# Destination Image(s) as a Dynamic Construct: Exploring Perceived Images of Turkey

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## Abstract

*This thesis inquires destination image (DI) as a holistic construct. Unlike the orthodoxy in tourism research, DI is approached from a wider social science perspective. A critical literature review is conducted to critically discuss seminal image formation models. Considering the sociocultural forces and recent technological changes, and changes in tourism information sources a dynamic framework is presented to elaborate on DI construction.*

*Considering DI as a concept in constant flow and evolution, qualitative interviews is conducted to better understand social constructions of images. To explore influences of sociocultural factors and online information search on Turkey's perceived images, 32 UK based informants from different backgrounds participated in this research. Participants were chosen through 'judgmental sampling'. To explore most salient impressions, interviews were designed as three interrelated parts; which are Repertory Grid Analysis, Scenario Analysis, and Online Information Search. The rich data gathered through this flexible design was analysed through Thematic Analysis. While perceived images are explored, dramatic influences of socio-cultural forces are highlighted. Perceived culture in a destination and cultural background of participants are highlighted as highly influential forces in DI formation. Online Information Search is designed to shed a light onto dynamic nature of DI. A critical examination reveals that images hold by individuals who have no prior experience of Turkey tend to be dramatically influenced by online information search.*

# Acknowledgement

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

*Presenter: "Do you think that [X city] has an image problem?"*

*Mayor: "I don't believe we have an image problem. We are like every other city that's growing across this country where we begin to have social media magnify the challenges we've had."*

This is a short episode from a TV interview on which a city mayor who was asked whether his city had an image problem by a TV presenter after various news in the city about the drug use and attacks by homeless people around the shopping malls (Haarer, 2016). This small episode highlights the two most important phenomena in this thesis. This current research is a small step to explore how images are constructed and what kind of roles are played by various forces in this formation process.

Similar to the TV presenter above, there are many people who associate various problems in a destination with a negative image. Rather than trying to understand causes of a serious problem in a town, city, region, or country, when someone refers to 'image problem' this implies that perceived images are not representing the reality in that place, and the reality is much better indeed. This might be the case or not, but the truth is that we have an 'image problem' in academia. Even a brief review of literature might reveal that there are countless combinations of the word 'image' with many other constructs. Do we refer the same construct when we say product image or destination image? What about country images? Literature might show that there might be still some confusion about these terms, but common understanding is that 'image does matter'. Even though, trying to label each and every problem in destinations as an 'image problem' may not be the ideal way of facing the challenges in a place, especially when the intangible characteristic of the tourism product is considered (Woodside, 2011), having a desired destination image seems to be crucial for tourism destinations (Chon, 1993; Mussalam and Tajeddini, 2016). Therefore, the main aim of this research is to understand how destination images are constructed, and how these construction processes are influenced by various factors. Considering

the tremendous increase in Internet, influences of online information search on image formation will be also explored along with other information sources.

Before discussing the importance of DI for destinations, tourism itself could benefit from a critical overview of itself as an industry with tremendous changes (Murphy, 1983) as a social force which touches the every bit of our lives (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006) or as a peacemaker, which endeavours to create a more harmonious world (Moufakkir, 2010). Besides, as a field of academic inquiry, its multi-disciplinary nature (Tribe, 1997) can be highlighted. Therefore, this chapter will start with a brief discussion of tourism as a business activity and a field of academic research. Then as an extensively studied construct (Pike, 2002) destination image (DI) and its relevance in tourism will be highlighted. After that, as the chosen tourism destination in this thesis, background information about Turkey, as a county and tourism destination will be offered. Finally, a broader overview of the whole thesis will be presented in this chapter.

## 1.2    Relevance of Tourism

Thanks to the steady growth and increasing diversification, tourism could be considered as one of the sectors that show tremendous level of expansion. Transaction volume in tourism is comparable to oil exports, food production and automobiles and even in some cases it surpass these sectors. This trend continued in 2015 and international tourist arrivals peaked at 1186 million and generated US$ 1260 billion revenues (World Tourism Organization, 2016).  While only 25 million people took an international trip in 1950, it is estimated that in 2050 this figure will reach to 4.7 billion (Yeoman, 2012).

Even though economic benefits of tourism are praised, relevance of tourism is not depend on only the generated revenues, it is relevant because it gives us power to facilitate relationships in everyday life and it offers a lens to look upon it. In this world of complex relationships among individuals, our lives with others matters, tourism therefore does matter (Jack, 2005). Tourism has been defined in various ways such as economic, technical or holistic definitions (Leiper, 1979b). For example, Smith defines tourism as (1988: 183) "the aggregate of all businesses that directly provide goods or services to facilitate business, pleasure, and leisure activities away from the home environment." As seen, he approaches tourism from an economic

angle and defines it as the "aggregate of all business". After defining visitors as the individuals who take a trip from their usual environment to another place for a duration of less than a year and for any purpose except employment, World Tourism Organization states that "[t]ourism refers to the activity of visitors" (2010:10). While this could be considered as a rather technical definition, in another publication by the same organization tourism is considered as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon. Besides, it is understood as the movement of people from their usual environments to other places for personal or business purposes (World Tourism Organization, 2014). Even though this could be considered as a holistic definition, there are some ambiguities such as the ambiguity in 'personal and business purposes'. Similarly, the definition below could be considered as a holistic definition:

> *'modern' tourism, entailing the commercial organisation of journeys in search of health, pleasure and difference that depend on access to disposable time and income on the part of the participants and make a significant economic and environmental impact on routes and destinations, generating employment and changing social arrangements in the process(Walton, 2009: 786).*

These latter definitions shed a light on the complexity of tourism (Pike, 2005). Walton's definition touches upon the social aspects of tourism. It highlights not only the economic significance of tourism but also its side effects to the environment. While stressing the employment generation through tourism, it emphasizes the changing social arrangements, too. Another important aspect of this definition is that it highlights the disposable income and time as the prerequisites for tourism journeys.

It may not be possible to agree on a single definition of tourism phenomenon. Since it has multi facets (Leiper, 1979b), its definition might vary according to which angle you approach it. However either as one of the biggest sectors in the world economy (World Tourism Organization, 2016) or a social force (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006) tourism's relevance as a field of academic research is undeniable. While conceptualizing tourism as an experience industry, Singh (2012: 1) states "[t]ourism is a many splendoured phenomenon. If I were to name, in one word, what the best and worst thing in the world is, my unequivocal answer would be tourism.

With its tremendous growth (World Tourism Organization, 2013) tourism has become a phenomenon that touches upon many aspects of our lives either as a constructive and destructive force. Therefore, this thesis will be exploring one of the most debated constructs in tourism, which is DI.

### 1.3    Importance of Destination Image (DI)

As a result of phenomenological growth in tourism industry, countless new destinations emerged to compete and get a share from global tourism market (Shani and Wang, 2011). Even though international tourism revenues have been constantly increasing (Seddighi and Theocharous, 2002; World Tourism Organization, 2016), each emerging destination increases the already fierce competition between tourism destinations. Because of the inseparability of purchase and consumption of a tourism experience, individuals may not try destinations before they actually visit them. This means that most of the time they have limited knowledge about destinations (Walls and Wang, 2011). Consequently, they might rely on subjective images they hold about these destinations (Dann, 1996; Um and Crompton, 1990). Hence, DI might significantly influence their purchase decisions (Baloglu, 2000; Um and Crompton, 1990). Considering the potential effects of DI on destination choice it has become one of the most studied constructs in tourism research (Pike, 2002).

As stated above, there is a rapid growth in tourism industry and as a result of this tremendous growth, potential travellers have so many alternatives to make a choice and spend their disposable incomes and precious times in one of them in a given period of time. In this complex situation, DI helps them to make a decision among various destinations on which they mostly have limited information. That is why DI has been considered as a very important concept in destination marketing (Shani and Wang, 2011). Some authors refer destination image as a 'stable' in destination studies (Suh and Gartner, 2004).

In his pioneering work about the importance of DI in tourism development, Hunt (1975) highlights how important a desired image for a particular place to become a viable tourism destination in the long term. He insists that having valuable resources is not enough to become a successful destination unless the area has a positive image:

> *The perceptions held by potential visitors about an area may have significant influences upon the viability of that area as a tourist-recreation*

*region. What these potential customers think about the natural environment, climate, and people of a region may shape perceptions or images which detract from or contribute to successful development. Although a region may contain a wide spectrum and high quality of tourist-recreation resources, a distorted image may detract from realizing potential use or optimum economic development (1975: 1).*

As seen above, while Hunt highlights the importance of image for tourism development in early 1970s, its significance has not diminished. On the contrary "[g]enerating and maintaining an appealing DI [has become] more important than ever" (Shani and Wang, 2011: 143) for destinations to pull potential tourists to themselves. As stated above, DI has a significant influence on destination choices (Lee and Bai, 2016; Pearce, 1982; Tasci and Gartner, 2007; Zhang *et al*, 2014), and it is crucial for destinations to have an appealing DI. However, despite the fact that there are vast amount of studies on DI, majority of them focusing on the relationships between DI and other constructs such as intention to visit(e.g Lee and Bai, 2016) destination choice(Um and Crompton, 1990), satisfaction and loyalty (Lee, 2009; Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Sun, Geng-Qing Chi and Xu, 2013), but the studies which seek to understand how actually DI is formed are rare(Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004). Even though there are few studies (e.g. Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Gartner, 1994; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; 1993) which contributed to our understanding of DI formation, rapid changes in information technologies and emergence of new media channels necessitate further studies which seek to understand DI formation holistically. In addition to changes in information sources, understanding of tourism has been also slowly evolved into a more holistic manner. Even though DI was studied through structured research methods in 1980s and early 1990s, after the new millennium researches have started to shed lights on the socio-cultural aspects of DI. These opened doors for further exploration of image formation. For example, in an unstructured study it is explored that state policies of USA are the main factors behind the negative images held by Americans toward Cuba (Canally, 2010). Influences of politics and political tensions between different nations on DI are also acknowledged recently (Chen *et al*, 2016).

To contribute to understanding of DI formation, in this study DI is considered as a holistic construct. As seen in the examples above, socio-cultural forces seem to play

significant roles in image formation; therefore, with a flexible design this study will explore possible influences of broader socio-cultural forces in DI formation. Besides, it will investigate influences of online information search on image formation along with other information sources.

## 1.4    Turkey as a Tourism Destination

Turkey is one of the 10 most visited countries in the world. While Turkey received less than US\$ 2 billion revenues from tourism in the early 1980s (Akkemik, 2012), it received more than US\$ 34 billion in 2014 and more than US\$ 32 billion in 2015(Turkish Statistical Institute, 2016).

Image is a phenomenon for Turkey. It is not uncommon to read a newspaper or view a TV program that refers to 'image problem' of Turkey. It has been noted that Turkey is a county that still tries to find its 'true identity'. Since its foundation, indigenous ruling elites have attempted to build a nation, which embrace 'Western values' (Gole, 2011; Mardin, 2011). Therefore, perceptions of Europeans have always been considered important in Turkey. It is mostly believed that Turkey has a distorted tourism image (Sönmez and Sirakaya, 2002), or a country image (Mutlu, 2005). Therefore, there are a number of studies on Turkey's destination images. Turkey is presented as a European destination, it also designates the subjectively self-assigned boundaries for European culture (Bryce, 2012), and for some Europeans, Turkey has remained as a country that is not European, but alien and an interloper (Robins, 1996).

Either because of their internal dynamics or/and external changes happening around them, destinations face constant changes over time. Destinations or the societies are not passive in these tremendous change processes. They engage with rest of the world to negotiate their roles in the complex stage of tourism relationships. Even though they may not have enough power to be in the places they want to be, they keep negotiating their place in this complex environment (Shaw, 2004). Therefore, Turkey as a destination has been trying to achieve more desired images to strengthen and expand its place in the world tourism.

## 1.5   Thesis Overview

In this thesis, I endeavour to explore DI formation in a broader context. To better understand current state of tourism research on DI, Chapter 2 will be highlighting previous researches on tourism destinations and images. To observe progress in image studies, conceptualization of 'image' in general marketing literature will be examined, and similarities between brand image and DI constructs will be highlighted. To shed a light on the different understandings of destinations, four different approaches to destinations will be discussed. After discussing the roles and structures of Destination Marketing Organizations, the first literature chapter will be concluded with a summary.

Chapter 3 will be the part where seminal DI formations will be critically discussed. After discussing the three well known models (Namely: Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; 1993; Gartner, 1994) some other relatively new models(e.g. Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002; Lai and Li, 2012; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007) will be also highlighted. While acknowledging contributions of all these previous models, the chapter will present a model that considers nuanced understanding of DI and changes in information technologies.

To highlight the tremendous changes in information sources and the possible effects of these changes in DI formation Chapter 4 will be covering phenomenal growth in Internet and social media usage. This chapter will offer a concise classification of various social media platforms. After grouping them in various forms, a comprehensive literature review will be offered to discuss roles played by social media on user generated content in marketing and tourism research. Possible influences on DI formation will be also addressed.

Chapter 5 will discuss research methodology. It will start with research questions, and a discussion on research philosophies.  Then three interrelated parts in qualitative interviews will be discussed. To present a detailed overview of the research process, this chapter will explain sampling, data collection and data analysis techniques. Before concluding with a brief summary, this chapter will address research ethics,reflections and limitations in research design.

Research finding will be presented in two interrelated chapters. Chapter 6 will mainly present how Turkey is perceived as a tourism destination.  Chapter 7 will present the factors that seem to influence DI formation. Online information search and influences of the search on DI formation will also be discussed in this chapter..

This thesis will be finalized with Chapter 9, which will present a critical overview of the findings. After re-visiting the research questions, this chapter will highlight theoretical insights, methodological contributions, and practical implications. After addressing the limitations in this research, it will be finalized by suggestions for future research.

# 2   Destination & Destination Image

## 2.1   Introduction

As a modest attempt to discuss significant roles played by various factors in destination image formation, the earlier definitions and conceptualizations of DI should not be overlooked. To better understand the state of DI in tourism studies, I will start this chapter with a broad coverage of definitions and discussions for Brand Image. While hundreds of image related articles were published by tourism scholars (Pike, 2002), image has been a central theme for marketing scholars too (e.g. Huang, 2010; Koubaa, 2008; Nandan, 2005). Therefore, to be able to critically discuss DI formation, comprehensive definitions of brand image will be followed by discussions on definitions of DI. Considering the abundance of image studies, collecting exhaustive definitions seemed to be neither practical nor essential. Therefore, even though it can be considered as a selective sample, I have included definitions that shed a light on a different aspect of brand and destination images. When comprehensive definitions of brand image and DI are covered, questioning the nature of 'destination' seems to be highly relevant.

Since destinations are mostly perceived as brands (e.g. Hankinson, 2005), the complexity of a destination (Pike, 2005) not only as a tourism product to be consumed but also as a dynamic place to live in has attracted little attention from tourism scholars. To shed a light on the complexity and dynamic nature of a destination (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002), destination as the main construct it this project will be discussed from traditional and socio-cultural perspectives. Since DI seems to be conceptualized as a product that is packaged to be consumed by various tourist segments by traditional approaches, socio-cultural perspectives will be discussed to offer a nuanced and holistic understanding of destinations.

Finally, as one of the main stakeholders in tourism, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) will be examined in this chapter to better understand their roles as image promoters (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011). Their organizational structure, financial and human resources and the challenges they face will be other areas to discuss in this chapter.

## 2.2 Definitions of Brand Image

Despite the abundance of studies on DI (Pike, 2002), there is a little attempt to conceptualize DI (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a). Even though it seems to be necessary to define a phenomenon before measuring or operationalizing it, while there are plenty of studies which tried to measure favourability of a particular destination image(e.g. Huang and Gross, 2010; Mercille, 2005; Sönmez and Sirakaya, 2002; Tasci, Meydan and Cavusgil, 2006), the question of 'what is a destination image?' is still a relevant question to ask. To be able to answer this question and to understand the formation of DI, conceptualisations and definitions for brand image from different perspectives need to be examined. Although tourism scholars started to highlight the importance of destination image in early 70s (Hunt, 1975), image had been investigated by marketing and consumer behaviour scholars since 50s (Gardner and Levy, 1955). In their influential study Gardner and Levy share a rather length description;

> The **image of a product** associated with the brand may be clear-cut or relatively vague; it may be varied or simple; it may be intense or innocuous. Sometimes the notions people have about a brand do not even seem very sensible or relevant to those who know what the product is "really" like. But they all contribute to the customer's deciding whether or not the brand is the one "for me."(P: 35)

This definition implies that even though consumers are not aware of brand images in their minds, these images exist, sometimes not highly relevant to realities of a product, but in various degree of intensity they exist and play significant roles in purchase decisions. The two characteristics of an image is emphasised in the above quote. While image does not necessarily a reflection of the 'reality' of a brand, but more like a subjective construct its role in decision-making is prominent. As one of the early scholars who write about images, Boulding (1956) assumes that image is a subjective knowledge. This means that everyone has a unique image based on his or her own personal interaction with the social environment. Therefore, each individual does not only have an image, but he or she also builds it "as birds build nests" (Bullmore, 1984:237). Boulding (1956) mentions that consumers prefer to rely on their subjective images rather than facts when they need to make a purchase decision. Hence it can be said that images play more important roles than physical attributes or

functions of products in purchase decisions (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). This shows that scholars acknowledge importance of images in purchase decisions and they started to examine brand images in various contexts since 1950s.

Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) try to conceptualize brand image with a comprehensive literature review that consists of articles that attempt to define brand image, and they state that because of the overuse of the term *'brand image'* and proliferation in the conceptualization, there is a risk of being unproductive. They also note that "the way in which brand image is defined determines the nature of research questions that are posed, the methods that are used, and ultimately how findings are translated to the creative process." (p.110). This highlights the necessity of defining *'image'* before trying to measure image of a product or brand. As they stated, whole research process seems to be shaped by the definitions adopted by researchers. Most importantly what is measured as 'image' of a brand is pre-determined by researchers' conceptualizations.

A critical literature review makes the complexity of brand image more visible. While some of the authors define brand image as an attribute-based concept, some others state that it cannot be understood by looking at multiple attributes since it is a holistic, gestalt concept. The table below shows definitions from different scholars who have various views about 'what is a brand image'.

Table 1: Definitions of Brand Image

| (Reynolds, 1965; Lindquist, 1974) | The mental construct developed by the consumer on the basis of a few selected impressions among the flood of total impressions; it comes into being through a creative process in which these selected impressions are elaborated, embellished, and ordered. |
|---|---|
| (Lindquist, 1974; Poiesz, 1989) | ... (Brand) image complex by nature and consists of a group of tangible or functional factors and intangible or psychological factors. |

| | |
|---|---|
| (Poiesz, 1989; Dichter, 1993) | Images... range from holistic, general impressions to very elaborate evaluations of products, brands, stores or companies. |
| (Dichter, 1993; Reynolds, 1965) | The concept of "image" can be applied to a political candidate, a product, a country. It describes not individual traits or qualities, but the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others. |
| (Keller, 1993) | Perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory. |
| (Low and Jr, 2000) | Brand image consists of functional and symbolic brand beliefs. |
| (Batra and Homer, 2004) | Brand image beliefs include all the associations that consumers connect with the brand, including but going beyond brand personality associations…they go beyond the perceived quality of the brand on functional product and service criteria and deal instead with "intangible" properties of the brand. |
| | |
| (Nandan, 2005) | Brand image is a consumer-constructed notion of the brand. Consumers ascribe a persona or an image to the brand based on subjective perceptions of a set of associations that they have about the brand. |
| (Srivastava and Kamdar, 2009) | Brand image can be described as the way in which a particular brand is positioned in the mind of a consumer. Clearly, consumers form an image of the brand based on the associations that they have remembered with respect to that brand. |

When the above-mentioned definitions are closely examined it can be seen that deciding or agreeing on a particular definition is a highly challenging aim to be attained. While some of the scholars consider image as only beliefs about a brand or

product (e.g. Low and Jr, 2000), some of them agree to take it as perceptions, or brand associations (e.g. Keller, 1993), or the way in which a brand positioned in the mind of a consumer (Srivastava and Kamdar, 2009). Even though Nandan(2005) claims that brand image and brand persona are the same constructs, Batra and Homer (2004) mention that brand image goes beyond the brand personality. According to Linquist (1974) brand image consists of tangible and intangible factors, and Dichter(1993) states that image is the total impression of a brand rather that individual characteristics, or attributes.

The above definitions seem to be contradicting and mutually exclusive from various aspects, but indeed they are overlapping in many ways. First of all, it seems to be agreed that image is a construct that is formed in the minds of consumers. Secondly, images can be based on some brand associations remembered by consumers. While tangible and intangible attributes of a brand or product are playing profound roles in image formation, overall or holistic impressions are also crucial to understand brand images. Besides, images tend to be subjective (Bouilding, 1956) and relativistic constructs (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002). Therefore, brand image can be defined in a broader sense as a subjective and relativistic construct that constitutes holistic impression of a brand in the mind of an individual.

### 2.3    Definitions of Destination Image (DI)

As stated in the introduction, destination image (DI) has become a vastly researched topic in tourism.  Since the publication of Hunt's (1975) seminal article '*Image as a Factor in Tourism Development'* in Journal of Travel Research, hundreds of articles have been published on it. More than 15 years ago, Pike (2002) analysed 142 journal articles that were written on DI. Since then, several more have been published. However, discussions and disagreements on conceptualization and measurement of DI have not gone away.  A closer and critical look may reveal that disagreements in marketing on brand image have been brought to tourism studies. While some authors adapted definitions that assume DI as summation of individual attributes, others insist that it is a holistic construct rather than sum of the individual attributes. There is another school of thought it suggests that DI needs to be examined considering its attributes and holistic aspects. If the definitions of DI in the table below are reviewed

in relation to the previous table, similar disagreements on the definition of DI and brand image can be observed.

Table 2:Definitions Destination Image

| (Hunt, 1975; Crompton, 1979) | The impressions that a person or persons hold about a country in which they do not reside. |
|---|---|
| (Crompton, 1979; Hunt, 1975) | The sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination. |
| (Phelps, 1986; Coshall, 2000) | Perceptions or impressions of a place. |
| (Reilly, 1990) | Image describes not individual traits or qualities but the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others. |
| (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991) | Image is the mental construct developed by a potential tourist on the basis of a few selected impressions among the flood of total impressions. |
| (Gartner, 1994) | Destination images are developed by three hierarchically interrelated components: cognitive, affective, and conative. |
| (Milman and Pizam, 1995; Gartner, 1994) | A sum total of the images of the individual elements or attributes that make up the tourism experience. |
| (MacKay and Fesenmaier, 1997) | A compilation of beliefs and impressions based on information processing from a variety of sources over time, resulting in an internally accepted mental construct . . . a composite of various products (attractions) and attributes woven into a total impression. |
| (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Phelps, 1986) | An attitudinal construct consisting of an individual's mental representation of |

| | knowledge (beliefs), feelings and global impression about an object or destination.' |
|---|---|
| (Coshall, 2000; Bigné, Sánchez and Sánchez, 2001) | The individual's perceptions of the characteristics of destinations. |
| (Bigné, Sánchez and Sánchez, 2001; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a) | An individual's overall perception or total set of impressions of a place. |
| (Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007) | A destination image is an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions toward a destination.[*Cognitive,Affective, Conative*] |

The table consists of selected definitions. Although it is not exclusive, it covers different conceptualizations of DI from various perspectives. It can be seen that similar to proliferation in brand image studies, DI studies are also highly controversial. While some of the definitions stress individual attributes or characteristics of destinations (Coshall, 2000; Milman and Pizam, 1995), some others take holistic aspects into account (Crompton, 1979; Reilly, 1990). While DI is defined as sum of total impressions about a place by some scholars (Bigné, Sánchez and Sánchez, 2001; Phelps, 1986), it is also defined as a mental construct based on few selected impressions out of a flow of impressions (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). For Crompton (1979) it is not only impressions it is sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions about a destination. As can be seen Hunt(1975) claims DI exists for the places in which a person does not reside, but Phelps(1986) implies that each place has a DI. For some, DI is held only by potential visitors (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). All these definitions show the challenges faced by tourism scholars to find an agreed definition for a highly controversial construct. According to the tale *'The Elephant in a Dark Room'*, in India some people are gathered to see an elephant that was exhibited in a dark room. Since there was not enough light to see the elephant, people start touching it and they described it as the part they touched upon. The one touching its trunk said the animal resembles a pipe, another touched its stomach and said it looks like as a wall, the one touching the ears said it seems to be a fan. According to the part they touch they defined the elephant(Whinfield, 2001).

As in the tale, even though various studies did not create an agreed definition, they shed lights on different aspects of DI. While each study contributed to our understanding of DI phenomenon, they created confusions, too. Without acknowledging the effects of philosophical orientations on academic research, it is highly likely to retry to conceptualize DI and suggest a construct as the DI that does not make a sense for the scholars from competing paradigms. Therefore, rather than trying to agree on a static definition, acknowledging complexity of DI and considering DI as a mental construct which is shaped by subjective realities of individuals could create a productive research area for scholars.

When the definitions in the previous table are considered it can be seen that they try to describe what is a DI, however, most of them describe it from a partial view. While Coshall(2000) and Milman and Pizam(1995) emphasise the attributes of a destination, Bigne et al, (2001) stress overall perceptions or impressions. While MacKay and Fesenmaier(1997) understand it as compilation of beliefs and impressions, Baloglu and McCleary(1999a) see it as a compilation of beliefs, feelings and impressions. For Gartner(1994), it consists of beliefs, feelings and intentions. Even though their definitions seem to explain different constructs, a closer examination may reveal that in most cases as in the elephant story they are explaining a different part of an unknown entity. However, there are some implicitly agreed characteristics of a DI. First of all, DI is a construct that is created in the minds of individuals. Therefore, projected image and perceived image should not be confused. While projected image is a desired construct to be created, perceived image is the one that is perceived by individuals. Secondly, even though individual attributes of a destination might influence image construction, DI is rather a holistic construct. Therefore, not only individual characteristics of a destination, but holistic impressions of a destination are important, too if not more important. Besides, while knowledge and beliefs might be helpful to understand image formation, feelings should not be overlooked. Finally, subjective realities of image holders are vital to understand DI. Therefore, a DI is a subjective, relativistic construct created through various interactions with/in external environment. While it might be formed based on the knowledge of destination characteristics, it is more likely to be in the form of total impressions. Even though it is stated as destination image, it should be understood as the flows of images, because

it is dynamic construct tends to be exist in multiple forms. It might evolve from organic to induce or from secondary to primary stages.

A critical review reveals that scholars are divided between structured and unstructured views to understand DI. While some scholars believe that destination image has a structure (For example Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Gartner, 1994; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007), others propose that there is no proven structure (Reilly, 1990; Dann, 1996; Ryan and Cave, 2005), therefore, it needs to be examined as a gestalt. The scholars who state that DI has a structure have also disagreements among themselves. While Baloglu and McCleary(1999a) and Beerli and Martin(2004) propose the cognitive, affective, and overall model, Gartner (1994) suggest a cognitive, affective and conative model. Additionally there is a three dimensional model suggested by Echtner and Ritchie (1991; 1993). These models will be discussed in details in the subsequent chapter. However, I believe that before discussing these influential frameworks, discussion of 'destination' as a construct might benefit this current study.

## 2.4    'Destination' in Traditional and Socio-Cultural Approaches

Even though 'destination' is a concept that attracts attention of many tourism scholars and high number of research papers published on (e.g. Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005; Chen and Phou, 2013; Saarinen, 2004; Qu, Kim and Im, 2011; Um and Crompton, 1990), there is not an agreed definition of it. As the main element in tourism, destination is the cornerstone of all tourism activities. Destinations are the main forces behind all travel related activities. Without a 'destination' the travel itself seems to be impossible. Yet, the question of 'what is a destination?' is still there to be answered. Of course, I do not claim that it is possible to find a rubber sealed answer for this question, but to clarify what has been understood by the term 'destination' by various scholars, in this part I will take a closer look at it from different angles. It has been conceptualized variably in various approaches (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011), but these conceptualizations are far from finding a common ground. Therefore, as Framke (2002:93) stresses;

*[P]erhaps the concept generates confusion rather than clarity, since there appears to be certain systematic self-contradictions in its use: the destination as a narrative, as an attraction, as a geographical unit, as an empirical relationship, as a marketing object, as a place where tourism happens . . . and so on. It is interesting to investigate whether a destination is seen as a locality or as a production system, as an information system or as the production of services. Each approach tends to define the destination in a different way, emphasizing only one facet with no interest in certain others.*

As mentioned in the above quote, a state of confusion seems to exist about the nature of a destination. The richness of studies on DI implies that the term 'destination' is known by all, and the main task is to measure how its image is formed. Therefore, while DI has become a main research theme in tourism, the destination itself was not considered as a topic of inquiry. However, as Framke(2002) highlights the way destination is defined seems to affect which aspects of a destination are inquired by researchers. Even though, availability of different perspectives on a particular research theme might be an opportunity to understand a phenomenon from various angles, if a particular perspective is favoured in a field of inquiry, the other voices could struggle to find a platform to express their views on particular issues. Research on 'destination' appears to be revolved around finding appropriate tools to implement a successful promotion strategy for various destinations. One of the main criticisms about the tourism studies is that, policy makers lead tourism research. Therefore, tourism researchers try to offer the best measurement tools to measure the image of a destination to understand its strengths and weaknesses and to project a positive image through various information channels. Therefore, rather than approaching destination as a multifaceted construct to study, they tend to put effort for creating easy to administrate and generalizable measurement tools for the Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) (Ateljevic, Morgan and Pritchard, 2007; Tribe, 2004; Tribe, 2008). When the conceptualization of 'destination' in tourism studies is understood, prevalence of image studies started to make more sense. According to Saraniemi and Kylanen (2011), there are four approaches to understand the concept of Destination, which are:

1. Economic Geography –Oriented Research

2. Marketing Management- Oriented Research

3. The Customer-Oriented Research

4. Cultural Research

In the Economic Geography-Oriented Research destinations are considered as specific geographical areas, such as country, island, region, city etc.(Leiper, 1979a; Smith, 1994). In this perspective destinations are considered as sum of the tourist attractions (*Natural or Man-made*), and facilities in a specific geographical location. This approach is useful to define boundaries of 'destinations'; therefore, specific tourism offices, such as Visit Leicester, Visit Leicestershire, Visit England, and Visit Great Britain can be created, and tasks and responsibilities can be shared in a hierarchical structure. However, tourists may not be aware of the geographical boundaries or they may have different boundaries in their minds. Even sometimes they may not aware of the exact location of a destination. For example, in this current study it has been observed that because of the similarities in their names participants confuse Morocco, and Monaco. Therefore, their impressions about a destination may be formed based on little information available on the media, or heart through personal experiences.

In the Marketing Management-Oriented research, the main idea is that a destination is a product that can be developed and promoted (Haugland *et al*, 2011). While previous (*Economic Geography*) approach seems to be suitable to set up hierarchical units to pull mass amount of tourist to a specific area, Marketing Management – Oriented approach is mainly good for marketing. In this approach a destination can be defined as "geographical, economic, and social unit consisting of all those firms, organizations, activities, areas and installations which are intended to serve the specific needs" of tourists (Flagestad and Hope, 2001:449). This definition implies that destination is considered as a production system, which produce various services to be consumed by tourists (Framke, 2002). When a destination is defined as a production system, all other aspects of a destination such as being a permanent place to live for locals, or as a place that is shared by various stakeholders become less important for researchers. Since the definition dictates a certain understanding of a

destination, it is a product to be marketed, alternative conceptualizations can be easily over sighted. While it seems to be one of the dominant approaches to study destinations, it is not free from various drawbacks. Although, tourism destination is considered as a product, and classical marketing concept is preferred, only the 'promotion' or 'advertising' seems to dominate marketing efforts in this approach. Because of the complexities of destinations, and existence of too diverse stakeholders in a destination (Pike and Page, 2014), Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) try to focus on *Promotion* rather than other Ps of marketing. Since a tourism destination is considered as a product, which can be branded and marketed as any other product, images become the most important 'tools' to differentiate a destination. Therefore images become crucial for practitioners to promote their destinations. The fundamental question to answer is that 'what kinds of image(s) are promoted'. When the projected images are chosen by a small group which pursue interests of a fraction of stakeholders, because of the lack of participation by other stakeholders, especially locals, DMOs may promote an image which is not realistic, and also not supported by locals.

Customer-Oriented research seems to be focusing on service aspect of tourism. Similar to other service industries the key point becomes the facilitating an unforgettable experience (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008; 2011) for the tourists. Although it sounds a good idea at first to focus on creating a great experience for tourists, because of the complexities, DMOs cannot control all service providers. Therefore, they started to create isolated tourist areas and routes, which are mainly designed for tourism consumption. However, at this point 'authenticity' becomes a matter for the tourist and tourism researchers (see Heitmann, 2011b). While tourists travel to a specific place to experience something different they started to face similar attractions and facilities in all places. Additionally, local people may perceive this as unfair and they may develop hostile attitudes toward tourists.

The alternative cultural approach suggested by Saraniemia and Kylanen(2011) seems to be considering the highly complex nature of a destination. In this approach a destination can be defined as:

*a set of institutions and actors located in a physical or a virtual space where marketing-related transactions and activities take place challenging the traditional production–consumption dichotomy(Page:1).*

As can be seen from their definitions, rather than setting strict geographical boundaries in their definition, they define destination as a constantly changing and reshaping space on which various actors take part in different transactional roles, and each one of them might have a highly different boundaries for a destination. A closer examination of this definition shows that destination is not a necessarily a product to be marketed to particular consumers, but rather a place which hosts various marketing activities conducted by a number of different actors. As stated by Morgan et al., (2011) a 'place' becomes a 'destination' through narratives and images disseminated by marketing activities. In addition to criticism of traditional production-consumption dichotomy, this definition offers new insights about the nature of a destination. It states that a destination does not need to be a physical space, it can be also virtual, or a socially constructed space.. Considering the developments in technology and changing travel behaviours, incorporating a virtual aspect to destination might open new doors for creative research for tourism scholars.

One of the eminent characteristics of this alternative approach is that it does not consider a destination as a static geographical place with fix boundaries. On the contrary, destination is understood as a socially constructed space that is in constant flow;

*Destinations are being constantly produced and reproduced through complex practices and discourses: to some tourists, tourism companies, local people, and other market actors, the destination may appear totally different in terms of shape, content, and relationships(Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011:7)*

In addition to being in a constant flow and dynamic state, destination is also highlighted as a subjective construct that might be perceived quite differently by various actors. Compared to rigid boundaries in an economic-geography oriented research, blurred constantly changing boundaries seem to define destinations.

Since 'destination' is the focal point of this research, these detailed discussions about the nature of a destination have been included to embrace different approaches to answer the question 'what is a destination?. Even though, they have been examined under four different categories, when these categorizations are carefully examined, it looks possible to group them under two broad categories named as 'Economically Oriented and Socio-Culturally Oriented' approaches by Framke(2002). Even though the first three approaches have fairly unique characteristics, in each of them commercial aspect of a destination seems to be magnified while other characteristics are neglected. Therefore, while they can be grouped as economically oriented approaches, the alternative approach suggested by Saraniemi and Kylanen(2011) could be named as socio-culturally-oriented(Framke, 2002).

### 2.5    Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)

DMOs are non-profit organizations, and as the name suggests which are created to market a tourism destination to potential travellers (Gretzel *et al*, 2006), and they can be organized in various forms, such as public and private partnerships, public funded organizations, or membership based organizations (Prideaux and Cooper, 2003). Today, in the level of states, regions cities DMOs are formed to present a place as a tourism destination (Pike and Page, 2014). These types of hierarchical organizations seem to be in-line with economic-geography oriented understanding of tourism destinations (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011).

As stated above these organizations are designed to offer a geographical place to potential visitors in the form of tourism products and services. For example, as the national DMO for Britain, Visit Britain defines itself;

> *As the national tourism agency we play a unique role in building England's tourism **produc**t[stress added], raising Britain's profile worldwide, increasing the volume and value of tourism **exports**[stress added] and developing England and Britain's visitor **economy**[stress added](Visit Britain, 2016).*

As can be seen Visit Britain introduces itself as a unique player to develop a tourism *product* and to increase volume and value of tourism *exports*, and to develop a visitor *economy*. While it represents Britain as a geographical entity, the statement implies that it is responsible to develop a tourism product for only England rather than whole

Britain. It is obvious that Britain as a tourism destination is considered as a product with the geographical boundaries of the UK. However, unlike the firms, DMOs may not be able to develop a 'product' in reality because they lack in control to manage a destination (Pike and Page, 2014) to create a product not only because of the limited financial and human resources (Gretzel, Yuan and Fesenmaier, 2000), but also because of the complex nature of a destination on which various stakeholders have a say. Because of the abundance of stakeholders, politics of decision-making can make implementing a synchronized marketing strategy almost impossible. And in many cases power structure can be the determining force for a tourism campaign rather than theoretical frameworks. As stated above, DMOs are usually organized as public-private entities; therefore, they are dramatically affected by political changes. In some cases power of big corporations may let those companies to dictate the marketing campaigns for certain destinations. For example, European tour operators forced Morocco to change their branding, which was not in-line with their offerings.(Pike, 2005).

Because of the challenges in many areas to be able to implement a marketing strategy, rather than implementing a traditional marketing strategy to develop and promote a product to the market they tend to undertake mostly the *promotion* of a destination (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011). Since destination-marketing research is mostly undertaken by researchers whose main interest is in solving the management and marketing problems by DMOs, it has been criticized as being applied research rather than being academic(Pike and Page, 2014). In this research, I try to approach tourism phenomenon from a broader social science perspective; therefore, rather than trying to solve a specific managerial problem for a particular destination, I am trying to understand how destination is conceptualized and how the images of a particular destination, (i.e. Turkey), are formed. Because "a destination is not a product and, while there are significant opportunities in the imaginative and responsible application of product marketing to places, destinations cannot (and should not) be marketed as if they were soap powder".(Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott, 2003:287). Acknowledging that destinations are not soap powder, through this research, I try to seek for alternative ways to understand the nature of a destination, and look for fresh insights to understand DI formation.

## 2.6    Summary

To sum up, in this chapter, I tried to introduce and discuss cornerstone elements of this research, which are 'destination' and 'destination image'. To be able to understand progress in DI studies, studies on brand image have been discussed. Critical review of the marketing and tourism literatures revealed that DI has been mostly understood as brand image for a destination, which is a construct created through marketing narratives and images(Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2011). Selected definitions showed that similarities between the conceptualization of brand image and DI are remarkable. While tourism scholars were producing astonishing number of studies on DI, the nature of 'destination' as the main element in tourism seems to be passed over to a certain extends. Therefore, to shed a light on the complexities of a destination (Pike, 2005), four different approaches (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011) are critically discussed. These approaches can be grouped as 'economy-oriented, and socio-culturally oriented researches' (Framke, 2002). Researchers who approached destination with an economic orientation mostly produced studies that overlooked complex nature of a destination, which is a socially constructed space(Saraniemi, 2010). Finally, DMOs as geographically bounded hierarchical organizations, and their rather ambitious aims to create desired images are critically examined in this chapter.

This chapter is designed to address complex nature of destinations, and to discuss various approaches to understand a destination and DI formation. As discussed in this chapter, conceptualization of DI seems to be highly affected by orientation of researchers. This chapter highlighted some common grounds and to open room for new insights to study 'destination' and DI formation, the next chapter will address the crucial question: how destination image(s) are formed, and how this formation is affected by various elements.

## 3 Influential Frameworks & Proposed Model

### 3.1 Introduction

Despite the tremendous developments as a field, tourism research stayed mainly confirmatory and reproductive rather than scholarship which has sought to break new epistemological, conceptual or ethical grounds (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011; Tribe and Airey, 2007; Tribe, 2007). Since tourism is mainly considered as a sole business activity in the academia (Tribe, 2008), and almost all the problems of tourism thought to be solved through creating a desired image, astonishing number of studies have been produced on DI. Over reliance on 'image creation' might be because of the limited control of DMOs on destinations (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005; Pike and Page, 2014). As a result of not having enough power and resources to create the destinations they wished, they tend to shift their efforts to promotion campaigns to create desired images for their destinations (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011; Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013). A study conducted with 99 senior executives from mainly DMOs in USA confirmed that only 10 per cent of DMOs had more than 10 million US dollars funding, whereas 27 per cent received less than 1 million US dollars(Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005)When these figures compared with billions-dollar advertising budgets of some companies (Taube, 2013), financial challenges faced by DMOs can be better understood. While having a positive DI becomes main goal for DMOs, it is not unexpected to see studies which   link unachieved goals to not having a desired image. For example, Sönmez and Sirakaya(2002) studied Turkey as a case and concluded;

> *Despite its Mediterranean location, Turkey has been unable to consistently achieve its tourism goals, as evidenced by fluctuating numbers in tourism earnings and a small share of the international tourism market. This discrepancy might be attributed to Turkey's image in the minds of world travellers (Sönmez and Sirakaya, 2002:185).*

Even though some claims such as 'having a small share from international tourism market' may not be the case today, the quote above shows the importance attached to

DI by tourism scholars. When the quote above is critically examined, authors' conceptualization of a destination as a pure economic entity can be observed. When a destination becomes a sole economic entity, it must be marketed to world in growing numbers. However, as stated earlier since the DMOs lack in control and have very limited financial and human resources (Pike and Page, 2014), promotion becomes the sole marketing activity they undertake and trying to create a desired image is one of the most crucial aspect of these promotions(Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011).Even though, they are not able to create a product, similar to the firm based understanding in marketing they try to create desired images.

While criticizing over reliance on 'image creation', I do not claim that DI is rather trivia. On the contrary, DI is a highly vital element in tourism studies. However, rather than trying to 'create' images, scholars and tourism professionals should focus on understanding image formation. As discussed in the previous chapter, destinations are highly complex social structures, on which marketers should have a rather limited control. For example, when countries are considered as destinations, "[they] are judged by what they do, not by what they say"(Anholt, 2011:21)This does not mean destination marketing needs to be getting axed. However, before trying to project a desired image, DI formation should be well understood.

When an in-depth literature review is undertaken to investigate DI, it can be seen that studies on DI are mostly based on few frameworks which were developed by distinguished researchers such as (Baloglu, 2000; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002; Gartner, 1994; Lai and Li, 2012; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007).In this chapter, to better understand DI formation, I will critically discuss previous seminal frameworks in depth. While trying to shed a light on their invaluable contributions to our understanding of images, I will try to offer a nuanced and more social science oriented understanding of tourism phenomena, and DI formation. First of all, in order to acknowledge their contributions to our understanding of DI, and to discuss the interrelationships among them, three seminal frameworks (Namely : Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; 1993; Gartner, 1994; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a) will be examined. Then recent conceptualizations which approaching DI from different angles will follow. To explain the rational for the current study, and to address the research gabs in image formation; critique of

previous frameworks will be shared. Finally, I will present an alternative holistic framework to study DI.

## 3.2    Three influential models

The literature on destination image in general revolves around its conceptualisation (e.g. Gallarza et al, 2002; Tasci et al, 2007), its components (e.g. Gartner, 1994; Baloglou and McCleary, 1999), its measurement (e.g. Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Govers et al, 2007) and its influence (e.g.Bigné, Sánchez and Sánchez, 2001). Particularly tourists' decision making process has been investigated extensively(e.g.Heitmann, 2011a) and  it is acknowledged that Destination Image (DI) plays and essential role in this process (Um and Crompton, 1990; Goodrich, 1978; Hong *et al*, 2006; Choi, Lehto and Morrison, 2007).   Despite this importance, as stated by Baloglu and McCleary(1999a), "little empirical research has focused on how image is actually formed" (p.869) and there is a need for conceptual frameworks of the formation of DI (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002; Lai and Li, 2012). Notable influential suggestions include the works of Echtner & Ritchie (1991), Gartner (1994) and Baloglu & McCleary (1999). While these studies contribute significantly to our understanding of Destination Image formation, several socio-cultural factors and more recent technological changes, especially changes in information search and influences of internet and social have arguably not been considered in these earlier frameworks. Therefore, to address this gab, this paper attempts to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of destination image formation under the particular conditions created by the current economic, technological and social environment. While suggesting a holistic framework to study DI, seminal frameworks deserve to be discussed in this chapter.   To offer a better understanding of the progress in DI research, seminal studies will be discussed in a chronological order.

### 3.2.1    Three Dimensional Model

In the early 1990s, Echtner and Ritchie (1993; 1991) criticized the previous works as lacking theoretical conceptualizations. In order to address this gap in the literature, they tried to conceptualize DI through a three dimensional framework.

Echtner and Ritchie (1993:43) define destination image as;

*[N]ot only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination. Destination image consists of functional characteristics, concerning the more tangible aspects of the destination, and psychological characteristics, concerning the more intangible aspects. Furthermore, destination images can be arranged on a continuum ranging from traits which can be commonly used to compare all destinations to those which are unique to very few destinations.*

This definition highlights the dimensions in their model. This is one of the earliest studies that take holistic aspect of DI into account. While individual attributes are acknowledged as an important part of DI, previously overlooked holistic aspect is also considered in this definition. For that reason these studies can be considered as inspiring for further holistic researchers. Since they conceptualize DI in a holistic perspective, they insist that traditional research methodologies may not be appropriate to measure DI. They criticize the previous studies for overusing structured methodologies to measure DI. They state that while functional and psychological common attributes of a destination can be captured by structured methods, its holistic and unique aspects need to be examined with qualitative techniques. In order to make clearer, London can be a good example. While London has common functional characteristics such as, price levels, public transportation, accommodation, and climate, or it has common psychological characteristics such as level of friendliness, safety, fame etc. and almost all destinations can be compared according to these common characteristics. However, there are unique features and events (Functional), such as Thames River, or British Museum in London. They are unique to London, and they are not comparable with other destinations. Additionally, there are unique auras (Psychological). For London, it can be considered as the excitement. For Venice, its Love city image can be considered. This discussion shows that although, other studies such as Baloglu and McCleary(1999), and Gartner(1993), effectively measure common aspects of destination image, they fail to address holistic unique aspect of it.
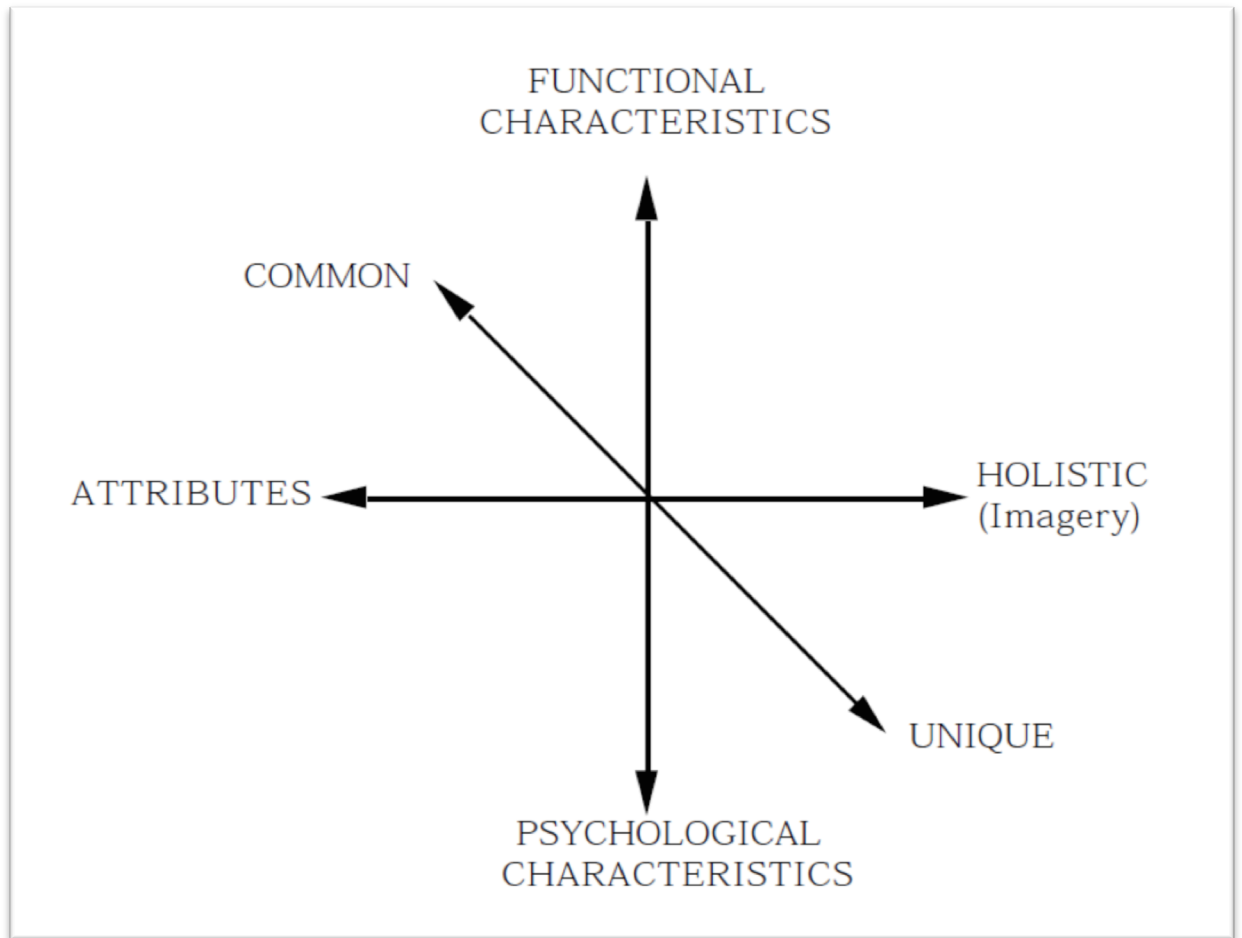
Figure 1: Three Dimensional Model by Echtner and Ritchie (1991:43)

According to their framework, DI is formed along three continuums. The first continuum ranges from individual attributes to holistic impressions of a destination. While destination offerings and facilities, such as accommodation, transportation, and visitor attractions, can be considered as individual attributes of a destination, general feelings toward a destination are regarded as holistic impressions. The second continuum consists of functional characteristics, such as weather and landscapes at the one end, and psychological characteristics, for example atmosphere, safety and friendliness of locals, at the other end. The third continuum ranges from common image attributes to unique image attributes. As stated above while common attributes can be found in all destinations, such as; whether, landscapes and public transport, and comparisons between different destinations are possible, unique attributes are exclusive to a specific destination (For instance, the Eifel Tower in Paris, religious atmosphere in Vatican, and the Pyramids in Egypt). In their ground-breaking articles, Echtner and Ritchie (1993; 1991) emphasize that destinations do not only have

individual attributes but also holistic imageries. Although there are significant number of studies dealing with individual attributes of destinations, holistic aspects of DI has been overlooked in tourism research (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2002; Choi, Chan and Wu, 1999). Therefore, to better understand DI and its formation, comprehensive studies which consider these overlooked aspects of DI seem to be crucial to contribute image studies in tourism.

### 3.2.2 *Cognitive, Affective and Conative Model*

A few years later, Gartner (1994) tried to further investigate destination image formation. According to Gartner's (1994) conceptualisation, DI consists of cognitive, affective and conative components. While cognitive component refers to knowledge and beliefs about a destination, affective image components refer to emotions, feelings, and attachment toward a destination. Based on the cognitive and affective evaluations, there is a conative image which refers to behavioural intentions of travellers towards a destination. This conceptualization approaches DI as an attitudinal construct (Cian, 2011; Stern, Zinkhan and Jaju, 2001) and focuses on the image forming agents, offering a useful framework to explain image formation. Gartner (1994) focuses particularly on the information sources in image formation and their significant influence over the whole process. This study seems to be one of the seminal works which examine the role of information sources, which are named as image forming agents, in great details. They have been divided into 8 subcategories: *Overt Induced I* (e.g. Traditional Advertising), *Overt Induced II* (e.g. Information coming from tour operators), *Covert Induced I* ( Second Party endorsements through traditional form of advertising), *Covert II Induced* (Second Party endorsements through unbiased reports), *Autonomous* (News and Popular Culture), *Unsolicited Organic* ( Information received from friends and family unsolicited), *Solicited Organic* (Information received from friends and family solicited), *Organic* ( Visitation). Even though he preferred to examine them as in eight categories, a careful reading suggests that in broader sense they can be divided, as *induced*, *autonomous* and *organic* information sources. While induced information sources can be considered as the any agent which has a vested interest in tourism (such as destinations, or tour operators) and they try to boost their images thorough disseminating positive messages on various promotional channels. Autonomous information sources could be any information agent that has no vested in tourism, and

the primary purpose of information dissemination is no to boost tourism demand for a particular destination. Therefore, they might contains highly undesirable messages for a particular destination. And finally, organic information sources can be considered as the people who are known through personal relations, and believed to share their true experiences.

Even though, as suggested by himself there are autonomous, and organic information sources on which destinations has no control of any sort Gartner claims that if the importance of different information sources in image formation is known, a better image promotion mix can be developed to enhance destination images. An implication of this claim is the assumption that DMOs have control and power to manipulate destination images with a strategic promotion mix, which is seen as unlikely in tourism markets that are highly complex and competitive (Berne, Garcia-Gonzalez and Mugica, 2011; Buhalis, 1998). Besides, when it was published it could have been considered as a ground-breaking contribution to image studies, but over the two decades unprecedented changes occurred and new *image forming agents*, such as internet and social media blurred all sorts of classifications. Therefore, rather than examining information sources in an confined promotion mix understanding, new holistic approaches might contribute to our understanding of image formation in the global age.

### 3.2.3 *Cognitive, Affective and Overall (Global) Model*

Another highly influential model was developed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999a). They define image as "an attitudinal construct consisting of an individual's mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings, and global impression about an object or destination" (p.870). Their definition implies that DI consists of three interrelated constructs: cognitive, affective, and global. While both the Gartner (194) and the Baloglu and McClearly (1999) models are shaped around the causal relationships between cognitive and affective components (Lai and Li, 2012), their main difference is that for Baloglu and McClearly (1999), the conative component suggested by Gartner (1994) is not considered as a part of DI. They criticize previous image studies as being lack in theoretical foundations and focusing only the cognitive aspect

of a DI.  In order to conceptualize DI, they mentioned the roles of Personal Factors and Stimulus Factors. (*See the Figure Below*).
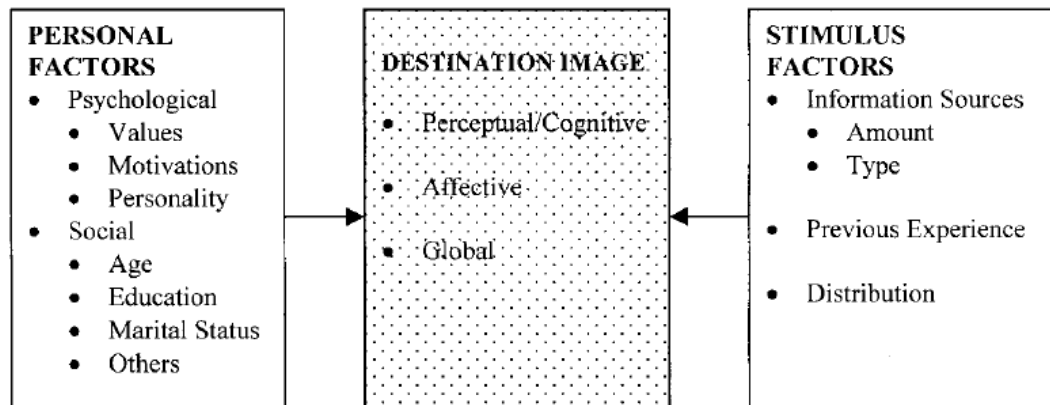


Figure 2: General Framework for Image Formation (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a)

 This framework was based on the previous literature and empirical research which has been conducted with prospect tourist in the USA through postal mail. This study is quite important for my project, because it is not only a study with an influential framework but also a study which based on the opinions of prospect tourists for Turkey.

Similar to Gartner(1994), Baloglu and McClearly(1999a) also mention that information sources play a very significant role in DI formation along with tourist motivations, and socio-demographic characteristics. However, their consideration of socio-demographic factors is based on a market segmentation understanding whereas more novel understandings of markets generally require a move beyond a segmented approach towards more fragmented views (e.g.Firat and Shultz II, 1997). This means that while studying image formation, in addition to socio-demographic characteristics of individuals, consideration of subjective meanings may open new paths to explore the complex nature of DI. This requires embracing of wider socio-cultural understanding of the tourism phenomenon (Tribe, 2008; Tribe and Xiao, 2011), and a flexible research design. While consumers have been analysed in previous DI studies as different tourist segments, voices of individuals and their subjective understandings seem to be silence. Therefore, there is an urgent need for comprehensive studies

which consider socio-cultural, historical and economic situations of individuals, and let them speak and express their subjective understanding of tourism phenomenon and DIs.

Based on the general framework proposed by Baloglu and McCleary(1999a), Beerli and Martin (2004) suggested a further developed model to explain the formation of DI.(*See The Figure Below*)
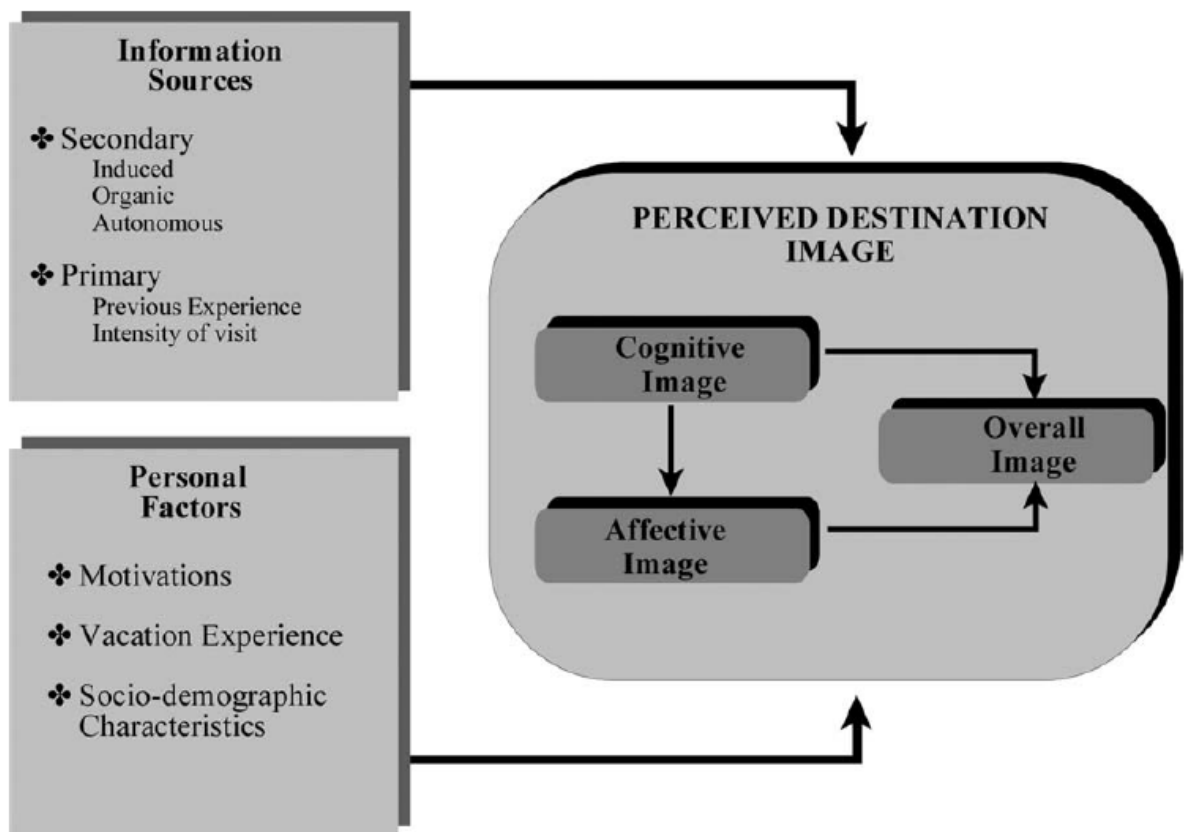


Figure 3: Destination Image Formation Model by Beerli and Martin(2004)

In this model cognitive image is considered as the image occurring based on the knowledge and beliefs about a destination. Whereas, affective image is an outcome of feelings toward a destination (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004). For example, based on the information received from varying sources someone might extend his or her knowledge about Turkey and develop beliefs about it. These knowledge and beliefs are considered as cognitive image of Turkey. In addition to knowledge and beliefs, he or she may have positive or negative feelings towards Turkey, and these feelings serve as affective image of Turkey. As can be seen in the

figure, cognitive image has an influence on the affective image, but it is not the only determinant of it. In addition to cognitive and affective images, there is an overall image, which is affected by cognitive and affective images, but again they are not the only determinants of the overall destination image.

This further developed model seems to be better illustrated since it shows the relationships between Cognitive, Affective, and Overall Image. Another improvement in the model is that it tries to explain information sources by putting them in two different categories. A literature review shows that conceptualization of DI as a cognitive, affective and global components is highly common (e.g. Baloglu, 2001; Baloglu, 2000; Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Bigné, Sánchez and Sánchez, 2001; Bigné Alcañiz, Sánchez García and Sanz Blas, 2009). However, when these studies examined closely, even though they claim that there is a proven structure of DI, and there are statistically proven relationships between these three interrelated constructs, they acknowledge that there might be other factors affecting image formation but not considered in their structured research designs. Therefore, in this research rather than trying to replicate previous structured models to measure a particular destination's image, to explore image formation with a holistic understanding, I will present a holistic model in this chapter.

### 3.3    Alternative models

Although valuable efforts have been made to conceptualize DI in 1990s, because of the complexity of DI, scholars keep trying to reconceptualise it in the new millennium. Based on a comprehensive literature review, Gallarza et al (2002) postulate that DI is a complex, multiple, relativistic, and dynamic concept. It is complex because it allows more than a single interpretation. Multiplicity of DI refers to its multiple components, from individual attributes to holistic impressions, and multi-disciplinary research on it.   Since the tourism products are not generally available to pre-test before purchase, their evaluations are made with subjective judgements rather than objective realities. Therefore, each individual has a unique subjective image for a specific destination; therefore DI is a relativistic concept (Jenkins, 1999). Finally, DI is not a static concept; rather it is dynamic and it changes according to time and space. Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil (2007) also try to

reconceptualise DI, and define DI as "an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions toward a destination" (p.200). One of the most recent conceptualizations has been offered by Lai and Li (2012). Unlike the earlier conceptualizations, DI is not considered as an attitudinal construct in this framework but rather as a collection of core- and periphery images. Although these recent conceptualizations (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007; Lai and Li, 2012) try to consider complex and holistic aspects of DI, these studies do not consider socio-cultural, historical, political and economic factors in their definitions, and pay insufficient attention to recent technological changes such as the rapid development of the internet and, particularly, social media. Therefore, there is still a need for comprehensive studies, which consider the socio-cultural, historical, political, economic and technological factors.

### 3.4    Criticism of the previous Conceptualizations

A broader reading might show that formation of destination image seems to be mainly understood based on the above-mentioned frameworks. Therefore, there are many researchers who try to measure DI of different destinations through mainly adopting the above mentioned Cognitive, Affective, and Overall Image framework (e.g. Baloglu, 2000; Beerli and Martín, 2004b; Lin *et al*, 2007; San Martín and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008), or Cognitive, Affective and Conative framework(e.g. Agapito, Oom and da, 2013; Lee, 2009; Pike and Ryan, 2004; White, 2004). Even though there are hundreds of papers on DI, only few try to investigate 'what is a destination', and even most of them do not define what a DI is, but they try to measure DI. This creates repetitive works that offer some practicality for the DMOs but not much for understanding of DI formation.

In this research I try to conduct a research that mainly investigates a topic (DI) that is developed in a business oriented positivist paradigm.   In this paradigm, DI has a structure that consists of different components.  According to conceptualizations of Baloglu and McCleary(1999a), DI is very similar to Brand Image, Product Image, or Store Image.   Therefore, the managers (DMOs) should constantly measure it to improve their images in this highly competitive tourism market. While measuring DIs, complexity of a destination and its image should be considered. However, to a great extend, historical, political, social, and cultural forces, which might shape images, seem to be overlooked in structured studies.   These factors seem to play

crucial roles on the images individuals hold in their minds. For example, in his critical investigation Canally (2010) discovers substantial effects of politics on DI formation. He tries to explore image difference of Cuba among American and Canadian citizens, and conclude that because of the politics and censorships of United States, American citizens perceive Cuba differently than Canadians. This statement opens new roots for DI investigation. While most of the traditional DI studies take geographical distance, and other segmentation variables into account, effects of wider factors such as politics seem to be highly invisible. "We must try to examine critically the purpose of our research and ask whether our knowledge has served to enhance social justice or whether it has simply served to reify historical power and social relations" (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011:5). Imagine that Canally preferred one of the traditional frameworks to measure DI of Cuba among American and Canadian citizens. Would it be possible for him to understand effects of American policies on the images held by Americans? In the most likely scenario he would be able to explore differences in their perceptions, but he would fail to explain 'why' their perceptions differs. These discussions show that even though there are significant amount of articles on DI, to contribute the conceptualization of DI, a holistic view seems to be necessary, because as researchers "instead of shoring up existing privilege, we must become good listeners to silent voices and sharp observers of invisible objects."(Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011:25).

### 3.5   A Nuanced Conceptualization of Destination Image

Similar to the general marketing discipline, research in tourism has been mainly directed by firm-based understanding of marketing and the marketing environment. Because the wider socio-cultural and historical context of tourism markets is assumed to be too complex (Pike, 2005; Fesenmaier and MacKay, 1996) to attempt to influence it, the attention of tourism researchers have been mainly focused on the firm-based (DMOs) promotional activities. This narrow understanding of tourism and destination has resulted in a lack of research for the socio-cultural and historical aspects in tourism (Venkatesh and Peñaloza, 2006). While there are some attempts to explore holistic nature of DI through qualitative investigations (Reilly, 1990; Ryan and Cave, 2005; Cave, Ryan and Panakera, 2007), their attempts were overlooked by traditional tourism studies. Holistic approaches to what destinations are (e.g.Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011) and how their images are formed (Gallarza et al,

2002) help go beyond monolithic views of destinations and their images. For instance, as briefly mentioned above, the insightful analysis of Gallarza et al (2002) concludes that destination images are complex in that they are not unequivocal, they are multiple in the elements and processes that construct them, they are relativistic in that they are subjective and they are dynamic in that they vary with the dimensions of time and space. Snepenger et al., (2007) describe places as 'storehouses of meanings', capturing the ways in which place meaning is defined by visitors and locals through being there, through their consumption practices and through their interactions. Cultural and sociological approaches suggest that places are best thought of as "results of social practice and, thus, processual structures of meanings and values" (Saraniemi and Kylanen, 2011: p.138) replacing the traditional, "clumsy and technical supply-demand divisions" (p. 140). For Cresswell(2004), places are constructed by people doing things and in this sense are never 'finished' but are constantly being performed.

One of the implications of such novel and nuanced understandings of destinations and their images is that traditional structured methods may not capture holistic aspects of DI (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991), even though the vast majority of researchers rely on structured methodologies of positivist paradigms. Since the positivist research in tourism offers a better operationalization of tourism management (Tribe, 2008), research developed in this paradigm favours the managerial understanding of tourism. This can be seen as leading to research that silences the voice of individuals. Therefore, studies that do not only consider managerial aspects of tourism need to be conducted to understand formation of DI (Canally, 2010). In order to address this gap in the literature, novel frameworks seem to be necessary to study DI formation. The current study attempts to contribute to this direction by raising questions about the dominance of managerial understanding in tourism, and offering an evolutionary nuanced way of conceptualizing DI.

As stated above, only a handful of scholars try to conceptualize DI. The concept of DI is understood vaguely and mainly considered as the sum of the individual attributes by significant amount of scholars (Therkelsen, 2003). I see this as a potentially significant problem in tourism research. Since researchers try to understand and measure each attribute of a destination individually, it becomes too difficult to capture holistic meanings, atmospheres and auras in a destination (Jenkins, 1999).

Furthermore, there is ambiguity on a commonly accepted definition of DI among tourism scholars. While many studies do not include a specific definition, others cite many definitions without an evaluation of the one they are based on. When the literature is reviewed it can be seen that scholars do not use DI as a single term but to cover several aspects and types of destination images, arguably reflecting the complexity of the concept. There is *projected* image, which is the image promoted by DMOs, and this is not the one which is constructed in the minds of individuals (Jenkins, 1999; Kim and Lehto, 2013). This image which is constructed in the minds of individuals is called *perceived* image (Beerli and Martín, 2004; Chen and Hsu, 2000; Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001). The perceived image is also divided into *primary* and *secondary* images. While primary image refers to more complex image constructed after the personal experience of a destination, secondary image is the one based on the induced and organic information sources (Jenkins, 1999; Gartner, 1994; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). These categories may signal that DI is a construct that can be easily divided into individual parts; however, my understanding of DI is as holistic, therefore DI is not the individual attributes of a destination but rather total impressions people have of that destination(Reilly, 1990).

My review of the literature leads to see DI as a holistic construct rather than a total of individual attributes (Reilly, 1990; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). Therefore, the framework presented on the underneath figure will guide me to understand DI formation. Although it may not be possible to present a complex and multi-dimensional construct (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002; Pike, 2005) in a simplistic figure, this model may help to a nuanced understanding by stressing roles of diverse influencing factors in DI formation. While socio-cultural, historical, political, economic and technological factors are scarce in extant studies; they have been explicitly addressed in this nuanced conceptualization. Therefore, it can be said that casting a light on these excluded factors is a significant contribution of this research.

Through a simplistic model, I will try to explain DI formation. Figure shows that a destination project an image through different media channels. This is the desired image that particular destination wants to create in the minds of potential travellers (Mak, 2011). However, since individuals may have some information about the specific destinations through organic sources, such as TV, Internet, books, magazines, relatives and friends; they almost inevitably have an organic image in their minds

(Gartner, 1994; Jenkins, 1999). Therefore, when they perceive promotional messages from different media channels, the organic images in their minds may or may not change (Ekinci, 2003; Tasci and Kozak, 2006). Although these changes are explained as a sequence, these organic and induced images may not be easily distinguished from each other, and either induced or organic images may be constructed earlier than the other. Because these organic and induced images are constructed prior to actual visitation of a destination they are called secondary images (Gartner, 1994). As suggested in the figure, the image projected by the destination might have an impact on these secondary images, but there are other factors such as culture, history, politics, economics, technology and motivations which may influence the formation of images (Canally, 2010; Fesenmaier and MacKay, 1996) Therefore, in order to explore pre-visit impressions of individuals, or the secondary images in their minds, these influences need to be taken into account. When someone visits a destination, destination image in his/her mind becomes richer and more complex. This is called primary image since it is based on the first-hand experiences (Gartner, 1994; Jenkins, 1999). To distinguish the role of actual experiences in DI formation, both the primary and secondary images in the minds of individuals needs to be further investigated. The conceptual framework depicted in this figure will guide me to conduct an empirical study that will investigate destination image formation incorporating the factors identified here.
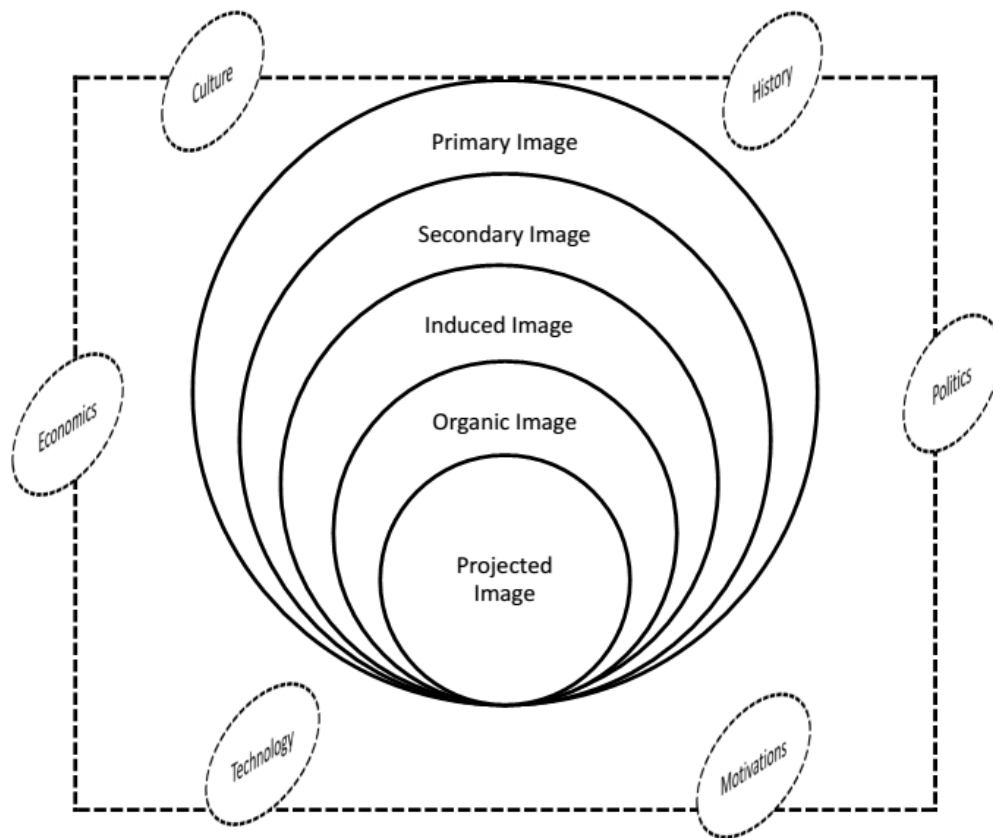
Figure 4: Proposed Framework to Conceptualize Destination Image Formation

### 3.6    Summary

Although tourism scholars have been studying DI for more than four decades, there are few studies that contribute significantly to our understanding of DI formation (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007; Lai and Li, 2012). I have identified above the need to consider socio-cultural factors and recent technological changes in such conceptualizations (Canally, 2010). Perhaps as a consequence of positivist understanding of tourism phenomenon, DI research seems to be dominated by quantitative structured research methods (Tribe, 2008; Ateljevic, Morgan and Pritchard, 2007) whereas qualitative studies might be more appropriate to capture the processes that allow individuals to construct destination images in their minds. Although there are recent attempts to bring wider social science perspectives to tourism studies, further research is necessary in order to contribute to a better

conceptualization of destination image and shed a light to overlooked socio-cultural aspects of tourism along with recent technological changes. This study is a humble attempt to provide novel explanations of destination image formation in the contemporary environment.

While highlighting the changes in market environment, and proposing an evolutionary holistic framework to study such a complex construct, significance of technological developments are also mentioned in this chapter. Even though countless technological developments are happening, the focus of this project is developments in Internet, and online information search. As stated earlier in this chapter, while seminal models discussed in this chapter contributed to our understanding of DI formation, socio-cultural factors were highlighted in this nuanced conceptualization. Besides, considering the time the most previous models were developed, only a naïve expects to understand effects of relatively recent changes in information sources by looking at previous frameworks. Therefore, to better explain the changes occurring in tourism information seeking and influences of these changes on DI formation, dramatic developments in Internet, and online information search will be critically examined in the forthcoming chapter.

# 4 Online Information Search and Destination Image Formation

## 4.1 Introduction

Technological improvements are changing our lives, and bring new challenges and opportunities for organizations and consumers. As stated by Govers and Go (2009,p.1) "[i]n this present-day world of parallel virtual and 'real' experiences… [t]he common saying, 'It's a small world' is increasingly true". There have been spectacular changes in the ways the consumers receive, consume, and disseminate information about products and services (Hudson and Thal, 2013). Tourism is one of the sectors that are mostly affected from these changes (Buhalis, 1998; Leung *et al*, 2013). Recently, tourism has become the number one industry for the online transactions volume (Mack, Blose and Bing Pan, 2008). The rapid increase in Internet and social media usage brings new challenges and opportunities both for tourism destinations and travellers (Schmallegger and Carson, 2008) because it changes the information search and purchase behaviours of travellers (Lo *et al*, 2011), ultimately impacting on the way in which destination images are formed. The Internet offers extensive opportunities for immediate and direct relationships between market constituents and this has severe consequences for the processes that form images. Online communication technologies and, particularly, social media facilitate and encourage rapid interactions not only between companies (or DMOs) and consumers but, more importantly, between consumers themselves. The ease of information access and the readily available multitude of communication channels clearly impact on the way in which destinations are represented.

Tourism destinations are dramatically affected from the advances in information and communication technologies (Gretzel *et al*, 2006; Gretzel, 2006; 2011). In the past, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) controlled the media messages to some extent, and they tried to create desired destination images through their promotional campaigns. However, invention of new media channels started to challenge their rather limited roles (Pike and Page, 2014), since the User-Generated Content (UGC) cannot be controlled by DMOs. In the past, travellers had only few information

sources, but today they do not need to rely on information received from controlled sources. They can communicate easily and cost effectively with all stakeholders in the tourism sector. In addition to communication with previous travellers who are willing to share their experiences with potential visitors, they can interact with accommodation suppliers, travel companies, DMOs, and local residents of a destination (Miguéns, Baggio and Costa, 2008; Lo *et al*, 2011; Carson, 2008). That is why tourism has been affected tremendously by technological changes and improvements (Gretzel, Yuan and Fesenmaier, 2000).

While tremendous technological changes are occurring, and various effects are observed in daily life and tourism experiences, traditional models that attempt to explain DI construction do not offer holistic explanations about the current technological changes and DI formation. To better understand the developments in information technologies and to explore the effects of online information search on DI, in this chapter, I will elaborate on the travel information search and growing dole of the Internet in this search process. As the game changers in the new millennium, social media and UGC will be defined and critically discussed in this chapter. To clarify the terms social media and UGC, this chapter will include definitions and classifications of social media platforms. Then, social media and UGC in management and marketing, tourism and DI formation will be discussed. Before finalizing this chapter with a brief summary, prior research methods for social media and UGC will be highlighted.

### 4.2 Travel Information Search

Destination choice is highly affected by information available and used by individuals(Fodness and Murray, 1997). Because of the intangible characteristic of a trip, most of the time travel to another destination brings high degree of uncertainty. Travellers seek information to reduce uncertainty in their trips(Fodness and Murray, 1997). It has been noted that information source influence DI formation(Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Gartner, 1994; Martín-Santana, Beerli-Palacio and Nazzareno, 2017).

Since tourism is an information intense sector, it is highly critical to understand changes in information technologies(Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Tourism information search has been dramatically transformed by Internet(Amaro, Duarte and Henriques,

2016) Unlike traditional information sources, the Internet serves as a communication channel that allow users to interact with various individuals such as travellers, service suppliers, destination marketers(Llodrà-Riera *et al*, 2015). Through the Internet, people might access information in only fraction of a time required by traditional information channels(Buhalis and Law, 2008). Even though the Internet makes information search quicker, easier and more effective for individuals, the information available online is not necessarily neutral and interest free. Therefore, in a typical online search it is more likely to access various sites which offers conflicting and divergent views. Hence, stance of a customer towards a product might be affected by the sites visited(Roscoe *et al*, 2016).

Even though there are studies which does not report any perception differences among individuals who seek information through traditional channels or the Internet(e.g. Luo, Feng and Cai, 2004). As seen in a study on Las Vegas, individuals' perceptions of a destination might significantly differ based on the UGC they interact(Lim, Chung and Weaver, 2012), or in the case of China online information search might significantly, and positively change DI(Li *et al*, 2009). Therefore, it can be assumed that not only as an information source but also as a communication channel the Internet might influence a destination image (Llodrà-Riera *et al*, 2015). While the Internet was considered solely a sales platform at the beginning of this millennium (Biswas and Krishnan, 2004), it has been developed as platform, which enables customers to interact with other consumers and suppliers through social media channels. Therefore, it might become an influential force in DI formation.

While stressing the influences of the Internet on information search and probably on DI formation, it should be considered that social media and UGC play major roles in increasing power of the Internet. Even though, this project is not particularly focused on social media and UGC, as the highly important components of the Internet(Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014; Abzari, Ghassemi and Vosta, 2014; Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schäfer, 2012), they are assumed to be influential factors in the online information search. Therefore, social media and UGC will be classified and critically discussed in this chapter.

## 4.3    Definition and Classification of Social Media

Importance of social media and User -Generated Content in tourism is acknowledged by tourism scholars (Law and Xiang, 2013; Leung *et al*, 2013; Liang *et al*, 2013; Ayeh, Au and Law, 2013; Dwivedi, 2009). These two terms are mostly referred together. While discussing the significance of the Internet and social media, some of the researchers use concepts like User-Generated Content (Cox *et al*, 2009), or traveller-created content(Li *et al*, 2015). In this project the term User -Generated Content (UGC) is preferred.

Agreeing on a clear-cut definition for social media is not easy(Lim, Chung and Weaver, 2012); however, in order to critically discuss social media there is a need to decide what is social media, and what is not? When the academic and professional publications are reviewed it can be seen that there are terms like, Web 2.0, (*Travel 2.0*)(Constantinides and Fountain, 2008; Chen, Yen and Hwang, 2012), User-Generated Content (*Traveller Created Content*) (Cox *et al*, 2009; Munar, 2011; Akehurst, 2009), which are used interchangeably with *social media*. However, Kaplan and Haenlein(2010) differentiate these concepts.  According to them, Web 2.0 is the online platform in which content and communication are not created and controlled by organizations.. On the contrary, content and communications are created, modified and republished by all users. UGC refers to all the content that are publicly available and created by end- users rather than organizations. Therefore social media can be defined as a group of Internet applications that built on Web 2.0 and facilitate the creation and dissemination of UGC (Lim, Chung and Weaver, 2012). While capturing the essence of these constructs in this definition, for a fuller understanding of social media and UGC, a classification of social media applications might be useful. Although social media applications are classified in six sub-groups in this chapter, it

does not mean that alternative classifications are not unlikely. On the contrary, there can be alternative classifications, because it is an emerging field and being studied by almost any social scientists.

### 4.3.1 Collaborative Projects

Collaborative projects allow joint creation of the content. The main idea behind these projects is that participation of many users will create a better content than the contents created by specific individuals (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Best example for this group is Wikipedia. As a web-based multilingual, free-content encyclopaedia, it has become one of the most important reference sites. Users with an Internet connection can write and make changes on articles. Editing is restricted only for few articles to prevent disruption and vandalism. Therefore, it has become the most comprehensive encyclopaedia(Wikipedia, 2017). Although, the content created by users can be incorrect, most of the time it is assumed to be true since many users contribute to the content creation. *WikiTravel* is the platform which is a wiki created for travel topics. Importance of collaborative projects can be better understood with these examples. When I typed '*Istanbul*' and search it on Google, I received more than 276 million results, but first result was Wikipedia in Turkish, and the second one was its English version. WikiTravel comes on the second page. However, the pages of Istanbul Tourism, or the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which are the state organizations responsible for tourism activities in city and national levels respectively, were not included in the first three pages. When I repeated the same process for *'London',* I received more than 1 billion results and the first one was again Wikipedia. *VisitLondon* comes after Wikipedia. This shows that there is a great chance for potential tourists to obtain information from collaborative projects, or Wikipedia in this case, rather than official web pages of destinations. Of course, Google's algorithms play a significant role here, but significance of Wikipedia cannot be overlooked, either.

### 4.3.2 Blogs

Blogs have become most common social media and networking platforms. Personal blogs can be considered as online diaries that presented in reverse chronological orders (Thevenot, 2007). It has been reported that effects of consumer reviews are highly influential in the early stages of a product but it diminishes over the time (Hu,

Liu and Zhang, 2008). However, in tourism context, for many travellers especially for the first time visitors each destination could be considered as a new-released product.

In addition to personal blogs there are blogs that are created by organizations and destinations (Akehurst, 2009; Schmallegger and Carson, 2008). As stated by Mangold and Faulds (2009) consumers feel more engaged with companies and their products when they are given opportunities to express their feelings through reviews in the blogs. In order to utilize this opportunities not only private companies but also many destinations started to use blogs to increase communication between consumers (Akehurst, 2009). In 2003 one Taiwanese traveller created a blog named '*I left my heart in Aegean Sea*' and uploaded his holiday pictures in Greece to share with his friends. After a short time that blog became famous and many Taiwanese started to plan a trip to Greece (Lin and Huang, 2006). Research shows that consumers believe that reviews on social networks, especially on the travel blogs are more trustworthy than the messages received from traditional marketing channels (Akehurst, 2009).

### 4.3.3   Content Communities

These types of platforms allow users to share media contents between users. The media content can be text, or other media formats such as photos (Flickr), videos (Youtube, Dailymotion), and power points (Slideshare). Users do not need to create profiles, or they need to supply only some basic information to create a profile (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).  YouTube is the most popular content sharing platform with more than 100 million videos uploaded per day (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009; Lim, Chung and Weaver, 2012). When I searched for the term 'visit London' more than 8 million video results appeared on the screen, and the majority of the ones on the first page were created by individuals rather than tourism organizations. There are particular cases which shows the power of content communities how a single unhappy customer can damage the reputation of a big company (Tran, 2009). In 2008, after a flight with United Airlines, singer Dave Carroll realized that his guitar was broken during the transportation.  He asked for compensation, and after a lengthy process company refused to pay compensation for his loss. He recorded a music video named it '*united breaks guitars*' and uploaded on YouTube (Kietzmann *et al*, 2011) . By the time this thesis written it was viewed more than 15 million times (See YouTube, 2016). Considering the recent forceful removal of a customer from his seat(Burley, 2017), "United Airlines has been widely cast as an example of corporate

heartlessness and indifference, issuing tone-deaf statements that deflected legal blame while doing little to prevent brand damage, at first, and then resorting to ever more abject apologies that still failed to assuage public anger" (Waldmeir and Bond, 2017). As of this chapter is written, there are various videos on this issue, and some of them have already been watched more than 1 million.

### 4.3.4   Social Networking Sites

Online communities of people with common interests and activities are called as social networks. Through these networks users can interact with each other by using simple texts to videoconferences, from photographs to videos. Social networks include not only personal pages, but also recommended pages for some individuals, organizations, or destinations and activities.(Miguéns, Baggio and Costa, 2008).In short social networking sites can be defined as;

> *web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulatea list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traversetheir list of connections and those made by others within the system(Boyd and Ellison, 2007:211)*

When a user profile is created, social networking sites allow their members to communicate with other users via e-mail, photos, videos etc. They can invite their friends to join their groups, fan pages, or they can follow updates of their online friends. The largest social networking site is Facebook (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), it has gained more than 1 billion members by 2012 (Williams, 2012), and more than 1 billion user logged in on a single day in 2015(BBC, 2015) and if it was a country it would be the third largest country in the world (Hudson and Thal, 2013).

### 4.3.5   Virtual Game Worlds

Virtual game worlds are the three dimensional platforms which allow their users to interact with other users through their preferred characters, or avatars. Although, they offer great interaction, most of the time users need to obey strict rules to play games. Therefore, these rules prevent discussion of topics that are not directly related to games. Therefore, these platforms can be good marketing medium for game related products, but not that much for other products categories.(Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

### 4.3.6 *Virtual Social Worlds*

Virtual social worlds are the platforms very similar to virtual game worlds. However, unlike game worlds, social worlds offer a great chance for communication between users, or residents. Similar to daily life, residents take a walk, go for shopping, and communicate with others. SecondLife is the one of the known virtual social worlds (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). To imitate the real life there is a currency in Second Life called Linden Dollar, which can be exchanged for US dollar and can be used for virtual goods and services on the SecondLife (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009).

As stated above, the chosen categories are highly subjective. However, to better understand the changes in information and communication channels, I think some form of categorization can be helpful. Therefore, various platforms that constitute social media are briefly mentioned in this part. These categorizations show that, social media is much more than a new information and communication channel; indeed it is an entire online platform consists of users' contents and communications. It might be in various forms such as wikis, social networking sites, and review sites, content community sites. The essence of it is social interaction of people through information and communication technologies, and creation of contents in various format such as word, pictures,videos. (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014:28).

## 4.4 Social Media and User-Generated Content in Management and Marketing

Community aspect of social media (e.g Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007) or consumer co-creation of the value (e.g. C.M. Sashi, 2012) can be considered as the two main areas in marketing research (Anderson, Hamilton and Tonner, 2016). Platforms called social media are characterised as the sources of extensive UGC, and users could be named as 'prosumers'(Fuchs, 2013). There are scholars who state that consumers are not the producers but actually 'working consumers' who work but not receive the revenue from the market; therefore, prosumption practices seem to be exploitative (Cova and Dalli, 2009), but empowerment and material gains earned by individuals cannot be overlooked (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). Today, individuals are empowered by social media to share their opinions either individually or in a collective manner to influence potential buyers, therefore they have to some extend power to influence brands (Hajli and Lin, 2014; Kim and Johnson, 2016). Besides, participating in the UGC creates social and economic benefits for individuals (Gruen,

Osmonbekov and Czaplewski, 2006). However the co-creation process and power relations seem to be highly debated areas by critical scholars.

> *"while consumers are genuinely empowered by co-creation practices, this empowerment that frees the consumer in a diversity of ways also offers significant avenues for entrapping the consumer into producing for the firm"(Bonsu and Darmody, 2008:355).*

Digital services and products can be considered as substitute or complimentary for offline counterparts (Yuksel, George and Elizabeth, 2016). While traditional form of media coexist with new form of media such as social media, the new media allows consumers to participate in content creation rather than considering them as passive audiences (Mandiberg, 2012). This rapid and unprecedented increase in the consumer participation has resulted instant changes in the managers/consumers power relations (Patino, Pitta and Quinones, 2012). There are scholars who ask for a holistic understanding of the internet and social media:

> *"Internet should not be seen as a medium such as television or magazines, as internet is a communications infrastructure that is increasingly embedded in all other media, as we are web browsing on a cell phone, video conferencing using a laptop, chatting with friends from all over the world via a game console, and ordering products and services with a television remote control. Indeed, in "overdeveloped" or "advanced" (depending on your vantage point) industrial democracies, internet-enabled media have come to be part of peoples' daily lives, connecting subscribers to a vast global, always-on, digital information and communication network"(Deuze, 2008:28).*

The main argument revolves around the empowerment of individuals through social media and UGC. Even though there were death sentence calls for the phrase 'User – Generated Content' because "*[t]hey're words that creepy marketers use. They imply something to be commodified, harvested, taken advantage of*" and there are much better alternatives like 'Authentic Media' that is free from strict filtering process of international brands and corporations(Powazek, 2006). Considering the research objectives and widespread use of the terms, social media and User-Generated Content will play crucial roles in this current study because:

*Post-internet branding is about facilitating conversations around the brand. Consumers are now wired and capitalize on social networks to derive power from one another. They develop their own perspective on companies and brands, a view that is often in conflict with the image a brand wishes to convey (Christodoulides, 2009:142).*

The scholars who perceive social media as an opportunity for organizations ask for further research to gain new insights about the UGC creations and effects on brands and organizations. It seems that while there are numerous studies about the social media usage, effects of that usage seems to be under-researched (Ngai, Tao and Moon, 2015). For some, social media needs to be treated as a hybrid element of promotion mix (Mangold and Faulds, 2009) and UGC's effects on purchase decisions are well noted (Bahtar and Muda, 2016). Besides similar to traditional WOM, UGC have higher credibility than marketer generated information (Gruen, Osmonbekov and Czaplewski, 2006). A study conducted on customers of an Iranian company shows that social media has a greater influence on attitude than traditional advertising (Abzari, Ghassemi and Vosta, 2014), and another study conducted on AMAZON.com confirms that customer ratings play crucial roles in digital camera sales (Zhang, Ma and Cartwright, 2013).

Even though there are contested arguments about the importance of social media in consumer empowerment, it can be claimed that, social media has been changing the branding and marketing activities and the power relations between consumers and brands. Therefore, its effects on in tourism context especially on DI formation require further research.

### 4.5    Social Media and User-Generated Content in Tourism

Social media and UGC seem to be highly relevant and important for tourism practitioners and scholars (Law and Xiang, 2013) because UGC seems to be having a significant influence on travel information search(Xiang and Gretzel, 2010) decision making(Leung *et al*, 2013) and destination choice(Tham, Croy and Mair, 2013). Since individuals may not be able evaluate the quality of tourism services or products prior

to actual consumption, UGC seems to be adding some degree of tangibility before the purchase decisions (Bronner and de Hoog, 2016; Browning, So and Sparks, 2013; Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008). Travel choices about where to visit, where to stay what to do in a particular destination are dramatically shaped by UGC on the platforms such as TripAdvisor (Filieri, 2016). Therefore, researchers seem to be agreeing on the influences of social media on travel behaviours (Amaro, Duarte and Henriques, 2016).

It seems that studies focusing on social media and tourism destinations either focusing on textual data, such as reviews and blogs (e.g. Jani and Hwang, 2011) or audiovisual data such as travel videos (e.g Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). Sharing travel experiences on the social media needs to be considered one of the most important aspects of travel behaviour (Kang and Schuett, 2013). Scholars who consider social media and UGC as important elements in their research tend to examine information search, decision making before the travel (Jacobsen and Munar, 2012) and purchase decisions and post-purchase behaviour of travellers (Hudson and Thal, 2013).

It has been claimed that UGC and social media play paramount roles in travel planning (Simms, 2012) and travel information search (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Therefore scholars tried to understand motivations to post or share on social media (Bronner and de Hoog, 2011; Munar and Jacobsen, 2014) and relationship between user characteristics and social media usage (Amaro, Duarte and Henriques, 2016).

Importance of online reviews and feedbacks are acknowledged in hospitality and tourism industries (Schuckert, Liu and Law, 2015), and it has been stated that volume of online feedbacks affects the sales, and effect of negative feedbacks are greater than the positive ones (Yan *et al*, 2016). Even though travel blogs are argued to be sources of rich and authentic traveller feedback (Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts, 2007), compared

to traditional WOM, online UGC is perceived less credible (Tham, Croy and Mair, 2013).

Current literature on social media in tourism context tend to consider social media as a 'tool' which needs to be effectively used by tourism companies or DMOs to gain competitive advantage (Hays, Page and Buhalis, 2013). Ultimate goal of research on social media seems to be controlling or manipulating UGC. The quotes below shed a light on the understanding of social media by some scholars.

> *"the successful practice of manipulating and managing social media still remains largely unknown to practitioners and scholars" (Leung et al, 2013:5).*

> *"Social media does provide new means for tourism organisations including destination marketing organisations (DMOs) to reengineer and implement their business models and operations" (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014:32).*

The above quotes imply that social media is a 'tool' which needs to be 'manipulated' and 'managed' to 'reengineer' business models and operations. Scholars who approach the social media and UGC from management perspectives tend to treat social media as a magic bullet that offers solutions to all kinds of business problems as long as appropriately 'manipulated' and 'controlled'. Therefore, corporations are advised to engage with social media activities, because company reputation seems to be positively affected by these activities, especially among the non-customers (Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom, 2015). For example, research shows that when individuals engage with a festival brand on social media, their attachments to the brand are affected by this engagement and the attachment is resulting positive WOM for the festival brand (Hudson *et al*, 2015). These studies show that social media has been mainly studied from an organizational point of view, and the ultimate goal of the research is to produce measurement tools for tourism companies and DMOs to

'control and manipulate' UGC. However, a holistic and critical point of view requires to study social media not only from organizations' point of view, but also from the consumers, or traveller's side. Because;

> *online social media are arenas where new interactions and productions between tourists are made, albeit that these processes can take place in other ways. Furthermore, tourists can consume multiple media products concurrently and make their own links between various products, regardless of producer identity. Any media product, in isolation or in combination with other media products, can therefore be an entry point to the consumption of a particular tourist space.(Månsson, 2011:1647-1648).*

### 4.6 Social Media, User-Generated Content and Destination Image Formation

In the past, information regarding a destination seemed to be disseminated under a relatively controlled environment through relatively controlled chandelles by DMOs, but today anyone with an internet-enabled device might post, or share textual or audio visual information about any destination, and these post might affect the formation of organic images (Ghazali and Cai, 2013). Travellers might present an image which does not evoke the projected image presented by DMOs(Költringer and Dickinger, 2015) because developments in information technology transformed tourism experiences (Xiang, Tussyadiah and Buhalis, 2015) and "[t]ravellers became co-marketers, co-designers, co-producers and co-consumers of travel experiences"(Sigala, 2012:1) since Web 2.0 allows them to initiate or share conversations about the tourism products and services(Shao, Rodriguez and Gretzel, 2012) .

As stated by Kang and Schuett(2013:94)

> *"Social media have played a major role as a platform for personal travel story reviews, warnings, advice/tips, and recommendations which influence trip decisions and even create pre-trip destination impressions."*

There are various researchers who examined social media in the context of tourism destinations. For example, in a recent study, in the context of some Italian regional DMOs' social media marketing activities on Facebook, scholars claimed that visual posts increase the travellers engagement more than the textual ones(Mariani, Di Felice and Mura, 2016). In another study microfilms are suggested as important elements in branding and positioning of a destination (Shao *et al*, 2016). There are studies who tried to explore online destination images of particular places, such as Peru (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013), Seoul(Hunter, 2016), and Goa(Dwivedi, Yadav and Viral, 2009). However, these studies are relying on the mainly textual data on the certain social media platforms and try to understand how a destination is presented by users or what kind of destination images are shared by different consumer groups (Schmallegger and Carson, 2009). There is a study that tries to explore how Macau is presented on different online platforms (Choi, Lehto and Morrison, 2007) and found that images shared by DMO and the users are highly different. Stepchenkova and Morrison (2006) tried to explore how USA and Russia are   presented on various online platforms, and Wenger (2008) examined the user characteristics and presentation of Austria on travel blogs. Even though, they contribute to our understanding of virtual images at a particular time, they do not bring new insights to understand how destination images are affected by those UGC.

Considering the destinations travellers share their experiences, memories and evaluations of a destination through social media platforms not only with their friends and families but also with the potential travellers all over the world (Kladou and Mavragani, 2015), tourism scholars have developed a great interest to UGC about destinations because it has been assumed that feedback about destinations, especially the ones generated by individuals offers a great source of information for DMOs to understand what kind of images are floating on the net, and how a particular destination is perceived and presented by various stakeholders (Dwivedi, Yadav and

Viral, 2009). Even though these attempts might help DMOs to understand how their destinations are presented on the net at a particular point of time, these studies tend to rely on the textual data downloaded from certain platforms (e.g. Jani and Hwang, 2011). Therefore, it can be said that "It is evident that web pages containing UGC that are neither visible nor popular, nor contain information about a specific destination, cannot influence the construction of that destination's image."(Marine-Roig and Anton Clavé, 2015). Besides, effects of textual and visual data on various online platforms might be limited for certain travellers such as repeat visitors, because repeat visitors to a particular destination may not be willing to seek additional information as much as the first time visitors (Jacobsen and Munar, 2012), and it has been found that when people visiting a place first time, or when they intend to visit an international destination they tend to seek information from UGC(Simms, 2012).

### 4.7       Common Methods in Social Media Research

As mentioned before tourism as a field of inquiry is dominated by post-positivist research paradigm (Tribe and Airey, 2007; 2007b), and this is the case for social media research as well. Even though, the social media research is in infancy stage in general and in tourism particularly taking advantages of entering the field earlier scholars who approach social media from an applied business perspective dominating the field (Munar, Gyimothy and Cai, 2013).

When the studies are examined it can be seen that researchers prefer to use data mining techniques from the online contents rather than conducting researches with real persons. The following are some of the studies that investigate User-Generated Content and tourism.(Dwivedi, 2009; Ayeh, Au and Law, 2013; Munar, 2011). One of the most frequently used techniques is that downloading all comments under destination related contents on various online platforms and trying to quantify these comments by frequency counting. Based on the word frequencies they try to reach a conclusion whether the image of a destination is favourable or not.  While some researchers try to investigate role of the User-Generated Content in travel planning (Cox *et al*, 2009), some other researchers (Govers, Go and Kumar, 2007) use travel blogs as a distribution channel for their research questions. Every day, there are many news or comments about the importance of social media in business, especially in tourism. However, because of the lengthy review and publishing process, tourism scholars might fall behind the tourism practitioners in terms of following the

innovative changes in information technology (Pan and Crotts, 2012). As a new phenomenon there is not sufficient research on social media and tourism to deeply understand how travellers are effected by social media and UGC (Hudson and Thal, 2013), especially its role in the destination image formation process. As afore mentioned social media research is dominated by the studies which consider UGC on various platforms as their data, and through quantitative reductions to draw a current picture of a particular destination on a particular time. However, these studies seem to overlook '*user*' aspect of UGC. In order to understand 'users' role in UGC and to observe how 'users' are affected by other 'users'.

The current project differs from the extant studies by focusing on DI formation and online information search. Rather than examining how a destination is presented at particular online platforms, this research aims to explore whether online platforms influence DI formation. While possible effects of social media and UGC are considered, online information is not confined to these constructs. Letting participants to search and explore about a particular destination and observing their interaction with various online platforms including social media and UGC is one of the main contributions of this research.

## 4.8    Summary

Spectacular changes have been observed in the in the ways consumers receive and disseminate information about tourism products and services (Buhalis, 1998; Leung *et al*, 2013). In the past, DMOs, to some extent, controlled the media messages, and they tried to create desired destination images through their marketing campaigns, but traditional destination marketing has been challenged by appearance of social media applications and User-Generated Contents (Munar, 2012; Gretzel, 2006; Frías *et al*, 2012) because travellers do not need to rely on information received from controlled sources. They can communicate time efficiently and cost effectively not only with previous visitors to a destination but also with accommodation suppliers, travel companies, DMOs, and local residents of a destination through new media channels (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010; Pan and Fesenmaier, 2006; Lin and Huang, 2006; Hvass and Munar, 2012). Since the contents of new media platforms are not directly controlled by DMOs, they include both positive and negative views about destinations. These contents affect and change the perceptions of potential travellers (Miguéns, Baggio and Costa, 2008; Lo *et al*, 2011; Carson, 2008). These changes in

communication emancipate individuals from dominance of traditional information sources and open new research areas for scholars. While traditional information sources seem to be vastly investigated, online information sources and effects of online information search in DI formation is an area that needs to be further investigated.

In this chapter, dramatic changes in the power relations between consumers and brands and emancipation of consumers from dominance of brand controlled information sources are discussed. While importance online information search for brands and consumers are acknowledged, the challenges brought by new media channels are considered, too. As an emerging field in marketing and tourism research, social media and User-Generated Content attract attention of many scholars. Therefore, as the potential sources in online information searches, these two important constructs were critically discussed in marketing and tourism contexts and their role in DI formation has been reviewed. Finally, in this chapter previous studies' overdependence on textual and audio-visual data from various sources were mentioned and the urgent need for more dynamic studies that observe participants' interaction with online information sources is highlighted.

# 5 Methodology

## 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, tourism in general and DI in particular are discussed with a nuanced understanding of tourism. While extant studies were critically discussed importance of sociocultural factors is highlighted. Besides, a nuanced framework was presented to explain complex image formation process. To be able to reflect the depth and complexity in this formation, an appropriate research methodology should be followed.

In this chapter, after presenting research questions, I will discuss competing research philosophies in tourism studies and endeavour to explain epistemological and ontological assumptions in this research that affect chosen research methods (Botterill, 2001). A critical discussion of research philosophies will be followed by a detailed explanation of a three-pillar research design. Then to shed a light onto the actual data collection process, three important parts of the study will be explained in depth, and data analysis methods and process will be discussed. Finally, ethical considerations, reflections and limitations in this research will be elaborated.

## 5.2 Research Questions

The main aim of this research is to present a nuanced conceptualization of DI. To be able to conduct a holistic research, previous researches are critically reviewed in the previous chapters. While there are various seminal papers on DI, as discussing image formation socio-cultural factors and dramatic changes in information seeking have been mostly overlooked. These factors will be taken into account in this study.

Therefore, objectives of this thesis are:

a) To critically examine destination image formation through a nuanced conceptualization.

b) To explore the effects of personal characteristics on destination image formation.

c) To observe socio-cultural factors in destination image formation.

d) To examine the role have Internet and online information search on destination image formation.

In order to satisfy these objectives these research questions needs to be answered.

These are the research questions in this thesis:

1. What images do non-Turkish residents in the UK have about Turkey?

2. How socio-cultural characteristics of individuals affect their perceptions about Turkey?

3. How socio-cultural forces affect DI formation for Turkey?

4. What is the relative importance of different media platforms in destination image formation, and how online information search influences image formation?

### 5.3    Research Philosophy

Even though researchers may not be aware of, their chosen research methods can be influenced by their assumptions about ontology and epistemology. As stated by Botterill(2001) these assumptions do not tend to be explicitly discussed in tourism research. However, without explicit discussion of methodological assumptions, it is not easy to understand why particular research methods are dominant in an area of research.   As stated by various scholars some research methods can be privileged in different socio-political contexts or in a field of enquiry (Jamal and Everett, 2007; McLachlan and Garcia, 2015). As a result, alternative research methods cannot be easily chosen by scholars to challenge dominant research practices. The dominant position of 'positivistic' tourism studies is a good example to show how alternative research possibilities can be sidelined in a field of inquiry (Hollinshead, 2006).

Even though it is argued that resistance by some  scholars to embracement of social aspects of tourism and inclusion of more qualitative and critical methodologies is overturned eventually(Tribe, Dann and Jamal, 2015),"[n]ineteenth century claims to social science as a way of solving human problems as the basis for the creation of rational society have proved difficult to defend, yet continue to occur in the justification for tourism research"(Botterill, 2001:211). Understanding tourism as a solely business activity has created a research space which seems to be limited in

theory and conceptualizations. Overdependence on the managerial understanding has left tourism as an applied field of the business studies (Tribe and Airey, 2007; Ateljevic, Morgan and Pritchard, 2007). Compared to other social science disciplines, tourism has been considered as an economic activity rather than an area of academic inquiry (Humberstone, 2004). Although significant amount of research have been conducted on tourism, it may not be considered as a discipline yet (Tribe, 1997); therefore, tourism scholars probably wanted to be recognized by wider research communities through conducting empirical researches that require advanced statistical procedures(Jennings, 2012; Goodson and Phillimore, 2004). However this inhibits embracement of social aspects of tourism and created similar case studies, which lack innovative research methods (Ateljevic, Morgan and Pritchard, 2007).

When calendars show 1990s, critics have started to disapprove purely positivistic research to study such a complex phenomenon called destination image (Reilly, 1990; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). These scholars posit that DI is a gestalt, or holistic construct; therefore, needs to be examined through alternative methods. Even though, these are highly valuable calls to be listened, to some extend they prefer to isolate destination image from its socio-cultural, historical, and political environments (Canally, 2010). This signals that it is crucial for tourism researchers to welcome alternative studies to explore complexity of DI (Ateljevic, Morgan and Pritchard, 2007; Goodson and Phillimore, 2004; Tribe and Airey, 2007). Hence I believe that welcoming qualitative research in tourism studies creates richness by humanizing research and creating a platform for creative 'playfulness' (Wilson and Hollinshead, 2015). As long as scholars try to abandon strict policing of the established paradigms in tourism studies, alternative epistemological space seems to exist with more flexibility and plurality (Coles, Hall and Duval, 2006). In this study, if the formation of DI is considered as a story, I endeavour to tell this story through a nuanced style (Hollinshead, 2006).

Unlike positivism, rather than trying to predict and control social phenomena, interpretivism endeavour to understand and interpret it (Decrop, 2004).Positivists believe that the relationship between researcher and researched can be value free and should be unbiased (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Rakic, 2011), but I see "research as a unique, context specific product, co-created between researcher and the informant."(McGehee, 2012:365). Hence the primary purpose of this research is

'understanding' the formation of destination image, the epistemologically this research can be considered as an 'interpretivist' research.

"Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations."(Denzin and Lincoln, 2008:4). Meanings of social phenomena are constructed through interactions between researcher and participants (McLachlan and Garcia, 2015). However, since research is considered as a dehumanized construct, these interactions tried to be eliminated to increase 'rigor' (Walle, 1997) in vast majority of tourism researches. As stated by Decrop(2004), qualitative research is seen by many tourism scholars to exist only to further develop quantitative research by providing information. In this current research, qualitative research is conducted to bring new insights and to better understand formation of destination image, rather than as a preliminary tool to develop better quantitative research instruments. I perceive research as an endeavour to explore subjective meanings in a co-created manner (McGehee, 2012). Therefore, ontological assumptions of the current study can be considered as 'constructivist'.

## 5.4   Research Design

Even though tourism scholars started to explore methodological issues in tourism studies three decades ago(Dann, Nash and Pearce, 1988) and acknowledged shortcomings of quantitative studies in capturing and understanding meanings in tourism context, embracement of novel qualitative research methods seems to be still limited (Goodson and Phillimore, 2004), and domination of quantitative studies is highly apparent, maybe because of the lack in visibility of contribution of qualitative research into the actual bottom line in the tourism industry (Riley and Love, 2000). The present study is an endeavour to conduct a qualitative research to explore DI formation amid pervasive quantitative studies. Therefore, even though DI is a construct that has been studied mostly by quantitative research (see Pike, 2002), I tried to explore and understand overlooked aspects of image formation through a qualitative flexible research design.

After the 1990s, a proliferation has been observed in tourism research methods, but many scholars persist in using quantitative methods, mainly questionnaires as their main data collection technique to measure DI (Beerli and Martín, 2004b; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999bb; Liu, Lin and Wang, 2012). However, to understand the DI formation and role of various factors in this formation process a quantitative study may not be appropriate since its main objective is explanation rather than understanding (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009; Pansiri, 2005; Bryman and Bell, 2011). As discussed in the previous chapters, traditional quantitative studies may not be able to capture holistic impressions of a destination. Besides, they may not be appropriate to explore socio-cultural dynamics in image formation.

Even though DI is an immensely investigated topic (Chen and Phou, 2013; Qu, Kim and Im, 2011), the Internet and online information search are highly novel phenomena for tourism studies(Law and Xiang, 2013; Leung *et al*, 2013).This means that a quantitative study may not be useful to  for the present study. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted to better understand information search patterns, perceptions, behaviours and the experiences of travellers with online content (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011; Jennings, 2012). Since "qualitative research is explorative" (Diefenbach, 2009,p.877), interviews are designed to help me to explore hidden meanings (Goertz and Mahoney, 2012) and impressions in the minds of travellers. Even though, my research technique can be considered as interviewing, it consists of three highly interrelated parts, which are Repertory grid analysis, Scenario analysis, and Online information search.

### 5.4.1 *Repertory Grid Analysis*

Repertory Grid Analysis is based on the Kelly's Personal Construct Theory developed in 1950s (Kelly, 1991; Fransella and Bell, 2004). This theory tries to explore construct systems. Even though, it was originally developed to be used in Kelly's field of clinical psychology, it has been applied in many fields successfully (Glavas, Pike and Mathews, 2014). Personal Construct Theory drives from interpretive paradigm that focuses on understanding meaning attached by individuals (Marsden and Littler, 2000a; Marsden and Littler, 2000b). As stated earlier the main purpose of the interpretive paradigm is understanding, whereas generalization is the main objective for positivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).Although  Kelly  proposed a 'constructive alternativism' stance for the understanding of humankind and the things

around us, his theoretical propositions seemed to be neglected by many scholars who uses Repertory Grid Analysis in their research. There are some studies that deployed Repertory Grid Analysis (RGA) as a preliminary step for developing more structured surveys. However as stated by Fransella and Bell (2004) if the theoretical foundations of RGA in Personal Construct Theory are not overlooked, RGA can be considered as a perfectly suitable qualitative research technique. Since "*RGA permits individuals to use their own language to describe what is relevant to them*" (Coshall, 2000:85), RGA permits respondents to share their thoughts and opinions without interviewer bias (Caldwell and Coshall, 2002). As stated above there are many studies in which RGA has been used as a preliminary step for further quantitative studies but as seen in alternatives (e.g.Canally, 2010; Naoi *et al*, 2006), it can be used as the main part of semi-structured interviews. As stated by Caldwell and Coshall(2002), RGA is a semi-structured technique.

Most of the time in a RGA, participants are leaded to think in a bipolar way.(Kelly, 1991; Fransella and Bell, 2004). The main instruments to explore bipolar constructs in the minds of individuals are called 'triads' (Pearce, 1982). Although there are some alternatives, such as using photographs in these triads (e.g.David Botterill and Crompton, 1987), the triad cards are the most accepted way of conducting RGA. In a typical study participants are offered different sets of triad cards and asked to group two elements similar and one element as different, and asked in which way the two elements are similar and the other one is different. In order to fully utilize RGA it can be followed with a Laddering Analysis (Naoi *et al*, 2006; Pike, 2012) . In Laddering Technique when respondent choses a construct as important, interviewer keeps asking why it is important for him or her. Finally, as a ladder, interviewer tries to reach values of individuals that effects decisions of individuals.

RGA considers how people make sense of world (Caldwell and Coshall, 2002; Walmsley and Jenkins, 1993). Although it has been successfully applied in market research more than four decades, it has been underused in tourism studies (Pike, 2003). However it can be considered as one of the most useful methods for destination image studies (Coshall, 2000).  Because "[it] is particularly suitable for identifying the range of salient attributes individuals use to differentiate a competitive set of brands" (Pike, 2012:101). For instance, it has been conducted to explore images of different food stores (Buttle, 1985).

Although vast majority of destination image studies have preferred structured questionnaires for data collections (Pike, 2012) the major problem with this technique is that they do not reveal the salient dimensions which are expressed by respondents (Embacher and Buttle, 1989). As stated above RGA allows individuals to use their own words to express their thoughts and opinions about different elements (Coshall, 2000). Therefore, it allows exploring salient attributes in image studies. Another advantage of RGA is that researchers do not need large number of participants. Since there is no clear formula to choose number of participant in a qualitative study, ideally research continues until the data redundancy is reached (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). This means that conducting new interviews do not produce new insights for the study. Main advantage of RGA is that data redundancy can be reached even with a very few people (Pike, 2003; Glavas, Pike and Mathews, 2014), therefore, most of the studies includes less than 20 participants. In their study David Botterill and Crompton(1987) conducted their research with a single participant.

Theoretically, it is possible to use RGA in group settings. However, as seen in Pike's study of short-break destinations in Australia, when it is applied in a group setting it produces far less constructs (Pike, 2007). Therefore, it can be said that it is more suitable for individual interviews. The main reason for this can be that it was originally designed for clinical psychology.

When conducting RGA for different tourism destinations, unless the study does not focus on one of the destinations all destinations should be included randomly in the triads and all possible permutations of triads should be used (Coshall, 2000). However, this may create unmanageable workloads for interview. Therefore, In order to reduce required time of interviews some authors try to find specific formulas (Burton and Nerlove, 1976). In this study; I tried to explore perceived images of individuals about Turkey. Therefore, I included Turkey in each triad. It is mentioned by Kelly that 40 sorts of 20 elements produces almost all the relevant constructs (Pike, 2007). This means that while conducting interviews, I should consider data redundancy and practicality at the same time.

### 5.4.2 Scenario Analysis
Following the triad elicitation, to capture tourism specific images of Turkey, adapting the scenario analyses in previous studies (Canally, 2010; Govers, Go and Kumar,

2007) participants were asked to consider themselves travelling to Turkey in immediate future, and share openly what kinds of experiences they are expecting in Turkey. This allowed me to grasp differences between county images and tourism destination images. Additionally, if the participants could not state their thoughts and feelings deep enough in the triad elicitation, this scenario provided them a chance to recall their thoughts and feelings about Turkey, and share them in a story format.

*Right now, I want you to imagine that in near future, it can be next week, next month, next summer, next winter you decide but in near future you are visiting Turkey. Imagine that you are in Turkey, or you are travelling to Turkey. Could you please tell me your story?*

*Be spontaneous and share whatever thoughts and feelings come to your mind, whether positive or negative. Your response can be very detailed or quite brief, based on your knowledge and experience. There is no right or wrong answer. I only want to hear your true opinions, so please do not try to please me. If you have already been to Turkey, your previous experiences might come to your mind, and you might share them with me.*

*Right now, what do you think your experience in Turkey would be like? What images and thoughts immediately come to your mind? What would you expect to see, or feel, hear, smell, taste there?*

### 5.4.3   Online Information Search

As stated earlier even though there are calls to embrace novel research methods to bring nuanced understandings to tourism studies (Goodson and Phillimore, 2004; Rakic, 2011), alternative research methods seems to be still side-lined because of the dominant managerial understanding of the tourism phenomenon(Tribe, 2004; Tribe, 2007). When the literature reviewed it can be seen that social media and user generated content has becoming a topic which attacking attention of many tourism scholars(Hvass and Munar, 2012) and an area of exploration with relatively novel research techniques. It can be seen that content analysis of social media platforms (Munar, 2011; Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009; Månsson, 2011; Wenger, 2008), perceptions about certain social media platforms(Ayeh, Au and Law, 2013), social media and destination choice(Jacobsen and Munar, 2012), online information search behaviours (Ho and Liu, 2005; Jordan, Norman and Vogt, 2013; Pan and Fesenmaier,

2006), role of social media in online information search(Xiang and Gretzel, 2010) are some of the highly investigated topics in tourism. Even though there is a study in which researchers try to examine effects of online information search on image formation (Li *et al*, 2009) and which deploys a novel research technique such as recording PC screens in which researchers tried to measure destination image via traditional measurement scales. In this present study, I have deployed a similar research technique to record online information search behaviours, but unlike the previous research, I analysed this data in a more qualitative manner.

### 5.5    Sampling

To be able to conduct a research which considers wider socio-cultural, historical, political aspects along with recent technological changes, both the destination whose perceived images is explored and the place where the study is conducted need to be chosen wisely. Different socio-cultural groups should perceive a destination differently. Therefore, due to its significance in international tourism (World Tourism Organization, 2013), Turkey seems to be a suitable destination for the current study. Additionally, there are significant amounts of research that focuses on Turkey's destination image, but majority of them overlook socio-cultural aspects. Therefore, this study may shed a light on these overlooked aspects. Turkey has been chosen to explore its perceived images among the non-Turkish residents in the UK, which is one of the leading source markets for Turkey (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2014). Main purpose of conducting this qualitative research is not statistical generalizations, rather bringing new insights to formation of DI. Since this study focuses on the socio-cultural influences on the image formation, an ideal place should accommodate individuals coming from different socio-cultural backgrounds. In this case, Leicester seems to be an ideal place for this study not only because I am situated in Leicester, but also it has a multi-cultural population, 34 per cent were born outside the UK (Leicester City Council, no date). This multi-cultural population is invaluable, since wider socio-cultural influences are taken into account in this project.

Even though it may not be possible to determine exact sample size before conducting a qualitative research (Jennings, 2012), considering sample sizes in other qualitative studies (Hughes and Allen, 2008; Ryan and Cave, 2005), and requirements of the current study, 32 interviews seem to be sufficient to explore formation of DI through a holistic understanding. Although dozens of articles investigated DI, only few of

them tried to capture pre-visit or secondary images of destinations. Nevertheless, a comprehensive understanding of DI requires exploring both primary and secondary images. Hence, participants who have visited Turkey and who have never been there are included in this study.

While probability sampling seems to be an appropriate sampling in quantitative research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009), it can be considered hardly appropriate for a qualitative research (Marshall, 1996). In this project, I endeavour to better understand the formation of DI through subjective meanings shared by informants rather than generalizations; therefore non-probability sampling seems to be more suitable. When there is a need to conduct research with highly informative participants, whom are hard to reach but necessary to deepen and broaden understanding of a social phenomenon 'judgmental sampling' can be appropriate to choose research participants (Gursoy, Ekiz and Chi, 2007). Since the present study tries to explore perceptions of people from different socio-cultural backgrounds who have visited Turkey and who have never been there, judgemental sampling is appropriate to select participants.

In this research, DI is conceptualized as a complex, dynamic construct that evolves from organic to induced and from secondary to primary stages. To be able to understand these evolutions, this study requires not only the people who have experienced Turkey, but also who have never stepped in Turkey. Besides, to explore roles played by various socio-cultural forces, participants should come from diverse backgrounds. Since this study is trying to understand images in the minds of individuals who are not Turks, people with Turkish origins were not included in this study. Therefore, anyone over 18-year old who resides in the UK can be a potential participant in this research, but Turks.

To be able to recruit participants for the study, first of all I tried to seek cooperation from tour operators and travel agents operating in Leicester. Because of the strict company rules majority of them refused to cooperate. There was an independent agent who was relatively cooperative, but later he decided not to cooperate because he was not selling tours to Turkey. After trying various communication channels, and visiting branches, I sensed that it might not be possible to recruit participants through travel agents. Then, I decided to invite participants through various channels, these includes

visiting community centres, churches, mosques, and sending invitations through personal networks.

To briefly introduce my participants, I will present their short bios in the upcoming paragraphs.

*Adam: Adam, 50-year old, is working as a valet and never been to Turkey. He was born in the UK, and holds an undergraduate degree. He defines himself as an atheist. He worked in local music bands in the past. He is not a social media user, because he is highly sensitive about online privacy. Besides, he thinks that social media posts might create problems for the users because of the government surveillances. He perceives television as one of the main tool for propaganda.*

*Bob: He is a 48-year old service engineer with a high school degree. He was born in the UK. He is married with three children. He defines himself as a Christian and he is not a social media user.*

*Chris: Chris holds a PhD in engineering. He is in his 50s, married with two children. Chris is a social media user and has visited Turkey before. He defines himself as Christian, and devoted significant amount of time to his church services. Even though he received a salary from the church to teach at the courses organized by the church, he does a lot of voluntary works for the church.*

*Daniela: She is from Peru, and has been living in the UK for more than a decade. Daniela is at her late 50s. She has never been married and devoted her time to the church. She does not define herself as a Christian, but as a follower of Jesus. She thinks that the Christianity has become an 'institution' with its strict rules, but she lives for love and compassion. Daniela has never been to Turkey, and she is not a social media user.*

*Earl: As a 22-year old mechanical engineer, Earl has started his own business. Even though he shared quite interesting thoughts about Turkey, from Turkey's internal conflicts to its relations with neighbouring countries, he has never been to Turkey. He is an active social media user, and during the online information search session he was checking his*

*friends Facebook posts related to Turkey. He defines himself as a Christian.*

**Frank:** *He is a colleague of Adam, and works a valet at the same place. He holds an A-Level degree. He was born in the UK, and he has never been to Turkey. He defines himself as an atheist.*

**Gina:** *She is in her late 40s and holds a postgraduate teaching certificate. She has social media accounts, but sign-in rarely. She is married with two children. She worked in the Azerbaijan more than a decade and relocated to the UK recently. She has visited Turkey several times in the past. She defines himself as a Christian.*

**Henry:** *He is a 30-year old, UK born doctor, married with two children. Henry defines himself as a Christian. He has visited Turkey more than once. Henry is an active social media user.*

**Isabella:** *When the interviews were conducted she was working as visual merchandisers in a retail store. As a 24-year old she later started her own café business. She has never been to Turkey, and she is a social media user. She defines herself as a Christian.*

**John:** *He is a 60-year old teacher. John is married with no kids. He has recently visited Turkey and hosted by a Turk whom he met in the UK. He defines himself as a Christian. He is not a social media user.*

**Kay:** *She is original from Mauritius. Kay is at her early 20s and holds an A-Level. She has been adopted and lived in the UK more than a decade. Kay has never been to Turkey. She defines herself as a Christian and she is a social media user.*

**Leo:** *Leo is a 29-year old teacher. He is married with no kids. Leo has never been to Turkey. He defines himself as a Christian. He is a social media user.*

**Michael:** *As a retired marketing professional Michael has lots of travel experiences. He has been to Turkey, but mostly for business purposes. Michael is a 67-year old single and defines himself as a Christian. Even*

*though he is an active Internet user, he does not have social media accounts.*

***Neil:** He is a 27 year-old researcher. He studies for a PhD at the same time. He is an active social media user. Neil has visited Turkey before and defines himself as a Christian. During the interviews, he was frequently reflecting on his own thoughts.*

***Osman and Parwez:** These are two Pakistani brothers. They both hold A-Level diploma. While Osman is married with one kid, Parwez is single. Osman's wife and daughter live in Pakistan, and these two brothers share the same accommodation. Osman is around his 30s and Parwez is in mid 20s. Both of them have lived in the UK more than a decade and hold the UK citizenship. While Osman has visited Turkey as companion to one of his Turkish friends, Parwez has never been there. They both state that they were unemployed and looking for jobs. Both define themselves Muslims.*

***Rose:** She is a 62-year old, single. She holds an A-Level diploma. She is very good at computers. She teaches computer and Internet to adults. She is an active social media user. She has never visited Turkey. Rose defines herself as a Christian.*

***Sumayye and Talia:** These two friends are from Kazakhstan. Sumayye is in her 40s and Talia is in mid 30s. While Sumayye is married with two kids, Talia is single. Both of them hold PhDs either from Kazakhstan or Russia. While Sumayye is working at a university in Kazakhstan, Talia is employed by one of the state departments. They are participating various exchange programs. Neither of them has been to Turkey.  They define themselves as Muslims.*

***Veysi and Wahid:** These are PhD students. Veysi is from Iranian Muslim, and has lived in the UK more than 3 years. He is married with one child. He is an active social media user. He has been to Turkey either as a tourist or as a UK visa applicant. Since it was not possible to apply for a UK visa within Iran, he had to travel to Turkey and apply for his visa in Istanbul. Therefore, he had chances to   visit various parts in Turkey. Wahid is a*

*Pakistani Muslim. He is in his mid 30s and single. He spent significant times in the UK; he spent more than 10 years in The UK, but never been to Turkey. He is a social media user.*

**Ricardo:** *As a 72-year old, he is the most senior participant in this research. Ricardo has a high school degree. He is married and has three children and many more grand children. As a pensioner he spends significant amount while travelling, and has been to Turkey. He defines himself as a Christian. He is not a social media user.*

**Xiang, Zhen and Lin:** *These are female PhD students at their 20s. While Xiang and Zhen are from China, Lin comes from Taiwan. While Xiang and Zhen have lived in the UK for three years, Lin spent 10 years. None of them has visited Turkey. Even though they define themselves as Buddhists, Lin states that she is not actually practicing, and "it is more like a cultural thing". All of them have social media accounts.*

**Amita:** *She comes from India and pursuing a PhD for 3 years. She is a 28-year old single. She defines herself as agnostic. Amita has never visited Turkey. She is a social media user.*

**Barbara:** *She is a retired doctor in her late 50s. Even though she does not get her pension yet, she prefers to retire. She has a villa in Turkey and spends some time in there annually. She is married with no kids. She defines herself as a Christian. She is a social media user.*

**Carlos:** *He is an American lived in the UK more than 15 years and holds the UK citizenship. He is a 56-year old married teacher with four children. Carlos defines himself as a Christian. He has visited Turkey. Carlos does not have a social media account.*

**David:** *David is a 33-year old Indian who moved to the UK only one year ago after getting married his Indian wife, who is a UK citizen. He holds a master degree, and works as a customer service advisor in a utility company. David is a social media user and defines himself as an atheist. He has never visited Turkey.*

*Elizabeth:* *She is a 70-year old pensioner. Elizabeth is married with four kids. She attended the interview with her husband who was eager to speak about Turkey. She defines herself as a Christian. Elizabeth has visited Turkey before. Surprisingly she is a social media user.*

*Juliette:* *She is a research assistant from France. When the interviews were conducted she was visiting the UK as an exchange student. She has visited Turkey, and she is a social media user. Juliette defines herself as atheist.*

*Ali:* *He is an Iraqi Muslim at his 30s. He has a high school diploma. Ali arrived to the UK 7 years ago, and opened his own shop. Later he managed to bring his wife and two children to the UK. Ali has visited Turkey. He is not a social media user.*

## 5.6   Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews are the main research tools in this research to understand formation of DI. In order to facilitate interviews and to grasp hidden meanings in participants' unconsciousness without imposing predetermined questions, triad elicitation technique was conducted at the beginning of the interviews (Dann, 1996). Although there is not a certain limit for triads or sets, it is acknowledged that no more than 20 sets are required to add new insights to research data saturation (Canally, 2010). In other image studies in tourism, triad elicitation technique was deployed for less than 20 triad sets and theme saturation was achieved (Canally, 2010; Hughes and Allen, 2008). In order to ensure theme saturation, I included 9 destinations including Turkey;

In this study, besides Turkey, there were eight more destinations. If all the combinations (three destinations in each set) of 9 counties were included, there would be 84 different triad sets to be circulated. However, a typical respondent uses around ten triads. In order to tackle this redundancy problem, Pike(2003) employs Burton and Nerlove's (1976), balanced incomplete design formula, and the reduced number of triads for 9 elements become 24, rather than 84. Although it is still too much to use in a single interview it becomes more manageable. This formula could be an option, but since the current study is focusing on Turkey, similar to Canally's(2010) study, Turkey  was included in all triads. Since Turkey was in all sets, for each set there was

a need to choose 2 destinations out of 8. The table underneath lists all these combinations;

Table 3: Triad Sets

1. **TURKEY, Greece, Italy**
2. **TURKEY, Greece, Egypt**
3. **TURKEY, Greece, Morocco**
4. **TURKEY, Greece, USA**
5. **TURKEY, Greece, France**
6. **TURKEY, Greece, Spain**
7. **TURKEY, Greece, Germany**
8. **TURKEY, Italy, Egypt**
9. **TURKEY, Italy, Morocco**
10. **TURKEY, Italy, USA**
11. **TURKEY, Italy, France**
12. **TURKEY, Italy, Spain**
13. **TURKEY, Italy, Germany**
14. **TURKEY, Egypt, Morocco**
15. **TURKEY, Egypt, USA**
16. **TURKEY, Egypt, France**
17. **TURKEY, Egypt, Spain**
18. **TURKEY, Egypt, Germany**
19. **TURKEY, Morocco, USA**
20. **TURKEY, Morocco, France**
21. **TURKEY, Morocco, Spain**
22. **TURKEY, Morocco, Germany**
23. **TURKEY, USA, France**
24. **TURKEY, USA, Spain**

**25. TURKEY, USA, Germany**

**26. TURKEY, France, Spain**

**27. TURKEY, France, Germany**

**28. TURKEY, Spain, Germany**

As seen in the table above, because of the repetition, the triads above could create boredom for participants and inhibit diverse comparisons. Therefore, rather than showing them to participants in this order, I decided to randomize them through Microsoft Excel randomize function. As a result, the triads in the table below were created. Randomizing the triad sets created a more balanced and diverse distribution.

The main aim of conducting a Repertory Grid Analysis is to keep exploring new constructs in the minds of a participant until he or she runs out new constructs. In a typical interview setting, participants mostly run out construct after 10 sets.. Therefore, rather than using each of the 28 triad sets for each and every interview, I kept giving triads until the respondents run out of new constructs. To be able to use all the possible triad sets, when a respondent run out of new constructs after a particular set,I pursued the interview with the subsequent set. For example, if the first participant did not come up with a new construct after the eighth set, I started the second interview with the ninth set.

Table 4: Randomized Triad Sets

**11. TURKEY, Italy, France**

**24. TURKEY, USA, Spain**

**16. TURKEY, Egypt, France**

**2. TURKEY, Greece, Egypt**

**9. TURKEY, Italy, Morocco**

**15. TURKEY, Egypt, USA**

**19. TURKEY, Morocco, USA**

**17. TURKEY, Egypt, Spain**

**6. TURKEY, Greece, Spain**

**5. TURKEY, Greece, France**

**20. TURKEY, Morocco, France**

**22.TURKEY,Morocco, Germany**

**28. TURKEY, Spain, Germany**

**1. TURKEY, Greece, Italy**

**8. TURKEY, Italy, Egypt**

**27. TURKEY, France, Germany**

**4. TURKEY, Greece, USA**

**13. TURKEY, Italy, Germany**

**18. TURKEY, Egypt, Germany**

**14. TURKEY, Egypt, Morocco**

**21. TURKEY, Morocco, Spain**

**23. TURKEY, USA, France**

**3. TURKEY, Greece, Morocco**

**25. TURKEY, USA, Germany**

**12. TURKEY, Italy, Spain**

**10. TURKEY, Italy, USA**

**26. TURKEY, France, Spain**

**7. TURKEY, Greece, Germany**

Selection of triad elements is very important in RGA. To let individuals to compare destinations on different aspects, I tried to choose destinations with different characteristics. Although there is not a certain formula that explains how to choose elements, I have included main competing destinations of Turkey(Baloglu and McCleary, 1999b; Baloglu and Mangaloglu, 2001) and the most visited destinations by UK outbound travellers(Rhodes, 2015).

When the triads are completed, in order to better understand tourism specific images I asked participants to imagine they are travelling to Turkey, and share their imaginary travel experiences with me. As explained above, this travel scenario was adapted from previous studies (Canally, 2010; Govers, Go and Kumar, 2007). While triads gave me a chance to better understand relativistic images of Turkey as a county and a destination, the scenario analysis was helpful to explore tourism specific images.

Finally, to better understand the influences of online information search on informants' understandings of Turkey,, and to observe their online information search behaviours, participants were asked to imagine themselves as someone who had plans to visit Turkey in immediate future. Besides they were asked to conduct a 15-minute online information search about Turkey or do planning for the trip to Turkey. In order to analyse their search patterns, I had to record the PC screens they do information search on them. Even though there are extensive ranges of programs that enable users to record PC screens, I have installed CAM STUDIO 2 and OPEN BROADCASTER SOFTWARE for recording. As a researcher I found these programs to be sufficient enough to record good quality videos with a user-friendly interface.

Since DI is a dynamic concept (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002), rather than a cross sectional design a longitudinal design seems to be necessary in order to better understand the changes in images. However, because of the difficulties in approaching the same participants, longitudinal studies are quite rare in tourism studies. Even though it was not possible conduct a longitudinal research, this 15-minute information search served as a tool to better understand the image changes, if any. This helped me to better understand how a specific destination (i.e. Turkey) is presented on certain online platforms, and how these presentations resulted changes in images of participants. Information gathered from diverse sources helped me to elaborate the research questions (Decrop, 1999; Hunter and Suh, 2007), and to examine the data to ascertain patterns and structures (Stepchenkova, Kirilenko and Morrison, 2009) in online information search behaviours of informants.

## 5.7    Data Analysis

To able to conduct a rigorous qualitative analysis the interviews were transcribed by the researcher himself. In order not to lose important data, rather than using software

to transcribe them, all the recorded sound files were transcribed using Microsoft Word. To be able to understand complex nature of image formation and effects of various elements in this formation process a flexible analysis method was imperative.

One of the common problems in qualitative research papers is that while authors briefly mention the name of the analysis they employed a detailed explanation of analysis process and technique they used is mostly invisible.(Tuckett, 2005). However, to produce meaningful results from qualitative materials, robust methods of analysis should be conducted and detailed explanations of analysis should be shared (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic analysis is known for its valuable flexibility characteristics, but it is criticized as a prime example of "anything goes' in qualitative research because of this flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2006), and in various researches even though authors mentioned that they looked for the 'emerging' themes in data, they hesitated to name their method and share justification for it(see for examples Bryman, 2012). Despite the fact that it is one of the most common qualitative data analysis techniques, it is argued that thematic analysis does not have identifiable heritage and distinctive techniques to be differentiated from other analysis such as grounded theory and discourse analysis (Bryman 2012). However, it is still a highly valuable and rigorous method to analyse qualitative data (Braun, V., Clarke,V., 2014).

Thematic analysis, in general, can be defined as a method to analyse and identify meaningful patterns in a data cluster (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Joffe, 2011; Merton, 1975), or as a " constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society"(Braun and Clarke, 2006:81). While thematic analysis seems to be rooted in much older tradition of content analysis, it goes beyond the observable material to understand and interpret tacit meanings and themes (Joffe, 2011), and favours an 'inductive' analysis (Merton, 1975; Pettigrew, Archer and Harrigan, 2016). It is conducted in a theory -driven or data-driven manner (Boyatzis 1998). However, in can also be conducted in hybrid approach(Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) because "[t]A often does the following simultaneously: it looks at manifest themes as a route to understanding more latent, tacit content; its uses existing theoretical constructs to look at data while also allowing emerging themes to 'speak' by becoming the categories for analysis"(Joffe, 2011:221). Even though Joffe(2011)

prefers to use 'emerging themes', I do not see themes as entities to be figured out and emerged themselves, but rather constructed through a negotiated relationship between participants and researchers(Ryan and Higgins, 2006). Because "[h]ow we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, and personal politics that we bring to research" (Creswell, 2007:179). Therefore, the story in this research is constructed by interweaving findings with literature (Aronson, 1994).

As stated in previous chapters one of the main aims of this research project is to explore the effects of sociocultural factors in image formation, because it is stated that even though there are personal differences between each and every individual in a society, subjected to the similar experiences in a sociocultural settings they might have shared meanings and understandings to some extend(Ryan and Higgins, 2006) and thematic analysis seems to be a suitable method for this exploration because "thematic analysis conducted within a constructionist framework …seeks to theorize the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided" (Braun and Clarke, 2006:85)

Even though coding is a crucial part of the analysis, it should not be considered as analysis itself (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Park and Santos, 2016). To be able to conduct an inductive, or latent analysis(Campelo *et al*, 2014) each transcribed interview data was coded line by line in a grounded manner (Pettigrew, Archer and Harrigan, 2016). While coding, in addition to semantic meanings of the words, data was interpreted to construct latent themes. Because, as stated above, socio-cultural contexts plays a crucial role in my research and a solely semantic analysis may not provide insights to better understand effects of various sociocultural factors in image formation.

As stated above, in addition to repertory grid and scenario analyses, a 15-minute online information search was also conducted. Since the information search produced visual data, to better understand effects of online information search on the image formation, each information search session was captured in a video format by CAM STUDIO 2 and OPEN BROADCASTER SOFTWARE. Each video file was watched several times and to see patters in information search each visited webpage and the action taken by participants on those pages were written down in a sequential manner, which includes the time they spent on each webpage.

## 5.8    Ethical Issues

Even though research ethics are rooted in medical research (Beasley and Walker, 2014), today all kinds of academic research is governed and monitored by various rules and policies (For example: British Sociological Association, 2002; ESRC, 2015). While these policies may not eliminate all possible risks in a research, they might guide researchers and institutions to conduct ethical research. Even though debates on effectiveness of these policies exist, University of Leicester Research Ethics Committee has approved this current research.

Commonly agreed ethical principles in research are centred on "minimizing harm, respecting autonomy, preserving privacy, and acting equitably" (Hammersley, 2015:435). Since the current research did not require any physical or mental pressure to participants such as discussing sensitive topics, and all participants were over 18, there was not a significant harm to the informants.

Informing participants about the research and getting an informed consent, in all possible situations is an ethical principle (Miles and Huberman, 1994), but it has been argued that in rare cases getting an informed consent may not be practical (Fleming, 2013), but in the present study since the interviews were conducted face-to-face each participant was given an information sheet, and informed consent form.

As afore mentioned, harming participants seems to be an unlikely event in this research, but as in any research confidentiality is highly relevant (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In order to create anonymity of participants I have assigned aliases to individuals rather than reporting their real names in transcripts and findings in this research (Creswell, 2007).  Audio recordings were stored on an external hard drive which is protected in a locker and personal computer which is password protected.

## 5.9    Reflections and Limitations

Claims to truth are socially constructed (Hall, 2004). Qualitative research can be considered as a mutual travel taken together by the researcher and the research participants. The journey has influences on both parties and they co-create meanings from this journey(Dupuis, 1999). While DI has been mostly studied as a 'truth' to be discovered by traditional studies, in this research Turkey's images in the minds of the participants were constructed through highly subjective research practices. Even

though the study includes participants from various backgrounds, individuals from ethnic and religious minorities have lived in the UK relatively short period of times. Therefore, their own journeys to the UK were obviously another factor that might affect their images toward Turkey.

Being a researcher from Turkey has obviously affected research participants. Even though, the purpose of the study was clearly explained and they were encouraged share their true opinions, there were participants who said sorry before mentioning negative things about Turkey.

Even though this research has contributed to our understanding of DI formation,, as any social research, it has some limitations too. One of the limitations is stemmed from the timings of the interviews that were collected from December 2014 and March 2015. This is the winter season in the UK, and Turkey. Considering Turkey's image of a sun, sea, sand destination (*see findings*) a study conducted in summer might bring fresher recalls and more vivid elaborations.

As stated before, DI is a dynamic construct (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002), and it changes according to time and space. While I tried to capture this dynamic aspect of it through a dynamic design, cross-sectional studies may not be ideal to understand these changes. For example, while when I conducted this research it seemed that Turkey was perceived a safe and secure country, it might be possible to observe changes in these dimensions after the current developments such as blasts in Ankara and Istanbul.

Another limitation can be associated with the place for the study. Even though, I was trying to better understand the roles of sociocultural factors in image formation, and trying to keep my sample as diversified as possible, at the end all participants were located in Leicester, UK and they were subjected to live in relatively similar socio-cultural environments.

## 5.10  Summary

This chapter was devoted to explain and discuss the methodological choices and applications in this research. To stress the nuanced understanding of tourism phenomena, it started with a detailed discussion of philosophical assumptions and methodological orientations.   Even though positivist research paradigms still

dominate the tourism studies (Chambers, 2007; Tribe and Airey, 2007; Tribe, Dann and Jamal, 2015), alternative approaches started to become more visible (Ateljevic, Morgan and Pritchard, 2007). I tried to explain why tourism studies need alternative approaches and how an alternative study can be designed. After the detailed discussion of research design and data collection process, as a flexible analysis method, thematic analysis was explained (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Finally, ethical considerations, reflections and limitations were elaborated.

This chapter can be considered as an answer to calls for alternative research designs in tourism studies (Ateljevic, Morgan and Pritchard, 2007). This was a unique research design aiming to explore complexity of DI formation. The subsequent chapters will present findings from this alternative design.

# 6 Turkey as perceived by the UK's non-Turkish Residents

## 6.1 Introduction

Even though country image/ product's county of origin research in consumer research and destination image in tourism research have attracted attention of vast number of scholars, and witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of studies in the second half of the last century, the research on these two highly related areas moved parallel with a minimum cross-referencing. While studies on county image are mainly published on marketing journals, the ones that focus on DI are published on tourism journals (Mossberg and Kleppe, 2005). Since in this current study, I aim to explore wider socio-cultural factors in image formation along with effects of recent technological developments, rather than making a distinction between a county and a destination, in the first part of the interviews, Turkey is considered as a county and destination and I let participants to express their thoughts and feelings about Turkey.

While there is not an agreement on what is a DI, it is accepted that destination image has holistic impressions, whether it is called global image (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a) or overall image (Beerli and Martín, 2004) or core image (Lai and Li, 2012) , at the end there is a complex and dynamic construct which is, in my understanding, not the sum of different attributes but much more than the parts. In this chapter, I will try to explore how participants as a tourism destination or as a country perceive Turkey. Based on the thematic analysis there are emerged themes that presents how participants perceive Turkey.

First of all, being an Islamic country, or a county with an Islamic culture is a theme that is perceived by many participants. Therefore, the first theme in this chapter will be Turkey's Islamic culture. Then, another highly related theme, having a family oriented culture in Turkey will be discussed.  It will be followed by explorations and elaborations on Turkey's image as a bridge between East and West.  While these three rather holistic themes could be considered as the themes constructed as considering Turkey not only a tourism destination but also a country with its complex dynamics.

The following three themes are constructed around Turkey's existence as a Tourism destination. First of them will be the theme Turkey as a 'sun, sea, sand' destination, which is followed by discussion on another theme 'Turkey as a stable and relatively safe destination'. The final theme in this chapter to be discussed is 'Turkey as a destination with 'good food'.

As the themes suggest Turkey's DI should not be considered as a construct with static boundaries, but as a fragmented construct which is in constant flow of changes. While these themes are constructed through critical analysis of the data obtained through interviews, I acknowledge the subjectivity of this theme construction. These themes are constructed through analysis of data obtained from 32 individuals whose subjective accounts made this project not only interesting but also rich in details.

### 6.2    Turkey – a Country with an Islamic Culture

Even though there is a historically intertwined relationship between tourism and religion, and it is known that religion might affect behaviours in different social contexts, studies looking at the nature of relationship between religion and tourism are quite limited (Poria, Butler and Airey, 2003). While, there are ample amount of studies on *'Religious Tourism'*(e.g Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Henderson, 2011; Rinschede, 1992)*,* or religious sites(e.g Nolan and Nolan, 1992; Terzidou, Stylidis and Szivas, 2008), how religion might affect the perceptions and behaviours of people who are not pilgrims seems to be overlooked in literature. Through the in depth analyses new insights about the religion and DI formation are gained. It seems that religion has double facets in image formation as a personal factor and as a characteristic of a destination. While religion as a personal factor, or relevance of someone's own religious beliefs in DI formation are discussed in the subsequent chapters, in this part Turkey's image as a country with an Islamic culture as a main theme will be discussed.

While comparing Turkey, USA and Morocco; Neil, 27 year-old researcher, said *"I would say here, Turkey and Morocco probably got more in common in terms of their culture maybe their faith eahm broadly speaking".* He perceives Morocco and Turkey similar because of their culture, and more particularly because of the common religion they have. In order to fully understand what the culture means for him, I have asked for further clarifications and he replied *"I think I would only not knowing Morocco*

*very well, I would only be able to go from similar faith cultures"* This shows that how religion and culture are intertwined. Neil has been to Turkey but has limited knowledge about Morocco; his knowledge about the faith in that destination makes him to group Morocco and Turkey as similar destinations compared to USA. Besides religion seems to be one of the important aspects of Turkey's image in his mind.

Again while comparing the same set (Turkey, USA and Morocco) Elizabeth, 70 year-old retired British, grouped Turkey and Morocco together and added:

> *"Their culture would be more similar I would imagine ... culture would be more similar simply because of their faith. [**Interviewer**: their religion?]Because it does affect the culture" (Elizabeth)"*

The above quote also shed a light on the intertwined relationship between culture and religion. Elizabeth says *"their culture would be more similar... simply because of their faith"*. This implies that the sole reason behind being similar in culture is having common religion. To better understand how she perceives culture in these countries, I asked her how the cultures in Turkey and Morocco differ than the culture in USA, she continued:

> *"Well the culture in USA has always been, has been known as the land of the free when you come to somewhere like that [**pointing Morocco**] that is not the land of the free. eahm you have to do what you have been told or you will get into trouble, don't you. That is the land of the free, that is land of enterprise and it is full of people gone from all over the world different countries and make good there…"(Elizabeth)*

This narration implies that Elizabeth does not consider Morocco or Muslim countries as land of freedom. In this grouping, USA seems to have a highly positive image as the land of freedom, and Turkey and Morocco are considered as opposite poles. It is interesting to see that she has already visited Turkey, and in her explanations even though she grouped Turkey and Morocco as similar, she based all of her explanations on Morocco. She did not mention Turkey; while she was talking about lack of freedoms she pointed Morocco. Even though there is not an explicit account, it seems that she associates being a Muslim country with oppression of people. Complexity and multidimensionality of a destination becomes evident in her explanations. While

she was mainly talking about the issues more or less related to politics, in her explanations it can be sensed that these issues such as being free or not, or being oppressive or emancipatory is considered more like cultural phenomena. There could be various explanations for her groupings. When the interviews were conducted, there was a big turmoil in many Middle Eastern countries. News such as ongoing civil war in Syria, the rising of Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), the coup in Egypt were widespread on all sorts of media outlets. Since she has never been to Morocco, her images about it are secondary images and they should be formed based on other sources than first-hand experience. She also acknowledges this while she was comparing Turkey, Egypt and France. When I asked her which two countries are similar she said:

> *"Those two because they have similar religion...Turkey and Egypt yes eahm but eahm have I got my mind of the politics and looking place, because of what is in the news at the moment that sort of things are in everybody's mind, I mean I know a lot of trouble things going on Egypt eahm and possibly in Turkey as well" (Elizabeth)*

First she grouped Turkey and Egypt as similar because of the same predominant religion in these countries, but then she switched to politics. Complexity of image formation is highly visible in her explanations. Perceptions about religion and politics play interchangeable roles to form a complex image in her mind. And as she mentioned news, as an autonomous image formation agent (Gartner, 1994), plays a dramatic role here. It seems that intensity of negative news about the political instability in that region is highly influencing her thoughts. After mentioning troubles in Egypt she adds *"possibly in Turkey as well"*. This implies that she has not heard similar stories in Turkey, but as a Muslim country it is possible to have similar problems. Another noteworthy comment she made was that "*that sort of things are in everybody's mind*". This implies that she believes she holds an image that is shared by the other members of the society.

Elizabeth's explanations show that she associates trouble with being an Islamic county. As she already acknowledged news could play a crucial role in her understanding. Even though, she has experienced Turkey as a tourism destination and mentioned that she was perfectly happy in there, it seems that her image of Turkey

has negative connotations. Based on her accounts it could be assumed that secondary information sources shape her understanding of Turkey rather than her own personal experiences. Even if she had a positive experience in Turkey, since she associates Islam with oppression or lack of freedom, Turkey as a county with an Islamic culture seems to have negative images in her mind. Since individuals do need some 'anchorages" to judge and have a personal opinion about individuals, brands, countries, or tourism destinations (Nelson, 1962), in some cases prejudices might serve as anchorages to form an image about a country or destination.

As can be seen above while Turkey's image as a country with an Islamic culture has negative connotations for Elizabeth, for some other participants having a different religion was just another criterion to differentiate destinations. When the same set (Turkey, Egypt, France) was given to different participants they said:

> *"I would put Turkey and Egypt together, eahm because they are more Islamic obviously Egypt is very Islamic and Turkey is Islamic as well, it is main main faith in these countries, Islam." (Michael)*

> *"I think Turkey and Egypt are similar France is different from them because it is, maybe in this case eahm I separated them using religion factor maybe…Turkey and Egypt it is more Muslim countries eahm and France is Christian"(Sumayye)*

For Michael, Turkey and Egypt are similar because they are Islamic countries with slight differences in their religious characteristics. While "*Egypt is very Islamic*", Turkey is Islamic. This implies that in his mind countries can be grouped according to their religiosity, and if they are placed on a scale, Turkey's Islamic nature seems to be less intense than Egypt. In the second example, Sumayye, first grouped Egypt and Turkey together, and then tried to find a reason for that, and she said that she was "*using religion factor maybe*". This grouping implies that although religion is a factor to group them together, there could be many other factors. This indicates that sometimes participants may perceive some countries or destinations highly similar and group them in closer categories without knowing the exact reasons behind that grouping. In Sumayye's case, she realized that she grouped Turkey and Egypt as similar because of their common Islamic characteristics. This could mean that even though because of the organizational necessities destinations are considered as certain

geographical places with particular borders, those borders could not be meaningful for individuals (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011), and a destination in their mind could be quite different, and it can expand through new information.

Whenever either Egypt or Morocco was in the sets, there was a tendency in participants' explanations to refer religion as a criterion to differentiate destinations.

> *"There is higher amount of people they follow the Islamic faith living in Turkey and Egypt" (Bob comparing with Germany).*

> *"I would say, regarding France…eahm I would say Turkey and Egypt are Muslim in terms of religion" (Ali).*

> *Turkey and Morocco are Muslim countries and USA is a eahm non-Muslim country another distinction, if I make right (Wahid).*

Relativity is a crucial aspect for the relationships between consumers and brands. It has been confirmed that consumers do develop relative attitudes towards various brands (Ishida and Taylor, 2012). Similarly, it seems participants tend to have a relativistic images of Turkey as an Islamic country.  The other countries in the triad sets play crucial roles in how Turkey is perceived.

It is noteworthy to elaborate on some of the phrases in the aforementioned quotes. Although there are some countries that are known as officially Islamic, such as Islamic Republic of Iran, and Islamic Republic of Pakistan, when participants mention the word 'Islamic' rather than referring to official name of a county, they meant dominant religious belief in that destination. This can be seen in Bob's words. He says "*higher amount of people follow the Islamic faith*". A closer review of the quotes might reveal that while some participants preferred to say 'Islamic' some others chose to call 'Muslim' countries.  As can be seen in the names of Iran and Pakistan (Islamic Republic of Iran, Islamic Republic of Pakistan), 'Islamic' is and adjective to describe a state, rather than the word 'Muslim" which is the noun signifies a follower of Islam. In the excerpts above, while Bob and Michael grouped Turkey as 'Islamic'; Wahid, Sumayye, and Ali preferred to name it as a Muslim country. It might be because as Muslims they felt more personal, or for them Muslim could be a proxy word for Islam.

DI is a relativistic construct (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002), which means that people might have different perceptions about a particular destination based on which other destinations it is compared with. There could not be a better statement than the quote below to explain why DI is a relativistic construct.

> *"Ok, Italy and France are different but compared to Turkey they are similar, Italy and France are different. I will talk about differences between them but compared to Turkey they are similar…I see difference between these two but when you compare with Turkey, they are similar" (Veysi)*

Veysi is aware of differences between France and Italy but when he compares these destinations with Turkey, he perceives them similar. He stresses, "Ok, Italy and France are different" but when compared to Turkey they become similar.

While Comparing Turkey, France, and Italy, Xiang, originally from China but leaving in the UK for 3 years mentioned: *These two are sharing similar culture and Turkey has a different culture (Xiang).* When I have asked what she meant by 'similar culture' she replied:

> *"Europe and like they are like close regions are close so they have almost the same eahm kind of their living these kind of thing, even the buildings look very similar, so they give me the impression that they are very similar except the language."*

These obviously show that how subjective culture is. It seems that she considers culture as a 'big pot', and anything, which does not a have a clear explanation, can be thrown in it. During the interviews almost any participant mentioned culture as a construct to differentiate destinations from each other, and whenever they tried to explain what culture meant for them each participant shared a unique and complex definition of culture. This was possible thanks to flexible nature of the technique. In aforementioned quote, Xiang considers geographic location, life style, and architecture as components of a culture. Since the country of origin is China for Xiang, in her mind countries or destinations in this instance do not have certain boundaries, being located in Europe and having similar life style and architecture

make France and Italy similar in terms of culture. To fuller understand her conceptualization, I have asked how the culture in Turkey differs from these.

*Xiang: "eahm I think religion really matters in this case because most people in Turkey must be Muslim".*

Again this shows how religion and images are intertwined. As someone from China, her images about France and Italy seem not to be dramatically dissimilar to each other. She perceives them culturally similar, and Turkey as a county with a different culture. Even though, she touched upon the things like, life style and architecture, the latter excerpt indicates that the main differentiator for her is religion in this context. Besides having different life style and architecture, Turkey differs from Italy and France as a result of being a Muslim country. The above expressions imply that while there are various differences between countries, and people tend to have schemas in their mind. However, one of the most observable elements to differentiate these schemas seems to be religion in that destination.

As highlighted on the excerpts above, Turkey's DI has a predominant Islamic facet. Participants tend to visualize Turkey as a destination that culturally differs from European countries such as France and Italy. Even though Islamic culture serves as a blanket term to cover highly broad similarities with other countries such as Egypt and Morocco, participants seem to perceive significant uniqueness too. Culture as a broad term seems to playing a central role to differentiate various countries, and participants also mention not only the prominent religious beliefs but also other aspects. After discussing Islam's central role in the perception of Turkey, another cultural theme will be discussed under the name of 'family orientation'.

### 6.3   Turkey as a 'Family Oriented' Country

Culture with various elements was a peculiar construct when participants were asked to group destinations according to their similarities or differences. As discussed earlier in this chapter, for majority of participants, Turkey has an image that has considerable Islamic connotations. However, dominance of cultural elements is not only confined to religion. In addition to being Islamic, Turkey is portrayed as a county with a family oriented culture. Even though, this theme could be highly related to previous one, I prefer to discuss it under a new theme.

Despite the fact that she is a British, Gina lived in Azerbaijan for more than a decade and less than 2 years ago re-settled in in the UK. Even though she was in her own country, she explained that she was still feeling as a tourist. Living in a Turkish speaking country for a quite a long time made her to learn Turkish. Even though she was able to speak Turkish, the interview was in English. When I asked her to describe Turkey in a few sentences, she expressed:

> *"you have a community culture where people would probably even nowadays people would be more link to each other and more care for old people and respecting old people and looking old people as the top of the tree not the bottom of the tree. I like it a lot and then you have this a lot warmer weather and you just have all sorts of plants it is very exotic in England but it is just normal in there; pomegranates, vines all those things just come together in a picture of kind of sunshine really and it is not like that there are mountains you can ski but that is my picture of Turkey"* *(Gina)*

She says that there is "community culture" in Turkey, and adds "even nowadays". This implies that having a community culture might be considered as something belongs to the past. The subsequent explanations make it clear that she prefers and wants to see a similar culture in the UK. The shift from culture to the plants is quite interesting. First, she likened family to a tree, and moved to plants grown in Turkey. Without conducting these in depth interview, it would not be possible for me to understand how pomegranate became an exotic fruit in England, at least for her. Even though Turkey is still visualised as a sunny holiday destination, its image is fragmented and "community culture" seems to be a dominant aspect of it. When I asked the same question after the information search she said:

> *"eahm same. I mean one word I missed out last time was modern. I think it is very modern. I am thinking of cities now eahm and eahm also again with Istanbul it is very European but Turkey yeah I would think as a warm, very sunny friendly place, good hospitality, good food eahm"(Gina)*

Since she had already experienced Turkey, during the research she was looking at the places she already visited. This information search reminded her Turkey as a modern place. She especially mentions Istanbul, and how modern it is. This is a challenge for

DI studies if a country is chosen as the destination. It seems that images about a single city might dominate DI as in line Lai and Li's(2012) core periphery image structures.

In line with Gina's explanations, Michael also stress the family oriented culture as a distinctive characteristic of Turkey. Michael is 67 years old, leaving in a nearby village in Leicestershire. He has visited many countries because he worked as a marketing director for various companies, and he has also visited Turkey in various times.

> *"I think they are very family oriented probably more family oriented than in this country ...in the UK, I think because we are not so family oriented whenever an elderly person is not too well shut them in the home, you know let somebody else look after them, and you know that is very sad."(Michael)*

It can be seen that he is comparing Turkey with UK and express his unhappiness about the treatment of elderly in the UK. This was surprising for me, when I arrived to the UK; my observations led me to believe that in material terms elderly people were much better than in Turkey. The entire infrastructure, transportation systems, even market itself seemed to be designed considering the needs of those people. Therefore, they should be one of the happiest elderly on earth. But when I conducted interviews, it was fascinating to see how people are complaining about the loose family ties and loneliness of elderly. Since he seemed to be emotional and wanted to talk about this issue I did not interrupt Michael:

> *"I think because they are family at the end of the day more than likely brought you to the world and they looked after you and me. We, you were young and there were changing your nappy, wiping your bottom, cleaning you and in the future it is nice as a circle to look after elderly, look after your parents, but so many people, I think, in this county locked them in a home you know, I don't think you have that culture in many overseas countries. Then, definitely not in Turkey."(Michael)*

He was explaining in great details why other family members should look after parents or elderly. These vivid visualisations shed a light on his unhappiness with one aspects of his own culture; having loose family ties. Even though it is not explicitly

made there is an implicit analogy in his explanations. It seems that he likened treatment of elderly in Britain to treatment of prisoners. In this analogy care homes become prisoners for elderly who according to Michael deserve a much better treatment. The last sentence in the quote shows that having a family oriented culture is not unique to Turkey. He used 'overseas countries'. Even though it is not clear which countries could be considered as 'overseas' for him, as his home country, Britain is visualised as a county that left alone its elderly. In these explanations, it was interesting to see that rather than focusing on Turkey, he was mainly complaining about the UK. Even though, the UK was not in the triads, rather than comparing the countries in triad sets, it became clear that he was comparing the UK with other countries he perceives as more family oriented.

It is interesting to see how people associate Turkey with being family oriented, and how they are fascinated about living in a family oriented culture. Chris is a 54 year-old teacher. While comparing Turkey, USA and Germany he said:

> *"I lived in different countries. I know these [USA, Germany] countries think in a more individualistic, people live more individualistic lives, children parents and so on. While countries like Turkey there is going to be much stronger family, network or closer commitment to the family, living in terms of community within the country you know"(Chris).*

When all these quotes are considered it can be said that one of the stronger characteristic of Turkey, or Turkish society is being 'family oriented' or having a 'community culture' for these participants. Another noteworthy aspect is that while they perceive family oriented culture in Turkey highly positively, it seems that this is not a unique characteristic of Turkey. There are various countries that have this rather positively perceived characteristic, but it is something that is missing in the UK.

While having an Islamic culture was not necessarily a positive differentiator for Turkey, another cultural aspect, being family oriented, seems to be perceived highly positively by participants.

## 6.4    Turkey as a Bridge between East and West

'Turkey is a bridge between east and west' is a widespread metaphor that is either criticised as being a clichéd image or a metaphor that is far from reflecting realties of Turkey. First of all, it implies a passivity, and rather than considering constant changes, or active contributions of Turkey in these changes, It seems to be visualised as a 'bridge' which connects 'East' and 'West' which have certain differences (Greaves, 2007).   Turkey's geographical location seems to play a role in the construction of this bridge metaphor; its biggest city Istanbul connects Asia and Europe geographically. But as stated by Bryce (2007) it serves also a characteristic on which Western subjectivity is reinforced toward 'Orient'.  As the excerpts below are examined it will show that, the bridge metaphor implies a connection between different cultures rather than a geographical connection point (Greaves, 2007). As stated by (Tank, 2006: 463), this bridge analogy seems to be internalized even by policy makers in Turkey:

> *A country where East meets West, a bridge across two distinct geographical areas and cultural maps, a state caught between Europe and the Middle East—these are all popular perceptions of modern Turkey. Of these images, the idea of Turkey as a bridge is the most appealing to Turkish policy-makers who often use this analogy to emphasize Turkey's utility to the West as a 'go-between' to the East—a cultural interpreter of sorts.*

As seen in these discussions, even though the bridge analogy invites criticism of various scholars, as can be seen in examples, Turkey is still imagined by various participants   as a bridge between East and West.

> *Turkey, part of Turkey is in Europe isn't it, so sort of on the bridge between the two European and Middle East (Barbara)*

Barbara even used the word 'bridge' to describe Turkey. As can be seen her description based on the mostly the geographic location of Turkey. Again similarly

Adam referred to geographical location and said, *"Is got one foot in Asia one foot in Europe"*. While this excerpt clearly illustrate that they are referring to the geographical location of Turkey, there are other excerpts that are not clear whether they signify geographical location. For example, Neil says, *"Europe meets Asia for Turkey"*. And Michael says *"Spain and Italy are both eahm European obviously European, Turkey is somewhere half European and half Asian"*

On the other hand, there are other examples in which participants expressed their view of Turkey as a cultural bridge between east and west.

> *I do when I think of Turkey, I think having is, having   an extensive sort of history  and eahm  many, a lot of… because it's been sort of hub for a lot of different cultural movements through the years. So it's got a lot of influences (Adam)*

Adam mentions "extensive sort of history" in Turkey and he perceives it as a "hub for a lot of different cultural movements". When his explanations are considered together with Henry's remarks:

> *Turkey spans kind of the kind of cross Turkey is the cross the border of Europe and Asia really.  It is where Europe and Asia meet so I know kind of going back to Ataturk he kind of introduces a lot more eahm kind of European values maybe after the Ottoman Empire, I guess. (Henry)*

Henry first refers to geographical location of Turkey, but then his focus shifts to the cultural changes in Turkey. The above quote implies that he is quite knowledgeable about Turkey. He knows the historical changes in Turkey, and he states during the time of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk started to embrace European values. Even though it is known that there was a long lasting relationship between Ottoman Empire and European countries, he perceives the foundation of Turkey as a cornerstone for relationships.  When his further explanations are considered together it can be seen that, he perceives Turkey as a country that has been embracing higher European values.

> *Turkey it is again going back to the things like it is kind of struggling to divide between Europe and Asia. eahm but eahm although there are differences, maybe culture is more Western. European countries, Turkey*

*still shares some of those values, I think with with eahm eahm Western eahm culture maybe valuing things like secularism and that kind of thing eahm you know the way the way like the same calendar and things like that eahm oow. I guess you know valuing things like democracy eahm I don't know eahm (Henry).*

In his highly controversial article Huntington (1993) describes Turkey as the most profound example of a '*torn country*', which is a relatively homogenous country, but its members are divided over its belongingness to a particular civilization. Said (2001:12) calls him as "a clumsy writer and inelegant thinker", because of his assumptions about the 'civilizations'. However, similar to Huntington's (1993) description, Turkey seems to be imagined as a 'torn country' by Henry. He is mentioning a struggle because of the divide between Europe and Asia, but at the end he thinks that Turkey shares European values. It looks like that he has a particular type of Europe in his mind, but    here the difficult task is to define Europe and European values. The difficulty of defining what those European values are becomes highly visible in his narration. The abundance amount of expression "eahm" can be a sign for this difficultly.  He mentioned secularism and democracy as European values, but he also mentioned the calendar. This shows that even though he preferred to explain differences with an East and West dichotomy, this type of blanket definitions fail to grasp complexity and fluidity of cultures and values.

The cultural receptiveness is more obvious in another participant's explanations. Veysi comes from Iran but leaving in the UK for last 3 years. Because of the sanctions toward Iran, during the time of his visa application he had to travel to Turkey to get a UK visa. Therefore, he spent relatively longer time in Istanbul, Turkey.  He looks at the position of Turkey from a management point of view and finds it too challenging to govern because it is under effects of two competing forces; Eastern and Western cultures.

*I think it is very hard to manage Turkey, to govern Turkey because it is a country between Asia and Europe so you have got both elements there so you need to be very very careful about people in the country because the culture coming from Western the culture coming from the Eastern you have*

*your own ideology it is very hard to do, I want to mention few things I am*
*not happy at all, that my kid grow up in Turkey (Veysi).*

Veysi's explanations imply that he perceives Turkey at a point that is open to influences of foreign cultures, and it is facing difficulties to cope with these influences. In different parts of the interview he mentioned that the situation in Turkey seems to be a lost identity. From his point of view Turkey seems to be a country which has been losing its identity but at the same time struggling to embrace a much more Western identity. His understanding of a Turkey seems to be a cross point between two cultures which constantly affect it, and because of these rival effects it becomes a difficult place to govern. In the above excerpt he mentioned that there were few things he was not happy about in case his kid grown up in Turkey. When I asked probing questions to better understand his unhappiness, he told me one of his experiences in a restaurant in Turkey. While he was eating in the restaurant, the TV was on, and it was showing a content that is sexual even for a "Westerner". He asked, what if he was there with his kid. For him, because of the cultural change and struggle to find its true identity, Turkey embraced some practices which seem to be Western, but indeed they might not be a considered appropriate for a "Westerner".

While comparing Turkey, France and Morocco, Earl grouped France and Turkey as similar and explained;

*that gonna be being part of Europe eahm that kind of things those kind of*
*cultural links between each other , eahm because they both*[Turkey,France]
*part of the European region and interested in what is going on there*
*affected by each other with trade as well eahm so Turkey kind of being*
*gateway to Europe(Earl).*

In his explanations Turkey is depicted not only as a geographical bridge, but also a cultural bridge. First, he refers to their locations as being in European region, and then continues with mutual interactions in terms of trade and cultural links. Unlike, some of the previous participants, Earl does not portray Turkey as a passive object under influences of various cultural forces, but rather he illustrates it as one of the European countries. Even though, his explanations do not directly imply that Turkey is a 'bridge' in last sentence he mentioned that Turkey is a "gateway to Europe". This

could mean that in his understanding Turkey is a European country, but it is still a frontier for Europe.

As can be seen in different excerpts, Turkey has been perceived as a county that seems to be a 'bridge' both in geographical and cultural terms between East and West. While participants agree on its position as a bridge, the metaphor seems to serve a cross (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007)point between two highly different cultures; East and West rather than referring solely its geographical location. Even though this bridge metaphor may not reflect the realities of Turkey, and could be seen as a reinforcement of 'Western' subjectivity on 'Orient'(Bryce, 2007), there are participants who imagine Turkey as a meeting point of East and West. While this could be a positive characteristic of Turkey, at the same time it could be visualized as a 'thorn country' (Huntington, 1993). For example, for Henry, being a bridge makes Turkey to embrace Western values such as democracy and secularism that for him seem to be highly positive European values, but for Veysi being a bridge makes Turkey to lose its own identity, and makes it a difficult to govern place. For Earl, position of Turkey is defined relative to Europe and it is perceived as a "gateway to Europe".

### 6.5    Turkey as a Sun, Sea and Sand Destination

As stated by Alvarez(2010), Turkey has been promoted as a Sun-Sea-Sand (3S) destination for quite a long period of time. Even though there are attempts by Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism to diversify tourism offerings in Turkey, mass tourism still plays a significant role in Turkish tourism. In a recent strategic plan it was aimed to challenge Turkey's position as a solely beach holiday destination and marketing campaigns have been running to stress Turkey's alternative tourism offerings (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007). When the official tourism portal for Turkey is visited, diversification endeavours start to show themselves (HomeTurkey, 2016). While participants showed some degree of awareness for different types of touristic activities in Turkey, interviews highlighted that participants still predominantly perceive Turkey as a 3S destination.

Owing to the flexible design of the interviews, triads brought invaluable insights to this project. It was remarkable to see how participants grouped destinations based on the type of holidays they offer. There was like an imaginary scale on which different

destinations were ranked based on their tourism offerings. Two destinations, Greece and Spain have been mostly associated with 3S tourism and Turkey in many cases are considered along with them.

> *I am thinking in terms of holidays and tourism area because I think mainly for Turkey and Spain the beach the sea…you know and Italy I think more in terms of the architecture down till Venice (John).*

John does group Turkey and Spain as similar because he perceives them as 3S destinations while Italy is a place for architecture. Another noteworthy distinction could be observed that some unique places might influence overall images of a destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). While talking about Turkey and Spain, he mentioned relatively common generic places "the beach the sea", but while expressing his thoughts about Italy, he stressed architecture and cited Venice. It seems that Venice plays a crucial role for Italy in his understanding of Italy.

Like John, Neil also perceives Turkey and Spain as 3S destinations. First he ranked destinations, based on their popularity in the UK, and he added "Spain simply for beach holidays". The word "simply" deserves extra attention. It might imply that Spain is solely for 3s tourism, or "beach holidays" in his terms. Even though he added that Turkey is famous for "beach holidays" too, the implication seems to be that there is a degree of being a "beach holiday" destination. While Spain is only for beaches, degree of being a beach holiday destination does not seem to be so high for Turkey.

> *Spain and Turkey, I think I think in terms of popular British holiday destinations, Turkey and Spain are there and these are top 1, 2 or 3, Egypt is fairly popular but not as popular… for Spain simply for beach holidays, I think Turkey is as well (Neil).*

Another participant, Isabella is a 22 year old visual merchandiser, and has never been to Turkey, during the interview she acknowledged that she does not know much about Turkey. While comparing Italy and Turkey, she states that Italy is a romantic place and a place for good food, Turkey is a place for beach holiday. This shows that no matter how limited their prior knowledge about Turkey, some participants perceive Turkey as a 3s destination.

*I think they what eahm perceived is different eahm Italy is quite romantic ...yeah eahm good food, Turkey I would say beach holiday (Isabella).*

During the interview another non-visitor described Turkey as:

*Nice hot sunny place to go on holiday eahm and yeah (Leo).*

Rather than just a neutral description, Leo says "*nice* hot sunny place". This might show his positive feelings toward Turkey as a holiday destination. It might also mean that he enjoys, being in a "hot sunny place" for a holiday.

Even though Turkey was perceived as a 3S destination as can in the quotes below for John Turkey is not a typical 3S destination as Spain. They seem to be quite different destinations. Even though they both have resorts and offer sun, sea, and sand type of holiday, according to him Turkey's offerings are more diverse, and it is not perceived as a purely beach destination.

*"Spain and Morocco I would imagine, the culture, the way of life quite different. Eahm yeah very relaxed, good for holidays. Turkey I would imagine little bit more business like eahm little but more rushed. Busy, people doing things. I mean obviously I know about the nice resorts beaches and everything eahm but Turkey is a big county there is a lot to see in Turkey and I don't know a lot about Turkey. I get the impression that you come up the beaches and tourist destinations there is a lot to see eahm, whereas Spain lovely county I love to go there but it is almost exclusively known beach holiday resorts perhaps also obviously architecture but Turkey is a slightly different county for me"(John).*

Even though Turkey has been associated with beach holiday by majority of participants, for some participants it was not a beach holiday destination at all. For example Adam was comparing Greece and Turkey and he says "Greece is a more sort of place where you go and lay on the sun", on the contrary Turkey has diversity.

*it would certainly be somewhere with a lot of interests you know from different, form a lot of difference, diversity. A lot of diversity there [Turkey]. The way I have thought of Greece for example, I think Greece is*

*a more sorts of place where you go and lay on the sun, you know sit outside*

*of the… (Adam)*

For Adam Greece is a sort of place purely for 3S holidays. This excerpt implies that in Greece, rather than active participation in various forms of activities, "you go and lay on the sun". However, for him, Turkey is not a relaxing 'beach holiday' destination, it is rather a destination with diversity for different interests. Similarly Xiang, as a Chinese citizen living in the UK for more than 3 years, does not consider Turkey as a 3S destination either. She says she would be around the city (Istanbul) rather than on a beach. It seems that her image of Turkey is dominated by Istanbul.

*I didn't think about beaches in Turkey at all, I was thinking if I go Istanbul*

*I will be around the city, looking at interesting buildings interesting food*

*and other street will be very nice they have shops having some small things*

*I can get (Xiang).*

As I highlighted earlier in this part, majority of participants perceive Turkey as a 'beach holiday' destination, but in some cases as in Adam and Xiang's explanations, Turkey has an image of 'urban tourism' destination. Besides, there were few participants who had quite limited information about Turkey. For example, Zhen is another participant from China who spent 3 years in the UK, prior to online information search her knowledge about Turkey was quite limited, and her image of Turkey was quite vogue, after the online information search when she was asked how she would describe Turkey, she said:

*This time I found this is a place actually I liked your country with beach so*

*I mean the beach **[laugh]**. I liked this country, it is really beautiful, I don't*

*know why it does not belong to EU zone, not belong to EU but very nice*

*...yeah I think it was nearby another country **[landlocked]** so it is how to*

*say ...it doesn't have a coast (Zhen).*

Relative importance of information search became noticeable in her explanations. Information search obviously made positive contributions to her image about Turkey. As she mentioned before the information search she imagine Turkey as a landlocked country, but after the information search she realized Turkey has beaches which she seemed to be impressed by. Therefore it can be said that Turkey's image as a 3S

destination is reinforced by information search. Rather than solely expressing her neutral observations, she says that "it is really beautiful" and she assumes that such a beautiful county should be a EU member. A vogue image of a landlocked country has been transformed as a beautiful country with nice coasts.

To sum up, participants in this study tend to visualise Turkey as a 3S destination. However, as observed in some excerpts above, there are few participants who are likely to understand Turkey as an 'urban tourism' destination. Relativity of images (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002) can be observed when Turkey is compared with some other 3S destinations. Countries such as Greece and Spain are perceived as destinations that show more 3S characteristics than Turkey.

Besides, importance of prior knowledge and beliefs in image formation (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Gartner, 1994; Tasci and Gartner, 2007) is highlighted through explanations of non-visitors to Turkey. Dramatic effects of online information search were so obvious when there was a limited knowledge about Turkey. Since, there will be another part which discuss the roles played by various information sources in image formation, without further discussion under this theme, I will discuss another constructed theme in this project, which is safety and security.

### 6.6    Turkey as a Stable and Relatively Safe Country

Safety and political stability are two related and most important factors for destination's competitiveness (Dwyer and Kim, 2003). As long as a destination is not safe, or is not perceived as safe, all other qualities of that destination might become irrelevant for a potential visitor. "Peace, safety, and security are the conditio sine qua non for development of tourism. Any threats to the safety of tourists cause a decrease or total absence of activity in an affected destination, which in turn can negatively influence inbound tourism to neighboring (*sic*) destinations as well"(Cavlek, 2002: 493). In an empirical study it has been stated that safety was the second most important factors for travellers in their destination choice (Hsu, Tsai and Wu, 2009). Either perceived or real, concerns about safety and security might negatively influence destinations' images (Sönmez and Sirakaya, 2002). Therefore, safety is considered as one of the main image forming factors in tourism literature (e.g. Beerli and Martín, 2004; Choi, Chan and Wu, 1999). To better understand perceived concerns about safety and security in Turkey, the interviews included a question about

safety. However, also through the triads participants sometimes compared destinations based on their political stability and safety. Therefore, safety and security are treated as   another theme in this study. Considering DI as a relativist construct (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002), perceptions about Turkey's safety and security are also constructed as compared to other destinations in this study.   While grouping Turkey, France and Egypt according to their similarities and differences, Adam said:

*I would also say they [France and Turkey] got more stable political situation at the moment so safer places to go to because in Egypt a lot of problems than Turkey. Paris in France… [Laugh, imply Paris attacks - Charlie Hebdo]…I might be worried about going to Egypt, I think (Adam)*

The above quote could be considered as a prime example for a reflection of external factors on image formation. This interview was conducted in a few weeks after the attacks to Charlie Hebdo, a French satirical magazine, in which 12 people were shot death (see Rayner, Samuel and Evans, 2015). Even though, Adam grouped Turkey and France as "safer places to go", with the effects of recent attacks in Paris he hesitates about his comments. It seems that Turkey and France are perceived as the lesser evils compared to Egypt, rather than absolutely safe places to visit.  As in the case of Egypt, it can be observed that effects of political turmoil can be long lasting on destinations and on their images (Sönmez, 1998). There was a political transition in Egypt between the years 2011-2013, and since than it "looks set to lurch from crisis to crisis" as discussed by Wearing (2014). Even though, Turkey and France were grouped as "safer places to go", there was a hesitation because of the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris. This hesitation could be more obvious if the interviews were conducted in current days, because there were additional terror attacks in France (see Rawlinson, Chrisafis and Dodd, 2016) and Turkey. Various terror attacks hit Turkey since the suicide bomber blast in Suruc (Shoumali and Yeginsu, 2015). As one of the main hubs in the world, Ataturk Airport was attacked by terrorists (BBC, 2016) and a democratically elected government wanted to be over thrown by a military coup on 15 July 2016(Torun, 2016). Considering the broad coverage of these incidents in British media, if the interview was conducted aftermath of these events, there could be changes in his groupings.

In line with Adam's groupings when the same set was given to Carlos, he also grouped France and Turkey as similar and added;

*France and Turkey are alike because they don't have civil war right now, Egypt has civil war. (Carlos)*

These shed a light onto the effects of politics and political stability in a destination on image formation (Sönmez, 1998). Even though Egypt was relatively safe and stable in early 2015, compared to 2011-2013 he was still thinking that there was a civil war in Egypt. As seen in this chapter before, when the same set given to other participants they were grouping Turkey and Egypt as similar because of the common religion in these countries, but in the above examples the context shifts to the safety and stability and in this case Turkey is differentiated from Egypt and grouped together with France as "safer" options. This also shows that the image is quite context dependant, or as stated by Gallarza et al., (2002) it has a multiple nature.

While Adam and Carlos perceived Turkey as relatively safer places, unlike them, Chris had some reservations about the safety in Turkey. He mentioned that "rural areas" in Turkey and Morocco are not as developed as in Italy. In this context, it seems that he associates development with safety.

*I would imagine rural areas of Italy would be more developed than rural areas in Morocco and Turkey so in terms of what I would experience in these different places there is more safe aspect of travel in here[ Italy] than here and here[Morocco, Turkey]( Chris).*

As can be seen, there is an urban- rural dichotomy in Chris's explanation. While he noticeably differentiates that rural areas would be more 'developed' and 'safer' in Italy, he does not mention urban areas. It might be because he only has concerns about the rural areas in Turkey and Morocco, and he might perceive urban centres as safer than rural areas in these countries.

Political situation or political atmosphere was not directly associated with safety on each occasion. John has visited Turkey recently and it was the time for election campaigns. Since he visited Turkey himself, his experiences play paramount roles in his visualization of Turkey. While he is referring to "different environment" or "different atmosphere", rather than having a natural stance, he is highly critical. His

main criticism is mainly cantered around treatment of democracy as a means of grapping more power. When he refers to various election campaign materials such as posters and flags, his dislike of that kind of atmosphere becomes discernible.

*I am aware of this different way of approaching subjects like democracy and I feel there is eahm less less eahm less interest in democracy in Turkey than in other countries, I think there is more competition for power its own sake here and the things like flags and posters and that sorts of things, they introduce a different environment different atmosphere you just, you can't held that you are in a different place different values you would so, it is just something (John).*

The above excerpt sheds a light on the inseparability of tourism from political situation, and political atmosphere in a destination (Sönmez, 1998). It is obvious that experiencing a different atmosphere in Turkey during the elections made him to realize that there could be different values than the values he accustomed to. However, his explanations imply that his perceptions about Turkey seem to be affected by various other things along with his own first-hand experience. First he starts his criticism as saying that there was less interest in democracy in Turkey, rather there was a struggle to grab more power than running for a democratic election. Then he takes his own first- hand experience to ground his claims. This might show that he had already an understanding of Turkey as a country in which democratic values are not prised, and his actual visit gave him a chance to observe a different atmosphere that is not desired by him. Therefore, it can be said that his secondary images are reinforced through first-hand experience.

Effects of politics are not only considered in terms of safety and security. Occasionally participants grouped countries based on their political power. This was the case especially when USA or/and Germany were in the set.

*I think these are similar, because they are politically, politically powerful, Germany in Europe and obviously United States in the world, I see them as eahm yeah powerful politically and have an influence on the world...Turkey, I am sorry...I don't think Turkey politically powerful (Rose).*

*I think Turkey and Greece are more similar particularly economy because Germany is very powerful, stronger more powerful than Britain when it comes to, it seems to be anyway financially, industry, industrial more industrial (Barbara).*

*They are [USA] quite a big. Politically they are quite, quite well respected aren't they? (Bob)(Comparing USA with Turkey and Greece.*

The most distinctive characteristics of USA and Germany were that they were not perceived as prime holiday destinations, when they were in the sets there was a tendency to talk about politics, economy or power rather than tourism. While USA has been conceptualized as a powerful county which has an observable influence on all over the world, Germany has been perceived as the most powerful country in Europe.   Besides, as Barbara mentioned Germany's power is framed in mostly economy spheres.   One of the interesting comparisons was done by Barbara, even though the set was about Turkey, Greece, and Germany, when she separated Germany from the other two, she kept comparing Germany to Britain.  In Bob's words USA is "quite well respected", when it is compared to Turkey and Greece.   As Rose mentioned "they do not think Turkey politically powerful".

Safety and security is not discussed solely in the context of political stability. As I have mentioned earlier there was a specific question about safety, and when she asked about the safety in Turkey, as someone who already visited Turkey Gina said;

*I wouldn't travel alone as a woman in Turkey.* [Interviewer:  why?] *because it is not a good thing to do, it is not done and also from my past experiences I want to see people, I tried to see tourists the way the local people see them if I can and so it wouldn't be so so good in my opinion for a woman to travel on her own* [Interviewer:  why?]*It just not look nice…not look nice to local people maybe they think she is not a very nice person, so probably lots of people do it and probably they are safe doing it but I wouldn't feel comfortable because I would be thinking what are they thinking (Gina).*

While there was not an open criticism of the situation, Gina perceived Turkey is not a place which is welcoming solo female travellers. While explaining her perceptions

she tried to empathise with locals, and she thought that travelling without a male companion would not be nice in Turkey. She explains that probably this situation is not bothering many people but she herself would refrain doing so. Considering that she has already visited Turkey, her past experiences might play a significant role here, and in her understanding Turkey has an image which is not welcoming solo female travellers.

There were other participants who had some concerns about either their safety. Ricardo as a 72 year old retiree had some concerns about the safety in Turkey. However, his concerns were more related to shopping experiences in Turkey. Since his comments shed a light on the importance of a welcoming atmosphere on DI formation, even though it is rather lengthy, the quotes below highlight why he feels that atmosphere in Turkey can be threating at some points.

*Turkey and Morocco eahm come across a harder way of life…eahm harder way of life you know Greece gives you the appearance of more laid back, eahm more laid back way of life you know eahm. There are incidents in Turkey and Morocco that you can feel threatened. eahm you have good people there, I know you get them in every country you know, but people who eahm get pack on the tourist and can be a little bit threatened in that way you know . the market there you know there are people they can be intimidating in the markets area. Some of the shops you enter, they try to pressure you to buy more than you wanted, pay a lot more than what you wanted eahm you need to really really get very firm with them to get out the situation you know and some situations woman I don't mean alone but maybe with a couple of friend you know, when they get into shop they shut the door you know and they get problems with buying quite a lot of stuff you know. They felt very very threatened you know very threatened, they bought the stuff to get out not they liked them…These were the from people who had holiday in the same place we were you know… that was a similar thing when we were in Egypt you know, there wasn't only one in shop you know there were three or four of them in a shop you know. It happened to us in Egypt you know. There were three and four of them and the started to being very nice giving you drinks and things like that you know eahm and then they started to pressure you know…and price goes up you know and*

*then 'this is only for you, this is only for you', in Egypt you know I got verbally physical, verbally physical to let them know I was not getting any more nonsense of them you know.*

In line with Ricardo's highly detailed explanations of the potential problems with shop owners and stuff, there were others who complained about the conduct of businesses. For example, as a single female visitor Juliette said;

*I did not like the Grand Bazaar…I especially did not like the fact that owners or the seller were waiting in front of the…it put me eahm I didn't even want to look at the, look at the through the glass…I felt pressured or I did not like they are looking at me and waiting is she coming inside is she not. So you know that the prices are there really high. (Juliette).*

Even though she did not mention that she felt threatened or less secure during her trip, her comments show that she was unhappy about the conduct of businesses.

On the contrary some participants perceived Turkey as a "relaxed holiday" destination and do not associate any unpleasantness with being a female.

*I think it will be very sort of like relaxed holiday rather than you go home harassed, I really got harassed in Tunisia (Kay).*

Kay has never been to Turkey, and her image is formed based on secondary information sources. But still she perceives it as a nice and pleasant destination unlike her unpleasant experience in Tunisia. As can be seen studying destination images in a comparative manner showing us the relativistic nature of the destination images (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002). Significance of this relativity can also be seen in Juliette's groupings. While comparing Turkey, Greece and Egypt she said:

*Greece and Turkey are safe to me; Egypt is not (Juliette).*

There were some participants who have mixed feelings about the safety in Turkey. When she was asked about the Turkey Elizabeth answered;

*I am not sure what it is like at the moment, I am not sure I don't know.*

And when I asked her whether she had some concerns about safety she added;

*Yes, I want to go somewhere where I feel safe.* [And if you imagine yourself travelling to Turkey, do you feel safe?].*I was perfectly happy when I was in Turkey, I felt safe yes, perfectly happy because people were very friendly, and we got on very well. (Elizabeth)*

During the interview she made clear that she had some concerns about the Turkey as an Islamic country. While I have tried to understand her current perceptions about the safety in Turkey, she preferred referring to her past experiences and she mentioned in the past she was "felt safe and perfectly happy", but there was an implication that it may not be the case on present-day. The statement " I am not sure what it is like at the moment, I am not sure, I don't know" seems to stance for a negative perception rather than a lack of knowledge. Because she kept explaining how evil ISIL is, and what kind of horrible things are occurring in Islamic countries.

Considering the time interviews are conducted and when this thesis is written there might be many factors affecting the perceptions of participants and the researcher, myself. As seen in the excerpts above Egypt is suffering from a highly negative image because of the political instability in it. It is very difficult to reverse a negative image through marketing campaigns (Ahmed, 1991b). Even though Egypt was relatively stable when the interviews were conducted, the participants framed it as a county which has "civil war". While they tended to group Turkey as "safer" to visit during the interviews, unprecedented events took place in Turkey. When a BBC reporter Lowen (2016)  wrote on 17 July 2016:

*"Turkish tourism is in crisis. A country that welcomed 37 million visitors in 2014 - then the sixth most popular tourist destination in the world - is expected to see a drop of at least 40% this year".*

This would be read as a disastrous year for Turkey, worse happened and on 15 July 2016, the democratically elected government faced a military coup which was thwarted and when these paragraphs are written millions were still protesting against the coup in Turkey.  Even though, in this study I relied on the data which were collected in early 2015, it could be considered as a cornerstone for future studies which try to understand effects of shocking events, such as terror attacks and military coups.

To sum up, in this study Turkey has been perceived as a relatively safe and secure place to holiday in. Compared to countries such as Egypt, it was considered as a safe place because it did not have political conflicts which were widespread in some countries. However, in 2016, unprecedented events took place in Turkey. This is more likely to damage its image as a safe and secure place to visit. Therefore, readers should take the time of the interviews into account.

Besides, the intertwined relationships between politics and DI are highly visible in this part. As an example, there was a good relationship between Turkey and Russia, which was the second tourism source market for Turkey. As a result of a military conflict in Syria the relations between Turkey and Russia was on a halt more than 6 months, and there was travel bans and sanctions which were practiced by Russian governments to damage Turkish tourism. In the first half of 2016, the tourism arrival from Russia to Turkey was almost non-exist.

### 6.7   Turkey as a Country with "Good" Food

Even though the importance of food in destination marketing seems to be overlooked in literature, food is an important element in tourism and it might strengthen the competitiveness of a destination through its contribution to the authenticity of a destination (Lee and Arcodia, 2011; Rand, Heath and Alberts, 2003). Therefore it can be considered as a prominent part of a destination brand (Lin, Pearson and Cai, 2011). In this project, Turkish food seemed to be perceived as a positive attribute for Turkey's DI.

Through the analyses it can be seen that 'good, different, and spicy" were the most chosen adjectives to describe Turkish cuisine.

*I heart that Turkish food is quite good (Lin).*

As can be seen rather than referring his own personal experience, Lin says he 'hears' that Turkish food is good. Since Lin has not visited Turkey yet, her perception might be based on secondary sources.

In terms of cuisine, Turkey is pictured as a place that offers different food than Western Cuisine. As can be seen in Earl's explanations, Turkey seems to be imagined as 'authentic other'. The food in Turkey along with Moroccan food is imagined as

'different' compared to American food, which is not that much different than British food at the end.

> *You go to Turkey and Morocco for food rather than you go to America for food (Earl).*

> *I don't know smelling food eahm kind of imagine how it is gonna smell but I am guessing like spices more common eahm you walk around streets and smelling more restaurants you see food being cooked in different ways (Earl).*

When he was asked to imagine himself in Turkey, his imagination was filled with 'different smells' and spices.

When participants experienced the Turkish food, their explanations tend to be more specific and detailed. Rather than imagining as the 'exotic other' the distinguished characteristics of Turkish cuisine were shared.

> *For example food would be not kind of processed food it would be properly you know from fresh ingredients…almost everything I have eaten probably like kebab dolma anything to do with aubergine I love, but a lot of fresh things you see in England everything is processed packaged and eahm mass produced whereas if you get fresh stuff people have just grown then you get the real nice taste (Gina).*

As I explained earlier, Gina has visited Turkey before and she spent more than a decade in Azerbaijan. While talking about the food in Turkey, she shares her preferences for "fresh and properly" food.  She named particular food, such as kebab, dolma and she expressed her "love" with "anything to do with aubergine". The "processed" and "mass produced" food in England seems to an aspect of her life in Britain she is not happy with it, whereas fresh food in Turkey seems to be a formula for "real taste".

Obviously, not everyone is fascinated about Turkish food;

> *I would be looking forward to see eahm, maybe thinking perhaps the food might be too hot for me (Rose).*

Unlike Gina, Rose does not share her great appetite Turkish cuisine; she rather thinks that it can be too hot for her.

As seen in Parwez's explanations particular food and drinks seem to be paramount elements in Turkish cuisine. Although he has not visited Turkey yet, Parwez mentioned 'baklava' and 'Turkish tea', and it seems that he has tasted them. Considering he lives in Leicester, which is a city home to quite a few Turkish restaurants his experiences in these restaurants might be a possible explanation.

*So food is very nice and Turkey as well they have very kind of baklava which is special kind of thing the food is very nice as well Turkish tea which is very popular in the UK as well(Parwez).*

Again Kay has not visited Turkey but it seems that Turkish food such as 'shish kebab' seems to play important roles in her image of Turkey.

*I assume food is sort of like like I still saying (laugh) like you get all the grilled food and they do like shish kebab and stuff which is great, and it is very affordable (Kay).*

As can be seen 'food' seems to be an important element in participants' understanding of Turkey. When they are asked about Turkey, they tend to have positive thoughts and feelings toward Turkish cuisine. While non-visitors tend to stress differences between Turkish food and Western food, people who have been to Turkey share more vivid details and the aspects they enjoy in Turkish cuisine. Even though there are few participants who consider Turkish cuisine not very appealing for them, it seems that there is a consensus among majority about the 'goodness' of Turkish cuisine.

### 6.8   Summary

In this chapter Turkey's images as a country and tourism destination have been presented. Being a country with predominant Muslim population, Turkey is mainly understood as a country with an Islamic culture. Besides it has been imagined as a place with a family oriented culture. Even though it might be considered as a cliché, another common theme is that Turkey is a bridge between East and West. While it has been perceived as a relatively safe, sun, sea sand destination, it is perceived as a destination with a desired cuisine.

# 7 Factors Affecting Destination Image Formation

## 7.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the themes that represent Turkey's images were discussed in detail. Turkey as a country and a tourism destination was discussed from its Islamic culture, to its rather "different" cuisine. While highlighting how participants perceived Turkey, the possible forces that might shape their perceptions were briefly mentioned. As highlighted in the themes, different participants perceived Turkey differently. To better understand DI formation, the forces that play significant roles in image formation need deeper discussions. To be able to offer a fuller picture of image formation, significant elements in image formation and their roles will be critically examined in this chapter.

First of all, as a prominent socio-cultural factor, culture in a destination and its interpretation by participants will be discussed. Afterwards, another highly related factor, religious beliefs and affiliations of participants will be highlighted as influential image forming agents. Even though culture and religious beliefs seem to be intertwined, because of the significant references to religion and religious beliefs by participants, these two socio-cultural themes will be discussed under different sub-headings. Critical discussions of socio-cultural factors will be followed by in-depth examination of various information sources and their effects on image formation. As well noted by various scholars (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Gartner, 1994) TV and other information sources will be examined. Personal characteristics and destination features will follow comprehensive discussion of the information sources; in this part as broad categories of the themes, influences of familiarity and cultural closeness, novelty seeking and geographical locations of destinations will be highlighted. Finally, this chapter will be finalized by a critical discussion of online information search and it's effects on image formation.

## 7.2 Socio-Cultural Factors in Destination Image Formation

There is a consensus that our culture affects our perceptions, decisions, satisfactions and behaviours; but examination of these effects seems to be limited in tourism studies. (Correia, Kozak and Ferradeira, 2011; Turner, Reisinger and McQuilken,

2002). Considering complexity of culture as a construct, researchers' hesitations can be understood. In order to make things easier, it would be great to have an agreed definition of culture that has different dimensions that make cross-country comparisons possible such as Hofstede's five dimensions (2001). However, I believe that "viewing culture as a fairly homogenous system of collectively shared meanings, ways of life, and unifying values shared by a member of society"(Arnould and Thompson, 2005:868-869) could limit understanding of complexity and heterogeneity of culture. "[A]nalysis of it [culture] to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."(Geertz, 1994:215). Since I seek meanings in this project, before exploring how culture and socio-cultural factors influence image formation, I tried to understand how participants understood culture.

### 7.2.1  How Participants understand Culture?

While culture is defined as *"the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time"*(Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2016), or in the same stream "*as a consortium of communication (or a bundle of messages) that a given people have in common: their shared experiences, shared perceptions and values, shared consciousness*" (MacDonald, 1991:10). As acknowledged by Hofstede (2003), meaning of 'culture' differs from one paradigm to another in social sciences and there are different research approaches for that reason. While acknowledging the heterogeneity and overlapping characteristics of cultures (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), I let participants explain what the culture means for them. This was rather a necessity, because *culture* was one of the constructs that were frequently touched upon to group countries according to their similarities and differences. Whenever participants mentioned 'culture' as a distinguishing quality to group countries as similar or different, I asked them what did they mean by 'culturally similar' or 'culturally different'? Even though, each participant referring culture as a similar or different trait of the countries was asked this question, the selected quotes below give an idea about how variously culture was understood by participants.

While comparing Turkey, USA, and Morocco, Xiang grouped Turkey and Morocco as similar and said, "these two [Turkey and Morocco] are sharing similar cultures." When I asked him what did she mean by culture, she responded:

*Language, the way they dress up and also the religion and the food they eat these kinds of things, their habit… (Xiang).*

*As comparing Turkey,Spain, and Italy Veysi kept talking about cultural similarities between Spain and Italy, and stressed that Turkey was different because of its Easter culture.* When he was asked to express his thoughts about what constitutes culture for him, he replied:

*…it includes many. Maybe it is about style of life, how do you, how do people live in these countries. So eahm culture includes the way they wear clothes, the way they eat, the way they interact with each other the way they talk, the way they get education, the way all these things (Veysi).*

During the comparisons of Turkey, USA, and Spain, Amita grouped USA and Spain similar and shared her reason to group them similar:

*I see these countries as Western countries this is European and this is American and Turkey is a Middle Eastern country so there are lots of cultural differences.*

To better understand how she perceived Eastern and Western Cultures, she was asked what culture meant for her, and she responded:

*…the culture is different even if I dot say Western or Eastern eahm the food clothing style or eahm these two things come to my mind right now(Amita).*

*John was comparing Turkey, Spain, and Morocco*, and he grouped Spain and Morocco as culturally similar. Later, he expressed how he perceived culture:

*I would imagine the culture, the way of life quite different eahm yeah very relaxed, good for holidays. Turkey I would imagine little bit more business like…(John)*

When these examples are examined it can be understood that the more individuals you ask the more various conceptualizations you get. As seen above, almost anything can be considered as part of the culture. I think that is probably why Hermann Goering uttered: "Whenever I hear the word 'culture', I reach for my revolver."(Cited in Hofstede, 2003:811; Walsh, 2013). In the first excerpt, Xiang considers language,

dressing, food and religion as elements of culture. She adds that habits are also part of a culture. It seems that for Xiang, culture is more or less consists of shared meanings by a group of people. For Veysi and John, culture is probably can be summarized as a way of life in a destination, for Amita culture means food and clothing style. As can be seen that, at various occasions culture means 'life styles, cuisine, dressing style, atmosphere' for participants. While they tend to perceive certain similarities and differences between cultures, their understandings of culture seem to be fragmented. Therefore, rather than agreeing on a shared definition of culture, participants' remarks highlight that culture is a complex and fragmented construct, hence participants subjective realities need to be considered.

### 7.2.2   Culture as a Factor in Image Formation

When the analyses of the interviews are finalized, I was fascinated by the frequency of the codes that were linked to culture. During the interviews, when participants were given three different countries, almost every participant mentioned culture as a distinctive characteristic to countries. This is because the culture seems to be used as a proxy for the county (Woodside, Hsu and Marshall, 2011). Besides tourism itself can be considered as a mutual cultural exchange, both hosts and guests are affected by tourism activity and a 'tourism culture' is constructed based on reciprocal influences (Canavan, 2016).

While comparing Turkey, Greece and Germany, even though he has given the country names Veysi was using 'nation' as a proxy for the country.

> *"So to be honest I find these two nations very close to each other, they are neighbours and the kind of their culture is very similar. I find Greece people the most from the people, I think the culture is very similar, although religions are not similar, politics are not similar, but this kind of culture, style of life look to me very similar compared to Germany."( Veysi)*

He knows that Turkey and Greece are neighbours, and perceives them as culturally similar. Here it becomes obvious that his perceptions of these countries are centred on people. He explains that even though the religion and politics are not the same in these two countries, because of the people their cultures are similar. This might explain why he used 'nations' even though he is given county names. When I kept

asking what the similarity between the cultures he said: *"that is that friendly thing…"*. 'Friendliness of locals' is considered as a 'Psychological Characteristic' of DI (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; 1993) and as stated by Jenkins (1999) it is the only psychological element that has been considered in the majority of the DI studies. When the next quote is examined it can be seen that when someone has limited information about particular countries their perceptions could be formed based on their interactions with the people from those destinations.

> *"…most of my friends say people they come from Greece and Italy they 80% they are good friend, they don't communicate with others, so I think as culturally these two countries are very close. …most of them they prefer go to pub or a bar, they like drinking… but I would like to put also these two together[Turkey,Greece]… yeah,once I found out that these two countries' food are similar… like eahm not kebab another one, let me think, because oooh some baklava"* (Zhen)

The complexity and subjectivity of culture becomes obvious in this narration. As a student from China, Zhen observed that people from Italy and Greece are quite good with each other; therefore, their culture must be similar. Besides *"they like drinking"*, so she perceives Italia and Greece as culturally similar countries. Her narration shed a light on the importance of interaction, and organic images (Chon, 1991; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). Since she comes from a distant place her perceptions are mostly affected by her interaction with the people from these countries. This narration also shows that her groupings are not mutually exclusive, while Italia and Greece are similar; there are also similarities between Greece and Turkey because they both have '*baklava*'. It is a sweet originated in Middle East, and became known in Anatolia during the Byzantine Empire and then adapted by Ottoman chefs for the Sultans in Istanbul (Walsh, 2015). Both Greeks and Turks claim ownership.

Even though participants tend to associate a specific culture to a particular country, at the end there is an East-West dichotomy for some participants;

> *"I see these countries [Spain,USA] as Western countries, this is European and this is American and Turkey is a Middle Eastern country so there are lots of cultural differences"(Amita)*

Amita seems to be grouping countries in two big categories: 'Western and Eastern'. In her mind there are lots of differences between these cultures, but when I asked for them in details she replied: *"the culture is different even if I don't say Western or Eastern, eahm the food, clothing style or eahm these two things come to my mind right now"*. This is a common situation for many participants, even though they think that there are huge differences between the prominent cultures in different countries, when they are asked to mention those differences, their explanations seem to be rather limited. This shows that even though 'culture' as a construct has richness and depth in their mind, its nature seems to be fragmented. Even though they believe that there are cultural boundaries, the start and end points of these boundaries are highly fluid. However, participants tend to assign a cultural label to each country. Overall they tend to group countries either as 'Eastern or Western'. The challenge for Turkey is that, as stated in the previous chapter, it is neither perceived as an Eastern or a Western country, but more like a 'bridge' between them.

Perceived culture in a particular country seems to be dominating image formation. As seen in the excerpts above, participants tend to assign countries into bigger cultural groups as either 'Eastern or Western'. Eastern countries tend to be pictured as 'exotic other', which offers mysterious experiences and "Symbolizing the elsewhere and the exotic, the Other has functioned as a vehicle that allowed for an inverse image of home, place, self, and power" (Galani-Moutafi, 2000:215). It seems that culture's role has double facets. While culture in a destination seems to play a highly significant role in image formation, individuals' cultural affiliation is another factor that should not be ignored to better understand DI formation. Even though culture might be a dynamic and nonhomogeneous construct, as seen above religious beliefs are considered as an inseparable elements of cultures. Therefore, to highlight the effects of religious beliefs on DI formation, I will discuss the complex relationship between religion and DI formation under the next heading.

### 7.2.3  Effects of Religious Beliefs on Image Formation

As a cultural element, religious beliefs play significant roles in consumption behaviour and decision making (Delener, 1994), but religion still can be considered as an under- researched construct in marketing (Karatas and Sandikci, 2013) and tourism. It stays as a topic which deserves further research because "[re]ligious beliefs play a significant part in sculpting social behaviour. Differences in religious affiliations tend to influence the way people live, the choices they make, what they eat and whom they associate with"(Kim, Waller and Zafer Erdogan, 2004:537). Therefore, it is likely that their religious affiliations might affect what kind of images they hold about a particular destination.

In this project, I shed a light on this rather overlooked relationship between religious affiliations and DI formation.  Through the interviews, participants shared their views about particular countries by referring to their own beliefs. As stated earlier in this chapter, for some participants countries might look culturally similar or different based on the prominent religions in those countries. However, religious affiliations of participants are also emerging as a prevailing force in DI formation.

 When some statements are examined, at the beginning it might seem that participants are grouping countries according to the prominent religious beliefs in those countries. But a critical and deeper examination might indicate that participants are not only grouping countries based on perceived similarities or differences between them but also according to the religious beliefs the participants hold. The excerpt below from a Muslim participant might be an example;

> *"My perception is if somebody goes to Morocco or Turkey they would experience perhaps similar. Their culture must be more similar as compare to French culture, the French culture would be very different but again then you would say it is based on the religion because of the history and religion so even history is connected to religion because all these countries are Muslim countries so, I mean not this one but these two are Muslim countries" (Wahid)*

Wahid is a Pakistani born British Muslim lives in Leicester. He is a practising Muslim, and if it is possible he tries to attend congregations at nearby mosque. During the interviews, we needed to take a break because he wanted to attend afternoon (*Asr*) congregation. During the interview, in different contexts he was referring to religion, especially his own belief, Islam. While comparing Turkey, Morocco and France, he thinks that the experience in Turkey and Morocco could be similar because they are both Muslim countries. While grouping these countries, his categorization seems to be being Muslim or not, because for France he says "France culture would be *very* different" and he groups France as not a Muslim country, rather than saying a Christian country or a secular country. This shows that his understanding of different countries is highly affected by his own religious beliefs, and he tends to group countries whether they are Islamic countries or not.

Effects of religious affiliation on understanding of the other destinations can also be seen in Rose's remarks;

> *"I studied history at teacher training course but also being a Christian,*
> *quite a lot of the early churches things centred around Greece and Turkey,*
> *I find that interesting"(Rose).*

Rose's overall evaluation of Turkey is quite positive. She states that she is a Christian and there are many Christian heritages centred around Greece and Turkey and this is interesting for her. Being home for early Christian heritage seems to be a positive aspect for Turkey, which makes Rose to hold positive images of Turkey. However, as can be seen in the comments below, unlike Rose, some other participants might perceive Turkey quite negatively because of the early Christian heritage in there.

> *"being quite open reading this book [*From the Holy Mountain: A Journey
> In The Shadow of Byzantium*] recently and hearing about the way many of*
> *the older Christian eahm churches and cathedrals have been shut down*
> *demolished or reused in a different way, there is less interest in exploring*
> *the history and taking from it preserving what is good in Turkey, I think*
> *than other places like Germany and Greece and that worries me" (John).*

John works for a charity, which has connections with a church in Leicester. He has visited Turkey recently; during the interview he was quite open and he mentioned his

fascination of Turkey in different contexts but for the Christian heritage, especially after reading a book which tells the stories of ancient Christian heritage around Turkey, he perceives Turkey as a country that does not preserve Christian heritage. He shares his unhappiness about the current states of Christian heritages in Turkey. Rather than preserving and exploring history, and benefiting from past experiences, Turkey seems to be pictured as a country that is eradicating Christian heritage. While comparing Turkey with Germany and Greece, he thinks unlike Turkey those countries are protecting Christian heritage.   As a Christian he seems to expect Turkey to protect Christian heritage as other countries, which are known as Christian countries.

> *I am a Christian, and I follow what happens to Christians in countries that are Muslim and persecution of Christians, and I know there are a lot in Egypt and I also know there is a lot eahm dreadful things to Coptic Christians in Egypt so I am influenced there (Elizabeth).*

Elizabeth follows what happens in countries where Christians are minority. As can be seen, she thinks that Christians are persecuted Muslim countries and this makes her unhappy. She gave Egypt as an example to sufferings of Christians in Muslim countries.  Even though there might be other people, or even many other groups were suffering from brutal political atmosphere in Egypt, Elizabeth singled out Coptic Christians as the main group that suffers. This shows that her perceptions about country might be highly influenced by her own religious belief, Christianity.

To sum up, even though the roles played by religious beliefs in social behaviour and consumption practices of individuals and groups are acknowledged by scholars (Delener, 1994; Karatas and Sandikci, 2013), their implications for tourism research seem to need further research. As a prominent cultural element religion seemed to play a prominent role in participants' DI formation. As explained above, their affiliation with a particular belief system is affecting some participants Di formation dramatically. This shows that the complex relationship between religious beliefs and DI formation might benefit from further research.

### 7.3    Information Sources in Destination Image Formation

Information sources are vastly cited as influencing factors in destination image formation (e.g, Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004), and effects of various information sources are discussed in great details(Gartner, 1994). However

since many of extant researches were conducted prior to or early 2000s, while traditional information sources were covered in great details, new information sources such as social media and user-generated content do not have a place in these studies. Of course there are many recent studies that focus on social media and different topics in tourism, but they do not particularly offer comprehensive analysis on the complex nature of the relationship between online information search and destination image formation. Apparently there is a greater need to explore effects of online information search on image formation along with other information sources. Since the effects of online information search will be critically examined in the subsequent parts in this chapter, in this part TV and some other traditional information sources, and their roles in DI formation will be discussed.

### 7.3.1   TV as an Information Source

Participants mentioned various information sources, but TV was the mostly cited and discussed mainstream media channel. Even though participants perceived trustworthiness of information acquired through TV as questionable, they mentioned that it is one of the main elements in their information seeking and gathering.

Daniella is one of the participants who are cautious about TV;

> *I haven't been in Turkey that is a problem that is everything I have heard of watched TV eahm (Daniealla).*

While explaining her thoughts about Turkey as a tourist destination, she admits that she has never been to Turkey, so her knowledge mainly comes from the TV. Besides she used the word 'problem' to mention that the images formed thorough TV messages can be misleading or distorted.

Adam is one the participants who does not perceive TV as a trustworthy information source;

> *I realize now TV is mainly for propaganda you know (Adam).*

> *The things I don't believe what I see on TV, That is where we get a lot of information from, so, so I found it very hard to be sure about anyway, I haven't been there myself. (Adam)*

In different parts of the interview he mentioned his distrust on TV. As seen in above examples, he perceives TV is solely for propaganda. And in the second example, he mentioned he cannot be sure about the accuracy of his perceptions about Turkey, since he has never been there and he does not believe what he saw on TV. He implicitly stresses the importance of first-hand experience by stating it was hard to be sure without actual visitation.

Rose shared one of the interesting comments;

> *I see Turkey as mostly men out there ... (laugh), that could be could be from TV or in my mind I am thinking it eahm women in Turkey are lower position (Rose).*

She mentioned that Turkey would be a place where women have lower position. And she added, "It could be from TV". This implies that she thinks her perception is affected by TV, or she does not sure why she perceives Turkey as a place where women have lower status. However her sentences imply that there is a visualisation in her mind about the public places of Turkey, and those places are male dominated. It could be because of the various scenes in various TV programs which present male dominated public places.

### 7.3.2  Other Information Sources along with TV

While answering the question participants listed TV in some cases as one of the factors they think they affect their perceptions, but not necessarily as the most important one. Besides, rather than being sure it seems that on that spot they were trying to figure out what might affect their perceptions. When they mentioned the TV, I have asked them what they remember on TV, which focused on Turkey, and almost in any case there was not a particular program to be mentioned;

> *mainly news and quiz shows  eahm a few Turkish people I met maybe restaurant I have been Turkish eahm and like from general conversations with people come up occasionally and I don't know like background cultural influences how we perceive the world (Earl).*

As can be seen in Earl's comments TV programs such as news and quiz shows might play a role to certain extend, but he admits that there can be various factors which might affect the image formation. In addition to TV programs, Earl mentioned highly

crucial but mostly over sided elements such as people from the destination, or the enterprises whose owners are coming from that destination. Besides, he highlighted his own cultural background and mentioned that cultural backgrounds affect how *we* perceived the world.

Before explaining various elements that might affect his perception, Henry explained how his information search behaviour has changed. As can be seen below he explained how might travel brochures affect his perception in the past, but it is not the case in the current times, because he ceased looking at travel brochures.

> *eahm, probably some previous experiences being there but also eahm probably from looking through I don't know anymore but I used to look through holiday brochures things like that, I was used to do that when I was younger and I saw pictures of Turkey or wherever might be tourist destination(Henry.*

Since he implied that he was no longer looking at travel brochures I have asked him whether he was still looking at them and he added;

> *no not really much, I think television maybe eahm you know in the past watching programs about Turkey also reading you know kind of reading about history of for example Byzantine like that that kind of make me interested in history of Turkey eahm Constantinople and that kind of things and now Istanbul so a bit eahm maybe other people's experiences my parents experiences going there before telling me ...yeah they share what is like and they suggested it before as a place to go and eahm we got Turkish friends in Leicester eahm who very keen on Turkey and they tell us about how nice it is and eahm they showed us a DVD about the hometown of , I think Bodrum (Henry.*

As can be seen from his explanations Henry has quite detailed information about Turkey. While mentioning TV he clearly stresses the importance of many other factors. In addition to media channels, people either from Turkey or Britain seem to have a greater influence on his perceptions of Turkey. Of course his past visits to Turkey should be also considered, because as stated earlier primary images tend to be

more complex and diverse (Lubbe, 1998). In his comments significant roles of organic and induced information sources (Gartner, 1994) become highly visible.

Some participants mentioned the news, but not necessarily news on the TV. As can be seen in Leo's explanations when there was an extreme case such as Greece other countries might look much stable and financially well of. Considering the extensive coverage of economic crisis in Greece in British news outlets seems to make Leo believe Turkey and Morocco are better in terms of financial stability.

> *Greece has been in the news a lot in the UK about being financially unstable eahm having to borrow lots of money, their government is kind of in financial trouble whereas, Morocco and Turkey haven't been on the news about that eahm (Leo).*

Similarly, Isabella did not mention a specific news outlet but she acknowledged that Turkey is on the news for bad things. In different stages of interviews she mentioned riots and protests in Turkey. Therefore, the bad things might stance for mainly social unrest and demonstrations in Turkey.

> *Unfortunately, Turkey is on the news for bad things like unrest and things like that (Isabella).*

One of the dramatic and complex explanations was shared by Zhen. When she was asked to describe Turkey as a destination she stated;

> *eahm before I go, come[before coming to the UK] here I think eahm I always read some news about Iran and Iraq ...so for me a bit dangerous country ...eahm because you guys both believed in the same religion...so I think maybe it is a bit dangerous but later I visited here, I have friends exactly from Iran and another friend she comes from Iraq, so they are very amazing they are very nice and once getting closer, I ask is it safe to visit, they said what are you talking about, and I said my view about their country they explained the current situation to me , and I found out eahm maybe news in China is not 100% real ...yeah biased and maybe they have some fake news and then the people in China will feel ooo we are really happy because out of China they are not safe...so after I came here I think eahm  I think it is  a peaceful place.*

The above excerpt shed a new light on the complex process of image formation. Religions, politics, news, people from destinations seem to play crucial role in her perceptions about destinations. As can be seen without knowing much about Turkey, she had associated it being a dangerous place because of the common religious beliefs in Turkey and in some other countries such as Iran and Iraq, which are presented as dangerous lands in Chinese media. Travelling to a new place, the UK, meeting people from those countries associated with danger, and security risks, made her to believe that trustworthiness of news in China are highly questionable. And there are dramatic changes in her perception towards countries such as Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Despite the interview was conducted during a time when there was ongoing turmoil in countries such as Iraq and Syria, her perception was changed positively.

As explained by Henry earlier there are tremendous changes in information search in tourism industry. When I asked Adam how he searched for information about a destination, he replied;

> *Quite randomly, I would… I would you know try to looking different places like Wikipedia, ask people, go on social media and ask people as well you know. When you know anybody who have been to Turkey (Adam).*

Adam's explanations shed a light on the changing patterns of information search and importance of social media and user-generated content along with other traditional sources. The current study contributed to creation of academic knowledge in destination image formation through qualitative interviews that incorporates Repertory Grid, which is a novel attempt in a highly structured research area. However, one of the bigger contributions stems from incorporating an online information search to better understand how people look for information and how the new information acquired changes their perceptions.

## 7.4 Familiarity, Novelty Seeking and Geographical Proximity in Destination Image Formation

### 7.4.1 Familiarity

The paramount role played by destination familiarity in image formation is well addressed in tourism literature (Yang, Yuan and Hu, 2009), and it is mostly accepted as a positive factor in image formation (Beerli and Martín, 2004; Chen and Lin, 2012)

and destination choice (Lee and Tussyadiah, 2012). While there are various aspects of familiarity (Prentice, 2004)  it can be considered as the amount of information someone has(*informational*) and previous visitations to a destination(*experiential*) (Baloglu, 2001). Through the analysis it became obvious that familiarity cannot be confined to the previous visitations only.

While comparing Turkey, France and Greece, Isabella said: *"I think I don't know much about Greece at all to be able to say".*  To at least learn her thoughts about France and Turkey, I encouraged her to keep comparing Turkey and France without considering Greece in the set.

> *"eahm because I live in the UK , France is a , I know much about France you know I visit France quite easily regularly… just to do food shopping, this is what I used to do, I lived down south before. We went for food shopping and came back… so France seems a lot more closer to home a lot more eahm  I think, I understand France more because I just know it closer to home"(Isabella).*

Because of the familarity, Isabella seems to have a high level of cultural empathy for France than Turkey. As she mentioned she was visiting France even for routine shopping experiences. Based on the cultural closeness and familiarity she thinks that she better understands French culture. Even though cultural closeness does not always guarantee positive feelings towards another destination (Swift, 1999), for Isabella, cultural closeness and feeling familiar to a destination seem to play a significant role in her DI formation. This shows that the images held by participants might be affected by their familiarity and cultural closeness.

Dramatic effects of cultural closeness and familiarity in image formation and destination choice (Lee and Tussyadiah, 2012) can be observed in another participant's remarks. When Turkey, Egypt and France are given to Leo he explained;

> *"I think that I will put Turkey and Egypt together because I think the culture in Italy is more what I am been used to and the culture in Turkey and Egypt I don't know, a little bit different, I will less hesitate to go for me going for Italy, whereas and Egypt and Turkey I want to go like arranged tours, that kind of thing because eahm I don't know, I don't know I don't*

*want to kind of my foot in it [laugh] …yeah I wouldn't, I would know what to do, ask the things or that kind of thing I think I find, I would be happier to find just somebody and speak kind of in Italy, whereas I would be so quiet so , I don't know …yeah I guess I would be more comfortable in Italy than Egypt and Turkey"(Leo).*

Leo's explanations draw a vivid picture of unknown, mysterious atmosphere in Egypt and Turkey. On the contrary, cultural closeness and familiarity he feels toward Italy make him to visualise a 'like a home' atmosphere in Italy. While acknowledging that he would be more comfortable in Italy, he shed a light on the influences of familiarity and cultural closeness not only on destination image but also on destination choice (Lee and Tussyadiah, 2012). As it might be seen that type of holiday, activities to do in a destination, and interactions between 'host and guest' are influenced by familiarity. While the proclamation "I don't want to kind of my foot in it" could be considered as his expression of hesitation and unwillingness to visit a destination which has an image of unknown, mysterious place, the statement "I would be happier to find just somebody and speak kind of in Italy" illustrate his willingness and happiness to visit a familiar destination.

Although the discussions above might imply that the more familiar someone with a destination the more positive images he/she holds about it, there are cases in which when participants live in further areas their perceptions of a particular destination tend to be more positive (Crompton, 1979; MacKay and Fesenmaier, 1997) . As explained by Hsu and her colleagues these can be explained by novelty seeking; the places are less familiar are more exciting (Hsu, Wolfe and Kang, 2004). For example, while comparing Turkey, Morocco and Egypt, John categorized them according to his own informational and experiential familiarity with these countries;

*Morocco is too unknown for me, if I was an adventures person I would say you know I love to go there, but I don't have any great interest in Morocco really, as I already said I feel closer to, Turkey is a country that some of my friend have been to and I now people who have been to Egypt and had a good time so I think I will put those two together and keep Morocco separate (John).*

After acknowledging that Morocco is a destination which he is unfamiliar with, he declared that he did not have an interest to visit it. However, as familiar destinations Turkey and Egypt are the ones which he wants to holiday in. He said that if "I was an adventurous person, I love to go there". This means that personal characteristics should not be ignored while discussing effects of familiarity on image formation. Therefore, another highly related motivational construct 'novelty seeking' will be discussed on the succeeding pages.

### 7.4.2 Novelty Seeking

Novelty can be understood as the antithesis of familiarity (Jang and Feng, 2007; Lee and Crompton, 1992). Tourists might have different expectations for travelling. While some would like to indulge themselves in mundane activities in a familiar environment, some might prefer visiting an unknown place looking for exciting novel experiences (Chang, Wall and Chu, 2006; Kim and Ritchie, 2014). In each scenario there could be benefits and challenges for destinations. When people are novelty seekers they might constantly search for novel experiences and they do not want to revisit places they already visited (Assaker, Vinzi and O'Connor, 2011) even if they hold positive images of them. While this can be a chance for recently developed destinations to attract them, for the established destinations it can be terrifying because they should constantly look for new visitors.

> "... if you going to go to USA, it is a big step, it is a long way, it is more expensive eahm , and I think culturally Italy and Turkey, because they are foreign countries, eahm they eahm you know they do obviously speak a different language, it is always interesting to go to a county where the language is not English as it would be in the USA, I think food as well would be more interesting and attractive and appealing in both Turkey and Italy eahm than maybe USA eahm, it takes shorter in terms of travelling to get to Turkey and Italy"(Michael).

Michael's explanations shed a light on the motivations of an individual who is seeking different experiences. The statement "it is always interesting to go to a country where the language is not English" touches upon one aspect of his desire for novelty. Even though it could be easier for him to cope with challenges in an English speaking country, he finds non-English speaking counties more interesting. In

addition to language, alternative cuisines in Turkey and Italy seem to be more appealing for him. When he kept explaining his thoughts about these three countries it becomes clearer that novelty seeking is not compounded to language and food but it covers much broader areas;

> *"I think eahm when you are going to a different culture like Italy or Turkey you know you just see things you wouldn't see in the UK eahm, restaurants, eahm the way people dress, eahm and streets, shops that is all different from what we would experience in the UK and what you would experience in USA, which could be quite similar to the UK" (Michael).*

Even though authenticity is considered as a fantasy (Knudsen, Rickly and Vidon, 2016), Michael's comments shed a light on the power of this fantasy. In his narration it can be felt that travel is an escape from dull routine everyday life to exciting novel experiences. Even though there is a constant debate about the authenticity in tourism, even if it is considered as a fantasy, there are, obviously, people who search for this fantasy. Therefore, destinations that seem to be novel and different might create positive feelings for those novelty seekers.

Carlos was born in the USA, but leaving in the UK almost for two decades. While comparing Turkey, USA and Spain he grouped USA and Spain as similar for the fact that they have Christian cultures whereas Turkey has and Islamic culture.

> *"How could…himmm ok USA and Spain because Christian culture Turkey because not Christian, Islamic culture."(Carlos.*

To better understand how he perceives Christian and Islamic culture I further asked him to explain how these two cultures are different;

> *"eahm Christian culture is my culture eahm  it is the one I grew up in that it is what I am used to eahm Islamic is the one that is not familiar to me eahm which actually is a good thing in this case because when I travel, I want to see things I am not familiar with."(Carlos).*

Rather than talking about the similarities and differences he perceives in these cultures he preferred to explain them by putting himself in the centre. After mentioning that he was familiar with Christian culture but not so with Islamic culture

he stressed that it was a good thing in tourism context because he wants to travel the places that he is not familiar with. As discussed again in this chapter, someone's religious affiliations tend to influence their perceptions about countries and destinations. Even though, there were negative thoughts and feelings among some Christian participants towards Muslim countries. As seen in Carlos's comments Muslim culture can be a positive image contributor for novelty seekers.

Novelty seeking cannot be only confined to cultural differences. There tend to be other aspects of novelty, such as geographical differences between countries. Therefore, geographical location is considered as another theme to be discussed in this part.

### 7.4.3 Geographical Location

Effects of geographical location on DI formation has been considered in few studies, and it is assumed that distance between the place someone lives and the destination has some effects on image formation (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002) . Even though as seen under the familiarity discussions, when someone is more familiar with a destination their images tend to be more positive, there are studies in which "*the farther away respondents resided from [a destination], the more favorable was their image of that country as a vacation destination*"(Crompton, 1979,18).

However afore mentioned studies mainly focused on the distance between the places where participants live and the destination which studies are conducted upon. Unlike extant studies, geographical location is not considered as a variable to explain differences between participants' perceptions in the current study; rather geographical location was a main criterion for participants to differentiate destinations. When participants given various sets they tend to group destinations based on their geographical locations, or geographical proximities between destinations.

Mediterranean and European are constructs which have been cited by participants to refer either solely to geographical location of a destination or cultural characteristics of nations. For example;

> *I would say Turkey is the odd one out that is really I associate Spain and Greece as being Mediterranean countries whereas, I tend to think of Turkey is being Asian, Eurasian (Adam).*

*Ok those two [Turkey, France] are in Europe and that [USA] is not (Gina).*

While Gina simply grouped destinations depending on whether they were located in Europe or not, Adam referred to the word 'Mediterranean' but it was not clear whether he was referring to geographical location. It seems that in addition to geographical location, there are some cultural aspects in his grouping of these three countries. There are some examples in which the word 'Mediterranean' is considered as a geographical label, rather than including some cultural connotations.

*I put Turkey and Greece together simply geographical reason, that is when*
*I think them on the Mediterranean [comparing with USA] (John).*

In this example John says "simply geographical reason" and groups Turkey and Greece as Mediterranean. It is obvious that he was referring to geographical location. This does not mean that the word 'Mediterranean' was always used as a geographical indicator. Again when John was given Turkey, Italy and Germany as a set to compare, it became more visible that 'Mediterranean' was a construct that signified certain cultural characteristics.

*Again eahm saying again, what I do here I put Italy and Turkey together*
*for the reason that they are both southern European, let put it that way*
*Mediterranean warmer climate easy going atmosphere and probably*
*slightly more agricultural and tourist orientated than Germany which I*
*always think of being not too similar to Britain talking about colder climate*
*you are talking about eahm industrialised economy, busy people I have*
*been there Germany is lovely country but I don't put it in the same category*
*as the other two basically (John).*

He starts referring to geographical location, but then focus of speech shifts to the atmosphere and economic developments in these destinations. Germany is serving to distinguish destinations with a 'tourism atmosphere' from the ones 'busy, industrialised'. It was common for participants to express their thoughts and feelings towards Germany as in a form of highly developed industrial country image, but it is not associated with tourism. John says, "I have been there, Germany is lovely county" but then he adds that he does not group it with other two.

As observed in the subsequent quotes when participants were given a set that included Turkey and Greece, there was a tendency to compare destinations according to their geographical locations.

*I would say Turkey and Greece are similar eahm because they are eahm…Turkey is not really part of the EU officially but it falls within Europe doesn't it, just half of Istanbul is in Europe so you can categorize as European [comparing with USA] (Osman).*

*Greece…Greece and Turkey are on the same sort of the connected in land wise, aren't they? They quite close to each other [comparing with USA] (Bob).*

*I am just based on the fact that Turkey and Greece are in the same part of the world; Morocco is in North Africa (Earl).*

To indicate their similarities, Osman groups Greece and Turkey as 'European'. Since Osman had visited Turkey recently and spent quite a few days in Istanbul, he took Istanbul as a reference place to give details about the geographical location of Turkey. While Bob referring to geographical proximity between Turkey and Greece, Earl's explanations also include geographical proximity without mentioning Europe, or Mediterranean he said, "Turkey and Greece are in the same side of the world".

Even though it was one of the mostly referred constructs to differentiate destinations geographical locations of destinations were not always the accurate.

*Ok, ok. I would say Turkey and Morocco would be similar, they are both in Europe and USA is outside of the Europe, USA is I think in America, which is a bit far from, it is a different continent as well (Parwez).*

Parwez considered Turkey and Morocco as countries in Europe. There was vagueness for the Morocco, in multiple occasions participants mentioned that they did not know anything about Morocco, or as in the example above it was confused. Confusion might occur because of the similarities between Morocco and Monaco. Because another participant also defined Morocco as a "very tiny state in Europe" (Lin). Similarly, Zhen thinks that Morocco is in Europe and a member of European Union.

> *This is because they are [Germany, Morocco] belong to Europe, this [Turkey] is also European but not belong to EU (Zhen).*

When she was given Turkey, Germany, and Morocco, Zhen grouped Germany and Morocco as similar and Turkey as different, and as the excerpt above shows that she grouped them as similar because she thought they both were located in in Europe and members of EU.

It seems that Morocco as a destination was suffering from lack of awareness. The excerpts below highlight the dramatic level of lack of awareness about Morocco, or about its geographical location.

> *I don't know much about Morocco to be honest (Veysi).*

> *For some reasons I don't have no desire to see Morocco, not at all ...and it could be just maybe I don't know anything about it (Carlos).*

> *I know very little about Morocco... (Gina).*

> *I'd say Turkey and Germany are similar and Morocco is the odd one out...I only because eahm I am not sure where Morocco is.  I am pretty sure that they are in Europe but I am not sure where Morocco is (Frank).*

While all these quotes confirm that those participants admit that their information about Morocco is either limited or inaccurate, one of these quotes shed a light on the possible drawbacks of participants' limited information about Morocco. Carlos mentioned that he did not have a desire to see Morocco, and it could be just maybe he did not know anything about it. He thinks that lack of his willingness to visit Morocco could be because of his limited knowledge about it. This shows that lack of a positive secondary image could be a real challenge for a destination to attract travellers. Even though Morocco is one of the relatively well-established destinations for European travellers, in my set it was the least known destination, and its geographical location was confused with Monaco.  As can be seen in Carlos's explanations there might be less willingness to visit a destination if there is a lack of information about that particular destination.

### 7.5 Effects of Online Information Search on DI Formation

As discussed in the previous chapters of this project, the roles played by various information sources (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a), or image forming agents (Gartner, 1994) in image formation are acknowledged and well documented by tourism researchers(Beerli and Martín, 2004; McCartney, Butler and Bennett, 2008; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). However, as relatively recent technological developments, roles played by Internet and online information search in DI formation need further explorations. Therefore, it can be said that one of the main contributions of the current project is that it expands our understanding of complex relationships between online information search, and image formation.

As explained earlier in the methodology chapter, to observe information search patterns and to understand whether there are some observable changes in participants perceived images about a particular destination, i.e. Turkey, they have been asked to conduct a 15-minute online information search. While searching, they were guided to assume that they would visit Turkey in near future. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to understand effects of this online information search on DI formation.

To better observe if there were any observable changes in the views of participants about Turkey, each participant was asked to share his/her thoughts, feelings, and visualizations about Turkey just before the information search and after it. As can be seen in the following participant comments, this online information search affected image formation in various degrees for participants who have prior experience in Turkey and those who have quite limited knowledge about it.

Barbara, as a 58-year-old retired British doctor, has a villa in Turkey and almost every year she spends some time in Turkey. Her explanations, therefore, can be assumed to be shaped by her own experiences. As someone who has highly rich experiences in Turkey, she defined Turkey as a good place for holiday because of its good facilities, friendly people and value for money. These are with Echtner and Ritchie's (1991; 1993) terms, common image attributes which can be found in any destinations, that is why many DI studies used these attributes in their scales(e.g Chen and Hsu, 2000; Dolnicar, Grabler and Mazanec, 2000; San Martín and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008).

> *It is a good place to go for holiday because there are good facilities, friendly people, and it is good value (Barbara).*

Even though she has a villa in Turkey, her definition does not reflect positive feelings towards Turkey. It seems that Turkey is a destination that offers functional attributes she is looking for rather than offering a unique travel experience to her. To better understand why her description incorporates mostly functional characteristics, her travel motivation should be taken into account. Usually, in a sun, sea and sand type of holiday, especially when it is not combined with various activities individuals' priority could be functional attributes of a place(Prebensen, Skallerud and Chen, 2010). Besides, as can also be seen in this thesis, one of the main factors which make participants to travel is novelty seeking. When someone owns a property in a county, and spends several days in that place he or she might lose excitement for that particular destination.

As mentioned before, DI is considered as a dynamic concept (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002; Lai and Li, 2015), and it evolves from organic to induced (Gartner and and Hunt, 1987; Gartner, 1994) and from secondary to primary stages. Even though primary image seems to be labelled as the final stage in image formation, this final and more complex construct keeps evolving through new information.

In the literature it is mentioned that UGC affects brand equity (Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schäfer, 2012), satisfaction (Sharma and Baoku, 2013), behaviour (Ye *et al*, 2011), and it might influence perceptions (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014) and images too (O'Connor, 2010). While the 15-minute online information search offered new insights to better understand possible influences of online information search,along with UGC on image formation and it also shed a light on the dynamic characteristic of DI (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002). One of the main shortcomings of DI studies is that, while majority of them are cross-sectional, longitudinal ones are scarce. Because of the difficulties in repeating a research in different times, many researchers have to rely on data that are gathered through cross-sectional studies. Even though, this project itself is not a longitudinal study, to understand the changes in a limited time period, and to observe the effects of new information on DI, participants were asked to share their thoughts, feelings, and visualizations about Turkey both before the information search and just after that.

As I mentioned earlier, Barbara has visited Turkey several times. When she was asked to conduct a 15-minute information search, she immediately started to look for flight

and accommodation. Even though she had a villa in Turkey, she said she would prefer to stay few days in Istanbul before moving to her villa. Even though she spent most of her time to arrange a hotel in Istanbul, after the information search her description becomes more detailed and she uses positive adjectives such as, 'good, nice, interesting' to define Turkey. This shows that information search helped her to refresh her memories and create positive emotions for Turkey.

> *"...good place to go for holidays eahm because there is sunshine, friendly people eahm good food eahm nice beaches, interesting places to visit"* (Barbara).

Complexity of image formation seems to be eminent when her descriptions are compared. Even though she had first hand experiences in Turkey, looking for information for another part of the country seems to add positive feelings to her image of Turkey.

Unlike Barbara, Isabella, a 24 year-old British visual merchandiser, has never been to Turkey, and she has limited information about Turkey, when she was asked to describe Turkey before the information search, she struggled to express her thoughts and feelings for Turkey. Rather than a description, she shared few words about Turkey *"...eahm holiday,...eahm can I say Istanbul as ...eahm Islam eahm and yeah"*. These can be considered unique image attributes (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; 1993) or core images (Lai and Li, 2012) in her mind. This also shows that even with limited information someone might hold organic images about a destination (Gartner, 1994). However, as seen in Isabella's expressions those images tend to be more abstract. These quotes from Isabella's description of Turkey imply that for her, Islam and Istanbul were two main attributes of Turkey. To observe the changes in her understanding of Turkey, she was asked the same question after the online information search and her remarks became more detailed.

> *"it seems that there are a lot of hostels and hotels to stay, accessible ...eahm interesting, interesting, lots of different castles and things like that"* (Isabella).

When she started to search, her first search term was "where to visit in Turkey". When the results were displayed, she scrolled down until she saw the result for

TripAdvisor that has the title "where to go in Turkey?" It was an entry to get advice from the community, and in one of the replies Olu Deniz was mentioned. She copied it and search on Google Maps. When she searched for directions from Istanbul, after seeing more than 10-hour travel time, she went back to posts on the TipAdvisor, and repeated the same search for another destination,Kusadasi. After looking for the directions for Kusadasi, she decided to zoom in and look for places around Istanbul. At that point she realized there was a place called Sile, then she started to look for information about it. Even though it was a relatively short information search, after the information search she started to perceive Turkey as a place with a lot to offer.

> *"eahm beautiful… himm from the pictures I saw,…it seems that there are a lot of hostels and hotels to stay, accessible … yeah, eahm interesting , lots of different castles and things like that."(Isabella)*

She mentioned that there were a lot of places to stay, lots of castles or venues to visit. Besides she visualised Turkey as an accessible and interesting place. While she was only mentioning general facts about Turkey before the information search, when she completed the information search, even though it was a very short one, her description included her personal thoughts and feelings, and image(s) in her mind started to evolve into a new stage.

As a 30- year-old doctor Henry visited Turkey more than once, when the same question asked before the information search Henry described Turkey as:

> *"…a friendly, historical country eahm with good climate, beautiful coastline eahm and yeah yeah good tourist destination" (Henry).*

When this description is compared with Isabella's description this one looks more focused and more tourism oriented. This shows that there are significant differences between primary and secondary images (Lubbe, 1998; Cherifi *et al*, 2014). While secondary images could be formed solely based on the general facts about a destination, primary images tend to be formed based on first hand experiences, therefore they tend to be much more complex and detailed. As mentioned earlier, DI is a dynamic construct and it might evolve from different stages through time and space (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002). When the effects of information search on primary and secondary images are observed it can be seen that, while new information

might create significant changes on secondary images, primary images tend to be more enduring and slow changing, but they still might be affected by online information search.

> *"I think Turkey is a eahm a friendly and historic place and, and eahm with its beautiful coastline and beautiful weather eahm during the summer"* (Henry).

Even though there seems to be less observable changes in his descriptions, it is still the case that his description becomes more personal and it includes more emotionally positive adjectives to describe Turkey. While he was using a positive but more natural word 'good' at first, he used 'beautiful' to describe Turkey after the information search. It could be because he was looking at the places he had already visited; this could have reminded him to beautiful times he spent in Turkey.

Effects of online information search on secondary images were highly prominent in Daniela's remarks. Changes in her understanding of Turkey represent some of the most significant changes after the online information search. When she tried to describe Turkey before the information search she said: *"Without being there…how I define Turkey [Thinking], friendly"*. She is originally from Peru, and she has lived in the UK more than a decade, but coming from a distant place she had quite limited information about Turkey. Thanks to living in a city where quite a lot of Turks live, she defined Turkey as "friendly". When she completed information search, there were vivid changes in her description.

> *"Now, I have seen on the web …I am much more excited about going to Turkey because I didn't know how … I had a picture, global picture of Turkey, and now you see these things like that and that and that and that. I want to be there, and what can I say about Turkey. There is a lot of richness not what only it is built now, but what has been built throughout generations so eahm… for different people they are looking for different things, the beaches, or the cuisine, or the history or the scenery you have different angles, my taste was Asian ruins and eaahm nature the scenery".* (Daniela)

She says that she was much more excited about visiting Turkey. She acknowledges that she had a 'global picture' in her mind before the information search. However, what she meant here does not seem to be 'global image' as defined by Baloglu and McCleary (1999a). It seems to be rather a vogue, broad secondary image in her mind before the information search. When her remarks prior to information search and after the search are compared, the influences of online information search become more observable, even she acknowledges its effects as saying "*now I have seen on the web*". Despite mentioning as "the web", she spent more than 8 minutes on Lonely Planet. She kept clicking various destinations and checked the pictures for them. (See the figure below).
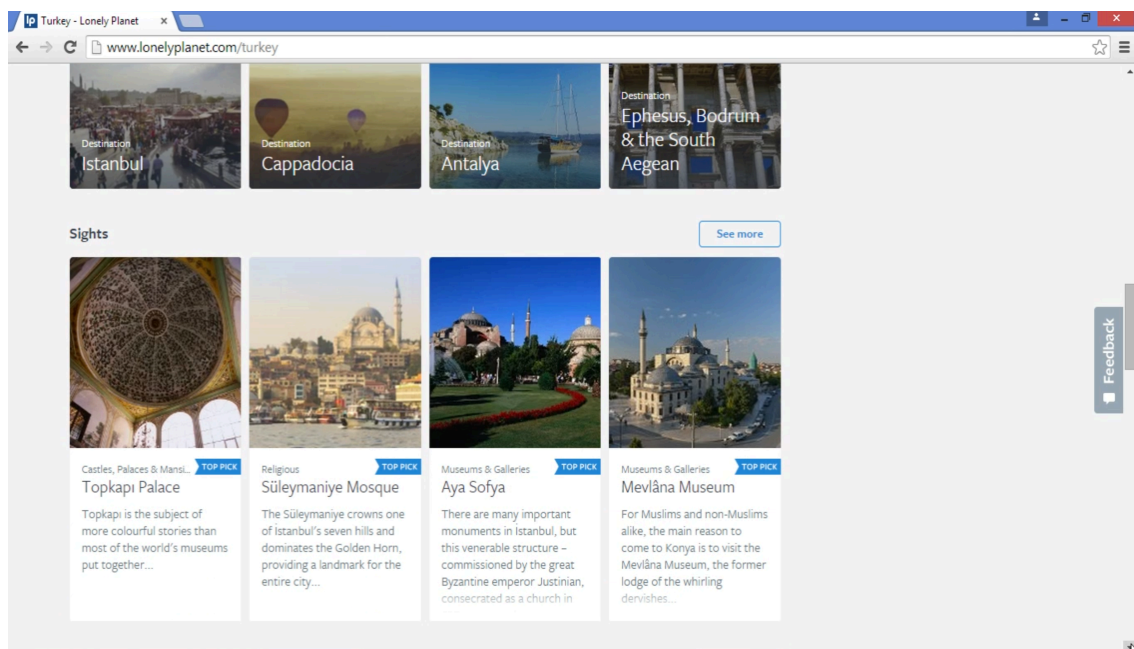


**Figure 5: Daniela's Search on LonelyPlanet**

Even though, I have asked her to define Turkey, she slightly changed the context and started to explain why she wants to visit Turkey. However, this also shows how her image of Turkey has evolved in less than twenty minutes. It can be seen that Turkey seems to be a destination with lots of things to offer. She refers to cultural heritage when she says "there is a lot of richness". Even though, she figured out that there are other offerings such as beaches and cuisine, she states that cultural heritage and nature would be her choice to visit. She is aware of that people might have different tastes, and for her own tastes Turkey has great offerings. This shows that as the images in the minds of people, their tastes could be also fragmented.

As stated above, there were usually observable differences between the definitions of people who have already been to Turkey and who have never visited it. However, some participant's definitions showed that even though the images in their minds are based on the secondary and organic sources, they could be highly detailed and complex. Earl is a 22 year-old mechanical engineer. He graduated recently and has never been to Turkey, but his description implies that he has quite a lot of information about Turkey.

> *"I don't know. As I said, it is a big holiday destination eahm well known for that eahm with lots of different influences will be part European part Asia. eahm its history being an empire various points and an borders with interesting country with Kurdish people in part of the country they consider themselves Kurdish not Turkish as well, having links with Greece as well , eahm disagreement over certain lands , interesting politics and divisions of people eah"(Earl).*

It was interesting to see how different pieces came together to form a fragmented image in his mind.  And DI and country image in his descriptions seem to be intertwined. He mentions that Turkey "is a big holiday destination" but in the next line he says "interesting country" and then referring to identity related problems, and political rivalries between Turkey and Greece.  Even though the relationships between Turkey and Greece have been friendly at least in recent years, he is still referring to disagreements about the lands, which shows that DI has been affected by not only current events but also by historical ones. Even though the primary aim of this research is not to find best ways of marketing in a destination, this excerpts shows that the destination image is dynamic but the change occurs considerably slow. While preparing marketing strategy for a destination this should be considered, and campaigns should be long term oriented. After the information search, his description seems to be centred on tourism characteristics of Turkey.

> *I say a bit mix of things it would be in the heart you know between Europe and Asia , like seeing influences of both and and borders with different countries and eahm differences in geology. different climates different environments eahm different food as well different sorts of country and*

*even different ancient monument in the different parts of , religious places*
*as well yeah just eahm whole mix bag of everything yeah(Earl)*

Frequency of word 'different' in his remarks deserves attention. He mentioned it eight times, as to stress the being different but at the same time it seems that the word 'different' is used to mean 'various'. In the last paragraph he mentions that it is a "whole mix bag of everything".

To observe the what kind of changes occur after the information search in DI, if any, participants were also asked to describe what kind of an atmosphere they would imagine Turkey, both before and after the online information search. It was chosen because while atmosphere is considered as holistic psychological characteristic of a destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; 1993), 'affective image' defined as feelings toward a destination (Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004; San Martín and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008). There seems to be overlaps between what Echtner and Ritchie calls as atmosphere and what many other researchers name as affective image. Since it was emphasized that affective image is overlooked in literature (Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997), I have asked participants to define 'the atmosphere' in Turkey to better understand not only their thoughts but also their feelings towards Turkey. Besides, it offered a chance to observe changes after the information search.

As someone who has already visited Turkey, while describing the atmosphere in Turkey, Barbara says: "From my experiences happy, relaxed usually". The key word in this sentence is 'experiences'. She refers to her memories end perceive Turkey as a happy relaxed destination. In order to better understand the effects of information search on their perceptions, I have asked the same question both before and after the information search. When I asked the same question to Barbara after the information search she said: "eahm I would say relaxed". Even though, she did not used the word 'happy' this time, from the rest of the interview it was not clear that there is a significant change in her perception. Unlike Barbara, Isabella has never been to Turkey, but she also describe the atmosphere in Turkey as "I think for me, as a tourist, it would be relaxed". Even though their sentences seem to be similar it is obvious that there are significant differences. While Barbara experienced Turkey, and perceived Turkey as "happy, relaxed" destination, Isabella's sentence implies that she is

generalizing. She says "as a tourist". She assumes that for a tourist the atmosphere should be relaxed, not only in Turkey but almost in all tourism destinations. When I asked the same question after the information search this time she says "eahm beautiful... from the picture I saw". This time it is more specific, and the effects of information search are clearer. Isabella started with a Google search and then read suggestions on Trip Advisor, and in final step she found herself looking at the pictures on 'Virtual tourist'. This shows that her images of Turkey evolved because of the online information search.

As mentioned before, the 'secondary image evolves to 'primary image', which is called as 'complex image, by Fakeye and Crompton (1991), when someone actually visited a destination. As discussed in this part, while online information search had greater effects on secondary images, its influences on primary images tend to be rather limited. For example, as someone who has never been to Turkey, when he was asked to express his thoughts, feelings, and visualizations about the atmosphere in Turkey, Earl said:

> *I don't know it is hard to say without not really going eahm apart from seeing very lively, very good food eahm that really without going experiencing it really hard to say anything (Earl).*

As seen, he stress the significance of first hand experience, but effect of online information search is also visible in this quote, Earl is emphasizing that he has never been to Turkey, so it is difficult for him to say how the atmosphere is.

> *I was gonna say welcoming ...I think yeah I think as I said people are very friendly (Henry).*

These quotes confirm that after the visitation DI becomes a 'complex' construct (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). Since Henry has already visited Turkey, for him the atmosphere in Turkey is welcoming because the people in Turkey "are very friendly"

### 7.6    Summary

To sum up, this chapter had a broader scope to discuss critical roles played by various factors in DI formation. It consisted of four broad themes. First of all, socio-cultural factors were critically discussed. As two intertwined constructs, culture and religious beliefs were main socio-cultural themes. As another theme category, information

sources and their role in image formation was another important part in this chapter. As a mainstream information source, TV and its effects were discussed in great detail.

Before discussing effects of online information source in great depth and detail, some other highly related constructs discussed. While familiarity and cultural closeness were highlighted as positive image contributors for some participants, there were some novelty seekers whose images could be influenced by degree of familiarity and cultural closeness. Finally, geographical location of destinations and their importance for DI formation and destination choice were discussed.

Finally, as explained in research design, to better understand how people conduct information search on the internet for the purpose of a future holiday planning and how this information search influence their perceptions about a destination, in the third part of the interviews participants were asked to imagine themselves they were travelling to Turkey in near future, and they were asked to make 10-15 minutes information search for this future trip. The last part of this chapter focused on the analyses of online information search and its influences on image formation. Analyses shed a light on the importance of online information search in DI formation. When participants understandings of Turkey before and after the information search were compared, substantial changes were observed with the participants who had never visited Turkey before. For the participants who had experienced Turkey prior to interviews, although there were some observable changes, influences of online information search were relatively limited.

# 8 Conclusions

## 8.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to deepen our understanding of DI formation, and shed a light on the influences of various forces in this formation. As seen in the literature chapters, invaluable contributions of tourism scholars were appreciated, but to address roles played by socio-cultural factors in image formation and to observe possible influences of new information sources such as Internet and social media, a nuanced holistic understanding of DI formation is suggested in this research. Considering complex and dynamic natures of destinations(Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011; Framke, 2002) a flexible research is designed. To explore DI formation and effects of various forces in this formation process, research findings were presented in two interrelated chapters. Since Turkey is the chosen destination in this research, perceived images of Turkey have been presented in Chapter 6, and influencing forces in the formations of those images were discussed in Chapter 7.

This concluding chapter will start with a review of the research questions and the findings presented in the preceding chapters. However, rather than re-discussing every theme and sub-theme in those chapters in great details, it will be a concise critic of the findings. After that, the theoretical insights about the DI construction will be shared. Since three interrelated techniques are combined to conduct qualitative interviews, methodological contributions will also be highlighted in this chapter. Before wrapping up the thesis with critical reflections, limitations and direction for future research, practical implications for destinations and consumers will be highlighted.

## 8.2 Review of Findings

Despite the tremendous increase in studies on DI (Pike, 2002), as highlighted in Chapter 2, its formation is mostly overlooked by tourism scholars (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004). Compared to broader social sciences, embracement of alternative approaches in tourism is highly slow(Tribe, 2008; Tribe and Xiao, 2011). Therefore, DI has been measured by structured research methods, which lack flexibility to embrace holistic aspects of images (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; 1993). Even though there is a 'critical turn' in tourism studies (Ateljevic,

Morgan and Pritchard, 2007; Tribe, 2007), pervasiveness of positivist paradigm in tourism studies is still the reality. Therefore, as a construct studied for more than four decades, DI is mostly conceptualized without considering complexities of the environment in which images constructed. Extant studies on DI were critically reviewed to better understand DI formation. Overlooked socio-cultural forces and recent technological advances were considered as crucial 'image forming agents' (Gartner, 1994) in this study. As one of the most visited countries in the world, Turkey was the chosen destination whose images among non-Turkish residents in the UK were explored.

These were the research questions in this thesis:

1. What images do non-Turkish residents in the UK have about Turkey?

2. How socio-cultural characteristics of individuals affect their perceptions about Turkey?

3. How socio-cultural forces affect DI formation for Turkey?

4. What is the relative importance of different media platforms in destination image formation, and how online information search influence image formation?

The first research question is mainly addressed in Chapter 6. This chapter was designed to better understand how participants perceived Turkey as a tourism destination. Since one of the aims in this study is to explore holistic understanding of destinations, Turkey has been considered not solely as a tourism destination, but also as a county. Through thematic analysis six themes were constructed from the data. While Turkey is situated as a country in some of these themes, it is understood as a destination in some others. Turkey's Islamic culture was of the most observable themes in this research. In addition to being perceived as an Islamic country, participants incline to perceive Turkey as a family oriented county. Another culture related image of Turkey was being a 'bridge' between East and West. Even though, bridge metaphor resembles geographical location, it was referring to cultural

characteristics of Turkey. Even though it was possible to observe that Turkey was understood as a European destination, it also designated the subjectively self-assigned boundaries for European culture (Bryce, 2012), and for some participants, Turkey has remained as a country which is not European, but alien and an interloper (Robins, 1996). Even for the participants who considered Turkey as a European destination, it was a frontier or a 'bridge' between Europe and East, rather than a typical European destination. It was more like a frontier where Western values face Eastern ones. While these images may situate Turkey as a country, there were three prominent themes that present Turkey as a tourism destination. First of all, even though the richness in tourism opportunities was acknowledged by some participants, for majority of them Turkey was a typical sun, sea, sand destination. Relativistic characteristic of DI (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002) was very prominent in this regard. When it was compared with destinations such as France and Italy, it was understood as a 3S destination, but when it was compared with countries such as Greece and Spain, it was presented as a cultural tourism destination. As a tourism destination, Turkey was perceived as a relatively safe and stable place to visit. Finally, Turkey was also understood as a destination with 'good' food.

Following the exploration of Turkey's images held by participants, influential factors in their image construction were investigated. Even though there is a consensus that our culture affects our perceptions, decisions, satisfactions and behaviours; examination of these effects seems to be limited in tourism studies. (Correia, Kozak and Ferradeira, 2011; Turner, Reisinger and McQuilken, 2002). This study sheds light on the effects of culture on DI formation. Perceived culture in a particular destination seemed to be dominating image formation. Participants had a tendency to assign destinations into cultural groups as either 'Eastern or Western'. Eastern countries tend to be pictured as 'exotic other' (Galani-Moutafi, 2000:215). It has been observed that culture's role has double facets. While perceived culture in a destination seemed to play a highly significant role in image formation, individuals' cultural affiliations were another factor not be ignored to better understand DI formation. As a cultural element "[re]ligious beliefs play a significant part in sculpting social behaviour. Differences in religious affiliations tend to influence the way people live, the choices they make, what they eat and whom they associate with"(Kim, Waller and Zafer Erdogan, 2004:537).

Information sources are vastly cited as influencing factors in destination image formation (e.g, Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004). This study confirmed that for the majority of participants, TV was a crucial information source. However, as the analysis of the online information search showed, there are dramatic changes in information seeking behaviours, and Internet and online information search tend to influence destination image construction. While online information search created dramatic changes on secondary images held by people who have never been to Turkey, its influences on primary images seem to be less observable.

Conducting a qualitative research allowed me to explore DI formation in a holistic manner. While deploying a nuanced framework to empirically inquire Turkey's perceived images, this study contributed to holistic understanding of images. Besides, while answering the calls for novel visual researches, it produced methodological contributions. Exploring DI formation shed light on the overlook aspects and new technologies, hence there are practical implications for destinations and travellers. These threefold contributions will be highlighted in the upcoming sections.

### 8.3    Theoretical Insights

Important theoretical insights can be gained from this study. As we have seen in the literature review, since the early 1990s, research on DI has been proliferated. It has been either    conceptualized as a three-dimensional construct with holistic aspects (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; 1993), or as an attitudinal construct (e.g. Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Gartner, 1994; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007) or as a core – periphery structure (Lai and Li, 2012). These conceptualizations assume that DI has a structure. However, there are some scholars who state that DI should be understood as a gestalt (Dann, 1996; Reilly, 1990).  Even though all these studies contributed our understanding of DI formation, majority of them overlooked broader socio-cultural forces in DI formation.

As seen in Chapter 7, culture was the most highlighted theme in this thesis. When participants were given three different countries they tend to group them according to their perceived cultural similarities or differences. While perceived culture in a destination were influencing their image constructions, effects of participants' cultural backgrounds were also observable. Besides, even though extant studies mostly

overlooked influences of religious beliefs, this thesis showed that their influences are too big to be overlooked.

As discussed in Chapter 3, this study was conducted in the light of a flexible framework that incorporated wider socio-cultural factors and new information technologies. Analysis of the qualitative interviews showed that my initial framework (See the figure below) was highly effective to offer a holistic understanding of DI formation, but it also suggest that a revision of the model is required to reflect findings in this thesis.
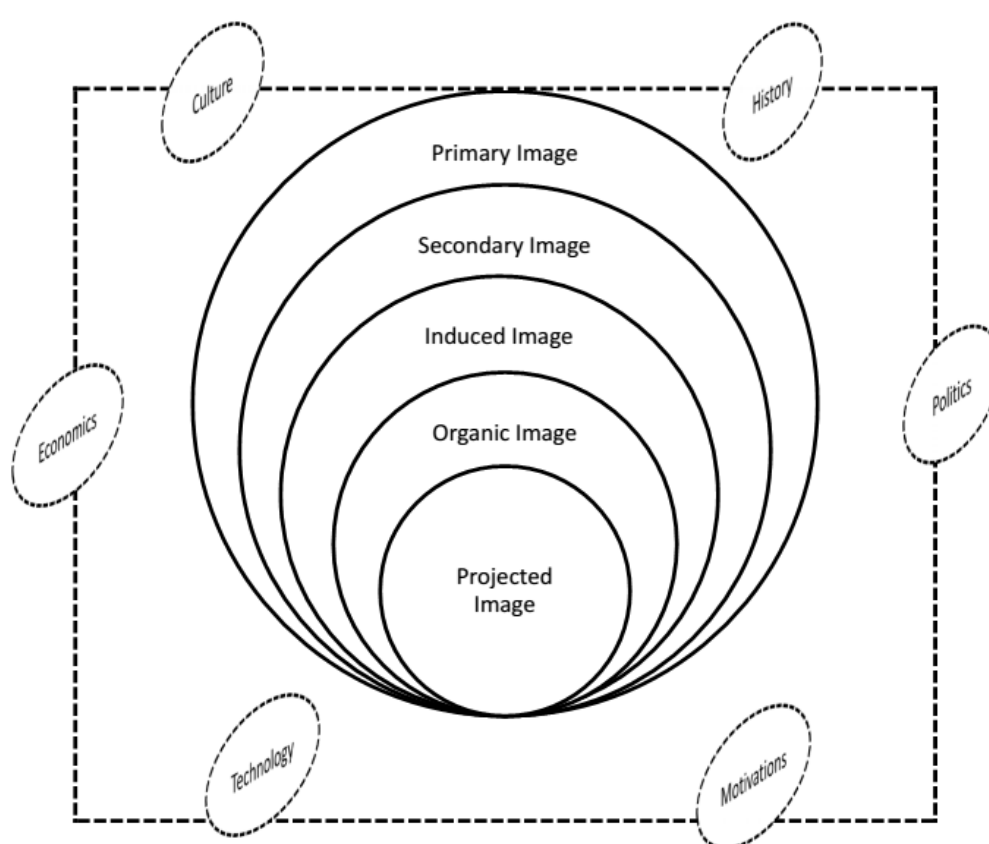


Figure 6: Proposed Framework to Conceptualize Destination Image Formation

While proposed model suggest that various socio-cultural forces might influence DI formation, findings showed that while culture and religion have significant influences on image formation, they did not show observable effects of economics, politics and history. Of course, this does not mean that these factors do not influence DI formation, but compared to effects of culture and religion their roles seemed to be less observable. Therefore, I developed a revised model (See the figure below) to present

findings and explain complex DI formation. By no means I have claimed that this is the only way of presenting image formation, but I state that DI formation is a complex process.
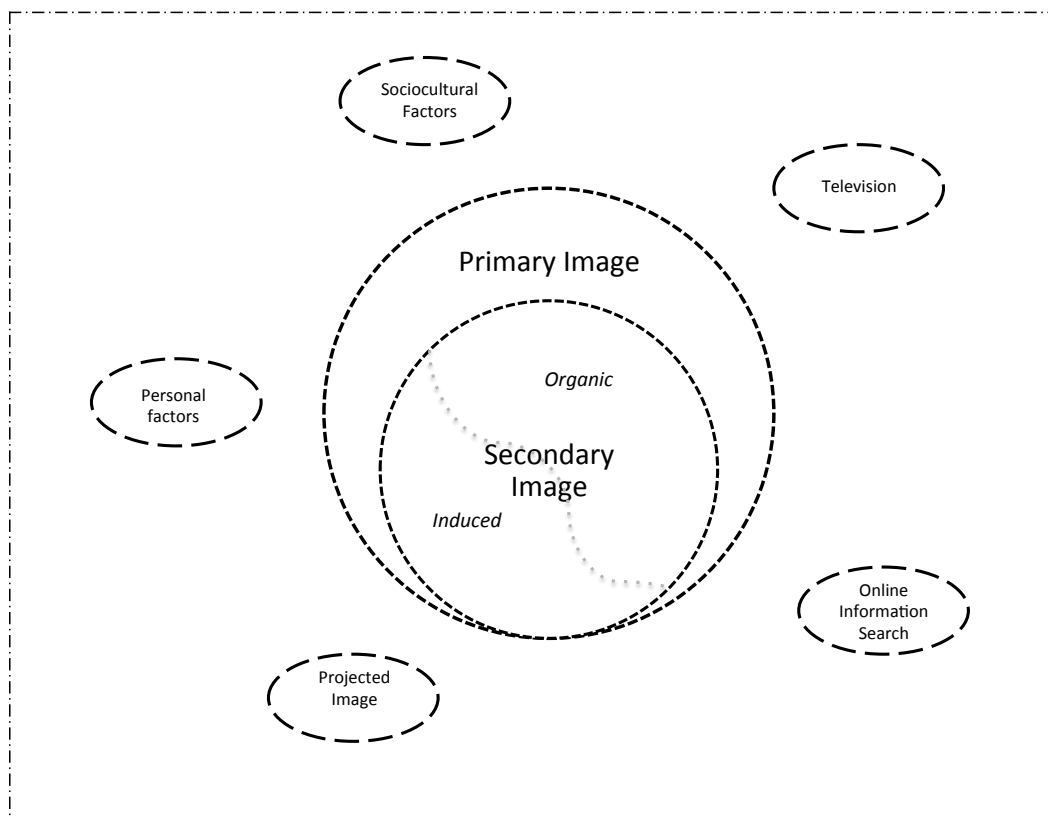


Figure 7: Revised Model of Destination Image Formation

This revised model is a broader representation of the research findings. Through this model I try to emphasize the some dynamics in image formation.   As seen on the figure, destination images are constructed in a dynamic environment in which multiple forces have various degrees of influences. In this current study, culture and religious beliefs seemed to be more prominent sociocultural factors. For the personal factors, in addition to backgrounds of participants, prior knowledge and experiences with chosen destination seem to affect the images they hold. Even though, this study has not shown greater influence of projected image, while doing information search there were few participants who consulted Turkey's official tourism portal. Even though there is a dramatic shift in travel information seeking, it is understood that TV is still a dominant channel that might influence images held by participants.  As seen in the previous chapter, significant changes have been observed in the images held by

participants after the online information search. However, its influences were more observable on secondary images.

### 8.4 Methodological Contributions

Before the early 1990s, research on DI was mainly structured and was operationalized through large quantitative surveys to measure image of a tourism destination in a given time (e.g. Ahmed, 1991a; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Phelps, 1986). Even though there were some attempts to explore images through qualitative researches (Dann, 1996; Reilly, 1990), structured research methods were dominating the field. However, as criticised by Echtner and Ritchie (1991; 1993) structured research methods fail to capture holistic aspects of images. Through the late 1990s, tourism scholars started to realize drawbacks in conducting solely quantitative studies; so qualitative studies have been conducted in the early stages of a research to develop rigorous quantitative scales. However, this embracement seems to be limited to a certain extend. Managerial understanding of tourism phenomenon (Tribe and Airey, 2007; Tribe, 2008) has been dominating the research on images too (Canally, 2010). Therefore, to better serve the destinations, scholars have been focusing on measuring destination images, rather than to deepen the understanding of image formation. Therefore, consideration of wider sociocultural forces in image formation seems to be rare. To explore the image formation in a broader context and to better observe influences of socio cultural factors on DI formation, qualitative interviews were conducted in this research. The unique design in this research made a contribution to explore DI formation in a broader context. Since it is acknowledged that DI is a relativistic construct (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002; Li, 2012), rather than forcing participants to answer particular questions about a chosen destination, they were empowered to compare and contrast Turkey with eight more destinations through Repertory Grids. As can be seen in other examples (Fransella and Bell, 2004; Pike, 2012), this technique enables participants to express their thoughts and feelings more openly. This research showed that Repertory Grid is a highly effective technique to conduct qualitative interviews on DI. While in this part the participants were not restricted to tourism, to further explore more tourism related aspects in their understanding of a particular destination a scenario analysis was conducted.

While Repertory Grid and scenario analysis were effective to explore roles of various factors in image formation, the online information search in the last part of the

interviews allowed me to observe dynamic nature of DI (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002). While exploring role of new information on participants' images, it shed a light on the secondary and primary images. Even though these techniques were not utilized first time in this research, to my knowledge, combination of this three is unique to this thesis. As seen in the findings chapters, combination of online techniques with established interviewing techniques, might offer new insights to better understand DI formation.

## 8.5    Practical Implications

In addition to theoretical and methodological insights, this thesis has twofold practical implications. The first implications are for the destinations and DMOs.  First of all, as highlighted in the findings, unlike a typical product or service, DMOs have hardly any control on destinations (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011). This might lead them to shift their focus on creating desired images, but as a complex phenomenon (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002), DI is not a construct that could be manipulated by marketing campaigns. This is more relevant when a country is considered as a destination. Even though tourism experience is considered as a product (Smith, 1994; Duman and Kozak, 2010), it seems to be a product consisting of a big bundle.  Socio-cultural elements in the destination and socio-cultural backgrounds of the potential visitors have significant influences on DI formation.  For example, religion seems to be a prime influential force in image formation. Therefore, destinations might benefit from a holistic understanding of images.

Another implication for the destinations is that images tend to be relativistic (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002; Li, 2012). Participants' understanding of a particular destination seems to be affected by other destinations. For example, when compared with Italy, Turkey was perceived as a sun, sea, and sand destination but when it was compared with Greece, it was expressed more like a cultural tourism destination.  When there was either Egypt or Morocco in a triad, religion was a mostly discussed construct, and when there was either USA or Germany economic developments were highlighted. This means that a particular country can be perceived relatively rich but also relatively poor. It can be a typical 3s destination in one context but not in another context. Therefore, rather than trying to understand how desirable their images, they should try to understand how desirable their images compared to other destinations.

Online information search brought some insights for destinations. During the information search official tourism portals did not seem to be prime addresses for participants. Therefore they might significantly benefit from observing their online presence. For example, Wikipedia was one of the platforms that were mostly visited by individuals who have never been to Turkey.

As mentioned above this research has practical implications not only for destinations, but also for consumers. As discussed in the findings chapters, the images we held about a particular destination tend to be in a dynamic, constantly evolving stage. Through reflexively questioning the context the images created, individuals might understand the dynamics behind the images they hold. For example, findings suggest that religious beliefs play important roles in image formation.

## 8.6 Reflections

To be able to conduct an entirely critical and ethical research, researchers need to be reflexive(Joy *et al*, 2007). This means that a researcher should be able to reflect on own assumptions that shape understanding of the world(Feighery, 2006). In other words, researchers should acknowledge the agency of themselves and their participants in knowledge creation(Ateljevic *et al*, 2005). Hence, I acknowledge that the knowledge created in this thesis was shaped by the mutual journey I took with the informants.

Similar to DI formation, this project itself has been constantly evolved. This long journey has started while I was pursuing my master at another university in the UK. As a formal practice, there was a 'reading week' and at the end of the week each student was required to write a dissertation proposal. I decided to write my master dissertation on DI, and after five years I am writing final chapter of this thesis. During these last five years, my own culture and background obviously shaped the research process. First of all, in Turkey, as in many other places, tourism is mostly treated as a vocational school subject that requires applied knowledge rather than critical academic studies. Therefore, the mission of tourism researchers is mostly trying to find solutions for business problems. Deciding to conduct a research on DI might be a reflection of my unconscious positioning of myself as a problem solver. However, may be as a result of studying a school that is known for its critical stance, my

position evolved to being a knowledge seeker whose purpose is to understand rather than measure and manipulate.

This thesis takes sociocultural factors into account in DI formation. As a researcher coming from the researched destination might create certain associations in the minds of participants. For example, for some Muslim participants, I was someone who shares the same religious beliefs, so in their remarks I was not a researcher, but a Muslim brother who is conducting a research. Therefore, while reflecting on themselves, they were reflecting on "us" and while commenting on Turkey, they were commenting on "our countries". On the contrary, for some Christians, I was "other". These presumptions might influence the images constructed through these subjective interactions.

This thesis deploys a novel interviewing technique that requires online information searches. This part seems to be highly affected by researcher and informants' competence on technology. Even though, I adjusted settings to minimize my influence on research patterns, conducting the research with a personal device forced participants to be bounded by my preferences. Besides, they were forced to use a technological device that was not belonging to them. Furthermore, since this part required an Internet connection, the connection speeds showed dramatic variations from one interview to the other. This shows that the research design might affect the images constructed in the minds of the participants.

At the beginning of my studies at University of Leicester, there were times I was feeling entangled in a 'critical bubble". When I walk through the aisles of the university library, there was not a single tourism journal. While many of them were accessible through online databases, most subscriptions started from 1990s, and to access to back issues I had to request interlibrary loans. When I attended semi-annual conferences organized by the school, there were times I felt I was listening a presentation in a foreign language. During the lengthy process of pursuing a PhD, I have attended various conferences and seminars that gave me a chance to communicate with tourism researchers from various disciplines. Those were the moments I felt there were researchers whose studies excite me. In 2014, I attended, *The 5th International Conference on Destination Branding and Marketing*, in Macau, and I presented a paper that proposes a nuanced holistic framework to understand DI

formation, which was co-authored by my supervisors. Following the conference, after review process, a conceptual journal article was published on *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* (Kislali, Kavaratzis and Saren, 2016). My encounters within the school and during the academic conferences contributed to my nuanced understanding of DI as a subjective and dynamic construct.

### 8.7    Limitations and Future Research

#### *8.7.1    Limitations*

This thesis offers a nuanced understanding of DI and embraces novel research design. It has contributed to current understanding of DI formation and shed a light on the overlooked sociocultural forces. It also highlights the influences of online information search on image constructions. However, as a contextually created knowledge, it has some limitations. First of all, as discussed earlier, even though this research aims to reflect images of the participants who come from different socio-cultural backgrounds, living in the same place might create similarities among the participants. Therefore, while dramatic influences of religious beliefs and cultural affiliations were highlighted, the effects of some other factors, such as economy and politics were not observable. To better understand how these forces affect image formation, research could be conducted in more than one county. However, this was not attainable because of the time and financial limits.

Secondly, even though DI is acknowledged as a dynamic construct (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002), and DI is presented as a construct in constant flow and evolution in the nuanced theoretical model, these changes in images are only observed through a rather short   online information search. A longitudinal study could enable researcher to observe changes through time and space. However, because of the nature of tourism research this was highly impractical.

Another limitation could be the experimental design for online information search. Even though, they were not going to travel to Turkey, participants were instructed to assume they were travelling. Since it was not part of an actual travel plan, participants did not associate any risks with their plans, so they showed behavioural patterns that could be less like to occur before an actual journey. For example, some participants directly visited hotels or airlines webpages to make a booking. If they were actually travelling, they could have been behaving differently, such as trying to find cheaper

options rather than making an instant booking. Besides, a 15-minute information search does not reflect real life experiences. In real life, people might seek information in unprecedented patterns. The information search duration and sequences might differ dramatically. However, to shed light on rather overlooked dynamic nature of images, this was a small contribution.

### 8.7.2 Future Research

This thesis offers some possible directions for future research. First of all, while this research exploring unprecedented influences of culture and religion as sociocultural factors on DI formation, influences of economics, history and politics were not observable. This might be as a result of chosen research site. A possible explanation might be that since participants were all located in the UK, effects of these forces may not differ to create differences in their images of Turkey. Therefore, scholars trying to understand effects of these forces in image construction can benefit from choosing multiple research sites, which hosts participants with varying backgrounds.

Secondly, research findings reveal that online information search creates changes in destination images. Even though its influence is more prominent on secondary images, it highlights that DI is a dynamic construct (Gallarza, Saura and García, 2002), which means that cross-sectional studies can be limited to observe changes in images. Even though, conducting a longitudinal research is highly challenging, tourism scholars should try observing construction of destination images in a much longer period of time. Rather than observing differences between the perceptions of visitors and non-visitors to a destination, observing evolution of secondary images to primary complex ones might offer much more insights.

This thesis contributed our understanding of online information search and its influences on DI formation, but because of being a role-play, some participants did not consider it as a risky decision. Therefore, they tend to be spontaneous while visiting various online platforms. Besides, conducting research on a device that is not owned and customized by them might inhibit their interaction with the devices. To address these challenges, scholars might try to inquiry real life travel information search by using various methods to capture whole information search process. Even though it might create challenges to design an appropriate study, researchers should

seek new ways of examining travel information search and its effects on destination images.

Even though in this study I presented a flexible research design, it was conducted in country level. In the future, conducting a holistic research for smaller destinations, such as regions and cities might reveal new dynamics in image formation. Similarly, new studies focusing on broader regions, or group of countries might be also useful to better explore relativistic nature of destination images.

**Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet**

# Participant Information Sheet

**Title of the study: Re-conceptualizing Destination Image Formation Process: Exploring Perceived Images of Turkey**

*My name is **Hidayet Kislali**, I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.*

**What is the purpose of study?**

I am a doctoral student at University of Leicester. As part of my doctoral thesis, I am investigating influences of various factors in destination image formation. By conducting this research I want to understand how travellers search information, what kind of information sources they consult, and how this information affects their perceptions and travel choices.

**Do you have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide. I will describe the study and go through the information sheet, which I will give to you. I will then ask you to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn/destroyed. You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you .You have the right to

have your questions about the procedures answered. If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

**What will you do in the project?**

In this study you will be asked questions as interview format related to your recent travel planning and visit experiences. Your answers may be tape recorded with your permission. You may be asked to look for information on internet and your activity on the screen can be monitored and recorded.  At any point, you may ask not to be recorded. This interview may take 45-60 minutes.

**Why have you been invited to take part?**

This study is aiming to acquire information from travellers who belong to different socio-demographical groups. Therefore, your contribution will make findings more comprehensive.

**What happens to the information in the project?**

The data I collected to be held confidentially and only the researcher and supervisors will have access to them. In accordance with the requirements of some scientific journals and organizations; verbatim (anonymized) extracts of the interview data may be used to report findings of the research, and may also be used in other related studies. Your name and other identifying details **WILL NOT** be shared with anyone.   The overall findings may be submitted for publication in a scientific journal, or presented at scientific conferences.

You will be able to obtain general information about the results of this research from the researcher at his e-mail address: hk142@le.ac.uk

# Participant Consent Form

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Title: Re-conceptualizing Destination Image Formation: Exploring Perceived Images of Turkey**

**Researcher:** Hidayet Kislali

**Purpose of data collection:** Phd Thesis

**Details of Participation:** A request to participate in an <u>interview</u> to examine role of various factors in destination image formation.

**CONSENT STATEMENT**

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw unconditionally at any time from taking part in this study.

2. I have been supplied a participant information sheet explaining the reasons for this study

3 My data are to be held confidentially and only the researcher and his supervisors will have access to them.

4. In accordance with the requirements of some scientific journals and organizations, verbatim (anonymised) extracts of the interview data may be used to report findings of the research, and may also be used in other related studies. My name and other identifying details **WILL NOT** be shared with anyone.

5. The overall findings may be submitted for publication in a scientific journal, or presented at scientific conferences.

*6.*    I will be able to obtain general information about the results of this research from the researcher at his e-mail address: hk142@le.ac.uk .

I am giving my consent for data to be used for the outlined purposes of the present study

All questions that I have about the research have been satisfactorily answered.

| Participant:<br><br>Signature:<br><br>Date: | Researcher:<br><br>Signature:<br><br>Date: |
| --- | --- |

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