

Figure 7: Twitter Statistics about Turkey and Antalya of top 10 Tour Operators

According to UNWTO report in 2017, as the number of tourists, Turkey is one of the biggest ten tourist attracting countries. However, the number of tweets of top ten tour operators in 2017 about Turkey is too low for a country's position in tourism sector.

If we look at the topics about Antalya that posted by tour operators in 2017, the topics are about Fethiye destination, prize news, general tourism information about Antalya, tour operators team information and congress publishing. However, tweets about Antalya is only 0.7 %. tweets which is a very low figure.

## CONCLUSION

Twitter usage of the top ten incoming tour operators to Turkey seems to be not enough. Tweeter is the fourth popular social networking site all in the world. Moreover, it is the second web site that has linking root domain. Furthermore, it is the 12 of the most visited web sites in 2016. According to brandwatch.com, in 2016 tweeter with its 330M monthly active users, 550 million people have posted a tweet once in their life, 500 million people visit Twitter each month without logging in. 23% of US citizens are monthly active users of Twitter and 80% of active users access the site via mobile. There is 707 average number of followers of a twitter page. 500 million tweets sent each day. which makes 6,000 Tweets every second. 65.8% of US companies with 100+ employees use Twitter for marketing and 77% of Twitter users feel more positive about a brand when their Tweet has been responded. 58% of top brands have over 100,00 followers on Twitter and 92% of companies tweet more than once a day. 80% of Twitter users have mentioned a brand in a Tweet and 60% of consumers expect brands to respond to their query within the hour. 76% of consumers are likely to recommend the brand following friendly service and companies using Twitter for customer service see a 19% lift in customer satisfaction. Most importantly, Twitter revealed total ad grew 208% year to year. [11]

In this context, twitter is an effective marketing tool to reach the target costumers, get in interaction with them, and to manage their perceptions about their services. So tour operators should use this tool effectively and regularly to keep active communication with their

customers. Especially customers from Y and Z generation spend long hours in social networking sites. When they decide to buy a good or a service like travel, they definitely take search on internet and social networking sites. They read the comments, see the advertisings and refer to experiences of others. As traveling is intangible social media has a crucial importance, especially customers who want to travel long distance/abroad, check the social networking sites before making their decisions about the destination, tour operator, travel services etc.

However, this study shows that, tour operators organize tour packages to Turkey do not pay enough attention to twitter. The tweeter posts about Turkey and also Antalya, are very inadequate. Turkey has very important role in tourism sector in the world. Antalya is also one of the most attractive destinations of Turkey. It is the second city after Istanbul which welcomes most tourists. For that reason, all partners in the sector, both governmental and private sector, should plan marketing strategies in digital world using social networking sites as marketing tools. They should may provide some relevant information, some financial priorities and opportunities to tour operators which generate tour packages to Turkey.

Further studies are possible about this subject. Another deep content analysis or other research methods can be used to analyze twitter or other social networking sites, other social media and web sites and a comparison with other web sites and destinations, countries, firms, corporations can be made.

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