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Research Paper

Competitive positioning of winter tourism destinations: A comparative analysis of demand and supply sides perspectives–Cases from Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the competitive positions of five winter tourism destinations in Turkey. The explanatory sequential mixed method was used in order to compare the views of both the supply and demand sides. A questionnaire was first applied to current and potential visitors of the related destinations (n = 417), both in the field and online, followed by semi-structured interviews conducted with destination stakeholders (n = 12). It was observed that visitor perceptions positioned Uludağ with its tourism superstructure means and entertainment opportunities, Kartalkaya with its tourism superstructure quality and service quality, Erciyes, with its reasonable pricing policy and uncrowded slopes/lifts, Palandöken with its adequate number of lifts and snow quality, and Kartepe, with its beautiful scenery and accessibility. The assessments of the destination stakeholders demonstrated that strategies for strengthening the current position was not accepted at every destination and that only some destination stakeholders were inclined toward repositioning.

1. Introduction

One of the primary challenges in destination marketing is that of destination differentiation and the recognition of this differentiation by current and/or potential visitors. Differentiation is in fact becoming even more significant due to the rapidly increasing number of destinations in the marketplace and the increasing ambiguity of differentiation between them. This, in part, can be attributed to the effect of modernization and technological advances in tourism with standardization and 'dedifferentiation' in products and services the frequent, albeit not always intentional, outcome (Pike, 2008). Ries and Trout (2001), thus stated that the focus of marketing strategy must be on the 'battle' of differentiation in the customers' minds against competitors, and emphasized the importance of the positioning strategy.

Winter tourism destinations face particular challenges of dedifferentiation. In winter tourism (Hudson, 2003), the number of destinations has increased rapidly and the perceived image become dedifferentiated, especially since 1980s. Vanat (2017), for example, stated that there are more than 2000 winter tourism destinations and around 125 million ski tourists worldwide, despite the overall stability of the total number of visitors in the last 10 years. He also stated that mature markets reduced their growth while other markets were emerging and growing. In Turkey, as one of the growing markets, the number of winter tourism destinations has increased, especially after the 2000s, and the volume of the domestic market has improved significantly. Current studies indicate that the number of skiable areas in Turkey has reached 51 (Demiroğlu, 2014, 2015). It can be observed that the number of winter tourism destinations in Turkey, which is not often associated with winter tourism in international markets, is high with expectations that the numbers will increase further in the future. Thus, it can be argued that one of the most important marketing efforts for winter tourism destinations, both in the world and in Turkey, should be that of competitive positioning. In this context, the aim of this study is to examine the competitive positioning of five leading winter tourism destinations in Turkey and to reveal a better understanding of the competitive positioning of destinations.

The review of the literature that follows demonstrates that there are a limited number of studies on the positioning of winter tourism destination (Faullant, Matzler, & Füller, 2008; Frochot & Kreziak, 2008). Furthermore, it was observed that positioning studies conducted on winter tourism destinations or on other types of destinations were carried out only in the framework of visitor perceptions. This provides cause for concern in that the position the manager tries to create in the minds of the potential visitors is also important. In some cases, the current position might not generate sufficient profitability and repositioning efforts might be required. At that point, the positioning

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preferences of the managers become prominent. In this study, it is thus accepted that positioning is not just about visitor perceptions. As such, visitor perceptions and the views of destination stakeholders were assessed together.

2. Literature review

2.1. Destination positioning

According to Ries and Trout (2001) – pioneers of the field – positioning is differentiation of a brand in the mind of a potential customer when compared to competitors. As can be understood from the definition, the most important issue in positioning is differentiation in the competitive marketplace, as marketing is actually a battle and the minds of the customers are the battlefields for the brands. In today's competitive environment, neither being production oriented, as in the 1920s, nor being customer oriented, as in the 1950s, can bring success: today, success requires orientation for competitiveness. What is important in this case is to be perceived as different (Ries & Trout, 2001, 2006). Since tourism destinations have become dedifferentiated with the effect of globalization and modernization (Dann, 2000; Pike, 2008; Plog, 2000), it has become ever-more important to be perceived as different from other tourism destinations. At the forefront of the strategies that distinguish destinations from their competitors in the minds of customers and to enable them to gain a different position is competitive destination positioning/repositioning.

The positioning of a destination is the process of establishing a distinctive place of that destination in the minds of potential visitors (Gartner, 1989), and is about how a destination is perceived by current and potential visitors when compared to the competition. This perception could be either the result of the experience of the visitors or the result of the image management efforts by the destination itself (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Moreover, the perceived image of that destination is not sufficient for the determination of the competitive position of the said destination; images of rival destinations should be evaluated comparatively as well (Chen & Uysal, 2002). According to Pike (2008), the destination positioning process begins by determining the target market and general travel conditions in the target market, and then by identifying the competitors, determining the current/potential visitors, identifying perceptions about the strengths/weaknesses of each competitor, and identification of the opportunities/options for differentiated positioning. In the final stage, the competitive position is selected and implemented, and the success of the positioning strategy is assessed over time. According to the author, one of the most important issues in this process is the fact that the destination attribute(s) to be used in the positioning strategy should be important, salient and determinant in the procurement process.

The literature review demonstrates that there was an increase in studies on destination positioning, especially since 2000s. Coastal destinations (Botha, Crompton, & Kim, 1999; Pike & Mason, 2011), convention destinations (Baloglu & Love, 2005; Kim, Sun, & Ap, 2008; Kim, Yoon, & Kim, 2011), golf destinations (Kim & Chun, 2005), honeymoon destinations (Kim, Agrusa et al., 2005), and urban destinations (Prayag, 2007) were scrutinized in terms of positioning. Furthermore, countries (Claveria & Poluzzi, 2017; Gürsoy, Baloğlu, & Chi, 2009; Kim, Guo, & Agrusa, 2005; Li, Cheng, Kim, & Li, 2015) and provinces (Chen & Uysal, 2002) have been the subjects of positioning research as macro destinations. One of the most common techniques to analyze the competitive positions of destinations is perceptual mapping. In this technique, participants are asked to compare several competing destinations, and the competitive positions of the destinations are examined on maps that contain scattered attributes and destinations. Researchers mostly apply multidimensional scaling (MDS) or correspondence analysis to obtain the perceptual maps, and interpret the competitive positions of destinations according to the distance of destinations to the attributes on the maps. For example, Kim and Chun (2005) examined seven golf destinations within the scope of ten attributes and applied MDS to obtain perceptual map. They revealed that Japan's and China's competitive positions comprised of 'inexpensive travel cost', while Australia and Hawaii held the positions for 'comfortable environment', 'beautiful scenery', 'safety', 'recognition of golf resort', 'excellent golf resort facilities', 'good climate', and 'family tour programs'. Chen and Uysal (2002) applied correspondence analysis to obtain a perceptual map of ten competing states of the US as convention destinations. They stated that Virginia, North Carolina and Pennsylvania held strong competitive positions for hiking activities; Maryland and New York shared the lead on attending festivals and special events. Besides perceptual mapping, there other techniques exist to analyze the competitive positions of destinations, such as general linear models (GLM), paired *t*-tests, and importance-performance analysis (IPA). In these techniques, similar to perceptual mapping techniques, researchers measure comparative perceptions of participants towards several rival destinations within the context of some attributes. The attributes that show the strengths of destinations are defined as competitive positioning elements of destinations. For example, Baloğlu and Love (2005) examined the competitive positioning of Las Vegas, Chicago, Dallas, Atlanta, and Orlando from meeting planners' point of view and applied GLM. They revealed that Chicago was positioned with 'Restaurant/Retail/Accessibility', while Las Vegas, Chicago, and Orlando held the positions for 'Facilities'. Pike and Ryan (2004) examined competitive positioning of Rotorua, Bay of Islands, Taupo, Mount Maunganui, and Coromandel as short break destinations by applying IPA. They revealed that only Rotorua and Coromandel have distinctive positions. Rotorua has strong competitive position on 'the good life/infrastructure', and Coromandel's position comprised of 'getting away from it all'.

2.2. Positioning of winter tourism destinations

Winter tourism is one of the most rapidly growing markets within tourism. Despite the negative effect of global warming, the number of destinations and skiers is increasing constantly (Vanat, 2017). Skiers, especially in countries where winter tourism is well developed, have hundreds of choices in the destination selection process. Since it is hard to keep that many choices in the mind, skiers place only a few of those destinations in their minds, with only the destinations that apply effective positioning strategies can conquer distinctive places in the visitors' minds (Ries & Trout, 2001).

Although limited in number, studies on the positioning of winter tourism destinations can be found in the literature (Faullant et al., 2008; Frochot & Kreziak, 2008). Faullant et al. (2008) examined the competitive positions of ten winter tourism destinations based on the perceptions of satisfaction of two different market segments (under 25 years old and over 50 years old). According to the findings of this study, in the market segment under the age of 25, the similarities between St. Moritz and Obertauerni-Mayerhofen, and Lech/Zürs and Dolomiti Superski, were high. Also in this market segment, St. Moritz has a competitive position based on 'slopes' and 'parties' items, while Toggenburg has a competitive position based on 'price' and 'kids slopes' items. Frochot and Kreziak (2008) utilized focus group interviews in the study they conducted on six French winter tourism destinations. In the study, the destination brochures were evaluated by those who participated in the focus group interviews. In light of these evaluations, the researchers identified the images of these destinations. Findings demonstrated that destinations generally had similar images with this being negative for positioning. However, it was stated in the study that there were also attributes that differentiated the images of the related destinations and that the destination marketers should focus on these.

Sainaghi (2008) also conducted a study on the performance and positioning of winter tourism destinations. However, the competitive positions that the author scrutinized were only related to the duration of the stay. In this context, the author investigated nine ski destinations in the Italian Alps, and considered only whether the visitors purchased

daily or multiple-day ski pass as a criterion. Findings demonstrated that the destinations with the highest competitive advantage were Livigno, Bormino, and Aprica, which stood out with their long periods of stay.

2.3. A brief history of winter tourism in Turkey

The winter sports that commenced in the eastern regions of Turkey in the early 1900s became an element of tourism in the 1930s in Bursa/Uludağ. Between 1925 and 1933, the trips to Uludağ organized by the foreign teachers at Galatasaray High School in Istanbul are considered as the beginning of ski tourism in Turkey (Ülker, 2006). A hotel was inaugurated in Uludağ in 1929 by the government to provide services in the summer, and this hotel started serving in winter as well in 1933. Also in 1933, the Bursa Mountaineering Club was established (Kuşku, 2012). This club contributed immensely to Uludağ becoming a winter tourism centre. This club, founded by the prominent people in the city, has undertaken various enhancements such as accommodations, transportation, and security, and facilitated the establishment of Uludağ as a ski resort. In this context, Bursa Mountaineering Club has a unique place in winter sports and winter tourism history in Turkey (Şaktimur, 1994). The 1930s can thus be assessed as a decade in that winter tourism emerged in Turkey. In the 1930s, winter tourism was perceived as a part of western lifestyle in Turkey which, in turn, was consistent with the newly established Turkish Republic's policy of westernization. In this regards, all the investments in the 1930s towards winter tourism in Uludağ were made by the national government, with the local government members played important roles in the winter tourism movement (Tuna Ultav & Şavaşır, 2014).

The expansion of skiing in Turkey as a tourism industry also took place in Uludağ during the 1960s. Uludağ has dominated 70% of the winter tourism market until the late 1970s, although new destinations have begun to develop since the 1950s (Demiroğlu, 2014). Elmadağ (in 1956), Erciyes (in 1963), Palandöken (in 1969), Sarıkamış (in 1969) and Kartalkaya (in 1977) are some of the destinations that have been established over time and had an effect on the popularization of winter tourism in Turkey. Kartalkaya has been an especially important competitor to Uludağ since it has been in operation due to similar climatic conditions and similar distances to Istanbul which is the largest domestic market in winter tourism. Furthermore, although Palandöken and Sarıkamış are far from the main markets, along with the advantage of being in the eastern Turkey with colder climes, they became important competitors in the market with their snow reliability, snow quality and slope conditions. Although Erciyes was identified as a winter tourism centre in 1963, the main development was achieved during the 2000s, with municipal investments and establishment of the destination management organization. According to the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture & Tourism (2017a), there are a total of 28 winter tourism destinations in Turkey (Fig. 1), eight of which are active (Erciyes, Davraz, Ilgaz, Kartalkaya, Kartepe, Palandöken, Sarıkamış, Uludağ). Demiroğlu (2014), who conducted one of the most recent studies in this field, stated that there are 51 skiable areas in Turkey based on his personal observations and experiences.

3. Method

3.1. Study area

In 2012, when the scope of study was determined, there were 28 winter tourism destinations in Turkey, and eight of those were 'active destinations' (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture & Tourism, 2012). To determine the study area, these active destinations were evaluated by taking into account the distance to the main markets (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir), total bed capacity, number of lifts and lift capacity, which are important objective criteria for winter tourism, and leading five destinations were included in the scope of study. Table 1 shows the situation of eight active destinations with regards to each criterion.

As shown in Table 1, Uludağ, Kartalkaya and Kartepe featured in the top five for all criteria and as such were included in the scope of the study. Despite the fact that it is far from the main markets, Palandöken was also selected, since it is in top five in terms of bed capacity, lift number and capacity of lifts. The last destination included in the scope of study was Erciyes due to it being in the top five in terms of lift number, capacity of lifts and distance from main markets.

3.2. Research design

The study was conducted with use of the explanatory sequential mixed method. In this methodology, the researcher collects and analyzes quantitative data in the first stage and then plans the second stage (qualitative study) using the findings of the first stage. The main point here is that the qualitative data collection stage is directly based on the quantitative findings. This pattern facilitates the clarification of responses taken at the quantitative level by qualitative interviews (Creswell, 2013). In the present study, initially, the perceptions of the demand side were measured by using the survey technique. Then the quantitative data were analyzed to reveal visitor perceptions regarding competitive positions of destinations, and the results were used to create semi-structured interview forms, since the main goal of interviews was to obtain the interpretations of supply side towards visitor perceptions.

3.3. Quantitative research

3.3.1. Questionnaire design

At this stage, primarily, scale items were determined that would be used to measure both the perceptions of visitors toward the importance level of destination attributes and the current situation of destinations within the scope of these attributes. In this context, first, 36 items were identified based on the studies that were conducted within the context of themes such as competitive positioning (Faullant et al., 2008; Frochot & Kreziak, 2008; Kim & Chun, 2005; Kim et al., 2008), competitiveness (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Hallmann, Müller, & Feiler, 2014; Hudson, Ritchie, & Timur, 2004; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Zemla, 2008a), image (Atay & Akyurt, 2009; Zemla, 2008b), performance-satisfaction (Hudson & Shephard, 1998; Kyle, Theodorakis, Karageorgiou, & Lafazani, 2010; Matzler, Füller, & Faullant, 2007; Scorgie, 2008), and destination choice (Konu, Laukkanen, & Komppula, 2011; Won, Bang, & Shonk, 2008). To test the content validity of the draft scale, expert reviews were taken into account (the expert reviews were obtained in two rounds). As a result, ten Turkish and seven international (a total of 17) specialists on fields such as winter tourism, destination marketing, destination management, etc. were identified. In the first round, ten of them provided feedback (nine academicians, one mountain hotel manager). This feedback was examined using the Lawshe (1975) content validity calculation method. Lawshe (1975) stated that the content validity ratio should be 0.62 when the number of experts is 10. As a result of calculation, the content validity of four items was found to be low and these items were excluded. In the second round, five people selected from the same expert group were interviewed and no modification was required except for certain small formal arrangements. Subsequently, a pilot study was conducted on a sample of 34 people in Uludağ using the 32-item draft scale. The pilot study demonstrated that the scale was reliable at the level of 0.97. However, as a result of the oral feedback obtained from the participants, it was realized that the prices for ski instruction in Turkey were determined by the ski federation and the same prices were valid in every destination and the related item (ski instruction prices) was removed from the scale. As a result, the scale included 31 items. These 31 items were used both for the measurement of destination attributes' importance and for destination assessments.

The questionnaire consists of four sections. In the first section, the importance of 31 items was measured using the range of 1 (not

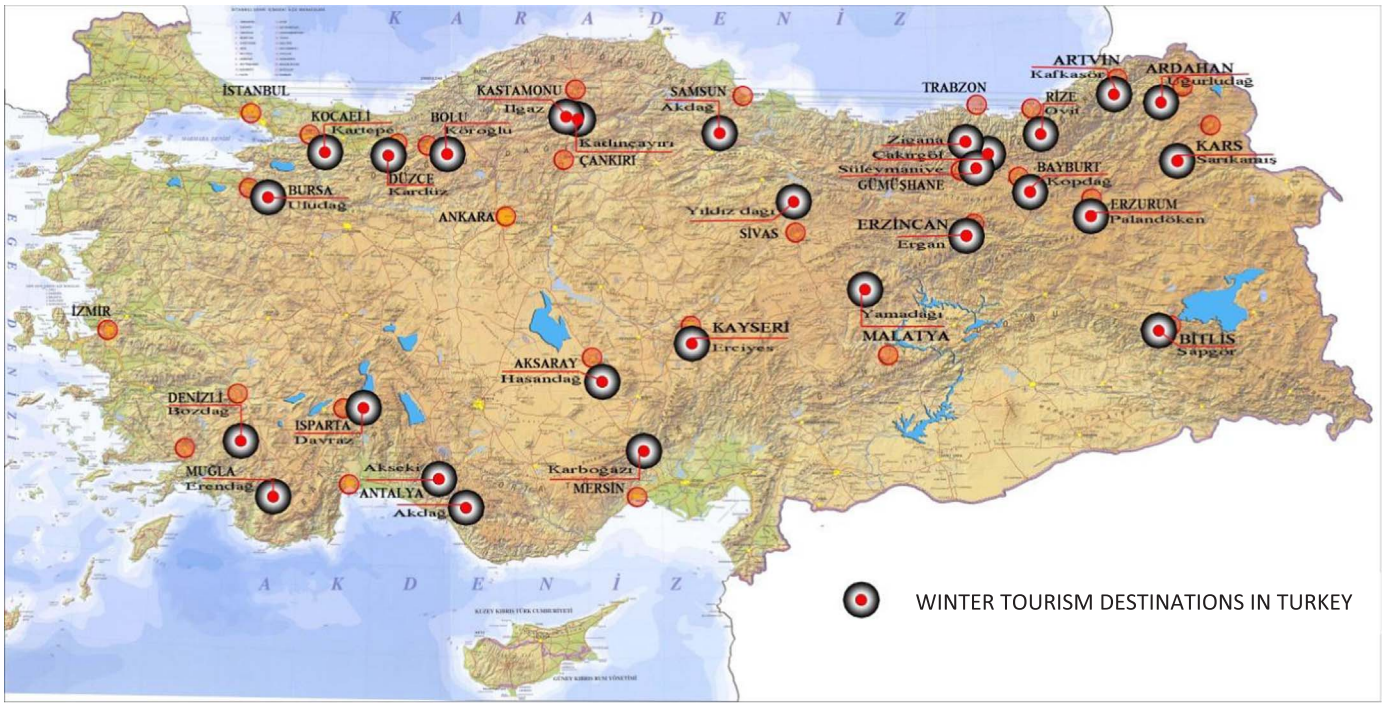

Fig. 1. Winter tourism map of Tukey.
Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture & Tourism (2017b).

Table 1
Criteria to select destinations for scope of study.
Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2012)

Destinations	Bed capacity	Lift number	Capacity of lifts (person/hour)	Distance from main markets (km)		
				Ankara	İstanbul	İzmir
Palandöken	2100[a]	16[a]	24.563[a]	873	1240	1472
Uludağ	1400[a]	20[a]	15.000[a]	394[a]	230[a]	334[a]
Kartalkaya	1200[a]	12[a]	7.000[a]	199[a]	266[a]	611[a]
Kartepe	800[a]	4[a]	6.400[a]	362[a]	117[a]	473[a]
Ilgaz	600[a]	2	1.439	247[a]	519[a]	864
Sarıkamış	500	3	4.148	1081	1448	1680
Davraz	467	3	2.800	412	598[a]	403[a]
Erciyes	460	9[a]	4.650[a]	312[a]	766	846[a]

[a] Shows the top five destinations for each criterion.

important at all) to 5 (extremely important).[1] The second section included the evaluation of five destinations within the scope of 31 destination attributes. Participants were asked to score the destinations between 1 and 5 points in this section. For the items that related to price, 1 = 'extremely expensive', 5 = 'extremely appropriate', and for the other 27 items 1 = 'extremely weak', 5 = 'excellent'.[2] No statement was attributed to the intervening numbers (2, 3, 4). Alreck and Settle (1995) indicated that such scales are a variation of the numerical scales, namely 'multi-rating lists', and numerical scales are scales with equal intervals. Similarly, Brace (2008) noted that these are equal interval scales. In the third section, participants were asked to state whether they visited the five destinations in past five years. In the fourth section, questions on general demographics, and winter tourism behavior were included.

3.3.2. Data collection and sampling

The quantitative data was collected between December 2013 and August 2014 (eight months) in the field and online. The population of the study included current and potential domestic visitors of the five destinations, namely Erciyes, Kartalkaya, Kartepe, Palandöken, and Uludağ. The study sample consisted of 417 domestic visitors. Since the goal of quantitative data collection process was to obtain both current and potential customers' perceptions, participants were not questioned whether they had visited all the five destinations. However, to make sure that they are qualified enough to assess five destinations, skiers who have experience at least two of the given destinations were included in the sample. Thereby, the purposive sampling method was applied. Due to the low snowfall in 2013–2014, the season was low, and on-site data collection efforts were below expectations. It was therefore possible to reach only 169 individuals. Efforts to collect online data at this point were effective: 429 individuals were accessed through Turkey's most comprehensive online winter sports platform, www.skiciyiz.biz (it had 15,296 members in August 2014). A total of 554

[1] The question statement in the survey regarding importance scale was: 'How important are the 31 items below for you when you select a ski resort? Please mark a number for each item from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (extremely important).'.

[2] The question statement in the survey regarding destination evaluation scale was: 'Please give points to the five destinations below within the scope of 31 items from 1 to 5 (1 is the lowest, 5 is the highest). 1 means extremely weak – 5 means excellent for the items between 1 and 27. And 1 means extremely expensive- 5 means extremely appropriate for the items between 28 and 31.'.

questionnaires were completed, and the quantitative data collection process was terminated since 417 of these responses assessed/compared all five destinations and that this figure was considered sufficient for positioning analysis.

3.3.3. Characteristics of participants

The sample of the study mostly consisted of males (81%), individuals aged 44 and below (89%), with a monthly income of 2000 TL or more (83%), and residents of Istanbul (53%) and Ankara (17%). Furthermore, 90% of the participants obtained information about the destinations via the Internet and their friends, 44% stayed for two nights (21%) or three nights (23%) at ski resorts, 50% used snowboard and 40% skied. The sample mostly consisted of current visitors of five destinations that were examined in the study. Descriptive analysis on past experiences of participants revealed that 71% of them visited all these destinations in the previous five years (2009–2013). Furthermore, 95% of all participants have visited Uludağ, 91% of them visited Kartalkaya, 84% of them visited Kartepe, 82% of them visited Erciyes, and 82% of them visited Palandöken. In this context, it is possible to interpret that the sample is qualified enough for competitive positioning analysis, since they are familiar with the destinations. One limitation was that the male participant rate was found to be too high in terms of representativeness of population. However, this rate is not unfamiliar with the domestic winter tourism market in Turkey. Previous studies conducted on winter tourism market in Turkey had also sampled with a high male rate. For example, in Sağlık and Kocaman (2014) study, which examined service quality in Palandöken, male representation was 75%. Likewise, in Atay and Akyurt (2009) study, which was about Uludağ's destination image, the male rate of representation was 60.2%.

3.3.4. Validity and reliability of quantitative data

The surface validity of the scale was provided within the context of the assessments of the academicians in the field of tourism in the social circuit of the author and the participants of the pilot study. As explained in the 'questionnaire design' section, content validity was accomplished with two rounds of obtaining expert opinion. For the reliability of scale on the other hand, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were determined, and reliability analyzes demonstrated that the 31-item scale was a highly reliable, both in terms of importance measurements and destination assessment (Table 2).

3.3.5. Quantitative data analysis

Correspondence analysis was utilized to reveal the competitive positions of destinations in the customers' minds. Correspondence analysis identifies the interrelationships between the variable values in the rows and columns in a cross-tabulation (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). In the present study, row and column variables were destinations and destination attributes. Therefore, the applied correspondence analysis revealed the relations of the destinations with the variables and interrelationships between the destinations on a perceptual map. This perceptual map demonstrated both the positions of destinations in the mind of the visitor and the similarities between the destinations. Since cross tabulation is needed to perform correspondence analysis, the scores of 4 and 5 attributed to the destinations for each item were added and necessary cross tabulations were established within the obtained frequencies and the analyzes were then conducted.

3.4. Qualitative research

3.4.1. Semi-structured interview form design

The form included three sections. In the first section, interviewees were asked to introduce themselves and provide information about their work experience in the relevant destination. The second section contained questions towards strengths, weakness, and close competitors of the destination and the attributes used in marketing communication.

Table 2
Reliability levels of scales.

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Winter Destination Attributes' Importance Scale	31	.927
Winter Destination Evaluation Scale (Erciyes)	31	.938
Winter Destination Evaluation Scale (Kartalkaya)	31	.944
Winter Destination Evaluation Scale (Kartepe)	31	.951
Winter Destination Evaluation Scale (Palandöken)	31	.947
Winter Destination Evaluation Scale (Uludağ)	31	.944

The questions in the third section were based on quantitative findings due to the explanatory sequential mixed method utilized. The objective of this section was to identify the views of supply side on the competitive positioning perceptions of the visitors. In this section, interviewees were asked to state whether they agreed with the visitor perceptions, and if they did not agree, what could have been done to change these perceptions. Thus, in the third section, information about the quantitative research phase was initially provided and findings on the competitive positions of the destinations were presented, then their assessments were obtained. Since different findings were obtained for each destination, five different interview forms were designed, albeit the first two sections of all forms were exactly the same.

3.4.2. Qualitative data collection process

After developing the semi-structured interview forms, destinations' representatives to be interviewed were determined. Observations of the authors of the current study on winter tourism destinations in Turkey showed that destination managers were one of the most important representatives. However, only two destinations (Erciyes and Palandöken) had destination management organizations (DMOs) in January 2015, when the interviewees were selected. For the destinations without a DMO, hotel owners or managers were considered as suitable representatives, since the hotel owners in Turkish winter tourism destinations invest not only for the hotels and restaurants but also for skiing superstructure such as lifts, slopes, and artificial snow; and they play important roles in destination marketing, in addition to marketing of their own hotels. The tourism superstructure of winter tourism destination in Turkey mostly consisted of only a few hotels and restaurants, except for Uludağ (there were 18 hotels). For example, in 2015 when the interviews were conducted, there were three hotels in Erciyes, five hotels in Kartalkaya, five hotels in Palandöken, and one hotel in Kartepe. Therefore, it was found appropriate to limit the number of people to be interviewed to three in each destination.

Uludağ and Kartalkaya were the destinations that did not have a DMO. Therefore, only hotel owners or/and managers were interviewed in these destinations. In Uludağ, three hotel owners who had experience in the destination since 1970's were interviewed. In Kartalkaya, two general managers and one marketing manager from two largest and oldest hotels were interviewed. On the other hand, there were DMOs in Erciyes and Palandöken. Thus, a vice general manager of Erciyes's DMO and a marketing manager of Palandöken's DMO were interviewed, in addition to two hotel general managers for each destination. In Kartepe, although several attempts were made and appointments were requested, no positive response was obtained and it was not possible to conduct an interview with a manager. Therefore, the views of the supply side were not obtained for Kartepe, and qualitative data collection process terminated with 12 interviews. All interviews were held between January 13 and March 11, 2015.

3.4.3. Validity and reliability of qualitative data

In terms of the validity of qualitative research, the concepts of internal validity and external validity are emphasized in the literature (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Merriam (2009) mentioned six strategies to determine internal validity of qualitative data: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, negative case analysis, identification of researchers' biases, and peer examination. In this study, it can be argued that all strategies were applied except for member control. For example, in the scope of triangulation, both multiple data collection methods (quantitative, qualitative data and secondary sources) as well as multiple data sources (views of supply and demand sides) were utilized. In the scope of long-term observation, interviews were conducted during the entire winter season and it was observed that the interviewees started to narrate basically specific information at each destination, so the interviews were ended. For negative case analysis, information that conflicted with the information provided by the destination representatives was scanned. Thus, both the conflicting statements of interviewees and critical assessments found in the secondary resources were investigated. Within the scope of identification of researchers' biases, attention was paid to conduct objective evaluations, especially in comparison between destinations, and not to act biased against any destination. Finally, within the framework of peer examination, the reviews of three academics in the field of tourism were utilized to establish internal validity.

External validity is related to the generalizability of the findings and the topics that are worth an attention within this scope are adequacy of the number of interviewees, presentation of sufficient detail about the research process, and the presentation of findings in such a way that the findings could be compared. In the study, the number of interviewees identified at five ski destinations and the qualifications of the interviewees were sufficient to reflect the destination attributes, as noted in the description of the qualitative data collection process. Also, all stages and elements in the qualitative research process (interviewees, interview process, interview locations and dates) were explained in detail. Furthermore, the findings obtained as a result of qualitative research were reported systematically and the findings could be compared to the findings in other studies (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

On reliability, Merriam (2009) stated that qualitative research should focus on the question of how consistent is the achieved outcome with the collected data, rather than the conventional reliability. Thus, it is important to review the consistency of the obtained findings and the data after the findings are reported. The author also stated that triangulation, expert review and the researcher's perspective techniques, which are applied within the scope of internal validity, must also be considered for reliability. Furthermore, the author pointed out the significance of the auditing technique for reliability. The auditing technique is related to noting everything from the beginning to the end of the research and continuously auditing these notes. In the present study, the techniques proposed by Merriam (2009) were applied to determine the reliability of the data. Thus, as mentioned in the assessment of internal validity, triangulation, peer examination, and researchers' biases criteria were satisfied. Furthermore, following the emergence of the qualitative research finding report, the consistency of the presented results was examined. In the context of the auditing technique, although a systematic diary was not kept, actions conducted during the research process were noted and interventions were conducted when necessary.

3.4.4. Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative analysis technique that was used in the present study is called a multiple case study. In this context, interviews were conducted in four destinations and visitor perceptions were analyzed comparatively, based on competitive positioning of destinations. Since the analysis of qualitative data was based on quantitative findings and the themes to be assessed were predetermined, a coding procedure was not implemented and no software was used. When presenting the findings, interviewees were coded based on the relevant destination and the title of interviewee. For example, in Erciyes, the destination manager was coded as EDM1 (Erciyes, Destination Manager 1), hotel managers were coded as EHM1, EHM2 (Erciyes, Hotel Manager 1–2), and so on.

Table 3
Importance levels of destination attributes.

Destination attributes	N	Mean	Std. deviation
1. Snow reliability	417	4722	0.6312
2. Adequate number of lifts	417	4719	0.6433
3. Maintenance of ski slopes	417	4671	0665
4. Value for money	417	4638	0.7008
5. Lift queues	417	4624	0.7303
6. Variety of ski slopes	417	4568	0.7008
7. Ski pass prices	417	4556	0.8129
8. Transportation facilities	417	4535	0756
9. Safety (preventing ski accidents)	417	4518	0,.8634
10. First aid services	417	4480	0.8578
11. Accommodation prices	417	4432	0.8468
12. Uncrowded slopes	417	4396	0.8628
13. Snow quality	417	4379	0.7692
14. Security (police services)	417	4345	0946
15. Speed of lifts	417	4281	0.8635
16. Conservation of natural environment	417	4249	1.0539
17. Overall service quality	417	4242	0.8212
18. Food & beverage prices	417	4235	0967
19. Food & beverage facilities	417	4041	0.9332
20. Info services	417	3878	1.0593
21. Quality of accommodation	417	3823	1,0034
22. Variety of accommodation	417	3741	1.1224
23. Quality of rental ski equipment	417	3664	1.3507
24. Beautiful scenery	417	3571	1.0855
25. Rental ski equipment prices	417	3566	1.3975
26. Image	417	3482	1191
27. Quality of ski instruction	417	3453	1.3844
28. Ski facilities for kids	414	3365	1.3969
29. Après ski	417	3158	1.2321
30. Night entertainment	417	2849	1.2476
31. Shopping facilities	417	2506	1.2993

4. Results

4.1. Importance levels of destination attributes

The importance levels of the attributes are extremely critical for competitive positioning strategy due to the attribute that differentiates a destination from competitors needing to be important enough to effect purchase behavior as well (Pike, 2008). Therefore, in this study, importance levels of attributes were measured from the demand-side point of view, with results presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the leading issue that participants deemed important was snow reliability. Especially, when considering the problem of snowfall that occurred during recent years, it could be argued that this problem had a significant effect on the visitors. When the other high-importance items were considered, it was understood that ski tourists prioritized skiing opportunities such as slopes, lifts and snow, and value for money, ease of access and safety. The attributes with a lower level of importance were shopping facilities, après ski, ski facilities for kids, image, and quality of ski instruction.

4.2. Competitive positioning of the destinations: comparison of the views of supply and demand sides

4.2.1. Demand-side perspectives

Correspondence analysis was conducted to reveal demand-side perspectives on competitive positioning of destinations. The chi-square value (2583.546) obtained in the analysis was larger than the critical chi-square value (146.564) (Table 4), indicating that the

Table 4
Correspondence analysis values.

Dimensions	Eigenvalues	Inertia	Chi-square	Significance	Proportion of inertia	
					Accounted for	Cumulative
1	0272	0074			65.5	66.5
2	0160	0026			22.7	88.2
3	0105	0011			9.8	98
4	0048	0002			2	100
Total		0113	2583.546	.000a	100	100

a.120 degrees of freedom.

interdependencies of items and destinations were significant (Bendixen, 1996). Furthermore, since the significance value was also lower than 0.05 (0.000), it can be argued that the correlation between rows and columns was highly significant (Blasius & Greenacre, 2006). The inertia values used in the correspondence analysis to replace the term of variance (Dolgun & Alpar, 2011) reflect the total variance in the crosstab (Greenacre, 2007) and the total variance explained by each dimension (Doey & Kurta, 2011). The inertia value (11.3%) in Table 4 indicates that the total variance explained was low. However, according to the chi-square statistics, the test was significant. Inertia value (88.2%) indicates that the two-dimensional structure was sufficient for advanced analyses (Hair et al., 2010).

4.2.1.1. Visitor perceptions towards similarities between destinations. To reveal similar destinations from the visitor's point of view, distances of destinations to each other on the perceptual map were taken into consideration, and the closer destinations were considered as similar and closer competitor destinations. According to the perceptual map reflected in Fig. 2, the most similar winter tourism destinations were Erciyes and Palandöken. In this context, Palandöken and Erciyes could be considered as closer competing destinations to each other. Uludağ and Karalkaya were also closer competitors to each other. Kartepe, on the other hand, was located at a different position when compared to other destinations.

Defining the similar destinations makes only a limited level of contribution to competitive positioning strategies of destinations. The attributes that create similarity and importance levels of these attributes need to also be examined, because similarity creating attributes could be considered as elements of shared competitive positions between destinations. The importance level, on the other hand, shows whether these items are worth enough to compete for. The perceptual map shows that the main attributes that create similarities between Erciyes and Palandöken are *lift queues* and *value for money*, since these items were at similar distances to both of these destinations. In addition, importance levels of these attributes show that they are worth enough to compete for. Because visitors perceived these items as important at high level (value for money = 4638; lift queues = 4624). In this context, it is important for Erciyes and Palandöken to seize the position relating these items. On the other hand, Kartalkaya and Uludağ have different situation in terms of similarity, since the attribute that creates similarity - image - was not perceived as highly important (mean = 3482; rank = 26). Thus, it could be argued that its possibility of influencing the competitive positioning strategy was low, and therefore does not constitute a point of conflict.

4.2.1.2. Visitor perceptions towards competitive positions of destinations. Fig. 2 shows that each destination has a unique competitive position in visitors' minds. For example, Uludağ was the closest destination to the items of *shopping facilities, image, night entertainment, après ski,* and *the variety of accommodation* on the perceptual map. In other words, Uludağ has a position in the minds of visitors with attributes related to the diversity of non-ski entertainment and the variety of available tourism superstructure. Visitor perceptions towards importance of attributes revealed that the most important of these attributes was the *variety of accommodation*. Therefore, the findings revealed that Uludağ could develop a strategy of positioning based on the variety of its tourism superstructure, especially using the advanced status of accommodation facilities and other tourism capabilities in conjunction. Kartalkaya is close to the items such as *food and beverage facilities, quality of accommodation, overall service quality, info services, quality of ski instruction* on the perceptual map. Among these items, those with the highest level of importance were *overall service quality* and *food and beverage facilities*. It is therefore possible to argue that these items were more effective

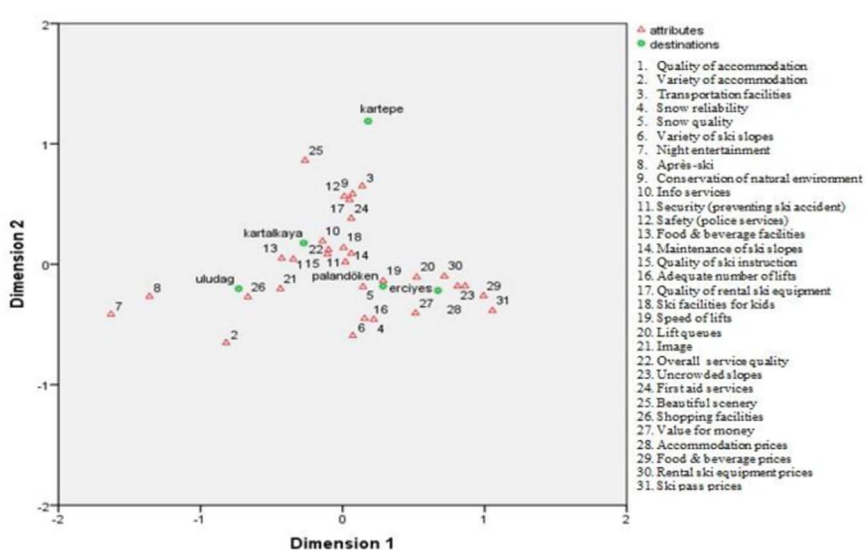

Fig. 2. Perceptual map of destinations.

on the competitive position of the destination. However, there is also the possibility that the destination managers could consider all or some of these attributes together as a single attribute. For example, *food and beverage facilities, quality of accommodation* and *overall service quality* items could be considered together and a positioning strategy could be developed based on the 'quality of tourism superstructure'.

Items that were closest to Erciyes on the perceptual map were *accommodation prices, rental ski equipment prices* and *uncrowded slopes*. Also, the items of *value for money, lift queues, food and beverage prices* and *lift ticket prices* were close to Erciyes. In this context, it could be argued that Erciyes has a position with reasonable prices and uncrowded slopes. *Value for money* and *lift queues* were among the five items that were most important for the participants. Thus, it could be argued that these two items had a significant effect on Erciyes' positioning. Palandöken is positioned closest to *speed of lifts* and *snow quality* items on the perceptual map. Furthermore, it is the closest destination to the items of *adequate number of lifts, snow reliability* and *variety of ski slopes*. This demonstrated that Palandöken is a destination that has good slopes, lifts and snow in the minds of the visitors. When the importance levels of these items are examined, it could be observed that the items with the highest importance were *snow reliability* and *adequate number of lifts*. Thus, it could be argued that these two basic ski attributes were the most significant elements of Palandöken's competitive position.

On the other hand, Kartape is positioned far from the other destinations and most of the items. This demonstrates that Kartepe does not resemble other destinations and was positioned in the minds of visitors with very limited number of items. The closest item on the perceptual map to Kartepe was *beautiful scenery*. Furthermore, the item of *transportation facilities* was also close to Kartepe. Thus, it could be argued that Kartepe has a position whit its ease of access and beautiful scenery. *The transportation facilities* among these items was more important for the visitors. Therefore, it could be concluded that transportation facilities were more important for Kartepe's competitive position as well.

4.2.2. Supply-side perspectives

4.2.2.1. Destination representatives' views on similarities of destinations. Destination representatives for the most part justified similarity perceptions of the visitors. In this context, those interviewed in Uludağ (UHM1, UHM2, UHM3) and Kartalkaya (KHM1, KHM2, KHM3) supported the idea that these two destinations were similar and very close competitors. The situation is somewhat different for Erciyes (EDM1, EHM1, EHM2) and Palandöken (PHM1, PHM2, PHM3). Interviewees considered the perception of similarity as justified in both destinations, however they considered Uludağ as a competitor based on market dominance and being the first winter destination in Turkey. Thus, it could be argued that the destination representatives and the visitors had different opinions about the competition between Erciyes and Palandöken. One of the key findings on the topic of competition was that although Erciyes was not yet considered to be of adequate capacity, it was regarded as the second most important competitor by the representatives of the three other destinations. However, certain destination representatives pointed out that Erciyes was a rising destination with public investments and destinations such as Kartalkaya and Uludağ were places that survive with private-sector investments and did not consider the competition between Erciyes and other destinations fair. For example, KHM1 indicated that the roads leading to Erciyes Mountain are like intercity highways and the municipality keeps them open, while the 23 km mountain road leading to Kartalkaya is kept open by the efforts of the hoteliers with their own resources at high cost.

Statements of destination representatives generally revealed that stakeholders do not develop differentiation strategies and they are not aware of the significance of differentiation. Furthermore, some of the representatives ignore the domestic competition. For example, EDM1 stated that they do not see the destinations in Turkey as competitors, and says that their main competitors are the European destinations. In addition, UHM1 said the following within the context of differentiation:

> Yes, if we put in a row, Uludağ comes first, Kartalkaya comes second, then Erciyes and Palandöken comes. But, I don't think we (Uludağ) need to do something for image differentiation. If you provide better service, slopes and lifts, customers will choose your destination.

4.2.2.2. Destination representatives' views on competitive destination positioning. In Uludağ, destination representatives generally justified the perceived destination position (UHM2, UHM3), but they also thought that some ski elements such as variety of slopes could also be used (UHM1). UHM2 stated that even people who never came to Uludağ have an image of night entertainment and après ski in their minds about Uludağ. UHM2 also stated that this image is a result of popularity of Uludağ's night life for many years. UHM1, indicating that transportation, skiing facilities and recreational elements were highlighted in Uludağ's promotion efforts at a limited level (participating in national-international fairs and self-promotion activities of hotels), stated that promotional activities were effective in the current perception in addition to the past experiences. However, UHM1 did not find it fair for Uludağ to be remembered by only its entertainment and tourism superstructure and thought that ski facilities should be a part of Uludağ's image. UHM1 indicated that Uludağ is a destination 'that provides everything together' in contrast to other destinations, and further mentioned the following:

> … The slope ranges are sufficient, highest number of lifts is here, there are 22 lifts in Uludağ. Our bed count is three times larger than others. There is no night entertainment in other locations …But as a disadvantage; we receive too many excursionists during the weekends. This, in turn, negatively affects our traffic problem here. And a lot of people enter the slopes without control, as skiers or on foot. This is our weakest point. (UHM1).

The views of the destination representatives of Kartalkaya indicated that there was a consensus between the supply and demand sides about the destination positioning. KHM1 and KHM3 found it significant to have such a positioning in the minds of visitors, and they expressed that this perception was justified. KHM2 also supported perceived competitive position and argued that they have reached a certain level of quality in Kartalkaya with their quality of service policies. KHM2, indicating that they also emphasized the quality of service in the limited number of promotional activities they conducted, emphasized the effect of low number of enterprises in preventing a decrease in quality perception. KHM2 also talked about visitor perceptions:

> That is correct. This image has developed. We already continue to work in this direction. We do not let it go by saying "We had a good season, we already sell it all." We sit down and assess every year how to conserve the image. It is pleasing to observe such an impression among our guests.

The three destination representatives interviewed in Erciyes stated that the perception of competitive position by the visitors is accurate. Two hoteliers (EHM1, EHM2) indicated that services such as accommodation, ski passes, food and beverages, ski equipment for rent in Erciyes were provided at reasonable prices compared to other destinations, so it was important that the visitors perceive destination with reasonable prices. The destination manager (EDM1) also stated that the current position in the visitor's mind is accurate, especially considering the ski pass prices, which are based on the understanding of social state by the municipality, and the prices in restaurants run by the municipality. However, EDM1 stated that using low price positioning as a marketing strategy would not add value to the Erciyes brand and that they could not adopt such a strategy as destination management organization. Thus, they would look for ways for repositioning, elements

directly related to ski sports could be utilized in the repositioning policy. However, EDM1 indicated that they have not initiated comprehensive marketing efforts, especially since they are not ready for the supply of tourism superstructure yet, and that when some of the 21 hotel projects underway would be completed, these could carry certain number of activities, including actions towards positioning. In this context, EDM1, who said that they were conducting certain preparations and that they were initiating marketing efforts albeit small-scale, stated that they prioritized topics that they were better at such as the slope length-variety (102 km), lifts (25,573 m), ease of access (20 min from the city centre), and artificial snow systems (75% of the slopes). Furthermore, EDM1 said that they frequently used 'cultural skiing' incentive, which was developed in association with Cappadocia destination, and since Kayseri was close to several cities in Turkey, they adopted the slogan of 'the closest ski resort in the world' based on the advanced highway and air travel facilities. EDM1 discussed the competitive positioning perception based on low prices as follows:

> … Yes, prices are very reasonable compared to other destinations. Within the scope of social responsibility, our mayor says: "Even someone who works for minimum wage, may come at least twice or three times during the season, with two children, but without feeling uneasy. We established this destination with taxpayers' money." He thinks that they should have fun as well.

In Palandöken, there was a high consensus between the destination stakeholders and the visitors. According to the supply-side (PHM1, PHM2, PDM3), the features that creating competitive advantage are proximity to the city centre and the airport, variety and length of the slopes, snow quality, snow reliability, and adequate/comfortable mechanical facilities. In this context, PHM2 considered the competitive position in the visitors' mind based on ski elements as 'accurate designation'. PHM1 stated that ski tourists look for good slopes, snow and lifts, which are all available at Palandöken, therefore, the visitors were right. PHM1 indicated that they focused on snow quality, slope variety and lift capacity advantages, and especially snow reliability in promotional activities. They used the slogan 'snow is lodging in Erzurum this year' in 2014 when there was a countrywide snowfall problem. PHM1 also stated that Palandöken is the most affordable destination, and even more affordable than Erciyes that stands out with its low price positioning. When compared to the destinations in the west, PHM1 argued that there were significant differences based on the Kartalkaya example: 'Turkey's cheapest ski pass prices are in Erzurum. When you go to Kartalkaya on weekends you pay 120 Liras per daily ski pass, here it is only 35 Liras.' PHM2 said:

> Almost the longest slopes in Turkey are here. You know, for the first time in 2011, Universiade Winter Olympics was held in Turkey and the biggest tourism investments in Turkey at that time were made in Erzurum. Bowling, ice-skating, ice hockey halls, high boards were built. Konaklı Ski Resort was built. Now, in the Grand Erzurum project, Palandöken and Konaklı would be joined to form a total of 150 kms of slopes. The structure of the snow is different and one of the most important and distinctive features is the artificial snow system we have on the whole mountain… But, nightlife and après ski facilities are not sufficient, and transportation costs are above average.

Although appointments were requested several times from the destination representatives in Kartepe, the interviews could not be conducted and the views of the supply-side could not be reflected here, since they did not reply to our interview requests.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Destination positioning studies generally focus on the perceptions of the demand side and aim to identify the current competitive positions in the visitor's mind (Faullant et al., 2008; Kim & Chun, 2005; Kim et al., 2005; Prayag, 2007). Such a focus is natural for studies as it is considered that the current position in the potential customers' mind is the most important factor in determining the positioning strategy (Ries & Trout, 2001). However, the competitive position in the customers' mind is not always profitable and effective for product/service providers. Because, the desired competitive position and the position in the customers' mind might not be the same (due to the wrong strategies applied) or the current positioning might no longer be effective due to factors such as variations in the competitive structure and customer attitudes. In such circumstances, one of the most important issues that managers need to focus on is repositioning based on different attributes (Trout & Rivkin, 1997). Thus, managers' own repositioning assessments are also extremely significant to determine a strategy. For this reason, it was considered that it would not be sufficient to measure only visitor perceptions during the assessment of the competitive positions of the destinations in the present study and the evaluations of the destination managers on these perceptions were also considered. Thus, whether the destination representatives would base their actions on the current positioning, and which attributes they could select if they desire to reposition were revealed. For example, Erciyes was positioned with reasonable prices in the visitor's mind. However, destination managers stated that low price positioning would not add a value to the Erciyes brand and they could shape their marketing communication strategies based on the framework of improved skiing elements with investments conducted in recent years. As was done in previous studies (e.g. Chen & Uysal, 2002; Kim et al., 2011), if the current study was based solely on visitor perceptions, it would probably be argued that the most adequate strategy for Erciyes was low price positioning. Similarly, in Uludağ which was positioned with its night entertainment, apres ski, and variety of tourism superstructure, supply-side considered that the current position is not profitable. On the other hand, in Palandöken which was positioned with its quality/adequate lifts and snow quality and in Kartalkaya which was positioned with its quality tourism superstructure and services, supply-side views revealed a high consensus between visitors and representatives. Hence, it is possible to argue that the analysis of both the supply and demand side perceptions reveals more effective results in positioning.

It is also possible to argue that including the views of the supply-side into the research contributed to study with regards to reveal the perspective differences of visitors and representatives on destination similarity and competition. Similarity relating results showed that Uludağ-Kartalkaya and Palandöken-Erciyes pairs were the similar destinations. According to classification of Chen and Uysal (2002), these destinations could be considered as mediate competitors. Since supply-side also made similar determination about competition, this consideration could be seen to be valid in Uludağ and Kartalkaya cases. However, the supply side of Palandöken and Erciyes considered Uludağ as the mediate competitor instead of each other, although they found the similarity perceptions held by visitors right. In this context, it is understood that the assumption that more similar destinations are closer competitors is not accepted by the supply-side of these two destinations. Representatives of Palandöken and Erciyes have considered each other intermediate competitors, rather than mediate competitors. From the destination positioning point of view, even intermediate competitors should apply differentiation strategies. However, it is understood from the statements made by all representatives in four destinations about marketing communication efforts that destinations have not developed strategies to distinguish themselves from even mediate competitors, destination marketing efforts were not sufficient, and all destinations were focused on similar attributes (lifts, slopes, transportation, etc) in limited number of promotional activities they conducted. It is also understood from the statements of representatives that differentiated destination images held by visitors are mostly the result of WOM marketing and/or past experiences. In this sense, it could be concluded that the stakeholders of winter tourism destinations in Turkey do not develop competition-based strategies; rather they focus

only their current strengths or the strengths they desire to have.

6. Managerial implications

First, to make a general recommendation, the Erciyes case, which reveals the significance of the professional DMOs, could provide a basis for future strategies. Within this scope, it would be appropriate to recommend Uludağ and Palandöken to complete the establishment of a destination management organization which has not achieved to professional level yet, and Kartalkaya, which is operated by two big investors, to establish an organization with the leadership of these businesses and manage the destination from a single centre. Thus, management and marketing efforts could be conducted in a single centre to deliver consistent messages to the potential visitors in accordance with the main principles of integrated marketing communications approach. Otherwise, as it is now, each hotel in the destination will send different messages about the destination within their own marketing campaigns. In addition, since it is understood from the statements of representatives that they do not develop differentiation strategies, it could be recommended for professionals to focus on competitive environment besides their own strengths. Recommendations for each destination are presented below.

Since ***Erciyes*** managers do not adopt low price positioning, it is recommended to develop a repositioning strategy within the scope of lifts, slope variety and uncrowded slopes which were closer to the destination in the perceptual map. Furthermore, value for money, which does not mean direct low-price positioning, could be a useful item. However, Palandöken is an important competitor in the efforts that would be conducted for the attributes other than the low price and uncrowded slopes. Because, these attributes were at similar proximity as Palandöken (even some were closer to Palandöken). Therefore, the message needs to be delivered more effectively than Palandöken. For ***Palandöken*** managers, with reference to the current position, a positioning strategy could be recommended based on the snow quality and lifts. In addition, snow reliability and slope variety could be utilized. It may be advisable for ***Uludağ*** managers to base their competitive positioning strategy on tourism superstructure and non-ski leisure facilities and to send messages stressing the fact that it was the first destination in the market. Furthermore, based on the considerations of certain destination representatives that skiing elements should be used in image creation, items such as variety of slopes and adequate number of lifts, which were in a relatively close position might also be used. However, it should not be forgotten that in this case, the established positions of Palandöken and (partly) Erciyes would be targeted. Therefore, marketing communication needs to be conducted more strongly in Uludağ, which was insufficient in establishing integrated marketing communications in the past. In ***Kartalkaya***, it was recommended that the present positioning, which was based on quality of the tourism superstructure and the quality of service, could be maintained. ***Kartepe***, which is not only a winter destination but attracts a significant number of visitors in the summertime as well, could also be recommended to use its beautiful scenery and transportation facilities to start from its current position and to strengthen it.

7. Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations. First, selecting only five destinations among 28 destinations may be seen as a limitation. Second, inclusion of only domestic visitors in the sample could also be considered as a limitation. However, winter tourism in Turkey is shaped by domestic demand at a rate of 80–85% (Demiroğlu, 2015), and it is very unlikely that the foreign visitors could easily assess the five destinations. Third, inability to conduct interviews with Kartepe's representatives despite our persistent efforts to make appointment was among the limitations of the present study. Furthermore, the stability of the findings could also be seen as a limitation, since winter tourism sector in Turkey is rapidly developing.

In future research, the positioning of different types of destinations could be examined by comparing the views of supply and demand sides. Particularly for winter tourism in Turkey, it is possible to conduct studies in the excluded destinations in the present study, especially the excluded active destinations (Sarıkamış, Davraz, Ilgaz), and to compare the findings of these future studies with that of the present study.

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