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## Strategic Analysis of the External Environment and the Importance of the Information: Research on Perceptions of Hotel Managers

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### Abstract

Information gathering from external environment is very important in order to create competitive advantage for hotels. Because of this, hotels are very sensitive to the external information and sustain the systems gathering, disseminating information and transforming it into the response. Furthermore the mean of information will change in parallel with the area which information related on. In this study different types of information based on different components of external environment were considered. Importance levels of different kind of information were determined. On the other hand, the sources of information were asked to rank by considering the level of importance. The most important types of information for hotels are information about computerization, automation systems and satisfaction levels of their customers. Thus, information based on technological environment, about tourists, about suppliers and legal environment were percept as relatively more important. As an information channel customers, internet, rivals working same location and employees were percept more important sources.

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### 1. Introduction

Effects of globalization, technological innovations, new markets which are developing and eliminating the borders, increase the importance given to information, changes on customer expectations lead organizations to be better than yesterday (Temel et al, 2007: 28). Rapid changes created by the phenomenon of globalization put pressure on organizations to adapt to these changes. As open systems organizations were become more affected by the environment and found them in the middle of a global race in the globalization process (Öneren, 2008: 164).

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The environment where organizations in is complex, and in a rapid change, at the same time competition is very intense. In such an environment dominated by uncertainties, the most important source of enterprises to know the potential opportunities and threats and in terms of utilization of these in favor of the organization is information (Özdemir, 2006). In rapidly changing world, the businesses are required adapt to changes and up-to-date information which they have, in order to sustain their competitive force (Liao and Wu, 2010: 1095). Information is a unique resource for individuals and organizations as well, to create adaptation, to learn new business forms, to problem-solving and to create core-competencies (Liao et al., 2010: 3972). Hotels should analyze the external environment effectively for response to the changing needs and desires of customer and adaptation to the market conditions. In this respect, strategic management could be considered as providing proper tools ensuring adaptation of hotels to the external environment. This is very important to know the extent to which it must be prepared to adapt to effects and pressures that come from external forces (Morden, 1993: 29).

Adaptation to the external environment and to achieve long-term success in hotel enterprises depends on the development of appropriate strategies. However, before they develop a strategy, hotel companies need to analyze the current status in the marketplace. In the process of adaptation to the external environment a basic function was taken upon by managers. In fact, managers must direct the relations of organization with external environment and retain a clear interaction of organization among actors of external environment. Such a close contact will empowered managers to capitalize on opportunities and avoid threats in the external environment (Stahl and Grigsby, 1997: 2). *“It is therefore important for enterprise management to understand the variety and characteristics of the external environment and forces relevant to policy formulation and decision making”* (Morden, 1993: 29).

In this study, organizational activities enforced to gain information from external environment are researched. In this context, it is tried to determine how the information obtained by the strategic analysis of the external environment was percept by hotel managers and which kind of information was evaluated as strategic.

Although the literature on strategic management is quite expansive, it can be mentioned that the number of studies addressing the strategic management in hotels is relatively low. In this respect, this study is important because it is addressing the strategic management process in hotels. The results of the study will offer a significant contribution to the literature by revealing the points of view of hotel managers to strategic management.

## **2. Strategic Analysis of the External Environment**

In fact, every business starts its activities with a clear mission and specific goals. In this respect, it is possible to say that each business consciously or unconsciously begin to operate in direction of some policies and strategies. However, rapid changes in environmental conditions are able to turn possible strategies inadequate. At this point, strategic management conceptualization was appeared as a term pointed out that the organizations living in an ever-changing business environment need to anticipate these changes and ensure harmony between the external environments (Dinçer, 2004: 4-5). Strategic management was defined as a set of managerial decisions and actions that ensure organization's compliance with its surroundings and long-term success is a process in which organizations' competitive advantages have been maximized and disadvantages have been minimized (Efil, 2004: 305).

Most of the researchers have pointed out that the external environment of tourism enterprises is changing rapidly and at the same time this complex environment forms competitiveness of firms (Oreja-Rodriguez and Yanes Estevez, 2007: 1450; Okumu et al., 2008: 538; Zhang et al., 2010: 719). When the changing environment was taken into consideration in which hotel enterprises are working, it was obviously seen that the hotels need to develop reliable strategies in order to work efficiently and effectively (Kılınç, 2008: 531).

Environment covers all factors which remain out of the firm but closely related to firm (Dinçer, 2004: 71). Changing conditions requires the hotel managers to analyze the external environment continuously and in a systematic way. For this purpose the managers working on strategic planning gain information from the different resources in external environment in order to sustain the competitive advantage of firm and to be aware of opportunities, threats and some unexpected progress. They evaluate, control and disseminate this information with the rest of company (Eren, 2005: 117). As mentioned above, in many cases, businesses were faced up to changing environment and cope with change by developing new processes and performing strategic analysis (Dinçer, 2004:71; Oreja-Rodriguez and Yanes Estevez, 2007: 1450).

Strategic analysis is a process consisting of investigation made on the current situation of the general and industrial environmental elements and re-evaluation of business elements in the internal environment (Ülgen and Mirze, 2007: 64). It comprises the activities such as definition of objectives, choosing strategies compatible with objectives, and some applications on analysis of external and internal environment (Dinçer, 2004: 70). The main purpose of strategic analysis is to learn any change occurring in the environment of organization by collecting information on these changes and to develop cultural or structural competency which enables adaptation (Evans, et al., 2003: 3; Adema and Roehl, 2010: 200).

Strategic analysis was realized in two stages: internal and external environmental analysis (Morden, 1993; Evans et al., 2003; Pearce and Robinson, 2011). Current business conditions were evaluated in internal environmental analysis, its resources and capabilities were analyzed (Dinçer, 2004: 40). Financial situation of the business, tangible and intangible assets, the quality and quantity of its work-force, capabilities related to marketing and R&D are such basic elements are examined in business analysis (Ülgen ve Mirze, 2007: 115-127; Dincer, 2004: 107-135). To know and re-evaluate the strengths and weaknesses compared to its competitors is very important for managers to facilitate strategic choices (Eren, 2005: 169).

The second stage of strategic analyses is conceptualized as environmental scanning. This stage is the process of identifying and tracking trends that lead to business opportunities and threats and involves several important management decision (Olsen et.al., 1994: 3). According to Okumus (2004: 125) environmental scanning is seen as an essential managerial tool which through employing systematic scanning procedures, hospitality firms can identify opportunities and threats and then develop successful plans. There are many studies treated on the external strategic analysis conducted by firms (Fahey et al., 1981; Hambrick, 1982; Suramianian et al., 1993; Elenkov, 1997). In addition, a lot of studies available in which the external environment of tourism businesses is analyzed (Costa, 1995; Olsen and Roper, 1998; Wu et al., 1998; Olsen, 1999; Costa and Teare, 2000; Olsen, 2004; Okumu□, 2004; Harrington, 2004; Adema and Roehl, 2010). External environment was defined as the whole of factors which are not under the control of the management but influences the processes such as decision-making, developing activities and structure of firm (Pearce and Robinson, 2011: 81).

According to the studies, the external environment was divided into two part as the far/ macro-environment, and close / micro-environment. In addition, it was understood that a second kind of classification made as the industry environment and the business environment. However, these concepts refer to the same phenomenon (Evans et al., 2003; Dinçer, 2004; Ülgen and Mirze, 2007; Pearce and Robinson, 2011). The general or macro-environment of hotels is composed of the parts such as the factors of socio-demographic environment, economic environment, political - legal environment, technological and ecological environment, while the task or micro-environment consists of competitors, suppliers, customers and substitution goods and services (Olsen et al., 1994; Evans et al., 2003; Okumus, 2004; Oreja-Rodriguez and Yanes Estevez, 2007). Scanning of each categories of the environment may provide a path to the executive to decide on the appropriate sources of information and using information both personally and non-personally. *“But, the most situations executive of the hotels is reluctant to engage with environmental scanning the most significant reason of that, executives are worried about information that comes from the source they use. They also express concern over their inability correctly to assign*

*probabilities to the likelihood of events actually occurring in the environment and what effect they will have on the firm. Thus it is often easier to make decisions about more immediate threats and opportunities than long-term trends”* (Olsen et.al. 2004: 3-4). In this study it is aimed to research how managers were perceived the information related on the external environment of a hotel.

### 3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to determine which kind of information gained in the analysis of external environment, considered or perceived as more strategic by hotel managers. As only one part of strategic analysis, the strategic external analysis was discussed. For this purpose, a field study was conducted to analyze the perceptions of managers of hotels located in some different cities of Turkey (Mediterranean, Aegean, Marmara and Middle-Anatolia Regions). The thoughts of persons in managerial teams of hotels such as general managers, assistant general managers, front office managers and marketing managers were determined. It was tried to evaluate how these hierarchies perceive the importance of information gained from external environment. A questionnaire was employed. Scale was developed by adapting the previous scale of Eren et al. (2000). The questionnaire form includes two parts of questions. In the first part, the factors and propositions were ranked. This part consists of statements about types of information and judgments were scaled in parallel with the style of Likert (evaluation will be made by the ranks of importance, from 1-Not all important, to 5-Very important). Second part consists of questions developed in order to determine personal and demographic situation of participants and some qualifications of hotels such as type, age, and number of rooms which the participant is working for. The results gained after statistical analyses are offered.

### 4. Findings

Demographic statistics of respondents were depicted in Table 1. Managers from 35 qualified hotel enterprises from the different parts of Turkey joined the study. Comparison between male and female respondents, male was represented by 60% and female by 28,6%. By age distribution, respondents that categorized between 36 to 40 years old contributed the most with 31,4%. As a main form of educational level most of the participants have bachelors degree (68,6%). As the nation is managers' perception, respondents were grouped into positions of general manager (14,3%), assistant GM (5,7%), marketing manager (22,9%), front office manager (40 %), and others (17,1%). Based on length of service, majority of the respondents were in the range of 1 to 2 years (31,4%). Based on the hotel type where the participants working for, majority were 5 star hotels (62,9%). Hotels are grouped in much closed numbers of rooms but most of them have rooms more than 350 (31,4%). Based on ownership of hotel, most of the hotels were grouped into local-independent category (45,7%). Finally by the age distribution, most hotels are 5 to 9 years in service (42,9%).

Table 1. The distribution concerning of participant's features

<b>Features</b>	<b>Frequencies (N)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	21	60
Female	10	28,6
Missing	4	11,4
<b>Age</b>		
30 and less	3	8,6
31-35	14	40
36-40	11	31,4
41-45	2	5,7
46-50	3	8,6
51 and over	1	2,9
Missing	1	2,9
<b>Educational Level</b>		
Elementary-Junior High School	2	5,7
Vocational and Technical High School	4	11,4
Bachelor's Degree	24	68,6
Post Graduate	1	2,9
Missing	4	11,4
<b>Position in the Enterprise</b>		
General Manager	5	14,3
Assistant General Manager	2	5,7
Marketing Manager	8	22,9
Front Office Manager	14	40
Other*	6	17,1
<b>Length of Employment in the Enterprise</b>		
Less than 1 year	3	8,6
1-2 year	11	31,4
2-3 year	5	14,3
3-4 year	5	14,3
4-5 year	2	5,7
More than 5 year	9	25,7
<b>Types of Hotels</b>		
S Class	3	11,5
4 Star	10	25,7
5 Star	22	62,9
<b>Number of Rooms</b>		
Less than 40	1	2,9
40-79 Rooms	5	14,3
80-119 Rooms	5	14,3
120-199 Rooms	4	11,4
200-350	8	22,9
More than 350 Rooms	11	31,4
Missing	1	2,9
<b>Ownership of Hotels</b>		
Local-Independent	16	45,7
Local-Chain	8	22,9
Foreign-Chain	6	17,1
Management License	3	8,6
Franchising	2	5,7

\* Other five are each financial manager, fiscal affairs manager, customer relations manager, accounting manager, reservation manager and assistant front office manager.

Respondents were asked to indicate the value on their perception on the importance of different kinds of information was depicted in Table 2. It is indicated that the most important information for hotels are “Computerization ratios in hotels”, “Automation systems developed for hotels “ and “Satisfaction level of tourists from hotel” with the arithmetic mean rates of 4,74. This means that hotels are very sensitive to the information on technological changes and satisfaction levels of customers. Following these, information about “market share of rivals” and “customer profiles of rivals” are very important (mean 4,71).

Table 2. Frequencies, mean and standard deviations for all items related to type of information

ITEMS	—	S.d.	—	S.d.
<b>Economical Information</b>	<b>3,87</b>	<b>0,83</b>	<b>Information abt. Rivals</b>	<b>4,11 0,71</b>
Inflation rates	3,74	1,14	Market share	4,71 0,62
Interest rates	3,57	1,21	Size	4,51 0,65
Policies of Central Bank	3,42	1,37	Customer profiles	4,71 0,51
Ratios related to economic growth	3,88	1,18	Strategies	4,45 0,74
Tax ratios	4,22	0,87	Strengths and weaknesses	4,47 0,74
International relations and competition	4,4	0,69	Reservation systems	3,77 1,28
Trends to cartelization	3,71	1,25	Room prices	4,57 0,77
Development plans	3,68	1,23	Occupancy rates	4,54 0,81
Investment incentives	4,26	0,93	F&B menus of rivals	4,11 1,25
<b>Socio-cultural Information</b>	<b>3,61</b>	<b>0,83</b>	Room capacity	4,25 0,88
Birth rates	2,71	1,31	Furnishings of the rooms	4,2 0,99
Social values and change	3,88	1,20	Pricing policies of rivals	4,48 0,85
Education and cultural level	4,42	0,73	Discounts and promotion prices	4,48 0,78
Age distribution and changes	3,25	1,24	Expenditures of rivals for water, heating	3,45 1,50
Leisure time valuing ways	3,8	1,18	Automation systems employed	3,74 1,44
<b>Age of Hotels</b>	<b>4,24</b>	<b>0,60</b>	Additional services offered	4,14 1,00
Political trends and changes	3,88	1,09	Wages of employees	4,17 1,17
Regional tension and terror attacks	4,64	0,77	Workforce training activities	3,94 1,37
International agreements	4,23	0,88	Employment policies of rivals	3,6 1,26
Legal adjustments for employees	4,05	1,01	Quality of workforce	3,97 1,24
Legal adjustments for natural environment	4,05	1,01	Communication channels in business	3,37 1,37
Adjustments related to tourism legacy	4,47	0,82	Suppliers	3,42 1,24
Adjustments for investment incentives	4,20	0,94	Relations with suppliers	3,28 1,38
Adjustments on customer protection	4,17	0,96	Level of service quality	4,45 0,88
Adjustments on tax rates	4,5	0,66	<b>Information abt. Tourists</b>	<b>4,45 0,58</b>
<b>Information abt. Suppliers</b>	<b>4,25</b>	<b>0,80</b>	Number of tourists visited the region	4,57 0,65
Number, size and quality level of suppliers	4,22	1,05	Average overnights in region	4,54 0,70
Prices of suppliers	4,34	0,87	Purchasing profiles of tourists	4,31 0,90
Prices and discounts offered by suppliers to	4,31	0,79	Purchasing power of tourists	4,64 0,48
Substitution possibilities of supplier goods	4,17	1,04	New purchasing trends of tourists	4,31 0,96
Conditions for getting substitute goods from different industries	4,22	0,87	Socio-demographic features	4 1,05
<b>Inf. abt. Technological Environment</b>	<b>4,67</b>	<b>0,52</b>	Attitudes of tourists toward hotel	4,37 0,80
Computerization ration in hospitality	4,74	0,65	Expectations of tourists from hotel	4,62 0,49
Automation systems developed for hotels	4,74	0,74	Satisfaction level of tourists	4,74 0,61
Hardware and devices which may be used in	4,54	0,78	<b>Inf. abt. Natural Environment</b>	<b>4,10 0,95</b>
Systems which may be used in meeting halls	4,68	0,47	Soil, water and air pollution	4 1,23

Changes on climate systems	4,25	1,01
Preventions against to natural pollution	4,2	0,96
Degradation level of natural environment	3,94	1,37

As an information about technological environment, the technological “systems which may be used in meeting halls” was percept highly important (mean 4.68). Findings reveal the high importance of information on technology, tourist and rival and hereafter information on legal environment. “Regional tension and terror attacks” (mean 4,64) and “Adjustments related to tourism legacy” (mean 4,47) is most important aspects which the hotels need to gain information about from legal environment. The most important factors of information needed about tourist are “purchasing power” (mean 4,64), “expectations” (mean 4,62), “number of tourists visited the region” (mean 4,52), and “average overnights” (mean 4,54) in addition to “satisfaction level”. Top rated factors of information needed about rivals are “Room prices” (mean 4,57), “occupancy rates” (mean 4,54), “size” (mean 4,51), “pricing policies” (mean 4,48), “discounts and promotion prices” (mean 4,48) and “strengths and weaknesses” (mean 4,47) except for “market share” and “customer profiles”.

By comparing means of overheads as information classes, the most important information group is technology (mean 4,67). The second is information about tourist with the mean rate of 4,45, and third is information about suppliers with the mean of 4,25.

Respondents voted the importance of information sources depicted in Table 3. The most important information source which was percept by managers is “customers” (mean 4,79). This is a clear proof of how the hotels must be aware of the importance of customers’ view to the services. For creating a competitive advantage, it is necessary to increase customer satisfaction, thus hotels must gain information about services offered, how these services are being percept, which handicaps are being felt and what components needed to improve. This kind of information could only be gathered from customers. On the other hand, services were offered in an atmosphere in which customer and businesses are faced. The process of service creates contacts between customer and members of business. Therefore hotels have broad opportunities to get information from customers.

Other sources of information for hotels are internet (mean 4,67) as a second, rivals working in same location (mean 4,57) as a third and employees (mean 4,55) as a forth important source. According to these findings it is possible to say that hotels are more focused on related actors in market and overrate the information gaining from these actors. Except for these sources internet appears as very important factor used very frequently by all kind of hotels. Some media tools (newspapers, journals and TV) and some publications may be on specific areas related to business world (publications by business associations, government agencies, etc.) have relatively lower importance.

Table 3. Mean and standard deviations for the items related to information sources

ITEMS	—	S.d.	ITEMS	—	S.d.
Employees	4,55	0,66	Workshops	3,70	1,31
Consultants	4,05	1,04	New employees	3,61	1,32
Customers	4,79	0,41	Publishing of foreign research inst.	4,08	1,21
Suppliers	4,05	1,17	Newspaper, Journal and TV	4,41	0,82
Stakeholders	4,05	1,12	Leader enterprise in sector	4,35	0,94
Publ. by TUIK, DPT, TURSAB, etc.*	4,26	1,05	Rivals working in same location	4,57	0,70
Internet	4,67	0,68	Rivals working in different location	3,54	1,30
Inf. gaining as mystery customer	4,14	1,18			

\*TUIK= Turkish Statistical Institute; DPT= State Planning Institution; TURSAB= Association of Turkish Travel Agencies

A linear correlation analysis was conducted to figure out the relationships between information evaluated as important and sources. When comparing the factors two type of information, information about economical environment and information about socio-cultural environment and three information sources, workshops, new employees and rivals working in different location were precluded. Because these factors were loaded lower than 4. This means that these factors were perceived lower than “important”. This way was chosen to observe which kind of relationship emerges between the perception of information as important and utilized source of information. Pearson Correlation Coefficients indicated that there are strong relations between types of information and sources of information.

As listed in Table 4, to attach importance to customers as an information source has no relationship with the types of information. The participant votes for this factor whether highly important or not does not reflect any aptitude related to the importance of different information areas. In other words, there is no relationship between perceptions on the importance level of different types of information and perceptions on the importance of customers as a source. And it can be said under the light of finding about the importance of customer as a source, all businesses need to information gained from customers regardless of whether they assign high importance to the information about some environmental areas.

Table 4. Correlation matrix of correlation between information perceived importantly and source

	Inf. abt. Natural Environment	Inf. abt. Technologic Environment	Inf. abt. Legal Environment	Inf. abt. Rivals	Inf. abt. Tourist	Inf. abt. Suppliers
Employees	,389*	,239	,457**	,379*	,720**	,717**
Consultant	,603**	,500**	,466**	,683**	,509**	,719**
Customers	,194	,283	,172	,111	,202	,209
Suppliers	,607**	,418*	,546**	,692**	,503**	,681**
Stakeholders	,425*	,235	,205	,438**	,353*	,414*
Publishing	-,148	,019	-,001	,218	,181	,169
Internet	,084	,002	,321	,105	,463**	,381*
Mystery Customers	,211	-,093	,256	,348*	,237	,286
Foreign Research Institutions	,281	,174	,358*	,275	,412*	,258
Media	,105	,151	,211	,379*	,217	,201
Leader of market	,054	-,103	,148	,272	-,014	,045
Rivals	-,001	-,070	,217	,297	,394*	,180

Employees are very distinctive sources to gain information about legal environment, rivals, tourists and suppliers. Consultants (as a person or an institution) are important sources to gain information about all kind of environmental components. Suppliers are a significantly related source for all type of information. Internet is also a source for all, but especially the businesses which attached importance to information about tourists, and suppliers, pointed out this factor as important. Stakeholders are a source which was drawn attention to gain information about natural environment, rivals, tourists and suppliers. Mystery customer is a significant way to gain information about rivals. Foreign research institutions were increasingly preferred while the importance attached to tourists increases. Rivals were mostly preferred while also the importance attached to tourists increases.

## 5. Conclusion

Hotels extremely need information in order to sustain daily routines and develop new strategies for the future. Thus, they must set systems going to gather information, disseminate it among different parts of business and create new solutions and responses to the changes occurring in the market. When hotels develop systems to gather information from the out, on different components of external environment were focused as highly important. By considering findings from limited sample, it can be mentioned that



hotels are very sensitive to the information about (in rank), “Computerization ratios in hospitality”, “Automation systems developed for hotels”, “Satisfaction level of tourists from hotel”, “Market share of rivals”, “Customer profiles of rivals”, “Systems which may be used in meeting halls”, “Regional tension and terror attacks”, “Purchasing power of tourists”, “Expectations of tourists from hotel”, “Room prices of rivals”, “Number of tourists visited the region”, “Occupancy rates of rivals”, “Average overnights in region”, “Size of rivals”, “Pricing policies of rivals for different seasons”, “Discounts and promotion prices of rivals”, “Adjustments related to tourism legacy”, and “Strengths and weaknesses of rivals”. The information groups of (in rank) technological environment, tourists and legal environment are highly important for hotels. As a source of information from external environment, customers, internet, rivals working in same location and employees are mostly important.

The comparison between types of information and sources of information reflects the relationship between perception on the content of information (context) and channel of information (tool). The hotels which attach high importance to the information about legal environment, tourists, rivals and suppliers also evaluate the employees as a highly important channel. The hotels which attach high importance to the information about all external areas also evaluate the consultant and suppliers as a highly important channel. To percept information about natural environment, rivals, suppliers and tourists is in relation with the level of perception of stakeholders as an information source. Information about tourists and suppliers are in relation with the perception about internet. The importance of information about rivals was percept very related to channel of mystery customer, while perception on the importance of information about tourists is related to perception on the importance of channels of foreign research institution and rivals.

As the limits of this study, some issues must be expressed such as time limit and the accessibility of sampling enterprises. The findings may be more significant and more valid consequences can be created when the study would be repeated on a broader sample.

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