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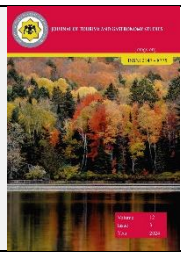

Destination-Country Image of Türkiye from Perspectives of American Non-Visitors

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Abstract

The significance of images in advertising, promoting, attracting tourists for destinations, and influencing their future behavioral intentions is widely acknowledged concept. In recent years, destination-country image research has gained momentum. This article seeks to evaluate how Türkiye (the fourth most visited country in the world) is perceived as a travel destination by American non-visitors. The focus on American non-visitors in this study is significant because Americans represent the largest group of international travelers globally. This demographic offers valuable insights for understanding potential tourism markets for Türkiye. By analyzing how American non-visitors perceive Türkiye, the study aims to enhance the country's tourism strategies, especially in a highly competitive global market. Their perceptions influence their likelihood to visit, making it crucial for tourism managers to tailor marketing campaigns to shift these non-visitors' views toward a more favorable image of Türkiye. The sample included potential tourists who have never visited Türkiye, also known as non-visitors. Furthermore, the study examined the relationship between how potential visitors view the destination country and their intentions to travel there. Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a widely used online research platform, gathered the data for this study. Data were obtained through a survey from a total of 302 non-visitors by conducting convenience sampling method. We employ PLS-SEM, a variance-based methodology, analyze the data set. After the analysis, we validated all proposed hypotheses. Therefore, the cognitive and emotional images have an impact on each other. There is a statistically significant and positive link between the affective image and overall and the cognitive image and overall ($\beta = 0.354$, $p<0.001$; $\beta = 0.258$, $p<0.001$, respectively). In addition, there were strong and positive links between visit intention and both affective image ($\beta = 0.262$, $p<0.001$) and cognitive image ($\beta = 0.168$, $p<0.001$). The cognitive and emotional components of an image have a significant impact on general image perception. The current study validates that both the general image and its elements positively influence non-visitors' visit intentions. The study concludes by presenting the management and theoretical consequences.

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Research Article

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of image in promoting and positioning destinations in the market, attracting tourists, and influencing their future behavioral intentions is unsurprising (Akgün et al., 2020; Hahm & Severt, 2018). The concept of country image encompasses the overall perceptions and opinions held about a particular destination country (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Moufakkir & AlSaleh, 2017).

Despite extensive research on the subject, prior works (Sroypetch et al., 2018; Stylidis, 2020, 2024) have continued to debate the conceptualization, dimensionality, and evaluation of images. Previous studies (Garcia-De los Salmones et al., 2022) have quantified several macro-level attributes of a destination country that contribute to its image, such as human rights, literacy level, accessibility, economic, political, security, environmental, technological, and social dimensions (Jin et al., 2018). In their study, Martinez & Alvarez (2010) frequently use the term "country image" to describe this particular style of analysis. At the micro level, various contexts extensively employ the destination-country image, a perception of specific features such as specific products, infrastructure, social environment, attractions, and natural environment (Aydin et al., 2021). Prior research has consistently confirmed a robust association between the marketability of products, usually referred to as the product-country image (Elliot et al., 2011; Li et al., 2014).

Afshardoost & Eshaghi (2020) have highlighted the impact of images on prospective visitors' tendency to choose a particular destination for their visit. All variables that impact the perception of an image would directly or indirectly affect visit intention (Aydin et al., 2021). Scholars widely acknowledge destination perception as a crucial element in the process of making decisions about preferring a destination (Tasci & Holecek, 2007; Tavares et al., 2020). The establishment of a favorable perception and the development of a distinct identity for a destination are vital in relation to its allure, guaranteeing its long-term viability and ability to compete effectively (Kovačić et al., 2022). Therefore, the issue of international tourism literature widely acknowledges the substantial impact of country image on buyer decisions (Guzman-Parra et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2016).

Understanding individuals who are not tourists about their perceptions of a specific country from the aforementioned standpoint is necessary. Policymakers and academics can utilize the acquired knowledge on non-visitors' perceptions to enhance marketing strategies in highly competitive environments (Sroypetch et al., 2018). In addition, understanding the perceptions of non-visitors towards a destination holds significant value for tourism managers seeking to forecast their future behaviors (Sert & Dündar, 2019). Furthermore, understanding the perspective of people who do not visit a certain destination will enhance a country's market by diversifying the tourist demographic and potentially enticing a greater influx of visitors (Yang et al., 2020).

Enhancing the perception of Türkiye's image from the perspective of non-visitors can yield benefits such as attracting a larger influx of tourists and improving the overall travel experience for international visitors. The study's findings will assist tourism management in implementing measures to promote the country. Identifying the impressions of non-visitors will help address some of the countries' shortcomings. Moreover, it will illuminate the tourism strategies that the central government should adopt. Measuring the image of potential tourists about Türkiye from the USA, the world's largest potential tourist outbound country, will affect their visit intentions and contribute to the elimination of negative image elements.

The positive image of those who have not visited the country before will motivate their willingness to visit

(Bianchi & Milberg, 2017). Therefore, we urgently need a study that explores the value of conducting an in-depth assessment of those who are not visitors (Tan & Wu, 2016a). Despite the growing amount of published research about DCI, empirical studies on DCI among non-visitors remain limited. Thus, this study has two primary objectives: 1) to ascertain the characteristics that contribute to the formation of cognitive and emotive representations of individuals who are not visitors. 2) To investigate how cognitive and emotional images influence the overall perceptions of people who have not yet been to a particular place and their desire to visit.

Furthermore, it seeks to validate the country's features, which form the dimensions of the image. The current study is significant from both practical and theoretical perspectives because it identifies the essential steps that tourism management must undertake to improve a country's brand image. Because countries need to be competitive in branding, marketing, and positioning in the global tourism market (Aminudin et al., 2017).

Türkiye's geographical position as a bridge between Europe and Asia, along with its rich cultural and historical heritage, makes it a unique destination. However, despite these advantages, it may not always be top-of-mind for U.S. tourists. Explaining how improving its image in such a large outbound market could significantly enhance Türkiye's global tourism standing would underscore its importance as a case study.

Evaluating Türkiye's image among American non-visitors is novel and unique because it targets a demographic that has not previously visited the country but holds significant potential as a future tourism market. The study focuses on non-visitors, a group often underexplored in tourism research, to assess how their cognitive and emotional perceptions shape their overall view of Türkiye and their intentions to visit. This approach helps identify areas where Türkiye can improve its image and attract a larger influx of American tourists. Additionally, since the U.S. is the world's largest outbound tourist market, understanding how Türkiye is perceived by Americans who have never visited allows for tailored marketing strategies that can directly address misconceptions or lack of awareness, which can significantly impact future travel behavior.

In summary, the study adds to academic knowledge by offering a deeper understanding of how non-visitors form destination images and by empirically validating the relationship between cognitive, emotional, and overall image components. For tourism management, it provides actionable strategies to enhance destination marketing, improve visitor numbers, and ensure sustainable tourism growth.

Literature Review

Destination-country image (DCI) occupies a central role in tourism marketing and consumer decision-making. It intertwines how visitors and non-visitors perceive a particular country in general, and from this spur on, where they choose to go and what form their journey will take (Lin et al., 2020). Understanding how DCI forms is important to the optimizing marketing strategies of destinations. Furthermore, it influences their final holiday itinerary selection. Therefore, the effective planning of destination marketing strategies hinges on the use of such DCI forms (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005).

DCI is a multilevel concept (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Martin & Eroglu, 1993), affecting how tourists perceive their destinations in many ways as Gartner (1994) asserted. Also, Laroche et al. (2005) provided empirical evidence supporting the validity of a multidimensional country image model. Baloglu & McCleary (1999) established the overall structure dimensions of DI. The overall image reflects how people generally feel about a destination when

considering both cognitive and emotional aspects (Chaulagain et al., 2019).

Undoubtedly, a positive DCI can lead to travelers choosing to go to that country (Chaulagain et al., 2019). It can also increase the amount of time spent within the country, the number of venues attended, and the amount of foreign currency earned. A positive DCI can bring higher visitor satisfaction and a greater chance of visitors later recommending it to others (Chen & Chen, 2010). The image exerts a decisive influence on the attitude and behaviors of tourists, and it holds great significance in terms of promoting tourism. According to Karri & Dogra (2023), the image is a comprehensive concept that encompasses products, attributes, and a holistic approach based on a country.

The majority of studies examine the country image concept to be a cognitive construct (Lam et al., 2022; Lindblom et al., 2018). According to Stabler (1988), a cognitive image can be defined as a compilation of characteristics that predominantly align with the assets of a tourism destination. Carballo et al. (2015) proposed a similar consideration. They asserted that one can evaluate a country's cognitive image based on its attributes.

Then Agapito et al. (2013) confirmed the link between the DI's dimensions, asserting that the cognitive aspect holds greater sway over the conative aspect with the involvement of the emotional component. Furthermore, Basaran (2016) also validated the multidimensional aspects of DI. He stated that the hierarchical structure of DI includes emotive, cognitive, and conative components. The relationship between cognitive and affective images is widely recognized, as most researchers agree that cognitive images influence affective one (Lam et al., 2022). Researchers such as Li et al., 2010 and Qu et al., 2011 have all confirmed this relationship. As a result, our study presents the following hypothesis:

H1: Non-visitors' cognitive perception of the country will positively impact their emotional perception of it.

According to prior research, both cognitive and emotional perceptions positively impact the general image of a country. Put differently, overall or general CI is significantly influenced by cognitive and emotional factors (Beerli & Martín, 2004). Baloglu et al. (2014) asserted that cognitive and emotive elements have a substantial predictive power on the general perception of first-time visitors. However, the significance of emotive images diminishes with frequent visits. In addition, Stylidis et al. (2017) distinguish between effects of cognitive and emotive images on the overall component among residents and visitors. According to them, the emotional impact of the image is greater than the cognitive one for visitors. Residents also have a similar impact on the overall destination perception. Lastly, Alcocer & Ruiz (2020) argue that cognitive and affective ones both influence the overall perception. Consequently, we assert to test the subsequent hypotheses:

H2: The cognitive image of non-visitors will positively influence the general country image.

H3: The emotional perception of non-visitors will positively influence the country's overall image.

The existing body of literature suggests that image has a crucial role in predicting tourists' future behaviors. For instance, Afshardoost & Eshaghi (2020) proposed that general and affective images, along with cognitive factors, influence intention to visit. Furthermore, Papadimitriou et al. (2015) confirmed that the general perception significantly influences the intention to visit, both among visitors and non-visitors. Additionally, Zhang et al. (2016) pointed out different constructs for the image of a country at the micro and macro levels. Prospective tourists indirectly influence their visit intention through macro DCI, whereas the DI significantly affects their visit intention through micro DCI. Some past studies pointed out the significant influence of image on the intentions to travel for

non-visitors' (Ahmad et al., 2021; Bianchi & Milberg, 2017; Cherifi et al., 2014). Also, Khan et al. (2017) report that these images significantly influence the visit intention in a positive manner. Similarly, Nam et al. (2016) also found empirical support for the concept that the presence of positive components in the cognitive and emotive destination perception is likely to result in a heightened visit intention. Additionally, Maghrifani et al. (2022) state that the Indonesian DI influences Australian potential visitors' intentions to visit. We examine the following hypotheses from the relevant literature:

H4: The cognitive image will positively influence the visit intention.

H5: The overall CI of non-visitors will positively influence visit intention.

H6: The affective evaluation of non-visitors will positively influence visit intention.

Research indicates that the overall impression of an image influences how its cognitive and emotional elements relate to intention to visit. Aydin et al. (2021) found the general CI mediates its cuisine's image and the travel intention. Additionally, Stylos et al. (2016) reported the general image serves as a positive mediator in the interaction between the cognitive image and visitors' intention to revisit. Liang & Lai (2023) also confirmed that image of a destination acts as a mediator between the image of destination and the visit intention. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: The holistic images mediate the connection between the cognitive image and non-visitors' intention to visit.

H8: The holistic image acts as a mediator between the emotional image and the intention to visit.

During the destination selection process, tourists are influenced by many variables. These include previous travel experiences (Nazir et al., 2021), word of mouth, print and visual media (J. J. Hahm & Tasci, 2019), pull and push factors (Suhud et al., 2021), and image (Chaulagain et al., 2019b). On the other hand, Baloglu (2001) summarized this situation as follows: Awareness of a destination obtained from previous experiences and information flow is of utmost importance in influencing the perception of a particular location. The research adds to the already existing literature by examining the perceptions of Türkiye is viewed as a vacation destination by those who have not visited before. Any of these factors is likely to influence tourists' intentions to visit. Visit intention strongly correlates with travel behavior. Given the circumstances, tourists are highly inclined to select a destination that possesses an excellent and favorable image (Achterkamp et al., 2011).

Others have examined images of prospective tourists, who are characterized as individuals with a high likelihood of visiting the place. Despite intensive image research, there are still many aspects of this complex structure that require full exploration. There is currently no established methodology for analyzing the destination image and its associated components, which leads to the use of various techniques and strategies (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). While a universally accepted definition of country image is lacking, scholars agree that each country has its own unique image (Dragoi, 2021). Thus, it is possible to measure the destination-country image in terms of its attributes. However, Li et al. (2014) argue that the majority of research perceives the image of country as a cognitive construct. According to Stabler (1988), cognitive image is comprised of distinctive features that primarily depict a tourist destination. Carballo et al. (2015) presented a similar consideration. They asserted that attributes evaluate a country's cognitive image (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Alvarez & Korzay, 2011; Martinez & Alvarez, 2010; Tasci et al., 2006; Uner et al., 2023; Yarcan & Inelmen, 2006).

Şentürk (2018) found that prior researches have demonstrated a wide range of designs and scales when examining the dimensions of image of a country. Different scales are used in studies (Akdeniz Ar & Kara, 2014; Garcia-De los Salmones et al., 2021) that want to find out how people feel about a certain product-country and country image (including cognitive, affective, and operational components) (Abdula et al., 2021; Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002; Sroypetch et al., 2018). This disparity should be considered in future investigations. Thus, the present study took this difference into account and avoided possible deviations by using a previously validated scale.

In summary, there are three types of research that focus on evaluating country image. The first type examines country image in a comprehensive manner, taking into account its dimensions and elements. The second category investigates the variables that impact individuals' CI perceptions. The second type explores the factors that influence people's CI perception. The third category evaluates the influence of a country's image on buyer choices (Dragoi, 2021). This research will evaluate the image of country dimensions and elements from the non-visitor's perspective, revealing their impact on their visit intention. The research model (Figure 1) provides guidance on the dimensions of the image and the hypotheses generated.

The primary theory underpinning the study is the Cognitive-Affective-Conative (CAC) Model of Destination Image, which has been widely used in tourism research to explain how potential visitors form perceptions of a destination and how those perceptions influence their behavioral intentions, such as the decision to visit. This model posits that the formation of a destination image occurs in three stages: cognitive (knowledge and beliefs about a destination), affective (emotional responses to the destination), and conative (behavioral intentions, such as the desire to visit). The CAC model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multi-dimensional nature of destination image and its influence on tourists' decision-making processes.

In this study, the cognitive image refers to the factual or knowledge-based perceptions that American non-visitors have about Türkiye, such as its cultural attractions, natural beauty, or infrastructure. The affective image refers to the emotional responses, such as whether they perceive Türkiye as exciting, relaxing, or safe. The study hypothesizes that both cognitive and affective perceptions directly influence the overall image of Türkiye as a travel destination, which in turn impacts the conative component, i.e., the intention to visit. By validating these relationships, the study confirms the applicability of the CAC model in explaining how non-visitors form their destination image and how this impacts their future travel behavior.

Additionally, the Attitude Theory, which suggests that attitudes are formed from cognitive and emotional evaluations and then influence behavior, is relevant. According to this theory, potential tourists' attitudes toward Türkiye are shaped by their cognitive and affective evaluations of the country. These attitudes then guide their behavioral intentions, such as whether they would consider visiting. The combination of these theories provides a robust theoretical foundation for the proposed model, supporting the relationships between cognitive, emotional, and conative variables.

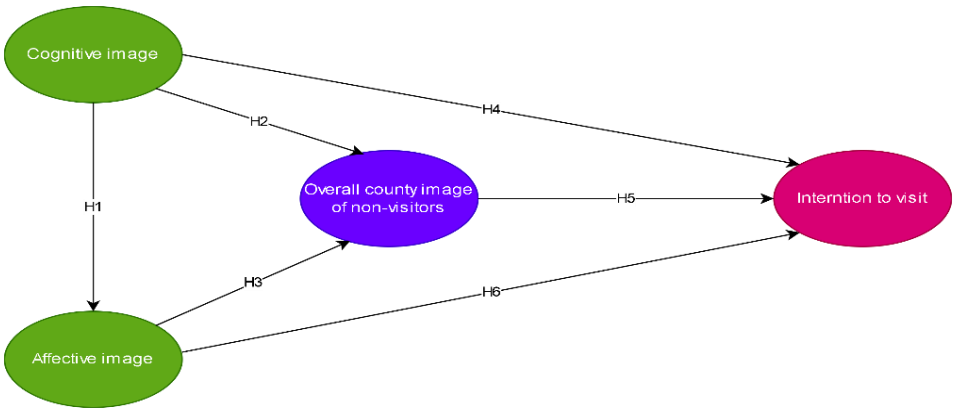

Figure 1. Model of the Study (Complied by the Author)

Methods of Research

Collection of Data and Sampling

We collected the data through an online survey technique by conducting convenience sampling method. The data were acquired from Amazon Mturk, an online research platform that has been extensively utilized in numerous research projects (Hahm & Tasci, 2019). On this platform, respondents were randomly selected. The ethics committee permission required for the collection of the data used in this study was obtained from Harran University Ethics Committee with the date 02/08/2022 and decision/number 150655. In the context of structural or measurement models, for optimal results, it is imperative to guarantee that the minimum number of samples is ten times greater than the maximum quantity of pathways (Chin, 2010; Hair et al., 2021). Even derived from the study of the research by Khan et al. (2017), an acceptable number of samples for this type of investigation is 302.

According to Reinartz, Haenlein, and Henseler (2009), a minimum number of samples of 100 has been considered sufficient for conducting PLS-SEM. In addition, Chin (2010) clarified the "ten times rule," which establishes the minimum sample size needed for a particular method. This article aims to choose a sample of tourists from the USA who have not yet visited. Because the citizens of this country that send a large number of tourists are also potential visitors. Their positive point of view towards the country will accelerate the flow of tourists from the USA. If the opposite situation occurs, in other words, if negative image elements are determined, necessary marketing activities will intensify and the direction of corrective image work will be determined.

Existing literature on tourists' impressions of destination image has predominantly employed quantitative methodologies, including structured and scaled responses, to gather participant data pertaining to present variables (Baloglu & Mccleary, 1999; Basaran, 2016). This study will be based on this model, which measures the perception of various destination characteristics (Figure 1).

In this study, several potential biases related to the data collection process could impact the results, including non-response bias and sampling bias. Since the data were collected through an online survey on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), there is a risk that certain demographic groups might be over- or under-represented. For instance, MTurk respondents may not fully reflect the diversity of the American population, as those who participate in online surveys are often younger, more tech-savvy, and may have different socio-economic characteristics compared to the

general population.

Non-response bias occurs when certain individuals in the target population do not respond to the survey, leading to an unrepresentative sample. In this case, no explicit information about the response rate is provided, which makes it difficult to assess the extent of non-response bias. To mitigate non-response bias, one approach could have been to send follow-up reminders or offer incentives to encourage higher participation rates from a broader demographic. Additionally, analyzing the demographics of respondents versus non-respondents could have helped identify any significant differences that may skew the results.

Sampling bias is another potential issue, as the study uses convenience sampling from MTurk, which may not perfectly represent all segments of American non-visitors to Türkiye. This bias may arise because MTurk users who opted into the survey might differ systematically from those who did not, such as in their travel preferences or familiarity with international destinations. To mitigate this bias, the study could have used stratified sampling to ensure that respondents represented key demographic categories like age, income, education, and travel frequency. Additionally, the questionnaire was pre-tested on a smaller sample of 40 participants to ensure the questions were understandable and relevant, helping to reduce response errors and improve data quality.

Finally, self-selection bias may also affect the study, as those more interested in Türkiye or international travel in general might be more likely to participate. While this type of bias is harder to control, the use of a large sample size (302 participants) helps increase the robustness of the findings. However, it would have been beneficial to explicitly address these biases and include strategies like weighting responses to better reflect the broader population. Overall, acknowledging and addressing these biases would strengthen the reliability and validity of the study's conclusions.

In this study, the data were collected through an online survey distributed via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), targeting American non-visitors to Türkiye. Since the primary language of the respondents was English, language barriers were not a significant issue, and therefore no translation of the survey questions was necessary. The survey was conducted entirely in English, as the participants were U.S. residents fluent in the language. This ensured that the questions were understandable and did not require any additional translation, minimizing potential language-related comprehension issues.

To further ensure that the questions were clear and easy to comprehend, a pre-test of the survey was conducted with a smaller sample of 40 participants from the U.S. This test run helped to assess the clarity and simplicity of the questions, confirming that participants could understand and respond accurately. Any issues related to wording or ambiguity were addressed before launching the full-scale survey, thereby reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation and ensuring that the data collected were reliable and relevant to the study’s objectives.

In addition, the survey used Likert scales, a widely recognized format that is easy for respondents to navigate. This format allows participants to rate their perceptions and intentions in a consistent, straightforward manner. These steps ensured that comprehension issues were mitigated, and respondents could provide accurate and meaningful data for analysis.

Survey Instrument

The data collection for this quantitative investigation involved the use of a questionnaire form. The primary concepts of the study were assessed using scales that were developed from prior studies carried out by Aminudin et

al. (2017), Basaran (2016), Bianchi & Milberg (2017), Phillips & Jang (2010), Stylos (2016), and Roypetch (2018). In June 2023, an experiment was conducted on the survey by a test run involving 40 participants in the USA. Both the scale validity and the apparent simplicity of its elements were verified. The participants accurately understood the questionnaire. The cognitive image aspects are assessed with a five-point Likert scale ranging from a (1- indicating very little) to (5- indicating very much). Furthermore, the affective image was evaluated using a Likert-type scale that ranged from (1- representing highly negative image) to (5- representing highly positive image). There are four dimensions in the research paradigm: cognitive, emotive, overall imagery, and visit intention. Furthermore, cognitive image encompasses six distinct dimensions (Table 2). These dimensions were determined through the implementation of PLS-SEM analysis. Furthermore, visit intention consists of two components, one of which pertains to the general perception of the country, while affective image encompasses seventeen bipolar items. Finally, under the conative component, there are statements that measure participants' willingness to visit. There are 3 expressions in these component dimensions, and expressions were obtained by adapting from the literature. From the table below, it can be easily observed from which studies in the literature the scale was obtained, with citations. In addition, the entire questionnaire and other topics that you want to specify have been added to the section.

The questionnaire comprises two distinct sections. The initial component pertains to the scale of the image. The concept of image scale comprises three primary components. The following section includes questions to ascertain the socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants, such as, age, gender, education level, marital status, income level, occupation, and travel frequency. This technique aligns with multiple comparable studies (Perpiña et al., 2021).

Analysis Method

PLS-SEM, a variance-based method that allows for path evaluation was conducted. This method acts as an alternative to the frequent use of covariance-based structural equation modelling. PLS-SEM distinguishes itself from prior models by not depending on any assumptions about the normality of the sample distribution. Additionally, PLS-SEM remains valid for a wide range of sample sizes. (Hair Jr. et al., 2022; Doan et al., 2021). According to a study by Do Valle & Assaker (2016), It is utilized less in tourism studies compared to CB-SEM. However, applying (PLS-SEM) aligns with the goals of exploratory research and meets the necessary criteria for sample size. PLS analysis was performed using SmartPLS v. 4.0.9.5 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2023). A bootstrapping method using 10000 resampling was used, and the model was estimated using Mode A, which is the reflecting mode (do Valle & Assaker, 2016).

Findings

Sample Characteristics

The demographic features of the participants and provides descriptive data were illustrated in Table 1. There were a total of 302 participants. The number of participants represented a diverse range of demographic characteristics, providing a comprehensive understanding of the participant population.

The study briefly mentions the demographic characteristics of the participants, but more emphasis could be placed on how the demographic distribution of the sample was investigated and how it impacts the study. Understanding the demographic profile of the sample is critical because different demographic groups (age, gender, education, income, marital status, etc.) may perceive Türkiye differently and have varying travel intentions. This information is essential

for assessing whether the sample accurately reflects the broader population of American non-visitors and how generalizable the results are.

The sample consists of 302 respondents from the U.S., with a balanced gender distribution (45% male, 55% female). The majority of participants fell within the 25-44 age group (45.7%), followed by those aged 45-64 (34.1%), indicating that the sample skewed slightly toward middle-aged adults, who are often in their peak travel years. In terms of education, nearly half of the participants (49.7%) had a university degree, with an additional 24.8% holding a master's or Ph.D. This suggests that the sample was relatively well-educated, which could influence perceptions of Türkiye, as higher levels of education are often associated with a greater openness to international travel.

Income distribution also shows a fairly diverse range, with 26.2% earning over $70,000 annually and 31.6% earning between $20,001 and $50,000. This suggests a mix of middle- and upper-income individuals, which is relevant since income can influence the ability to travel internationally. The study also captures marital status and travel frequency, with 53.3% of participants being married or living with a partner, and 53.6% having traveled at least once in the past year.

The demographic profile likely impacts the study in several ways. For instance, age and income could influence how participants perceive the cost and value of traveling to Türkiye. Older participants might be more concerned with safety or comfort, while younger participants might be more interested in adventure or cultural experiences. Similarly, individuals with higher incomes might have more positive views of Türkiye's tourism offerings, particularly in terms of accessibility, luxury, and accommodation quality.

The relatively high level of education in the sample could also skew results, as more educated individuals may have more nuanced or informed opinions about international destinations, including Türkiye. They might be more aware of global events, cultural attractions, or geopolitical issues, which could affect their cognitive and emotional perceptions of the country.

The study could improve by further discussing these demographic factors and conducting additional analysis to see how different subgroups within the sample (e.g., age, income, education levels) vary in their perceptions and visit intentions. This would provide a more granular understanding of the findings and help tourism managers tailor marketing strategies to specific segments of the American population.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Gender	**Count**	**%**
Male	136	45.0
Female	166	55.0
Age		
18-24	32	10.6
25-44	138	45.7
45-64	103	34.1
65+	29	9.6
Education		
High school	77	25.5
University	150	49.7
Master/Ph.D.	75	24.8

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (cont.)

Marital Status		
Single	111	36.8
Married/ Live in partner	161	53.3
Divorced/ separated/ windowed	30	9.9
Income		
Less than $20,000	64	21.3
$20,001- $50,000	95	31.6
$50,001- $70,000	63	20.9
$70,000 +	79	26.2
Occupation		
Student	42	13.9
Freelance	58	19.2
Retired	31	10.3
Unemployment	18	6.0
Enterprise staff	56	18.5
Government/ public institution staff	38	12.6
Others	59	19.5
Travel frequency		
Once	162	53.6
Twice	88	29.1
Three times	28	9.3
Four times and over	24	7.9
Sources of information about Türkiye		
Friends and/or family had visited Türkiye	66	22.0
Social media	69	23.0
Mass Media	84	28.0
Online reviews/blogs	81	27.0
Which country do you stay?		
America	302	80.5

Evaluation of The Outer Model

We used criteria like Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance explained (AVE) to assess the psychometric qualities of the measures. Nunnally & Bernstein (1994) assert that it is imperative for the standard loadings of all items to exceed a threshold of 0.7. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017) recommend excluding loading values of 0.6 or greater unless they negatively affect other psychometric parameters. Table 2 demonstrates that all Cronbach and CR values surpass the minimum threshold of 0.7, hence showing the internal consistency of the items and constructions. Moreover, based on the criteria established by Fornell & Larcker (1981), the average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs is equal to or greater than 0.5. Consequently, we selected those items exhibiting loadings equal to or exceeding 0.6 for subsequent study.

Table 2. The results of the measurement model.

Construct and indicator	**Loadings**	**P**
Natural attractions		
(α = 0.88, rho_A = 0.88, CR = 0.92, AVE = 0.74)		
The mountains, forests, and valleys offer a captivating and pristine landscape.	0.88	0.00
Gorgeous lakes and rivers	0.90	0.00
Awe-inspiring caves and subterranean structures		
There exist a diverse array of wildlife and flora		
Spectacular caves and underground formations	0.81	0.00

Table 2. The results of the measurement model (cont.)

Cultural attractions		
(α = 0.88, rho A = 0.88, CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.67)		
The presence of a unique historical and cultural heritage.	0.85	0.00
Unique attributes of architecture and structures.	0.86	0.00
Fascinating historical landmarks and museums.	0.86	0.00
Attractive regional gastronomy and diverse assortment of dishes.	0.74	0.00
A diverse range of products that foster and support local culture.	0.78	0.00
Social setting and environment		
(α = 0.79, rho_A = 0.79, CR = 0.90, AVE = 0.82)		
Favorable climate		
Serene and tranquil ambiance	0.91	0.00
Infrastructure and facilities		
(α = 0.90, rho_A = 0.90, CR = 0.92, AVE = 0.68)		
Infrastructure quality (including roads, water supply, electricity, gas, sewer, and landscaping)	0.81	0.00
The provision of high-quality and diverse accommodations	0.88	0.00
A diverse range of shopping amenities	0.85	0.00
The worth and diversity of dining establishments	0.86	0.00
Excellent nocturnal activities and amusement	0.80	0.00
The region offers a wide range of sports and outdoor activities, including but not limited to climbing, trekking, water sports, adventure sports, picnics, camping, hunting, and fishing.	0.72	0.00
Accessibility		
(α = 0.82, rho_A = 0.82, CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.84)		
Convenient accessibility to the entire country		
Sufficient and easily accessible regional transit	0.91	0.00
Price and value		
(α = 0.91, rho_A = 0.91, CR = 0.94, AVE = 0.85)		
The value for money is excellent	0.90	0.00
The cost of entertainment, attractions, and activities is deemed to be reasonable	0.94	0.00
Competitive pricing for alternative purchasing options, such as locally sourced products and flavors	0.92	0.00
Visit intention		
(α = 0.87, rho_A = 0.87, CR = 0.94, AVE = 0.89)		
I am quite probable to travel to Türkiye.	0.94	0.00
I am interested in visiting Türkiye in the future	0.94	0.00
Overall		
What is your overall perception of Türkiye as a tourism destination?	-	-
Affective image		
(α = 0.95, rho_A = 0.95, CR = 0.95, AVE = 0.56)		
unpleasant–pleasant	0.77	0.00
gloomy- exciting	0.79	0.00
sleepy- arousing	0.72	0.00
negative- positive	0.82	0.00
distressing- relaxing	0.77	0.00
unattractive- attractive	0.78	0.00
unsafe – safe	0.72	0.00
poor-excellent	0.81	0.00
common- distinctive	0.68	0.00
ordinary-novel	0.72	0.00
predictable-surprising	0.71	0.00
routine-fresh	0.76	0.00
unapparent- apparent	0.75	0.00
indistinct- distinct	0.65	0.00
unobvious- obvious	0.56	0.00
unclear- clear	0.72	0.00
unsatisfactory-satisfactory	0.86	0.00
Cognitive image		
(α = 0.95, rho_A = 0.95, CR = 0.95, AVE = 0.51)		
Accessibility	0.80	0.00
Cultural attractions	0.79	0.00
Infrastructure and facilities	0.90	0.00
Natural attractions	0.84	0.00
Price and value	0.75	0.00
Social setting and environment	0.82	0.00

All AVEs were equal to or greater than 0.5, achieving convergent validity. Fornell and Larcker's (1981) method was used in the study. The square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was found to be

higher than the correlations between that construct and all the other constructs shown in Table 3. Consequently, the study established the presence of discriminant validity. The study also used the Hetero-Trait-Monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio to make sure the results were correct. This is a more reliable method than Fornell & Larcker's approach (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Construct measurements may lack discriminant validity. Nevertheless, the data shown in Table 3 indicates that all ratios fall below the prescribed threshold of 0.9, suggesting that the construct measures possess sufficient discriminant validity.

Table 3. Discriminant validity using HTMT method.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Accessibility	**0.92**									
2	Affective image	0.57[0.64]	**0.74**								
3	Cognitive image	0.805[0.89]	0.73 [0.76]	**0.71**							
4	Cultural attractions	0.47 [0.54]	0.56[0.62]	0.79 [0.88]	**0.82**						
5	Infrastructure and facilities	0.73 [0.85]	0.65 [0.69]	0.90 [0.97]	0.62 [0.69]	**0.82**					
6	Natural attractions	0.61 [0.72]	0.64 [0.69]	0.84 [0.91]	0.65 [0.73]	0.67 [0.74]	**0.86**				
7	Overall	0.467[0.516]	0.54 [0.55]	0.51[0.52]	0.34 [0.36]	0.44 [0.46]	0.44 [0.46]	**1.00**			
8	Price and value	0.588[0.67]	0.52 [0.56]	0.75 [0.80]	0.55 [0.61]	0.57 [0.63]	0.51 [0.57]	0.45 [0.47]	**0.92**		
9	Social settings and environment	0.71 [0.89]	0.67 [0.77]	0.82 [0.93]	0.50 [0.59]	0.75 [0.89]	0.65 [0.77]	0.47 [0.53]	0.55 [0.65]	**0.90**	
10	Visit intention	0.51 [0.60]	0.57 [0.61]	0.54[0.582]	0.31 [0.35]	0.50 [0.56]	0.43 [0.49]	0.57[0.61]	0.42 [0.47]	0.52 [0.63]	**0.94**

Bold figures show the square root of AVE, HTMT ratios are shown in brackets.

Evaluation of The Inner Model

The bootstrapped R2 values indicate that cognitive image, affective image, and overall account for 44.4% of the variability in visit intention. The combined explanatory power of cognitive image and affective image accounts for 32.6% of the overall variation, whereas cognitive image and affective image collectively explain 53.8% of the variation. The bootstrapped path coefficients shown in Table 4 show that there is a statistically significant and positive link between the affective image and overall and the cognitive image and overall ($\beta = 0.354$, $p<0.001$; $\beta = 0.258$, $p<0.001$, respectively). These findings provide support for hypotheses H1 and H3. There were strong and positive links between visit intention and both affective image ($\beta = 0.262$, $p<0.001$) and cognitive image ($\beta = 0.168$, $p<0.001$), which supports H2 and H4. statistically significant association between visit intention and overall satisfaction, providing support for hypothesis H5 ($\beta = 0.350$, $p<0.001$). Hair Jr. et al. (2022) found support for all hypotheses, but the effect sizes of H1, H2, H3, and H4 showed weak f2 effect sizes, ranging from 0.02 to 0.15. However, they judged the impact size for H5 to be moderate.

Table 4. Path coefficients and size effects

Hyp.	Relationships	Path Coefficients	Std. Error	t-value	BCa Confidence Intervals	Decision	Effect Size (f2)
H_1	CI-> AI	0.73	0.03	19.14	[0.64, 0.79]	S	1.16
H_2	CI-> OI	0.25	0.08	2.90	[0.08, 0.42]	S	0.04
H_3	AI-> OI	0.35	0.08	4.15	[0.18, 0.51]	S	0.08
H_4	CI-> VI	0.16	0.07	2.39	[0.02, 0.30]	S	0.02
H_5	OI-> VI	0.35	0.05	6.28	[0.23, 0.45]	S	0.14
H_6	AI-> VI	0.26	0.07	3.55	[0.12, 0.40]	S	0.05

CI: Cognitive image, **AI:** Affective image, **OI:** Overall image, **VI:** Visit intention; **S:** Supported

To ascertain the mediation effects, we analyzed the indirect effects presented in Table 5. We used the bootstrap method to estimate the significance of the total indirect effects. The results showed that overall and affective image latent variables exhibited mediation effects ($p<0.01$).

Table 5. All indirect effects

Indirect effects	Std. Path coeff. (β)	Std. Error	t	BCa Confidence intervals	P	Hypothesis
AI -> OI -> VI	0.12	0.03	3.26	[0.06, 0.21]	0.00	S
CI -> OI-> VI	0.09	0.03	2.71	[0.03, 0.16]	0.00	S
CI -> AI -> OI	0.26	0.06	4.05	[0.13, 0.38]	0.00	S
CI -> AI -> VI	0.19	0.05	3.41	[0.08, 0.30]	0.00	S
CI -> AI -> OI	0.09	0.02	3.23	[0.04, 0.15]	0.00	S

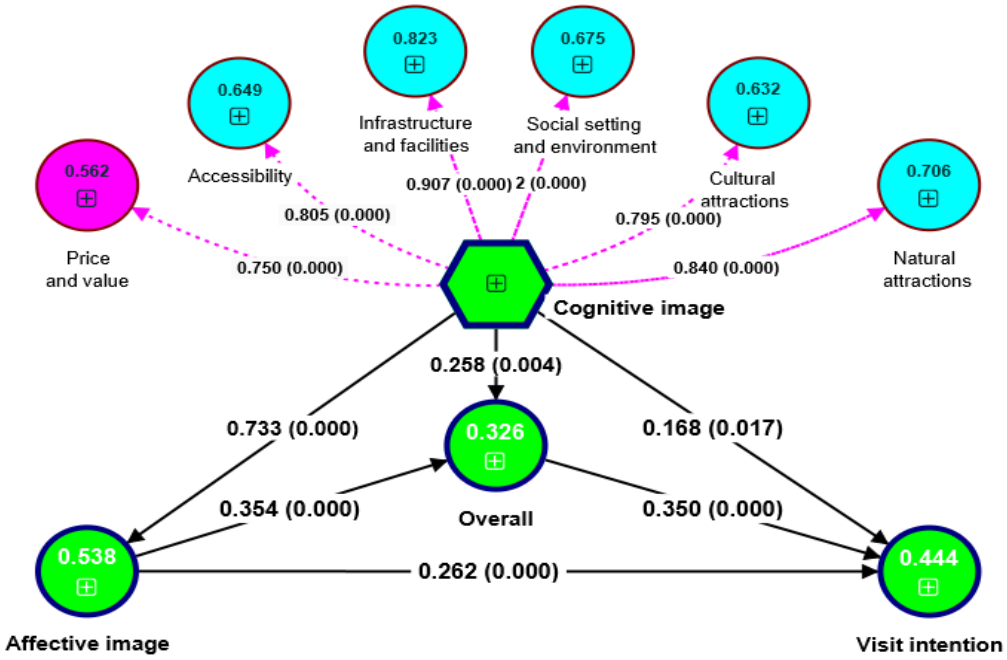

Figure 2. The PLS-SEM Model The values in the circle indicate the R2 value.

Discussion and Implications

The research findings correspond with those of previous similar researches (Agapito et al., 2013; Lam et al., 2022; Li et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2007; Stylidis, 2022; Stylidis et al., 2017) so that a link is established between the cognitive and emotional elements. To put it differently, the cognitive part has a positive impact on the emotional one. Additionally, Agapito et al. (2013) confirmed that these three components of images have significant relationships with each other. The cognitive one greatly affects the emotional destination perception. Chen et al. (2016) found a

similar pattern of results. It was disclosed that the DI consists of three interwoven constructs: cognitive images (knowledge potential tourists have about a location), affective images (emotions potential tourists have towards the place), and travel intention (Chen et al., 2016). Researches have confirmed that cognitive and affective components are key factors influencing the intention to travel according to the attitude theory (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Pike & Ryan, 2004).

The current study's findings add to the literature by demonstrating a positive correlation between cognitive, affective, and overall image (Baloglu et al., 2014). The study confirms previous research that cognitive and affective assessments directly influence the general image. It confirms the results of previous research on cognitive and emotional components having a influence on the general image directly (Beerli & Martín, 2004). Furthermore, Liang & Lai (2023) state that a secondary image serves as a reminder to those who have not visited the areas, motivating them to visit. Tan & Wu (2016) also discovered that affective and cognitive images positively influence the visit intention. Similar to the Ahmad et al. (2021) study, our research also demonstrates an empirical connection between the destination image and the visit intention. Image significantly influences the intention of non-visitors to visit. Similarly, Phillips & Jang (2007) discovered the cognitive and emotive aspects exert a substantial impact on the visit intention. aligns with previous findings in the image literature (e.g., Chaulagain et al., 2021), the present study validates link between country image and intention to visit. Yarcan & Inelmen (2006) found a similar pattern of results. The conclusion that emerges from this study is similar to that in Zhang et al. (2016), micro DCI influences potential tourists' visit intention directly.

Previous researches have extensively studied the notion of image in various fields, including product image, city image, and DCI (Aydin et al., 2021; Bexzod, 2022; Hahm & Tasci, 2019; Lala et al., 2009; Lascu et al., 2020; Martinez & Alvarez, 2010; Ragab et al., 2020). Numerous studies acknowledge a country as a destination and aim to assess the perception of its qualities by both visitors and non-visitors (Davari & Jang, 2021; Proyrungroj, 2021). The main catalyst for the substantial amount of research on this subject is the recognition that the perceived image affects the future of tourists' behavior. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to determine how American international travelers perceive Türkiye as a destination country. Since the United States is the world's top tourist destination, understanding how perceived image affects future behavior is essential.

Theoretical Implications

The present study's findings extend the current literature by demonstrating that the cognitive and emotional elements of CI affect the general image of that country in positive ways. In turn, the overall country image influences the non-visitor's willingness to visit. Furthermore, the research confirms that each component of the image individually influences the visit intention positively. To put it differently, the cognitive image positively influences the visit intention of non-visitors. The same is true for the emotional image component, where non-visitors' perceptions of the country's emotional image positively and significantly influence their intention to visit. Theoretically, it is possible to measure a non-visitor's image of a country in terms of its attributes. As a result, we are able to validate the attribute scale by determining the destination image in a country context, like other researchers (Zhang et al., 2016).To put it another way, using an attribute based country-destination image scale is an effective way to understand non-visitors cognitive, affective, and overall images and their impact on their intention to visit.

Managerial Implications

The managers in the realm of tourism and hospitality have to understand the CI. The image of a destination country can greatly affect tourist's decision-making process.

Managers should try to establish image advertising campaigns highlighting destination-specific characteristics and experiences. The narratives that they use should fit in with the country's cultural, historical, and ecological attractions.

Correctly positioning the destination-country so that it is distinct from its competitors is another key factor. For example, putting emphasis on eco-tourism, deluxe holidays, adventure tourism, or cultural heritage can attract different market segments.

Cooperation among the various parts of government, local businesses, and tourism boards can improve the overall DI. Joint efforts in infrastructure development, provision for recycling facilities on site for visitors, and hosting international sports events will raise the country's image.

Involving local communities in tourist activities guarantees a genuine experience for visitors while preserving their cultural heritage. Simultaneously, it helps maintain a positive image chiefly through word-of-mouth propaganda and more recent forms of communication like social media.

Communication transparently and punctually in a time of crisis (e.g. political instability, natural disaster) are two of the keys to maintaining trust and curbing negative perceptions. Managers should have plans for communications in a crisis that take into account possible damage to image.

Post-crisis recovery strategies need to concentrate on renovating the country's image through media propping up good news and highlighting successful projects. At the same time, they must give the potential tourist reassurances about security that he can understand with a bit of common sense.

Managers should introduce some of these, such as public conservation work, accommodation all made from local sustainable materials, and tourists who are responsible. Ensuring that tourism activities do not erode the social fabric of the destination is paramount. Promotion efforts to preserve cultural heritage should have a positive effect on the DI.

Utilizing digital channels for marketing purposes can greatly increase the exposure and appeal of a destination. Social media, virtual reality tours, and co-authoring partnerships with influential microblogs can tell compelling stories that reach out to a global audience. Big data and analytics are great tools for understanding tourist behavior, preferences, and satisfaction. Doing so will help businesses refine their marketing strategy and improve the overall tourist experience.

Providing personalized experiences based on tourists 'preferences helps to boost satisfaction and encourage repeat visits. Managers need to be aware of the fact that guests have different needs, and they should adjust programs accordingly. To make sure that in every one of its touchpoints of customer service, a destination upholds high standards of quality continuous training for staff, frequently collected feedback may be essential, and atonements with quality benchmarks will help staff to maintain its image. The image a destination country projects to the world is key in determining that country's attractiveness and threat position within the global tourist market. Managers must adopt a multi-pronged approach, including strategic marketing, stakeholder collaboration, crisis management,

sustainability practices, technological innovation, the development of rewarding experiences in order to effectively manage and create their destination's image. By adopting this approach, they can effectively facilitate the steady increase in both the quantity, and quality of tourists, making a valuable contribution to the economic advancement, and societal welfare of a particular location.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Prospects for Further Study

Heeley (2016) suggests that it would be misleading to put all the city's features on the market at once, instead of focusing on finding a unique, different, and single feature. Heeley (2016) asserted that merely placing the city's features on the market would suffice for image creation. Therefore, Heeley emphasizes that the studies are mostly repetitive. In this case, the question arises in which aspects Türkiye can differ positively from its other competitors. For instance, is it possible to distinguish differences in the cultural branches that span a year in the context of archaeological? By the end of this study, the impressions of visitors and the perceptions of non-visitors will reveal the areas where the country can differentiate itself? where the country can differ. People consider sea-sand-sun tourism activities insufficient.

Countries frequently employ a Likert-type scale to assess and appraise their perceptions. Sönmez & Sirakaya (2002) generally measure the characteristics of the analyzed destination. Thus, each attribute's scores are the basis for the analysis. However, this method has certain shortcomings. For example, sometimes participants have to express their opinions about certain qualities that are not part of their perceived image of a country. However, scales containing different dimensions stand out in the literature.

Inevitably, Türkiye's destination-country image may differ depending on the sampled respondents' countries. This study selected the USA, the world's top outbound tourist destination. Türkiye has the potential to increase its market share in this sector. Hence, we expect that the results of the study will offer valuable direction to both policymakers in the central government's tourist sector and scholars.

However, we must acknowledge the aforementioned differentiation as a limitation of this study. It is possible to come across different findings by sampling from different countries (e.g., Europe, the Far East, or the Middle East). In addition, the image perceived by those who have visited a country and those who have not is not the same. Future studies can obtain important findings by comparing both samples under a single construct.

Future research will focus on analyzing the data acquired, which indicates that the construction of destination images varies among different categories of individuals who have not visited the location. The study identified various categories of non-visitors, including potential visitors (individuals who express a want to visit), pre-visitors (individuals who have plans to visit in the near future), non-visitors without an inclination to visit, and non-visitors who are unable to come to the destination. These categories have an impact on the processes that create images. The degree of interest in a specific place directly influences the way potential visitors and pre-visitors view and form an image of that place (Cherifi et al., 2014).

Declaration

The ethics committee permission required for the collection of the data used in this study was obtained from Harran University Ethics Committee with the date 02/08/2022 and decision/number 150655.

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Appendix 1. Ethics Committee Permission

Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 03.08.2022-150655

T.C.
HARRAN ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL VE BEŞERİ BİLİMLER ETİK KURULU

Tarih: 02.08.2022
Saat: 13:30
Sayı: 2022/118
Konu: Ali Rıza MANCI

Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Etik Kurulu'nun yaptığı toplantı sonucunda Harran Üniversitesi **Turizm ve Otel İşletmeciliği Yüksel Okulu Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ali Rıza MANCI**'nın yürütücü olduğu, **"Ziyaretçilerin ve Ziyaretçi Olmayanların Bakış Açısıyla Türkiye İmajı"** konulu bireysel çalışması, oy birliğiyle uygun bulunmuş ve 02.08.2022 tarihinden geçerli olmak üzere onaylanmıştır.

e-imzalıdır
Doç. Dr. Ahmet İLYAS
Başkan

e-imzalıdır
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Emine YÖNEY
Başkan Yardımcısı

e-imzalıdır
Prof. Dr. Ayşe Dilek ATASOY
(izinli)

e-imzalıdır
Doç. Dr. Dursun ÇADIRCI

e-imzalıdır
Doç. Dr. Ömer SABUNCU

e-imzalıdır
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Derya EVRAN
(izinli)

e-imzalıdır
Doç. Dr. Yasin TAŞ

Bu belge,güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.