



TechTalk: Benchmarking and cross-cultural studies in tourism by Prof. Metin Kozak

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1. A brief overview of Professor Kozak's academic journey and accomplishments

Professor Kozak's academic journey began in 1986 when he started studying tourism in Turkey. After completing master's in 1991, he embarked on a Ph.D. journey in the United Kingdom, specializing in tourism. Over the years, he has worked in various countries, visited over 45 nations, and held positions in three different universities in Turkey, currently serving at Kadir Has University in Istanbul.

2. His research focus and its evolution over the years

In the 80s and 90s, there was a significant gap in research between Turkey and other countries. During his Ph.D. in England, Prof. Kozak explored various topics before stumbling upon benchmarking. This led to pioneering the concept of destination benchmarking in tourism, a major contribution to the field. Subsequently, his research shifted to consumer behavior,

destination marketing, decision making, and, more recently, the intersection of tourism with public health, technology, social media, and sustainability.

International collaborations have also played a pivotal role in his career. Being in a different country during his Ph.D. allowed him to establish powerful international networks. These collaborations have not only led to more impactful research outputs but also provided opportunities to explore diverse ideas and develop them into publishable papers or books. The international perspective gained through these collaborations is crucial for originality and recognition in the field of academia.

One of his major contributions was comparing Turkey and Spain as destinations using benchmarking. After four years, he became the world's sole expert in benchmarking and tourism. This research paved the way for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different destinations, setting a precedent for the academic community.

3. A journey marked by adaptability and evolution: future research plans

Looking ahead, he aims to understand consumer risk behavior in tourism and marketing. Exploring emerging trends like the intersection of technology and tourism, sustainability, and public health will be his focus in the coming years.

4. Most notable research projects or findings, along with their implications for the tourism industry

Dr. Kozak considers his Ph.D. work on benchmarking, specifically destination benchmarking, as a cornerstone of his academic career. This research delved into the differences in management, quality management, marketing, and consumer behavior from the 1960s to the early 2000s. Gathering a wealth of data over 40 years, he applied benchmarking to tourism destinations, producing numerous articles and even a book titled "Destination Benchmarking". However, practical challenges, especially data accessibility before 2010, limited further exploration. Today, with abundant data, revisiting benchmarking may be on the horizon.

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5. Cross-cultural comparisons in tourism

His second significant contribution involves cross-cultural comparisons between destinations and their visitors. This encompasses studying consumer behavior, perceptions, education styles, and more across diverse cultures. Several highly cited papers in the Google Scholar Global Score are rooted in this area, reflecting the global impact of his research in understanding and appreciating the intricacies of different cultures within the tourism context.

6. The evolution of benchmarking and cross-cultural studies in tourism research?

Benchmarking, particularly destination benchmarking, faced challenges due to limited data accessibility in the past. However, the current abundance of data presents new opportunities to revisit and advance this field. Cross-cultural studies, on the other hand, remain crucial as tourism becomes increasingly global. Understanding the nuances of diverse cultures is essential for creating inclusive and effective tourism strategies.

7. Envisioning future research directions or emerging trends in tourism that he finds intriguing

The proliferation of data and technology opens doors to new research avenues. Exploring big data applications in understanding consumer risk behavior and marketing in tourism is a direction he finds intriguing. Additionally, the intersection of technology, big data, sustainability, and public health with tourism presents exciting possibilities for further research.

8. Advantages that Turkey offers in terms of its rich heritage sites and culture?

Turkey's journey in the global tourism landscape is fascinating. Until the 1980s and 1990s, Turkey was not widely recognized on the international stage. The turning point came in 1980 when the country opened up to international influences in economics, politics, trade, and lifestyle. Faced with economic challenges, the government identified tourism as a key solution and provided significant financial support to the industry. This led to a remarkable increase in visitors, from just over 1 million annually to over 50 million today. Over the past four decades, Turkey's tourism industry has flourished, and it's now characterized by a powerful and professional sector.

Turkey's richness in history, culture, and location, combined with the warmth of its people and exceptional hospitality, forms the core of its allure. In his research, when comparing Turkey and Spain, Turkey stood out for its unparalleled hospitality. Visitors to Turkey often express pride in the warmth and generosity they experience. The country's historical and cultural depth adds to the overall appeal, creating a unique blend that captivates tourists from around the world.

9. The evolution of tourism industry in Turkey and the government's role in its development

The evolution of Turkey's tourism industry is closely tied to the government's strategic intervention in the 1980s. Faced with economic challenges, the government provided substantial support to the industry, including free lands and financial credits to entrepreneurs. This proactive approach led to a significant increase in visitor numbers, propelling Turkey into the global

tourism spotlight. Today, the industry is marked by a high level of professionalism, with educated and skilled individuals driving its success.

While Turkey's tourism industry has come a long way, there is always room for improvement. In my research comparing Turkey and Spain, while Turkey excels in hospitality, there are opportunities to enhance activities and facilities to further elevate the overall tourist experience. Continued investment and innovation in these areas will undoubtedly contribute to sustaining and enhancing Turkey's position as a premier tourist destination.

10. The role of academic journals in shaping discourse within the tourism field?

Academic journals are vital in shaping discourse within the tourism field. Serving on editorial boards, Professor Kozak has observed that the increasing number of journals in hospitality is positive for the field's growth. However, there is still a need for more journals, especially those focusing on specific themes. The competitive nature of tourism and hospitality journals, their commitment to ethical standards, and their readiness to adopt new trends and technologies make them stand out in the academic landscape.

11. Advice to a young journal like the *Journal of Smart Tourism*

For a young journal like the *Journal of Smart Tourism*, Professor Kozak advises to be patient and professional. Following international ethical standards and fostering a respectful relationship with reviewers are crucial aspects. The challenges faced in the early stages are part of the process, and with time, achievements and success will overshadow the initial difficulties. The journey of a journal, much like product development, has different stages, and persistence is key.

12. Current research interests, particularly within his specialized area of marketing and consumer behavior in an interdisciplinary context

The pandemic has given us a unique opportunity to reflect and reassess our research priorities. During this time, he has delved deeper into interdisciplinary aspects within tourism, hospitality, and beyond. Looking ahead, he is eager to explore the intersections of tourism with migration, public health, economics, business, marketing, and the realm of big data. This amalgamation of fields offers a comprehensive understanding, allowing us to address complex challenges and develop innovative solutions.

13. Envisioning the role of technology in shaping the future of academic research

The future of academic research will undoubtedly witness a transformation fueled by technology. As we move forward, we can anticipate an increased reliance on smart technology, not only as a tool but as a catalyst for collaboration across diverse fields. The integration of technology allows scholars from different disciplines to contribute to a holistic understanding of complex issues. Instead of focusing on isolated fragments, we now have the capability to see the entire picture and identify comprehensive solutions. This evolution promises a more enjoyable and creative future for academic research, particularly for the upcoming generations.

14. The future of smart tourism research in the coming years?

The trajectory of smart tourism research is undoubtedly fascinating, especially as it intersects with the evolution of tourism marketing. Over the last six decades, we've witnessed the integration of smart technology with service design, customer experiences, and overall tourism research. Looking forward, he foresees a deeper exploration of the synergy between smart tourism, customer experiences, and service design. These three components must remain seamlessly integrated to shape the future of tourism.

Moving beyond, researchers should explore the impact of smart tourism on well-being. This involves understanding how the systematic and well-organized nature of smart technology contributes to the lives of visitors, residents, and even employees. While robots might become part of this narrative in the future, it's essential to recognize that the influence of robots on customers and residents might take some time to materialize.

However, amidst the potential benefits of smart technology, there are challenges. For instance, in certain hotels, employees are prohibited from using smartphones during their shifts. This restriction aims to maintain a professional environment, preventing distractions that could negatively impact employee psychology, motivation, and customer interactions. It's crucial for researchers to delve into both the advantages and challenges posed by smart technologies in the realm of tourism.

In essence, the future of smart tourism research promises a comprehensive exploration of its intricate relationship with service design, customer experiences, and the well-being of all stakeholders involved. As technology continues to evolve, researchers must remain vigilant in addressing challenges to ensure the seamless integration of smart tourism into the fabric of the industry.


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