Examining eWOM Reviews of the Hotel Enterprises on Tripadvisor: The Case of Usak Province

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Abstract

Consumers tend to tell others about their product or service experience. The transfer of these experiences about products and services is known as word of mouth (WOM) communication. With technological developments and easy accessibility of the internet, these thoughts can be published electronically and become visible to everyone. At this stage, traditional WOM is transformed into eWOM online. Since tourism products and services are experience products, consumers need to rely on others' recommendations. Consumers; hotels where they stay, restaurants they eat, shopping businesses etc. comments on online platforms. In this study, eWOM elements are evaluated by examining the electronic comments for hotel businesses in Uşak province, which is an online evaluation platform on Tripadvisor. The study was carried out in tourism licensed hotels in Usak.

INTRODUCTION

For milions of people on Earth; it has become possible to communicate with each other by accessible internet with the tools such as computer, tablet, smartphone. Previously being passive, internet users are beginning to have an opportunity to create and share their own content on the internet. Sharing experience and comments of the consumers, constitutes an environment from which other people can be affected (Cuhadar, Koseoglu and Gultepe, 2018, p. 228). By the internet usage; searching information, communication and shopping styles have being changed. The traditional 'word-of-mouth' has taken place as its electronic version-eWOM (King et al. 2014, p. 167).

Today, computer users get information about almost every product and service on the internet and read about other people's experiences. In this context, a new and strong customer profile which includes looking at new possibilities for accessing information, meeting product specifications and prices, challenging others, seeking full refund of money, considering brand loyalty, waiting for after-sales service, answering pre-purchase inquiries and influencing other potential customers by sharing satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Yetkin, Unguren and Kacmaz, 2016, p. 100). Consumers want to get information about the destination or hotel which they have chosen. Therefore, via the evaluation web sites like TripAdvisor, otelpuan.com; they read the online comments of consumers. Online consumer reviews (consumer sourced media) is a tool of electronic word of mouth marketing (e-WOM). On these platforms, poeple make positive and negative comments about a product or a firm, and many consumers and firms can obtain information from them (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler, 2004).

Some of the previous studies on eWOM were conducted about consumer motivation (Hennig-Thurau vd., 2004), the impact of online reviews on purchasing decisions (Senecal ve Nantel, 2004 , Smith, Menon and Sivakumar, 2005), the effects of consumer reviews on product sales (Zhu ve Zhang, 2010; Cui, Lui and Guo., 2012). When the tourism studies about eWOM are examined, studies show that tourists have an impact on destination choices and purchase intentions (Arsal, Backman and Baldwin, 2008) and online reviews play an important role in hotel selections (Sparks and Browning, 2011; Filieri and McLeay, 2014). It is revealed that the effect of the content produced by consumers is important (Inversini, Cantoni and Buhalis, 2009).

This study was conducted both in order to evaluate the online comments of the customers of seven hotel enterprises - operating in Usak. In tourism sector, it is seen that Tripadvisor has lots of reviews about hotel enterprises and the hotels in Usak have the reviews mostly on this website. For this purpose, using qualitative analysing methods, online comments about the hotels on Tripadvisor were subjected to content analysis. The findings of the content analysis and the interviews were discussed.

Conceptual Framework And Literature Review

Definition of EWOM

Technological developments have been affecting consumer behaviours and communications. Wom can be described as "the exchange of information" (Liao and Yang, 2012). Internet has given consumers the opportunity to advise about products to other consumers and as being available to other customers all the time, eWOM is an important issue for researchers. (Hennig at al. 2004, p. 39). Hennig at al. (2004) makes the definition of eWOM as:

"any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet".

Before, when people needed to get information about products, they searched the sources of marketers, certifications or advices of acquaintance. eWOM has become more preferrable than these communication methods (King et al. 2014, p. 167). Rapid developing of internet have supported consumers with an environment where they can collect, analyze, interpret and disseminate information (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). Consumers are able to write positive and negative reviews about products and services and so that they contribute to marketing of those products and services (Hennig-Thurau vd., 2004). Traditional advertising systems have being stated as deceptive, and online reviews about products and services have being seen more realistic (Rowley, 2001).

Studies about blogs, online reviews, online communication and seeking information has been increasing and in recent years the studies about this area has focused on recommendation websites. People can share their opinions on social media and on recommendation web-sites as Tripadvisor (Harris and Prideux, 2017, p. 366). Tripadvisor is known as an independent evaluation site which people shares experiences about travel trips and comments about accommodation enterprises (Özgen and Kozak, 2015, p. 230), which is an intensively used online travel information platform in the tourism sector. In tourism sector, it is seen that Tripadvisor has lots of reviews about hotel enterprises and the hotels in Usak have the reviews mostly on this website.

Previous Studies

Online consumer reviews affect purchasing decisions of the other people (Mathwick ve Mosteller, 2017). For this reason being a commonly used online evaluation web site, Tripadvisor is an important resource of tourism reviews and has an important effect on the reputation and brand value of tourism enterprises. For this reason, hotel managers should continuously follow this source (Neirotti et al., 2016). Preferences like cleanliness, security, being economical and the location of the hotel may vary from consumer to consumer (Tan et al., 2018). At this point, online reviews and ratings are important sources of information that will influence the tourists' decisions about choosing a hotel (Fang et al., 2016). Tripadvisor enables consumers to make comments and ratings and enables hotel managers to respond them. This communication is very important for developing costumer relations (Shin et al., 2014). Various studies about eWOM reviews in tourism sector and the methods and findings of these studies are presented below.

It is possible to see the studies exmining the aims of the travels and features of the tourist groups by eWOM reviews. Chang et al. (2017) analyzed the online reviews of the tourists to determine the travel aims of them by using sensitivity classification and combined algorithm. They found that the couple travelers were more than the others and business trips were in a low level.

Thera are studies about the destination image, culture and eWOM reviews. For example Kladou and Mavragani (2015) analyzed the Tripadvisor reviews about İstanbul to determine the destination image and found that the online reviews and contents influence the destination image. Gao et al. (2018), obtained data from the Tripadvisor reviews of 24 hotel enterprises in a city by a software program called Pyton. The study revealed that there is an inverse relation between the online hotel ratings and consumer's power distances. And also it is revealed that cultural factors are very important for online reviews.

Analyzes about consumer contents are conducted in many studies. Ma et al. analyzed the written and visual contents of online reviews with deep learning algorithms and found that the photographs which are created by hotel enterprises don't effect the people samely as the photographs and writings which are created by reviewers. Boo and Busser (2018) examined online meeting planners by using both manual and automatic content analysis methods. The study reveals that positive reviews are made about hotel and negative reviews are made about the meeting by the planners.

The relationship netween the online reviews and the tourist satisfaction is being examined in many studies. Liu et al. (2017), examined the effect of features of hotels on general tourist satisfaction. The study reveals that the features of hotels affect general satistaction level differently. Guo et al. (2017) examined the online reviews of the tourists with the aim of determining satistaction levels. According to the results, high satisfaction levels are about roooms, staff and services. Also demographic differences were determined. Jannach et al. (2014) examined Tripadvisor ratings of 14 cities on 4 continents and found that the variables which encourage the satisfaction of customer segments were easily determined by the multi criteria rating datas.

Studies about the hotel enterprises' sales, revenues, performances by examining online reviews have been conducted. Neirotti et al. (2016) examined the Tripadvisor reviews of 240 hotels and found that online reviews influence the profitability of the hotels. Torres et al. (2015) examined how the number of Tripadvisor reviews and scores affect the hotel revenues. According to the results, there is a positive relationship between the number of Tripadvisor reviews and scores, and the average size of online reservation agreement. Hu and Chen (2016) examined the relationship between the hotel scores and hotel stars by using linear regression support vector regression and model tree methods. The study reveals that there is a relationship between the hotel scores and the hotel stars. Ye et al. (2009) examined the effect of online reviews in China's biggest evaluation web site on the number of bookings of hotel rooms and found that these reviews have a relationship with the hotels' performances. Also, Ye et al. (2011) state that online reviews affect online sales significantly according to their studies and also that online consumer contents have an important role in the hotel enterprises' performances.

A study about tourist preferences is conducted by Vermeulen and Seegers (2009). They made a trial web site and send to the tourist via e-mail with the aim of examining the effect of the online reviews on hotel preferences of tourists. According to the study, the hotel preferences of the tourist were affected by the online reviews. The authors mentioned that the online reviews increased the consumer cognition and that increasing consumer cognition by online reviews caused this.

It has been determined that, in the literature, numerous eWOM studies are conducted in the hotel enterprises of various destinations and various cities but it couldn't be encountered to a study which examines the ewom reviews of the hotel enterprises in Usak province. In this aspect, with the study it is aimed to contribute to the literature.

Method

Usak is a small province neighboring with many tourism destinations like Denizli (famous for Pamukkale attraction), Afyonkarahisar and Kutahya (famous for thermal tourism), Izmir (where the ancient city of Ephesus and

House of Mary located). Usak has natural attractions, heritage sites, thermal sources and local products but most of them have been recently discovered and have begun to be planned for tourism.

Usak province has a structure suitable for plateau tourism and has a great ecotourism richness. In this context; Ulubey Canyons, Kayaagil Valley, Murat Mountain, Gurlek, Elmadag, Burkazdagi plateaus stand out as the focus of the visitors with different natural features and attractiveness. Another type of tourism that can be performed in Usak is Camping and Caravan Tourism. On the other hand, plateau tourism is in a position to lead the development of agricultural tourism. The region is rich in food culture and it can be possible to introduce Usak villages to the world and to market their products. Karahallı Clandras Bridge, Banaz Hamambogazi, Kayaagil Thermal Area, Tasyaran Valley, Ancient City of Blaundus, Akmonya Ancient City, Karun Treasures are attractions that have tourism potential in Usak. In other words, with the cultural and natural assets, fertile lands, waters (rivers, lakes, ponds, dams, etc.), Usak province is suitable for different types of tourism (Usak Il Kultur ve Turizm Mudurlugu, 2019). Accordingly, it is possible to say that for the development of tourism in Usak, the accommodation sector should be developed. At this point, it is essential to examine customers' comments on hotels in Usak.

Qualitative analysis method was preferred in the study. There are eight licensed hotels in Usak province. In the first phase of the research, 7 hotels in Usak and a total of 201 reviews belonging to these enterprises were examined by content analysis method. In order to review the hotel enterprises, the hotel management pages in the Tripadvisor travel comment website have been analyzed. The reason for preferring the Tripadvisor website in this study is that it contains the most comments about the hotels in Usak.

The reviews of the hotel operators were examined and the positive and negative comments of the hotel guests were identified and counted. Online comments were subjected to content analysis using qualitative analysing method. The information obtained by content analysis is interpreted and presented in tables with frequency and percentage distributions. All comments were reviewed by each hotel last May 15, 2018. These comments were registered on May 16th and evaluated offline. The information for each comment is marked on the checklist. The investigation was carried out by two researchers. In the comments, all the words were evaluated by content analysis, and the words, frequencies and percentages were recorded for the guests' complaints and suggestions about the hotel.

Results

The results of the study have been combined through the Microsoft Office excel program. Table 1 provides information on the reviews of the hotel enterprises examined in the study. The number of hotel enterprises of which reviews are examined in the survey is a total of seven. All hotel enterprises are located in Usak. The number of comments on TripAdvisor belonging to these hotels is 201.

According to the results it can be seen that each customer makes different comments about different concepts and services of the hotels. This coincides with the literature as Tan et al. (2018) mentions that consumer preferences like location, cleanliness, being economical are different for each customer.

Table 1: eWOM Reviews of the Hotel Enterprises in Tripadvisor Web Site

Comments and Recommendations	Positive Opinion	Percentage (%)	Negative Opinion	Percentage (%)	Total Comments
Relevance for Family	1	100	-	-	1
Ambience	3	75	1	25	4
Bathroom	3	27	8	73	11
Price/Performance	14	67	7	33	21
Service Quality	27	82	6	18	33
Heating System	3	75	1	25	4
Breakfast	16	64	9	36	25
Location	18	100	-	-	18
Rooms	13	65	7	35	20
Parking	7	58	5	42	12
Restaurant	12	71	5	29	17
Cleanliness	19	83	4	17	23
Sleeping Quality/Noise	4	44	5	56	9
Wi-Fi	2	67	1	33	3
TOTAL	142	71	27	13	201

All comments are taken into consideration. Examining the comments on Tripadvisor, it has been observed that the most comments about the 7 hotel enterprises in Usak is about the service quality, breakfast, price / performance and rooms. Guests were positive with a rate of 82% regarding service quality. The hotels received the most of positive reviews about service quality with the number of 27 and there are 6 negative opinions about this concept.

Cleanliness seems to have positive opinions with a rate of 83%. There are 19 positive and 4 negative opinions about cleanliness of the hotels. About the locations of the hotels, 18 positive opinions have recorded with a percentage of 100% and no negative opinions were recorded. Breakfasts of the hotels have 16 positive and 9 negative opinions. Positive comments have also been made about the location of the hotel enterprises.

With 67% percentage 14 positive and 33% percentage 7 negative opinions on price / performance have been recorded. There are 13 positive and 7 negative opinions about the rooms. Restaurants have positive opinions with a percentage of 71% and negative opinions with a percentage of 29%. Parking have 7 positive and 5 negative opinions. Ambiance have 3 positive opinions with a percentage of 75% and 1 negative opinion.

Five negative and four positive comments have recorded about sleeping quality and noise. Heating system (with 25% percentage) and wi-fi (with %33 percentage) have 1 negative opinion each. Bathrooms have 3 positive and 8 negative comments with a percentage of 73% and this is the highest score of the negative opinions in the table.

Generally speaking, consumers which shares their opinion on Tripadvisor are satisfied with mostly location, relevance for family, cleanliness, service-quality, ambience, heating system and restaurants. The negative opinions are about mostly bathrooms (comments like small and not clean), noise, parking, breakfast, rooms, price-performance, wi-fi. Overall, the results show that with 142 positive and 27 negative opinions, 71% of the reviewers on TripAdvisor have positive opinions about the hotels in Usak.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine customer comments about hotel establishments operating in Uşak. For this purpose, online comments were evaluated and customers' opinions about hotels were revealed. As can be seen in

Table 1; the customers have a positive opinion on the service quality, cleanliness, price-performance and location of the hotels generally. Also according to the results, the conditions and concepts which have negative opinions are about bathrooms, wi-fi, noise, breakfast etc.

Usak is a developing city. Existing local hotels are required to compete with more newly opened and future star and chain hotels. At this point, it is considered useful to examine the results of the study in order to see the deficiencies and prominent features of the hotels from the eyes of the customers and to make improvements accordingly. The results can be recorded by the hotel managers and owners. So that, improvements can be made and the positive comments can be increased, negative comments can be decreased.

On the other hand, also eWOM reviews are an important resource for newly opened hotels to learn about their customers' opinions about the hotel. In the online reviews, it was observed that the response rates of the hotels were very low, and this study is thought to contribute to the managers in terms of raising awareness.

This study can be conducted in enterprises in different sectors or places to satisfy the requests of new-generation-customers which share opinions on internet and to take attention of the managers and owners of these enterprises.

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