

## **DIGITALIZATION OF THE CITIES: AN ANALYSIS OF CITY MUNICIPALITY WEB SITES AS A PART OF CITY BRAND**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The topics explicated in this abstract are communication strategies, online branding, city promotion and branding studies of municipalities, the usage of internet and web sites in creating and developing a city brand. Within the paper, the websites of Sydney, London, Paris, Rome and NewYork(respectively -2006) are compared with the websites of Paris, Sydney, London, Rome and NewYork(respectively-2009) by website analysis method. The aim of this study is to identify if there occurs a positive relation between the websites of the cities and The Anholt-GMI City Brands Index. The official web sites of municipalities of the first best 5 cities under The Anholt-GMI City Brands Index are also analyzed within the abstract.*

**Key words:** *Internet, Online Branding, Municipalities, Web Site Analysis*

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### **1. Introduction**

Cities of the day are centers of tourism activities. Many cities which can be qualified as tourism destinations including Paris, New York, Londra, Roma and Sidney are mentioned with the name of their cities and have become brands with these names. While choosing the places they will visit, consumers standing at the target of tourism activities not only consider the attraction points of the place but also the images about the location in their minds and in the minds of other people which plays an important role during the process. For this reason the locations which became brands and qualified as destination are the most active places in tourism means among all other tourism areas.

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Leading the most important elements which influence the success of tourism activities are the establishment of correct communication strategies and effective adoption of improvements in information technologies into any kind of activity. The scope, speed and effectiveness of these improvements are vital in sense of presenting the products and services which constitute the tourism supply because knowledge is the core of traveling and accommodation concepts which stand at the focal point of tourism activities. "While visiting a place, a tourist stays in hotels, eats at restaurants, goes shopping, uses public transportation, contacts local people and visits different localities(Jafari,1983:71-77)". Therefore, a tourist who rapidly obtains information about where to stay for what charge under what conditions will also make a rapid decision. Efficiency in communication technologies can be achieved through the constitution of strategies structured in accordance with target audiences' specifications and with the facts of competition atmosphere where each player needs to differentiate from others. Medias used in communicating with target audience have different advantages and disadvantages of their own. The duplex nature of communication is an important element that can increase its influence over the target audience as it will help knowing the details about them. This process of knowing helps organizations gain the ability to acutely respond to consumer needs and requests similar to the closeness lived in face to face communication. The most important benefit internet provides is its nature that allows private enterprises and public institutions to establish duplex, interactive and symmetrical communication. (Jo,Jung,2005:24) The facilities internet grants turn it into a unique tool in the application of marketing communication strategies(Doren,Fechner,Green,Adelsberger,2000:27).

With many facilities it provides to its users, internet has a major potential in the process of publicizing cities and turning them into destination brands. All points of attraction in a city that wants to become a brand can be gathered and presented to target audience through internet technologies creating a chance for regional competition. Considering the fact that people planning a trip surf the websites of tourism locations, internet grants following facilities (Passman,Pipperger,Schertler,1997:208-220): Access to detailed information about the tourism products and services of the location, reduction in the dependence to agents, ability to compare alternative products and services during decision making phase, making reservations directly and buying the product or service individually.

Within the context of this paper, the usage of internet in communication strategies executed by municipalities which are qualified as the authorities in branding process of cities and responsible for determining the tourism strategies will be comparatively analyzed through the official web sites of 5 best cities of 2006 (Sydney, London, Paris, Roma, New York) according to The Anholt-GMI City Brands Index.

## 2. Literature Review

**2.1. The Theory of City Branding:** A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of these which is used to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler,Armstrong,Saunders,Wong,2002:48). “It helps consumers make healthy choices by introducing the difference between the products(Ozkan, 2002)”. It fuels the beliefs, arouses the feelings and encourages the individuals to make the move(Kotler,Gertner,2002:249-265). De Chernatony and McDonald (1992) describe a brand as: ...an identifiable product augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added values which match their needs most closely. Furthermore, its success results from being able to sustain these added values in the face of competition. Some argue that brands will become less important in the digital age, and others argue. Online branding that increased information availability will lead customers to seek best value, irrespective of brand. It may be that branding may become less important for low value, frequently purchased commodities, but continue to be important for high value, infrequently purchased, highly differentiated items. Perhaps the question for the information industry is exactly how the role of brands will develop in this sector in the digital age(Rowley,2004:131-138).

Many locations which can be qualified as tourism areas have become brands with certain images in people’s mind smaller than the general scope of company but larger than many cities in the country(Tosun,Jenkins,1996:7). In a traditional point of view, tourism regions are perfectly defined geographical areas like an island or a town(Hall,2000:58). According to Leiper, tourism regions are a mixture of tourism products consisting of many elements. These products mentioned under the title of a tourism region present an integrated experience to the consumers(Leiper,1995:85). This integrated nature of tourism region positions it as a marketable product. Branding strategy at this point has gained importance for tourism regions as an essential element in marketing activities. Especially the cities which have recently become destination centers are the tourism locations where branding strategies are intensely executed.

There are many motives for a tourist while choosing a location(Pyo,Mihalik,Uysal,1989:277-282). However the competition atmosphere existing in tourism business as in all other sectors brings the rapid loss in any motive’s effect and the ability to easily imitate any unique specification by the competitors. Contrary to this fact, concept of destination branding has provided an initial point to implementers functioning as an element of advantage in competition atmosphere. Destinations can be turned into brands just as any other product(Killingbeck,Trueman,2002:1-22). However the successful branding of a destination is only possible through choosing its most appropriate marketable equities which can differentiate it from its competitors considering its own resources and abilities and through supporting these equities with effective communication strategies. Especially the improvements in communication technologies have increased the importance of communication strategies to be followed during branding process.

The rapid developments in communication technologies in the second half of this century have had to presume influences which brought the beginning of a new period. Business world is the one that is under biggest influence by this transformation that reigns over almost all fields of life including economy, social and cultural affairs. All sectors from industry to agriculture, from real estate to health are being re-shaped through information technologies. Economic system has stepped into a new age when social and political structure is also subject to a deep and great influence. World has turned out to be an internet geography where any kind of information is transmitted and reached easily.

Internet and web sites have become new tools of publicity parallel with the widespread usage of internet (Anbar, 2003). Companies and institutions of the present day attach great importance to web sites and e-mail addresses in publicizing themselves and reflecting their corporate images as internet serves them various occasions to express themselves to their target audiences. Some of these occasions aimed at the expression of institutions to their target audiences are the arrangement of corporate web sites, establishment of chat rooms and forums for exchange of ideas with target audiences, receiving of feedback from target audience about the company, product and services through e-mail and user groups, establishment of a duplex communication process by organizing a data base through digital interviews, surveys and online programs. In this sense, new communication technologies perform important functions in brand establishment process which depends on the successful application of communication procedures.

**2.2. Online City Branding:** The influence of developments taking place in communication technologies is an unavoidable fact over tourism business as well as in other fields of life including social and economic affairs. Technology in tourism business is now the main resource of sustainable competition advantage and a strategic weapon due to the important role played by knowledge during the definition, distribution, union, arrangement and presentation of tourism products (Buhalis,1998:198).

The most important element for tourism business is knowledge. All the elements subject to tourism activities are structured on knowledge basis; hence the transmission of knowledge to target audiences is the determiner of these activities' success. "The usage of information technologies in tourism business brings major advantages since knowledge is very important for the sector. Abstract tourism services can not be examined at the sales point before purchasing as they are not goods of a concrete nature. These services are purchased before usage in a place other than the place of consumption. For this reason, the ability of a tourism management to attract consumers is totally related to the publicity and expression of its services to its target audience. Accurate and updated information in accordance with consumer expectations is the key to the supply of tourism demand(Buhalis,1998:410)". In tourism business, there are many divisions that can be subject to internet usage such as ticket sales, hotel reservations, car rental and guiding services. Besides "new technologies force tourism managements to search for new procedures such as adopting re-construction processes in order to increase their power to compete. New technologies change the ways of activity execution and communication methods of managements as they change the information research, tourism service and

product purchasing ways of consumers(Connell,Reynolds,1999:501)". "Tourism consumers can access to any kind of information in the web sites of tourism enterprises equipped with multi-dimensional search engines, can make their reservations directly and buy the holiday option they like online. It is also possible to gather information through internet about weather forecast, road conditions, the specifications of the place to be visited and the opportunities it provides(Kircova,2002:225).

**2.3. The Role of Internet in City Branding:** Consumers and tourists of future are expected to be more conscious, higher educated and full of more intense demands; hence the changes in their consumption habits, ways of life, behaviors and demographic facts have to be closely monitored by tourism planners(Sari,Kozak,2005:248). Changes in the expectations, behaviors and values of tourists urged by the developments in communication technologies force the tourism business to adopt new strategies of communication and marketing. Tourism consumers are now more sensitive about the environment, more flexible and independent, more interested in quality and brands and harder to satisfy(Poon,1993:10).

The widespread usage of internet in tourism business and the sales of tourism products and services through the web raised the significance of branding in internet environment. There are many reasons for the preference of internet by the tourism consumers. "According to research results, the reasons for internet usage in tourism activities are easy access(82%), time saving(80%), practical usage(59%), more economic cost(50%), entertaining design(36%), ability to compare the alternatives(28%) and better information(21%) (Peter, Bascombe, Brenner, Green, 1996:27)". Regarding the internet usage percentages of tourism consumers, "experts estimate that 10% of internet users get connected for shopping, bank transactions and traveling organizations and the number of users is tremendously increasing (Walle,1996:76)". In a report published by World Tourism Organization Business Council (WTOBC) it is stated that ¼ of all traveling expenses will be made over internet in next five years. The report also furnishes that the traveling expenditures on the internet will increase more than any other expenditure and within following two years half of e-trading expenses will be constituted by them. According to the report, 15% of total tourism expenditures are made through internet with the highest estimation and this percentage is expected to reach at 20–25% during next four or five years(Oncuer,2006).

The main goals of tourism web sites are publicizing the region to the consumers directly and playing an essential role in establishing a regional image to turn it into a destination brand. At this point internet provides some benefits to the publicity and branding process of regions. Countries, regions, cities and the individuals or institutions responsible for the publicity of these places need to search the best ways of using information technologies in a way to provide maximum benefit and to consider these technologies as a component of strategies to be applied in publicity and marketing(Siyahhan,1998).

The essential rule in turning a product or service into a brand is to maintain effective transmission of all information about this product or service to the target audience. With the facilities internet provides "the

tourism products of small and distant destinations are as accessible in international market as the tourism products presented in well developed web sites in this highly competitive market. Tourists are now able to easily find whatever information they need (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development,2001:45-48)". Any kind of information about the city and its attraction centers is transmitted to target audience through internet by means of active opportunities of expression. In consequence, the web site of a destination to be marketed and turned into a brand and the specifications of this web site would be impressive in decision making process of tourists.

As stated by Ries, "Internet brands are invisible until you input the brand name into the keyboard. If you don't know the brand name and how to spell it, no sale can happen. Therefore, online, name recognition is paramount (Yan,2006)". During the establishment phase of a city brand on the internet, users should easily find the web site of the city to be positioned as a brand. Moving from this fact, many cities register URL addresses such as "www.paris.org" during the arrangement of their web sites. Sari and Kozak lists the basic elements which should be found in regional web sites devoted to the establishment of a city brand: (2005:260-261): URL includes the exact brand name, name and logo of region, major issues (region's major tourist attraction centers, historical places etc.), public institutions (especially about tourism and security), tourist attraction centers, festivals, regional organization which are responsible for designing and maintaining of site professionally and its activities, helping information (exchange rates, weather, emergency applications etc.), reservation and ticketing, interactive map of the region, joining, other information (news and events about region, food and beverage, transportation, rent a car etc.), forum and chat, communication and e-mail. Although these factors are suggested for regional web sites, they are also important for providing a general look to major issues in countries' web sites.

Information about target audience is an essential point in brand management process. Becoming a brand and succeeding in its management in an intense atmosphere of global competition necessitates the rapid access to consumer information and the accurate storage and reporting of this information. The element of cost should also be taken into consideration and all these tasks should be completed with the minimum cost possible. The membership facility of internet can be benefited by cities and regions while preparing their web sites. Membership facility can both provide some advantages to the users in traveling and accommodation activities and store socio-demographic information and traveling habits about the members. This facility also helps presenting private holiday options for each customer which establishes a close relationship with the target audience.

Integration of branding and marketing communication across different channels is very important (Rowley,2005:131-138). All marketing and brand establishment activities executed in a region can be united under the same roof by means of internet and web sites enabling the effective expansion of brand messages into the minds of target audiences.

The interface of web site is more important than any other element in the process of online brand establishment since the elements forming the brand in customer mind consists of the interaction of resources available in the interface. The design of interface should be approached by an expert to the slightest detail as it needs to reflect the individual business flow and usage models of target markets, customers and beneficiaries. Achieving such a level of expression and harmony requires an interactive consultancy on interface theory based on a deep knowledge, a multi-media development, a smartly planned research and technical parameters defining web interactions (Taskiran,2005). Main page of a web site should be designed in a way to attract visitors and let them surf easily and interactively in an entertaining composition. Particular information and details should be presented in easy-to-reach sub-pages without spoiling the plain harmony of main page.

Cities which want to become brands online should focus on the services to be provided online. Consumers expect to procure services about different matters from the web sites they visit. These services can be in a large scale from hotel reservations to car rental, from weather forecast to cultural activities in the city. For this reason, electronic services are provided online to the consumers. Quality and reliability of services provided are very important in sense of the brand establishment of city and the web sites which publicize it. Online services should also be supported and enriched with related visual elements. The presentation quality of many elements like city's interactive map, contact details of hotels, online reservation, activity schedule, car rental, memberships and payment privileges for members, correct direction buttons and active direction options about official institutions are all important in brand establishment process. Questions which can be asked at this point can be as following: Are the electronic services also entertaining for consumers? Are the services functional for consumers? Are the services easy to use? To what extend do the target audiences benefit from interactive applications? Do the services function accurately?

Regarding the contributions of communication technologies to publicity and brand establishment for the development of tourism, Buhalis states that the difference between the expectations and real experiences has decreased to a significant extent due to the visual experience and information provided to consumers before consumption phase (2003:133). The consumers now have more information and options about the cities or regions and their needs are better understood through data analysis, interaction and researches. Private communication systems are established enabling consumers to have more information about the products and services they are interested in; to benefit from target oriented suggestions and special promotions. These systems can be subject to active marketing strategies and they can present new services to create new values (entertainment facilities during flight or in hotel room, information channels, etc...) to consumers.

**2.4. City Municipality and City Branding:** Municipalities and local managements which are responsible for the planning of civic life affairs also have important duties within the brand awareness to be created for tourism activities of cities. The expectations of contemporary tourism consumers from local managements are increasing day by day which highlights the activity and effectiveness elements in municipal services. This

change is also felt in virtual atmosphere where expectations are continuously changing and being renewed. Municipalities desiring to turn their cities into brands can succeed as much as their level of satisfying the needs in internet media. A tourist who wants to visit a city now visits the web site of that city before planning his trip, reaches to any kind of information about the city and its tourism attractions in order to shape his traveling plans. Yildiz (1999) reached at interesting findings in his research about municipalities on the internet. As a result of the analysis of 30 municipalities active on the internet, it is determined that municipal web sites are usually focused on publicizing the mayor and his party just like a brochure used as a symbol of status instead of sharing information and being a part of interaction. However people planning to visit the region should be able to see city weather forecast, to reach public institutions, to virtually experience tourism attraction centers through sounds, visual images, writings and 3D multi-media facilities, to find assistance information about festivals, regional organizations, foreign currencies and emergencies, to make hotel and flight reservations, to check the interactive city map, exchange ideas with other visitors in forums and chat rooms and rent cars. For this reason, web sites which can actively serve the target audience and turn the city into a brand name should be designed perfectly. As also stated by La Vigne and the others(2001) the companies, their units and workers should first be prepared to the changes to be brought by the widespread usage of internet in their business. They should be informed about the plans and developments, their opinions should be asked and their support should be received.

### 3. Methodology

**3.1. Research Draft:** The approaches to web analysis are classified in two groups as qualitative and quantitative. The main question that must be answered at this point is the highlighting of a web site's goal and its design though it may be different from one discipline to another. In this research, the usage of internet by cities in promotion communication is studied in municipality basis as the top unit that plans and executes the civic promotion and tourism activities. Moving from the thesis about "the effect of municipal web sites and their designs on brand recognition, brand establishment processes and communication activities within tourism goals", the usage of internet by municipalities as a communication tool or communication media in expressing their cities to target audiences in international area is analyzed within this paper. The paper includes the analysis on the usage of internet and web sites by municipalities in tourism communications strategies, online branding and publicity activities and the comparative analysis of the official web sites of 5 best cities of 2006 and 2009 (Sydney, London, Paris, Roma, New York) according to The Anholt-GMI City Brands Index(Anholt,2006:13-18).

**3.2. Data analysis:** The basis to the methodological part of this research is the article "Election Campaigning on the WWW in the USA and UK: A Comparative Analysis" by Gibson, Ward, Margolis, Resnick and Ward(Gibson,2001). The web sites of the cities included in this research have been graded according to their capacity of the function part consisting of information flow, resource gathering, communication web, participation index and presentation part consisting of visual, accessibility, currency and visibility index. The



specifications of horizontal and interactive information communication flow have also been analyzed downwards and upwards.

#### 4. Findings

Each municipality whose web site is analyzed within the research is considered in sense of its web site's functions and presentation facilities, the ability of its ingredients to establish a brand, the accordance of web site with the communication activities about publicity and tourism and the its activity in presenting the ingredients. In this context, their targets and the level of target achievement about internet usage in online branding activities are determined. The research was executed between the dates July 27, 2007 - August 28, 2007 and May 13, 2009 - June 15, 2009

**4.1. The Whole Functions of the Web Sites of Analyzed Municipalities:** Considering the web sites of municipalities analyzed in the research, it is detected that all 5 web sites adopts a vertically structured communication process from top to down. However municipal web sites establish other different communication channels from bottom to top which means from target audience to the management. The chat and forum facilities support the flow of information at this point.

In 2006, Sydney municipality web site was granted 22 points by covering all requirements between the municipal web sites graded between 0-22 points under the subtitle of information flow within functionality basis. An important facility attracting the visitor in Sydney municipality's web site is the presentation of 2030 goals through a direction button placed in the main page. All the information is also presented to users with different frame buttons in the main page to establish efficient information flow. Sydney was elected to be the best city brand of 2006 within The Anholt-GMI City Brands Index. Accordingly, the facility of "effective transmission of brand information to target audiences" which is one of the most important phases of brand establishment was achieved in the web site designed by Sydney municipality. Sydney was followed by Rome, New York, London and Paris respectively. Though the municipality of Rome also succeeded to get a high score in information flow means, it could not cover some facilities within the index. The web site of Paris municipality establishes information flow with the directions from its main page to related institutions' web sites. Evaluating the research results, it can be stated that all municipalities received an average grade of 18.8 on information flow basis which allows saying that all web sites provide an information flow higher than average level to its users.

When the websites' functions were analysed in 2009, it has been found out that Sydney again gets a 22 points score (0-22 range) as it did in the 2006 analysis with regards information provision index. Paris; getting 17 points score in 2006 for the same index got 21 points score in 2009 which is mainly based on the improvements in its website.

	<b>Information Provision</b>	<b>Resource Generation</b>	<b>Networking Int. – Ext.</b>	<b>Participation</b>
<b>Sidney</b>	22	0	9 - 19 (28)	3
<b>London</b>	17	0	7 - 20 (27)	2
<b>Paris</b>	17	0	8 - 22 (30)	2
<b>Roma</b>	20	0	8 - 22 (30)	3
<b>New York</b>	18	0	10 - 22 (32)	4
<b>Average</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8.4 - 21 (29.4)</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Space</b>	<b>0-22</b>	<b>0-1</b>	<b>0-10 / 0-30 (0-40)</b>	<b>0-5</b>

**Table 1:** Functionality Of Analysed Municipalities' Web Sites (2006)

	<b>Information Provision</b>	<b>Resource Generation</b>	<b>Networking Int.-Ext.</b>	<b>Participation</b>
<b>Sidney</b>	22	0	9 – 20 (29)	3
<b>London</b>	18	0	8 – 20 (28)	2
<b>Paris</b>	21	0	9 – 25 (34)	3
<b>Roma</b>	20	0	8 – 22 (30)	3
<b>New York</b>	19	0	10 – 23 (33)	4
<b>Average</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8.8 – 22 (30.8)</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Space</b>	<b>0-22</b>	<b>0-1</b>	<b>0-10 / 0 30 (0-40)</b>	<b>0-5</b>

**Table 2:** Functionality Of Analysed Municipalities' Web Sites (2009)

Especially with the concept of social responsibility which is recently underlined has increased its importance for the products and services which want to become brands parallel with the intensity of competition. Target audiences have started to be interested in the social side of products and services and to evaluate their social benefits. For this reason, the facility of “resource collection over the internet for social campaigns in the city” was also included in the index. In 2006, none of the web sites analyzed has proved a finding about resource collection for campaigns. This index has not been found in 2009, neither. Hence the relevant index isn't a part of this study.

Communication process plays a vital role in the marketing of services which are abstract products. Becoming a brand in a service sector like tourism is only possible through the effective and accurate structuring of communication. In 2006, under the inner and outer communication index of the research, New York municipality has the highest score within a point range of 0-40. The municipality provides many directions to various institutions in inner and outer communication means through the buttons in its main page. New York municipality is followed by Paris and Rome respectively however Sydney could not achieve success in inner and outer communication despite of its success in information flow. London is on the 5<sup>th</sup> place in communication index. In 2009 analysis, it is found that Paris has increased its score in networking-int.ext. index forestalling

New York and becoming the first runner. Paris is followed by New York and Rome in this index. London and Sydney increased their score by one point in this index.

Sharing common values, ideas and opinions with the target audience is one of the opportunities granted to marketing world by technological developments. Products and services which attach importance to opinions of target audience and shape themselves in accordance with them will always be one step ahead in competition atmosphere. In 2006, the highest grade in the research was received by New York municipality with 4 points in a range of 0-5 with its facilities of chat, e-mail, forum, membership and site search. New York is followed by Roma, Sidney, London and Paris respectively. New York again got the highest score in 2009 for participation index. Paris is the only city which increased its score in the relevant index.

Considering the functionality of web sites, in 2006, Sydney municipality stands out in information flow index whereas New York municipality is better in other facilities. It's clearly seen that Sydney municipality's web site more effectively covers the requirements demanded by international tourism facts and by the internet users. Rome, Paris and London municipalities follow New York and Sydney. Paris, however, has increased its score in functional index and forestalled Sydney 4 points in the information provision index compared to 2006. In the other components of the functional index it is also concluded that Paris stood out. Paris website is concluded to supply the needed information especially for the international visitors. New York, Sydney, Rome and London followed Paris.

**4.2. Presentation of Analyzed Web Sites:** One of the opportunities granted by internet and web sites is the 3 dimension presentation of product or services with visual, audio and textual materials. Unlike the products of other sectors, products presented by tourism business can be tested only after purchasing and the ideas can be shaped afterwards. Web sites enable tourism enterprises to furnish their products on virtual atmosphere to target audiences at any place all over the world. Hence, the formation of opinions about product is closely related to the presentation of products on the web sites and the presentation is of utmost importance in brand establishment process.

In 2006, municipality web sites analyzed in the research are considered to fail in presentation means based on the average points in all indexes despite of their success in functional index. This detection proves that web sites could not achieve supporting the functionality they provide to their users with an effective presentation. Especially London municipality fails in effective presentation of its website although it reaches at the highest visibility percentage in Google, one of the most popular search engines all over the world, with a number of 1.900.000 and the web site receives the lowest point in the index. London is again found to be the most visible website in 2009. However its visibility has been supported with the its website's functional features. Paris has increased its visibility in 2009 compared to 2006 from 23.800 to 1.170.000.

	<b>Glitz Factor</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>Navigability</b>	<b>Freshness</b>	<b>Visibility</b>
<b>Sidney</b>	4	4	4	6	223.000
<b>London</b>	3	4	4	5	1.900.000
<b>Paris</b>	5	4	3	4	23.800
<b>Roma</b>	8	2	2	6	896.000
<b>New York</b>	7	2	2	6	948.000
<b>Average</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5.4</b>	
<b>Space</b>	<b>0-7</b>	<b>0-6</b>	<b>0-4</b>	<b>0-6</b>	

**Table 3:** Presentation Of Analysed Web Sites (2006)

	<b>Glitz Factor</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>Navigability</b>	<b>Freshness</b>	<b>Visibility</b>
<b>Sidney</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>334.000</b>
<b>London</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2.430.000</b>
<b>Paris</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1.170.000</b>
<b>Roma</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1.050.000</b>
<b>New York</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1.110.000</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>5.8</b>	
<b>Space</b>	<b>0 – 7</b>	<b>0 – 6</b>	<b>0 – 4</b>	<b>0 - 6</b>	

**Table 4:** Presentation Of Analysed Web Sites (2009)

In 2006, New York has 7 full points in visual index. However comparing the textual elements with visual ones, it can be said that the web site is unable to cover what is expected. The highest points in accessibility and navigability index are received by Sydney and London municipalities. The web site of Paris municipality has a plain presentation. The directions and information providing is made through directions to other institutions' web sites. Consequently, the presentation does not prove the success expected from the city brand. All municipalities are successful in freshness index. Sydney, Rome and New York municipalities update their web sites daily while London and Paris do it less frequently. In Rome and New York municipalities' web sites, there is no direction to foreign languages which is a missing point in reaching at international target audiences. On the other hand, the other languages button in London municipality's web site only translates certain parts of the site.

When the websites' presentetions are analysed in 2009 it is found that the highest score is obtained by New York and Rome. Paris and Sydney has only increased their score by one point. New York and Rome websites weren't up to the expectations in visual and textual context. In accessibility and navigaitability indexes the highest scores were obtained by Paris different from 2006 results. In freshness index all cities are found to be successful. Hence it can be stated that municipalities pay more attention to websites since the websites are being updated daily.

In 2006, the highest data capacity is held by Rome municipality's web site with a volume of 528 KB. Rome municipality is followed by New York with 240 KB, Sydney with 192 KB, London with 144 KB and Paris with 124 KB. The data capacity of all the websites has increased mainly Paris's depending on the changes. (Paris-585KB, Roma 560 KB, New York 320 KB, London 260 KB, Sydney 250 KB) A website with high data volume may mean that it includes more elements such as graphs, animations, audio and visual elements that enable effective expression compared to the others. On the other hand, in the countries or centers where the internet connection is slow, high data volume may cause some problems such as viewing the sites slowly or not being able to view some elements that affect the users negatively.

In 2006, as a result of the research made in Google as one of the most popular search engines for users all around the world, there is a direction of 1.900.000 links to London Municipality, 948.000 links to New York, 896.000 links to Rome, 223.000 links to Sidney and 23.800 links to Paris within the context of visibility index. In 2009 London links were 2.430.000; Paris links were 1.170.000, New York links were 1.110.000, Rome links were 1.050.000, Sydney links were 334.000. In visibility index all cities improved compared to 2006.

## **5. Conclusion**

Tourism industry which can be qualified as service sector has a global and information based nature at the present day. Services as the products of tourism business are consumed simultaneously with the production and the target audiences positioned as consumers are located in different places other than the service location. In tourism business, there is a significant physical distance between the products and target audiences. Consumers of this sector have to buy products and services they have not experienced depending only on the information they gather. For this reason, the information about the product and services has a major role in decision making process of target audience consumers as they are physically far from the product and services. Accordingly, the consumers first want to gather the information about the product and service, and then come to decision making phase. This fact necessitates the establishment of effective and rapid communication channels between target audiences and cities or tourism regions which want to become brands in competition atmosphere and the transmission of information in a speedy, accurate, reliable and wide spread way with the minimum cost possible. Considering these obligations, internet stands out as an effective marketing tool for service marketing especially in tourism business with its facilities of establishing rapid, effective and continuous communication with target audience, presenting information through visual, auditory and textual elements, achieving mutual interaction and many other similar conveniences. Making a definition of brand as the synergic total constituted by the identity created in consumer mind by product or service, presentation and performance, internet influences all these 3 specifications about the brands. This influence is higher in service sectors like tourism. Internet technologies helps presenting the brand identities of products and services to target audiences and increasing brand performances.

Within the paper the usage ways and percentages of internet and web sites by the cities which want to become brands in tourism business as a service sector is tried to be determined and the municipal web sites of best 5 cities in 2006 all over the world are analyzed depending on determined criteria. Evaluating the web sites of 5 municipalities in visual and textual basis, it can be stated that there are differences between each web site about succeeding in basic duties of directing users, contributing to city image and increasing the tourism potential. On the basis of established research criteria, Sydney municipality's web site can be considered successful in sense of reflecting the brand establishment activities to the internet media. Unlike other municipalities' web sites, Sydney municipality's web site displays the city logo and the goals of city for 2030. The website is also more successful than others in locating the direction buttons and in directing the users. Sydney municipality website which received the highest grade on functionality basis fails in presenting this functionality according to research results. Information provided in the web site is not adequately supported with 3 dimension animation elements. Media membership facility positioned in direction buttons is an important plus for establishing interaction with media. New York municipality's web site is the second one that attracts attention after Sydney's however this site also does not succeed in supporting its data with enough visual elements. Looking at the main page of the site, it can be said that online services are more qualified than others but the structure of directions and visual positioning is weak. Paris, which was took a back seat in functional and presentation indexes in 2006, got higher points compared to other cities in 2009 with the improvements in its website. This supports the Andholt City Brand Index's results in 2009- Paris was found to be the most admired city brand. Sydney's website got close points in 2009 compared to 2006.

The web sites of Paris and London municipalities prove not to present visual glitz that can impress target audiences and let them surf joyously. Research data shows that London municipality's web site has the lowest performance both in functionality and presentation index. The foreign language option can only be used in some pages, not in all direction buttons in the page. Animations and visual elements take place in Paris municipality's web site in the pop ups opened from the main page and in the web sites of organizations; this situation constitutes a negative result in online branding process. The web site of Rome municipality shows a performance close to those of New York and Sydney however it there is not a direction button for foreign languages for international users. During the research period, it was also detected that the site includes a city map button but it does not function. All the web sites analyzed in the research include assistance information that can support tourism activities and direct target audiences such as foreign currency, weather forecast, emergency contact information and other basic information about the region as well as information about regional public institutions, festivals and regional publicity activities.

In conclusion, it is determined that the web sites of 5 best cities of 2006 are not as successful as they are expected to be compared to their brand recognition. In 2009 the same findings were reached. . For this reason, it can be considered that municipality web site does not have a direct influence over tourism demand and city brand. However the increasing usage of internet by tourists and their demand about arranging all activities through internet is an important matter to be discussed in brand establishment means since tourists

provide information from web sites and get more interested in regional web sites while planning their trips. The Andholt City Brand Index's results matches with the website analysis index (functional and presentation) scores in both 2006 and 2009 ( the most popular cities are same as the most succesfull websites) showing that websites are very important communication mediums. In this context, municipalities which are authorized to establish a city brand should arrange their web sites considering international target audiences. Detailed information about city and region should be transmitted to target audience in a plain but effective way with the support of visual elements to enrich the ingredients. The services provided are also of utmost importance in the process of online branding. City municipalities should compose electronic service possibilities in their web sites in order to cover more needs of tourists.

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