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# Festivals and destination marketing: An application from Izmir City

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**Abstract:** Festivals are among the growing global city and destination attraction factors and they are very trendy. Studies indicate that there is a direct relationship between the successful organizations of festivals and the number of visitors and tourism income of a city destination. Thus, festival marketing efforts usually have a direct impact on city marketing efforts. Due to this fact, the study tries to figure out the festival marketing potential of Izmir city that seems to lag behind the general tourism development pattern of Turkey contrary to the great potential it has. The study comprises of two main sections, first one being a literature review on festival marketing, followed by the second section on a qualitative research on Izmir's festivals and their marketing potential. It tries to determine the positive impacts of Izmir's festivals on destination marketing and by grouping and categorizing them under similar characteristics figuring out the most promising ones. The research consists of four open-ended interview questions on festivals held in Izmir city. As practical implications, Destination Management Organizations, Destination Marketing Organizations, destination and city marketers, festival managers and destination tourism developers may benefit from the findings of this study.

**Keywords:** Festival marketing, Destination marketing, Izmir, Festivals, City marketing

**JEL Classification:** G14, M31, Z33

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Izmir is the third biggest city of Turkey, has a 7.7% share of the total GDP of the country. It has many resources and tourist attractions with being a city dating beyond 8500 years. It is named as "The Aegean Pearl" and has a huge potential for alternative tourism types like culture tourism, gastronomy tourism, active and passive cultural tourism, education tourism, yacht and cruise tourism, health and medical tourism, sustainable tourism and such. The city holds

important cultural events, conventions and expositions, national and global fairs like the marble fair. It is a global brand in surf tourism with Alacati destination and ciltaslow with Seferihisar region. It, also has a great potential for national and global festivals and has a huge potential with its' universities, specific cuisine, boutique museums, modern concert halls, libraries, culture and art associations, rich alternative media and already present annual national and international festivals and (Izmir Chamber of Commerce, 2010). Therefore, Izmir is found to be a suitable destination

for improvement in festival marketing and is chosen as a research subject for this study.

## 2 FESTIVALS IN DESTINATION MARKETING

A festival is an event that has become a traditional symbol of a region usually has been built up by local people that is held on the same day and the same month each year (Revilla-Hernández, 2016; Priporas et al., 2018). "Festivals, special events, and exhibitions are the cultural resources of an area that make possible the successful hosting of visitors (Backman, et al., 1995:15). The etymology of the term is based on the Latin roots "festum" in the meaning of "general fun and festivity". But originally Latin had two terms for festive events: 'festum', for public joy, merriment, revelry and 'feria', meaning abstinence from work in honor of the gods." (Falassi, 1987:1-2). The root of the word festival comes from "feast" ("fiesta"), standing for celebration (Skoultos, 2014). Indeed, "festivals provide a space and time away from everyday life in which intense extraordinary experiences can be created and share" (Morgan, 2008:90).

Festivals are activities that, when combined with other attractions in almost every community create a real tourist attraction and totally affect the image of the destination (Viktoria, 2013). They are becoming very common, globally popular and destinations are severely competing with each other in festival offerings due to many benefits it brings to the destinations. Therefore, "event marketing, corporate sponsorship of events and festivals for the purpose of accomplishing strategic marketing objectives, has evolved rapidly" (Cunningham & Taylor, 1995:123). Festivals are promoted with each city, country or destination in general, associated with a region or city specific product or culture and art product. A festival reflects the city in which it is done and the audience in that city, but it is the quality of the product offered at the place creating visitor demand for a festival (Li, & Petrick, 2006; Chenini & Touaiti, 2018). A festival is also a very useful and effective source used in city branding (Rizzi & Dioli, 2010; Christou, 2015).

Festivals have many economic and other benefits for the destinations that they are held in and "they have become a strong demand generating factor in recent years". They not only contribute to tourism, travel, leisure and hospitality industries but also act as an important tool to attain social, economic, environmental objectives of communities (Deniz & Aktas, 2015:44). "Like events in general, festivals have been recognized as an increasingly important element of destination marketing. Not only do they add to the critical mass of attractions available at the destination, but also, they provide promotional opportunities through the exposure they receive in various forms of the media" (Faulkner, 1999). In addition, festival marketing related studies indicate that festival and culture-oriented tourists have a tendency to spend more and have a higher education than mass tourists (Kim, Cheng & O'Leary, 2007; Volgger et al, 2017).

Festivals have positive and negative impacts to the destinations (Fotiadis, Xie, Li, & Huan, 2016). In order to promote the festival organizations for destination development, the positive impacts may be optimized which may be summarized as; economic and social benefits, feelings of becoming part of the community and marketing, competitive and promotional benefits (Prentice & Andersen,

2003; Derrett, 2004; Lee & Arcodia, 2011; Van Niekerk, 2017; Llopis-Amorós, et.al, 2018; Chen, King & Lee, 2018; Brownnett, 2018). Festival are important attractions for destinations, since they increase the competitiveness of the destinations, improve creativeness, innovativeness and image of the destinations while assisting the destination branding efforts by creating unique tourist experiences for differentiation (Nella & Christou, 2016; George, 2017; Sotiriadis & Shen, 2017). Furthermore, festival organizations increase the demand for the destination by attracting the tourists within the alternative tourism segment and when they are sustainable, they have a positive contribution to local quality of life and population well-being (Gunlu Kucukaltan & Pirnar, 2016; Mombeuil, 2018; Okumus & Cetin, 2018).

The main components of festivals are place, visitors and residents and their relationship effects on the positive impacts of festivals. The relationship of place and visitors leads to destination and city marketing whereas the interaction area of visitors and residents of the local region leads to culture tourism. The relationship between the place and residents take the form of sense of community and place (Derrett, 2004; Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017). Studies indicate that community-based cultural festivals grow over time to reflect the values, interests and aspirations of residents (Derrett, 2003).

There are many different types of festivals and events, but many authors mention that five types of events that may be categorized according to the number of attendees, the destination characteristics and the type of the visitors. (Culha, 2008; Ma & Lew, 2012; Dalgic & Birdir, 2016).

- Local festivals and events: Many trade and industrial fairs, special local exhibitions and specific industry fairs, local heritage festivals, local contemporary festivals, many music concerts, theatre shows and art exhibitions and other local festivals like the cherry festival and grape festival fall into this category
- Important regional festivals and events: National heritage festivals, national contemporary festivals fall into this category. Istanbul music festival may be an example to this type of event
- National festivals and events: Rio Carnival and Cannes film festival may be examples for this type of festivals.
- Global giant festivals and events: These festivals are huge, have attendees all over the world and very popular globally. FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games are examples.

Hence, a simpler "festival typology is created that broadly identifies three festival types termed 'home-grown', 'tourist-tempter' and 'big-bang'" (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002:325)

According to their content and theme the events may be classified as festivals, concerts and theatre shows, sport events, meeting, incentive, convention, exhibition (MICE) organizations and business events (Celik & Cetinkaya, 2013). Though the type of the festivals are categorized in five groups, there also exists different classifications. The different categorization of festival according to the different customer segments they attract, and their markets are as follows (Dalgic & Birdir, 2016; Sari, 2016; <http://www.festivaldunyasi.net>):

- Local festivals, for example; Malatya apricot festival, Finike festival
- Regional and urban festivals, e.g.; Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, Southeast food festival, Balkan

music festival, Adana Golden Cocoon Culture and Art Festival

- Mobile festivals such as the European Films Festival
- National festivals, like; Turkish Universities Folklore Festival
- International festivals, like; International Ankara Music Festival, International Ankara Film Festival, International Istanbul Film Festival, International İzmir Film Festival, International Kas Likya Festival.
- Traditional-annual festivals, like; 27<sup>th</sup> traditional Kemalpaşa Cherry Festival
- Single-once-only festivals, for example; International Nemrut-Commagene Festival, 'Adıyaman Symposium on the Crossing of Eastern and Western Civilizations'
- Festivals relating to a single area / subject / arts field e.g.; Rock 'n Coke - Rock music, Mengen Turkish food festival, children's festivals, theatre festivals, film festivals
- Multidisciplinary festivals such as; Ayvalık art festival: painting, sculpture, film, literature, music, etc.

Also, globally famous cities and countries are very popular with their own festivals so that they are even characterized and identified by them. Some examples of these global destination brands associated with their worldwide famous festivals are as follows (Dimanche, 2008; Muñoz-Martínez & Cervantes-Blanco, 2009; Celik & Cetinkaya, 2013):

- Tomato Festival - Spain
- Cannes Film Festival - France
- Venice Carnival - Italy
- Fasnacht Festival - Switzerland
- Harbin Ice and Snow Festival - Harbin, China
- Rio Carnival - Brazil
- White Nights Festival - St. Petersburg, Russia
- Oktoberfest - Germany
- Las Fallas Festival (The Festival of Carpenters and Fire) - Valencia
- London Architecture Biennial / Architecture Festival - England
- San Fermin Festival - Spain
- Edinburgh International Festival – England
- Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta - New Mexico
- Toronto International Film Festival – Canada
- New Orleans Jazz Festival – Louisiana
- Berlin Film Festival – Germany
- Day of the Dead – Mexico
- Pingxi Lantern Festival - Taiwan
- Bordeaux Wine Festival – France
- Burning Man Festival – Nevada, USA
- Boryeong Mud Festival - South Korea

festivals organized annually in Izmir city and its' provinces. With Izmir's potential that is promising to bring out new successful festivals in the coming years, the research tries to investigate the already known popular ones as well as the potential innovative ones.

Table 1 – List of Some Important Festivals of Izmir

Name of the Festival	Place & Date
Karsiyaka Children Festival	Karsiyaka & 18 <sup>th</sup> -25 <sup>th</sup> of April
International Fishery Festival	Foca & 9 <sup>th</sup> to 11 <sup>th</sup> of September
Bird Paradise & Spring & Kite Festival	Sasalı & May
Golden Cherry Culture & Art Festival	Kemalpaşa & May
Bergama Kermes Festival	Bergama & 1 <sup>st</sup> to 7 <sup>th</sup> of June
June Peninsula Games	Selçuk & 11 <sup>th</sup> to 15 <sup>th</sup> of June
International Izmir Festival	Izmir & 10 <sup>th</sup> June to 10 <sup>th</sup> of July
International Child & Youth Theaters Festival	Izmir & 17 <sup>th</sup> to 27 <sup>th</sup> of May
International Cesme Sea Festival	Cesme & July
International Music Festival	Izmir & 4 <sup>th</sup> to 9 <sup>th</sup> of July
Candarlı Culture & Art Festival	Candarlı & 30 <sup>th</sup> of August to 1 <sup>st</sup> of June
International Watermelon Festival	Bayındır & July
Camel Wrestling Festival	Selçuk & January
Alaçati Herb Festival	Alaçati & 7 <sup>th</sup> of April
Urla Artichoke Festival	Urla & 29 <sup>th</sup> to 30 <sup>th</sup> of April
Izmir Chocolate Fest	Izmir & 31 <sup>st</sup> of March to 2 <sup>nd</sup> of April
Cherry Festival	Buca & 21 <sup>st</sup> of May
Holifest	Izmir & 6 <sup>th</sup> of May
Flower Festival	Bayındır & 3 <sup>rd</sup> of May
Organic Life Festival	Izmir & 28 <sup>th</sup> of April to 30 <sup>th</sup> of April
Book Reading Festival	Izmir & 30 <sup>th</sup> of October
Izmir Coffee Festival	Izmir & 14 <sup>th</sup> of October
International Theatre Festival	Izmir & 2 <sup>nd</sup> of December
European Jazz Festival	Izmir & 1 <sup>st</sup> of April
Sports Fest	Izmir & 24 <sup>th</sup> of September
Grape Festival	Kavacık & 24 <sup>th</sup> September
Beer & Mussels Festival	Izmir & 28 <sup>th</sup> of May
Izmir International Puppets Day	Izmir & May
Electropol Festival	Izmir & April, May
International Homeros Festival	Bornova & May
Izmir Boyoz Festival	Izmir & May
Alaçati Country Life Kids Festival	Alaçati & July
Honey Festival	Kemalpaşa Dereköy Gökya
Tangerine Festival	Seferihisar & November
Humor Festival	Izmir & April
Izmir Short Film Festival	Izmir & November
Izmir Street Food Festival	Izmir & October

Resources: Celik, S., & Cetinkaya, M. Y. (2013). Festivals In Event Tourism: The Case Of International Izmir Art Festival. *International Journal of Contemporary Economics & Administrative Sciences*, 3(1):1-21. Izmirmag, <http://www.izmirmag.net/search/label/festival>, Izmir Culture & Tourism Directorate, <http://www.izmirkulturturizm.gov.tr/>

As the list of Izmir festivals indicates, there are various national and international festivals organized in the city, yet it is vague if they have meaningful impact on the city's marketing efforts. Thus, the study tries to determine the positive impacts of Izmir's festivals on destination marketing and by grouping and categorizing them under similar characteristics figuring out the most promising ones.

### 3 FESTIVALS IN IZMIR

In Turkey, about 2000 festivals, memorial days, festivals and feast-like events are organized, themes and subjects ranging from food such as cherry, grape, rice, and watermelon, to flowers, to ethnic celebrations, to sports, to gastronomy, to various art forms such as music, film, theatre and poetry (Polat, Polat & Halis, 2012). Thus, Izmir city with its provinces is one of the leading cities with holding 60-70 activities and agricultural, food, flower, film, music, poetry and art festivals annually (Karabag, Yavuz & Berggren, 2011; Gunlu & Lale, 2015). Table 1 below lists some popular

### 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the research is to determine the impact of Izmir's festivals on the destination marketing. In order to maximize the synergy and optimization benefits, it also tries to group the numerous types of different festivals held under specific categories. The research of the study is questioning; whether Izmir is optimizing the benefits of festival marketing and what are the innovative / suitable new types of festivals that it can apply. Suitable with the purpose exploratory research design is chosen to define the research problem

more accurately. As a popular method of exploratory research design, qualitative research technique is used to get expert idea on the topic. For population selection, snowball sampling is used to identify experts which consist of general managers of chain hotels, high level managers of festival and event planning organizations and festival related travel agencies. Primary research data is used to obtain the necessary information and for primary data collection, four semi structured open-ended interview questions are used where the population of the study consisted of 25 people who are experts on the topic, namely, Izmir city's marketing, event and festival organizations. The interview questions are held face to face within the 3 months time period. They are as follows:

1. Do you think the festivals have an impact on tourism destinations' promotion and popularity? If yes, how?
2. Please state the most important festivals that are organized in Izmir (please state the ones you are aware of).
3. Which other festivals should be organized in Izmir? Which ones do you recommend? Is it important to group the festivals and if so which category will have the highest positive impact on the city demand as an attraction?
4. Which of the already organized festivals contributes most to the Izmir's city branding efforts? Is this contribution enough? Why or why not? If not, please state your suggestions for contribution improvements.

## 5 ANALYSIS

The replies of the experts and related research analysis is as follows:

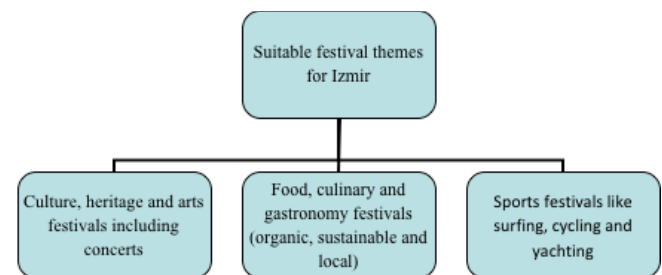
The first question is about the importance of festivals on destination's global popularity. All the respondents stated that they believe the festivals have a positive impact on tourism destination's global popularity and festivals are an effective way of promotion. The examples given are mainly: Oktoberfest, Tomato Festival, Burning Man Festival, Rio Carnival and Venice Carnival, as these globally known destinations are also identified with their annual festivals. One respondent mentioned that "these global festivals are upmost important for tourism destinations' promotion and branding and due to excessive demand for these global festivals tickets are reserved a year before the event". Another respondent stated, "the global festivals help locally known destinations to move towards internationally popular places". In addition, it was mentioned, "since festivals are promoted all year through, their promotion will aid the city's off-season marketing efforts".

The replies to the second questions indicated that the most known and popular festivals of Izmir are as follows; International Izmir Festival, International Music Festival, Camel Wrestling Festival, Alacati Herb Festival, Urla Artichoke Festival, Izmir Chocolate Fest, Flower Festival, Izmir Coffee Festival, Cherry festival, International Theatre Festival, European Jazz Festival, Izmir International Puppets Day, Izmir Boyoz Festival, Tangerine Festival, Izmir Gastronomy Festival and Izmir Short Film Festival. The results indicate that among the all festivals held in Izmir, culture and gastronomy themed ones are more memorable.

Third question of the study aims to figure out the respondents' choices on suitable festival types and themes for Izmir. Most of the respondents focused on a festival that is unique to Izmir, suitable to Izmir city's image which is related to its' culture, heritage and arts potential. In addition, some of the respondents preferred food and gastronomy festivals for Izmir, whereas the others preferred a theme on sea and marine sports. One of the respondents suggested "Izmir should organize an international surf and marine sports festival". Another recommended, "the theme should focus on International Homeros Festival". Thus, all the respondents recommended that the proposed festival should be internationally aimed and planned.

The replies indicated that the Izmir's optimal and suitable festival choices may be grouped under three groups as one being the arts and culture, namely on film and music, the other group on food and gastronomy and the third group on sports like yachting, surfing and cycling. Suggestion of grouping the Izmir festivals according to their homogeneous characteristics in three separate categories as culture, heritage and arts festivals, food and gastronomy festivals and sports festivals may lead to more effective and efficient organizations. Thus, with the help of grouping synergy and clustering benefits in some of the groups may also be achieved.

Figure 1 – Categorization of Izmir's Festivals



Food, culinary and gastronomy seemed to be the most promising and suitable festival theme for Izmir as one respondent mentioned "Izmir was one of the three invited cities along with Montreal and Hong Kong, to the famous 3rd Street food festival held in Lyon a.k.a. capital of European gastronomy" on 13-16 September 2018. Another respondent mentioned that "since Izmir is a member of Délice which is an international network of good food cities, it is important that it organizes gastronomy and food related festivals more often".

The last question of the study tries to point out the festival with the most potential, in other terms the one which contributes most to Izmir's city branding efforts. The replies indicate that the most contributing ones are found to be nature related festivals like Alacati Herb Festival, Urla Artichoke Festival and flower festival, coffee festival, marine festival, book reading festival and culture / arts related Puppets, Izmir Short film, Theatre and Jazz festivals. On the contrary, half of the replies stated that there is no such festival that has a great contribution to Izmir city's branding and marketing efforts and such a festival should be strategically planned, managed, marketed and organized by all the related parties, stakeholders and shareholders.

When the results are compared with other related studies in the field, it is found that according to the destination's unique

characteristics and resources, the popular and successful ones are also choosing the focus on the three groups as culinary, culture and / or sports (Chen et. Al., 2018; Okumus & Cetin, 2018). For Izmir, culinary and culture festivals are found to be more effective for branding compared to sports related festivals.

## 6 CONCLUSION

A festival is an event that has become a traditional symbol of a region usually has been built up by local people that is held on the same day and the same month each year. Festivals have a positive impact on tourism destination's global popularity and act as an effective way of destination promotion even during the off-season periods. Festivals are also effective tools for city branding and many global city brands like Venice, Rio de Janeiro and Munich are characterized and even associated with the festivals they organize annually. Since Izmir has been losing its market share of visitors and tourists recently, the study aims to investigate the Izmir's festivals' potential in increasing the visitor demand and the impact on city branding.

Izmir city organizes many festivals where popular ones are stated as; International Izmir Festival, International Music Festival, Camel Wrestling Festival, Alacati Herb Festival, Urla Artichoke Festival, Izmir Chocolate Fest, Flower Festival, Izmir Coffee Festival, Cherry festival, International Theatre Festival, European Jazz Festival, Izmir International Puppets Day, Izmir Boyoz Festival, Tangerine Festival, Izmir Gastronomy Festival and Izmir Short Film Festival. Taking into consideration all the organized Izmir festivals, it becomes apparent that they could be grouped under three main categories of food and gastronomy like cherry, artichoke, herbs, grape, chocolate, mussels, boyoz, coffee, art and culture like puppets, jazz, music, theatre and film and finally sports like yachting, jogging, marathons and cycling. Since Izmir becomes a member of Délice, which is an international network of good food cities, it is important that it organizes international food and gastronomy related festivals more often. As mentioned, grouping Izmir festivals in 3 separate categories as culture, heritage and arts festivals, food and gastronomy festivals and sports festivals is suggested for effective and efficient organization. With the help of grouping, synergy and clustering benefits in some of the groups may also be achieved. Thus, the results of the study indicate that among the all festivals held in Izmir, culture and gastronomy themed ones are more memorable than sports themed ones, therefore more effective for destination branding applications. As a general implication, it may be advisory for destination festival and event planners to group the destination's festivals and invest in the most promising and appropriate category for effective branding practices.

Lastly, even though Izmir holds many annual national and international festivals, none of them alone was found to have a meaningful potential to positively influence the Izmir city's branding and have a sustainable contribution to the city's marketing efforts. Due to this fact, it is suggested that all the related shareholders, groups and stakeholders should plan and organize an international gastronomy / culture festival, which relates to Izmir's heritage, culture and culinary resources.

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