

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF AIR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT**

**MASTER THESIS**

**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRANDS IN  
THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY:  
THE CASE STUDY OF TURKISH AIRLINES**

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**ISTANBUL, 2024**

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by

**FATİH AYDIN**

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in  
Air Transport Management**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR  
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**ISTANBUL, 2024**

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science in Air Transport Management.

Thesis Jury Members

Title - Name Surname

Opinion

Signature

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University.

Date of Submission

Seal/Signature

## ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name Surname:

Signature:



## ÖZ

### HAVAYOLU ENDÜSTİRİSİNDE SOSYAL MEDYANIN MARKALAR ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ: TÜRK HAVAYOLLARI ÖRNEĞİ

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Markalar tüketicinin karar vermesinde ve seçim davranışında çok önemli rollere sahiptir. Güçlü, tercih edilen ve benzersiz markalar yaratmak, yolcuların taşıyıcılara olan güvenini artırarak, cazip ekonomik getirilerle birlikte sürdürülebilir rekabet avantajlarının oluşmasını sağlar. Bu araştırma, başta Türk Hava Yolları olmak üzere son yirmi yılda havayollarının marka imajı için hangi strateji ve yöntemleri kullandıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Eun-Ju and Park'ın konsept modeline göre doğru strateji ile bir markayı kontrol etmek önemlidir. Marka imajı marka için önemlidir bu yüzden marka imajı ve onunla iç içe geçen sosyal medya, ortak marka stratejileri, marka bilinirliği, reklam, sponsorluk ve tanıtım gibi stratejiler havayolu endüstrisinde daha güçlü bir marka yaratır ve gelişmesini sağlar. Araştırmanın tekniği ankettir. Araştırmanın model ve hipotezlerine uygun olarak hazırlanan anketler müşterilere aktarılır ve cevaplamaları istenir. Elde edilen veriler ANOVA testi ve regresyon analizi kullanılarak analiz edilmektedir. Uygunluk SPSS programı kullanılarak test edilmektedir. Anket, Thy ile dünyanın farklı yerlerine sıklıkla seyahat eden 257 yolcudan oluşmaktadır. Uçuş hizmet kalitesi, uçuş sonrası hizmet kalitesi, yolcu memnuniyeti, havayolu marka değeri, marka bilinirliği, reklam stratejileri ve sosyal medya önemi değişkenleri bulunmaktadır. Araştırma sonucuna göre sosyal medya güçlü bir marka imajı oluşturmak için son derece önemlidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ortak Marka Stratejileri, Marka Güvenilirliği, Marka İmajı, Sosyal Medya.

## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRANDS IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY: THE CASE STUDY OF TURKISH AIRLINES

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Brands have very crucial roles in consumer's decisions and purchase preferences. Creating unique, favorable and strong brands provide to occur sustainable competitive advantages with alluring economic returns to increase confidence of passengers in the carriers. This thesis elucidates which strategies and methods are used by airlines to make firm their brands over the last two decades, particularly Turkish Airlines. According to conceptual model by Eun-Ju and Park, its very important to control the brand with the right strategy. Brand image is fundamental dynamic for a brand so this thesis will emphasize brand image and integrated dynamics with it such as such social media, co-branding strategies, brand credibility, advertising, sponsorship and promotion that are strategies to create and develop stronger brand image in airline industry. The questionnaire technique is used in this thesis. Questionnaires are prepared according to the hypotheses of the thesis transferred to consumers to reply. The data obtained were analysed using ANOVA test, and regression analysis. The convenience is tested using SPSS program. The survey consists of 257 passengers that usually travel to different areas of the world by Turkish Airlines. There are some variables such as flight service quality and post-flight service quality, passenger contentment, airline brand image, airline brand value, brand awareness, advertisement strategies and social media importance. According to thesis results, social media activities have important impacts on strong brand image.

**Keywords:** Co-Branding Strategies, Brand Credibility, Brand Image, Social Media.

## DEDICATION

It is dedicated to my wife Hanife Ulu.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is not possible to finish this thesis without support, help and guidance of many people. I thank you their constant encouragement.

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I owe the greatest debt to my little daughter, Nil, with whom I passed through the most difficult times and shared the greatest pleasure of love.

Fatih Aydın  
ISTANBUL, 2024

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## LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat
THY	Türk Hava Yolları
VIP	Very Important Person
KLM	Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
TL	Turkish Lira
UAE	United Arab Emirates
X	Independent (Explanatory) Variable
Y	Dependent (Explained; Affected; Response) Variable
b <sub>0</sub>	The Value of the Dependent Variable When X=0
b <sub>1</sub>	Regression Coefficient
e	Error Term
TV	Television
Phd	Doctorate of Philosophy
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Brands have crucial roles in consumer's decisions and purchase preferences. Creating strong, unique and favorable brands provide to occur sustainable competitive advantages with alluring economic returns to increase confidence of passengers in the carriers (Erdem and Swait, 2004). Consumers often make purchasing decisions with feelings of uncertainty because observing quality in markets is not very easy. Airlines used various methods to strengthen their brands. This thesis elucidates which strategies and methods are used by airlines to make firm their brands over the last two decades. It will emphasize the importance of social media, brand image, co-branding strategies, brand credibility, advertising, sponsorship and promotion strategies to create and develop stronger brand in airline industry (Dirsehan and Kurtuluş, 2018).

Brand credibility has crucial effects on consumer purchase intention in the airline sector so airlines have given importance it to keep their brand image strong. The strength of brand equity tells us whether a brand is following the right strategy or not. For an airline, a right mission declaration and accompanying branding strategy are substantial because they might provide to raise passengers' trust in the company. Moreover, reliability of a brand plays fundamental role in the relationship between passenger perception and brand equity. The positive correlation between social media activities of airline companies and customer feedbacks is obvious particularly in recent years (Park and Seo, 2018). These interactions substantially change the dynamics in the relationships between customers and brand. Social media become more reliable than advertisement because customer become to rely on information learned via social media more than other marketing activities. In other words, customization in social media allows companies to contact the uniqueness of their brands and enhance their preference for loyalty to these brands (Eun-Ju and Park, 2018).

Airline sector is having more and more competitive environments. The reason of this situation is that a powerful brand image brings reliability between consumers and airline companies. Hence, when airline passengers decide to determinate airline company that they fly with, can feel safe. Brand image that is a generally known and an outstanding factor of marketing has been substantial notion since the early 1950s and has appeared in consumer behavior research. Brand image, a generally known and prominent member of marketing, has been a substantial concept since the 1950s. Then, following right branding strategy became a requirement to constitute differential influences in preferences of consumers with increasing competition between airline companies. Various techniques are used to measure brand image in marketing. These techniques can be counted like free association techniques, reflective techniques, and open-ended queries associated with personality of the brand and its scale. Nonetheless, brand images cannot created easily and rapidly, necessitate long-term, multifaceted efforts. Currently, with the increasing interest in the of brand management, the different necessities of international marketing strategies among organizations in different sectors have also increased (Cortez, 2017).

Brand credibility points out whether to be believable of a product that takes part in a brand. It depends on perception of the consumers, whether the brand has the capability to consistently surrender on what is commitment. All practices and methods in marketing communications like sales promotion, sponsorship and brand image advertising try to establish increased consistency, clearness and brand investment (Lin and Ryan, 2016). Also, the credibility pointed out by a brand not only reduces consumer indecision or economizes decision making cost but also refers whether being believable of a product or service in a brand (Jeng, 2016).

Advertising is one of the most essential marketing communication methods that uses sponsored, non-personal message to support or market a product, service or opinion. The influences of the advertisement strategies such as social media usage in the airline industry cannot be underestimated. Advertising, sponsorship, promotion and brand awareness are fundamental dynamics that are effective on the preferences of passengers who benefit from the services of an airline company (Al Saed, Upadhya and Abu Saleh, 2020).

## **1.1. Thesis Objectives**

This study attempts to highlight the following issues:

- i. To investigate that how social media trend marketing activities effect on brand equity of airline companies
- ii. To elucidate the significance of brand image and co-branding strategies for airlines
- iii. To investigate airlines' brand credibility that described as the reliability and believability of a brands product
- iv. To present a comprehensive analysis on the influences of sponsorship, promotion and advertising on brand awareness and purchasing preferences on airline companies.

## **1.2. Thesis Questions**

This thesis will find answers following questions:

- a) The main thesis queries of the research are how airline companies create good brand image, what kind of dynamics are effective.
- b) How social media activities of airlines impact on brand image and brand awareness?
- c) What are the roles of sponsorship, promotion and advertising strategies on the airline client on purchasing choices?
- d) How do airline companies improve and protect their brand credibility?
- e) What kind of relationships between brand awareness and brand loyalty? Was the campaign of 'Widen Your World' by Turkish Airlines successful?

The questionnaire technique is used. Questions are prepared according to the hypotheses of the thesis transferred to consumers in order to find responses. The obtained data were analyzed using ANOVA test and regression analysis. Regression method, that allows researchers to predict or examine the variation in one variable based on another variable, is the main method of this thesis. The survey consists of 257 passengers that frequently travel by Thy. There are some variables such as flight

service quality and post-flight service quality, passenger satisfaction, airline brand image, airline brand value, brand awareness, advertisement strategies and social media importance. I will use analytical perspective in my thesis to see these dynamics in the airline industry. I will use compare and contrast method to see differences and similarities of the airlines' strategies.

In brief, airline industry has a very competitive environment so they use various methods and strategies to strengthen their brands and survive in the sector. In this paper, significant issues to create strong brand, importance of brand credibility, influence of social media, brand image and co-branding, advertising, sponsorship and promotion strategies are examined with various specific examples from various airlines.

- a) Firstly, today most of the airlines use social media effectively and they accessible across multiple major social media networks. They aimed to keep their brand strong by engaging the customer via customized feel and direct reply to queries of them.
- b) Secondly, airlines make effort to promote their brand images and they develop co-branding strategy.
- c) Thirdly, providing brand credibility is indispensable component for brand image, so airlines frequently use technology, distinguished customer service with essential quality to make it possible.
- d) Finally yet importantly, it is obvious that airline brand credibility is significantly effective on purchase preferences.

There is a lack of knowledge regarding build and develop successful brand image and relationships between co-branding strategies, brand credibility and social media particularly Turkish Airlines. Although, there are significant researches in this area, there is still gap regarding brand image of Turkish Airlines directly. This thesis provides to make important contribution to fill this gap. According to the results of the thesis, companies in the aviation industry attach importance to using social media, establishing relationships with their customers and sharing advertisements. It establishes relationships with its customers on social media platforms and follows strategies to attract potential customers to its companies. In this regard, in today's

technology and internet era, companies in the aviation sector should pay attention to using social media. In this way, companies in the sector can increase their communication with their customers and reach new customers.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW, THESIS BACKGROUND

Branding management refers to an administrative resource of an organization, examining internal and external powers, and determining strategies to obtain aims, determining and developing strategies to surrender brand equity or achieve brand value necessities over an exhaustive perspective of the brand, its target market, and the overall vision of the company. Five fundamental elements can be supportive to implement strategies for their business (Jeng, 2016).

- i. Businesses need to determine clear and realistic purposes. These objectives should respond to the request of the company like, what the company can obtain them and which methods should be followed. Firstly, it does not only set the goals but also it specifies the methods in order to reach them. During this phase, purposes in long and short term should be determined.
- ii. Businesses need to be capable to analyze, comprehend, and codify internal and external powers affects their business aims. They should know the requirements for them to survive in the competitive environment. They should use some analytical tools like SWOT (Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat) analyses.
- iii. Businesses should shape and improve their strategies by determining how they can obtain them. At this stage, they should determine requests of people, technology, and other resources. In addition, they should decide how they can distribute resources to perform tasks and what kind of performance paradigms are used to meet the success.
- iv. After the definition of the strategies, this phase consist of practice. The strategy is followed from planning until application. The resources are used according to their roles and responsibilities.
- v. The last phase of strategic management points out to interpret the impressiveness of applied strategies using determined metrics and the

company should comprehend whether inefficient should be changed with any other that that are viable and it should proceed to follow the business landscape and internal operations. Airline companies work on the implementation of setting purposes, objects and operations meticulously because it should aim to survive in the ambitious market. They put in serious effort to find the right target and allocate staff and resources effectively to achieve these goals.

## **2.1. Branding Strategies and Brand Credibility in Airline Industry**

Brands have crucial roles during decision process and choice preferences of consumers (Erdem and Swait, 2004). Creating strong, favorable and unique brands provide sustainable competitive benefits from alluring financial feedbacks. In addition, making efforts to establish strong brand images are significant for airline companies that are purposing to raise confidence of passengers in the carriers. Consumers frequently decide according to their uncertain feelings during the consummation because observing quality in markets is not very easy. Airlines used various methods to strengthen their brands (Dirsehan and Kurtuluş, 2018). This part will elucidate which strategies and methods are used by airlines to consolidate their brands over the last two decades.

Brand credibility has crucial effects on the intention of consumer purchasing between the airline companies so airlines have given importance it to keep their brand image strong. Being credible for a brand can enable important mutual advantages for airlines companies and consumers. When this issue is taken into consideration in terms of consumers, it is obvious that buying services from a confident airline brand guarantees the quality. On the other hand, a reliable brand refers that marketing strategies can be more beneficial because their message acceptance ratio is high therefore it provide to raise the sales of the airline companies (Jeng, 2016). One of the fundamental aims of this thesis is demonstrating the importance of brand credibility that is very influential element in the decisions of the consumers.

Brand equity is another important element that provides to test whether the branding strategy is successful or not. For an airline company, good branding strategies with the declaration of good statements are substantial because they enable to raise passenger confidence in the companies. Taking into consideration social media activities of the airline companies, the effect of on brand equity and customers responses is obvious particularly in recent years (Park and Seo, 2018). Thence, one of the purposes of this paper is examining that how social media activities effect on brand equity of airlines directly.

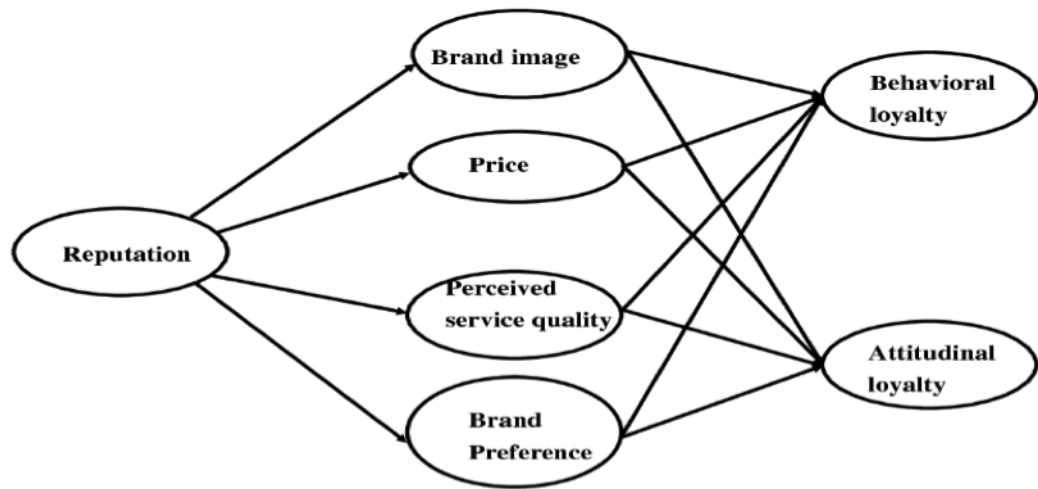
Brand image that is generally known and an outstanding element of marketing, is substantial and has appeared in the research of consumer behavior. In addition, brand image refers to a favorable brand image that can be established when evocations regarding the brand are affirmative, unique and powerful points out brands' network in minds of customers. Brand knowledge is observed by an associative network memory model's perspective. A good branding strategy becomes a requirement to constitute distinguished influences in consumer minds with increasing competition in the airline industry. The last main goal of this thesis is elucidating the importance of brand image and co-branding strategies for airlines (Al Saed, Upadhya and Abu Saleh, 2020).

## **2.2. Why is Brand Credibility Substantial for Airline Brands?**

Brand credibility refers to whether to be believable of a product that takes part in a brand. It can be established by rising consistency, clearness and brand investment in a long time, and through all practices marketing communications like sales promotion, sponsorship and brand image advertising. Being clear especially important because in the opposite situation, the brand can be perceived as inadequate and incomplete. Brand credibility can be seen as an intermediary that increases the consumer's ease of decision-making and therefore increases purchase intention. In addition, the credibility signaled by a brand not only reduces consumer indecision or economizes decision-making cost but also points out the believability of product (Jeng, 2016).

In the airline industry, airline brand credibility and consumer purchase intention have very intimate relationships with each other. When a customer estimates that an airline company has capability to have good service, this company has a good reputation for his/her eyes. Thanks to it, this consumer probably will buy the service from this company. It is obvious that the factor of brand credibility affects positively on buying propensity, mediated by decisional congruence or affective commitment. For airline companies, brand credibility has a good impact on buying preferences that is not mediated by decision accordance or impressive promise. Nonetheless, brand credibility requested long-term exertion and it is not simple to build it in a short time (Jeng, 2016). In May 2014, a research was made at Taoyuan International Airport in Taiwan to examine the importance of brand credibility. International passengers who attended to this research responded name of their favorite airline brand. After decisions of their favorite airline company, they responded to the questions in the survey regarding their selected brand “(e.g., my favorite brand of Airline Company delivers what it promises” (Lin and Ryan, 2016).

On the other hand, Singapore Airlines stands out as one of the most powerful airline brands from Asia market. Brand management comes first among the various reasons of that. Most associated directly with the powerful brand management operated mainly by the Singapore Airlines board of directors and senior management, with right brand equity as a consequence of a dedicated, professional brand strategy across a varied, global organization. Singapore Airlines that took part in the 2020 list of Fortune’s “World’s most admired companies”, ranked 28th. The main drivers of this brand consist of innovation, using best technology, genuine quality and perfect customer service. Even though, there is intense competition in the airline industry, Singapore Airlines takes part in the top airline companies in global scale that is truly capable to control the brand with the right strategy (Roll, 2021). Close relationships between dynamics can be seen in the below chart. (See, fig. 2.1.)



**Figure 2.1. Conceptual Model (Eun-Ju and Park, 2016)**

### **2.3. The Effects of Brand Loyalty on Creating Strong Airline Brand**

Businesses need brand loyalty to survive and thrive. Powerful congruence between visitors' perception of the destination is necessary for a successful branding strategy. Sustainability is necessary to survive for a company and thanks to the existence of loyal customers who can increase its profit. The brand identity designed by the destination marketing organization is very crucial dynamic because it provides to bring customer loyalty (Al-Gharaibah, 2020).

Brand loyalty is defined as “a type of attitude towards the product or service that will trigger repeated buying behavior” by Keller (1993). The most important way to measure, loyalty is taking into consideration attitudinal and behavioral factors. When a customer become more willing to be loyal to a brand, they do not think to buy another brand. Hence, loyal consumers are more lucrative than new ones because particularly loyal consumers does not influenced by raising prices and their sensitivities are less than the regular consumers are. Loyal customers have a connection with the brand and it is very hard to acquire it. Word of mouth and repeated purchase are two main dynamics to alter the profitability of the company and brand loyalty can be seen in these factors (Krystallis & Chrysochou, 2014).

D. Aaker (1996) explained, “Brand loyalty as the behavioral intention of the customer toward some certain brand” and he argued that people, who are loyal to a

brand, generally are ready to pay more for the products because they think that these products are more convenient than the cheap ones. It refers that there is a positive relationship between brand loyalty and sustainability of the brand. Brand loyalty provides clients build a powerful connection of people with the products and it enables to get the valued products (Aaker, 1996). Many factors have their influences on brand loyalty like customer satisfaction, brand switching, brand credibility, and service quality. Brand credibility and brand awareness not only provide to rise product's value and but also has a fundamental role in building a positive image of the product. These dynamics are all connected with each other (Ahmad A., Ahmad N. and Nadeem, 2014).

On the other hand, brand loyalty points out a dogmatic behavior. These impacts on preferences of consumer' purchasing behavior towards specific brands in every purchasing. Also, it refers mentally evaluating predetermined names (Assael, 1984). Customers often choose brands that provide satisfaction, confirmation and respect for them. No doubly, personal selling, customer training and advertising are expensive than having brand loyalty. Aaker (1995) emphasized, "Brand loyalty is the degree of customer's commitment to the brand." (See fig. 2.2.) Brand loyalty is the way to decline marketing cost, provide new consumers and establish trading advantages is influence for the companies (Aaker, 1995).



**Figure 2.2. Brand Pyramid (Aaker, 1995)**

The various layers that take part in this pyramid explain to make sure brand loyalty relying on consumers. Switchers in the layer of the pyramid are defined as consumers, who frequently prefer different brands because of low switching costs. However, content customers are generally who are willing to purchase exact brand continuously. Nonetheless, it is not emotional connection with the specific products for satisfied customers because they are recognized as loyal customers because the brand is able to satisfy the expectancies and necessities of customers so this repeated satisfaction brings loyalty to the brand (Aaker, 1995). When consumers like a brand, emotional connection exists between them. This provides to become volunteer brand ambassadors for customers. Its reason is having powerful reliability towards the brand (Ahmed & Moosavi, 2013).

#### **2.4. The Effects of Social Media Marketing Activities on Airlines Brands**

Social media, which was launched 26 years ago, with the innovation of Usernet. The aim of Ellis and Tom Truscott is to provide Internet users to express themselves in a platform. 'Open Diary'' which was founded by Susan and Bruce Abelson, is comprehended as principal social media channel. It enabled to put together social media users who write online diary (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). People can communicate with the other people around the world via social web sites by creating profiles and sending invitation thanks to these applications. People can reach profiles of their friends, send messages, and communicate with each other easily (Chen, 2009).

Today, in the global world we live in, companies have to determine the correct online platform and follow the right strategy to express themselves. One of the fundamental strategies is promotion the brand is word of mouth. Therefore, social media can be comprehended best new way to spread it. There are several reasons why word of mouth marketing is so important. It provides to present the unforgettable features and experiences regarding the products or services, which are shared among customers. In addition, companies thanks to word of mouth marketing can promote their brands by attracting the attention of potential customers in the marketing. They can make advertisement with this effective method. Customers can

communicate with the brands directly by developing technology. The connection between them provides to establish brand trust and loyalty (Toffler, 1980).

Airlines has not ignored the importance of social media and started to use it actively. To illustrate, more than 12 million people has liked Qatar Airways on Facebook (Eun-Ju and Park, 2018). When marketing activities of a company is taken into consideration, social media have a key role in setting up an individual relationship with consumers and they can access each other thanks to this way. Social media users meet and communicate with another user and share their ideas regarding specific products and brands. Airline companies had the opportunity to advertise, reach more people and strengthen their brands though these platforms. The interactions are substantially altering the dynamics between brand and consumer. Information learned via social media gives confident to the consumers more than from advertisement in marketing activities. Social media enables to decrease ambiguities by consenting consumers to set up contact with companies (Park and Seo, 2018).

In developing market, survival is not simple for airline companies so they need to use the social media tools effectively and protect their competitive advantage in the market. They can decrease their costs via this way and be trend and creating trust and loyalty towards the brand. The transparency provides to trust for social media users. They can solve the problems by reaching to companies in explicit place. Customer's trust and satisfaction is refreshed, when the problem of customer is solved through social media. Companies can make strong their communications with the customers via Twitter or Facebook creating awareness motivation and right exposure to increase profit of the companies (Hartzell et al., 2011).

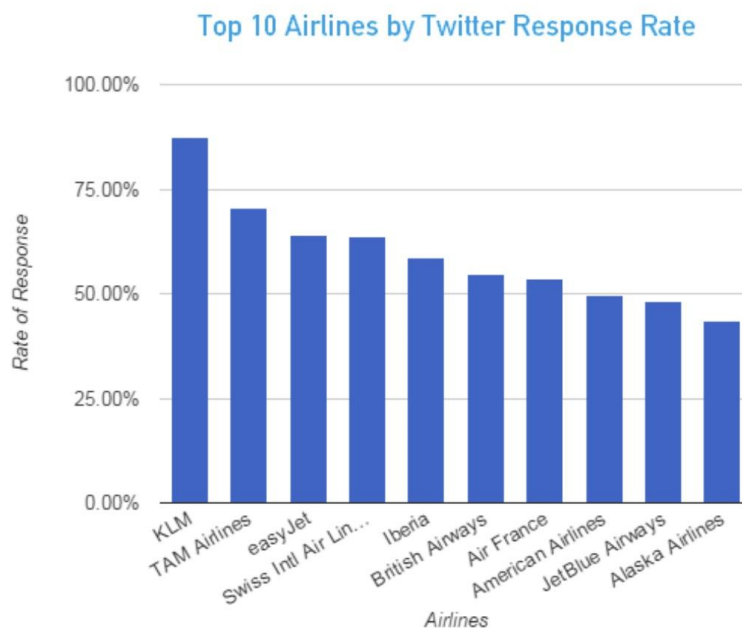
On the other hand, improving marketing trends refers that the marketing professional can create and maintain a relationship determined by customers. In addition, companies can evaluate their competitor posts and they can think again about their strategies via social media (Copp, 2016). Moreover, social media experts should be very careful in managing social media accounts to prevent misunderstandings to protect the reputation of airline companies (Dekay, 2012). To illustrate, Onur Air shared the following message on Facebook: "we will donate 0.5 TL for every

follower that you will add.” It happened after Van earthquake in 2011. When people see this declaration, they blamed them being unethical on Facebook. Then, the company erased some of the negative comments on Facebook. However, some social media users carried topics to Twitter and this situation became more chaotic. The company had to step back by sharing a new comment “We apologize from our followers for the misunderstanding” but this declaration could not save the situation, on the contrary, it made it worse. The company became a negative Trend Topic on Twitter because of these events, and the value of the company reduce and lost followers (Sungur, 2011). It shows that the social media managers should manage social media very carefully using right strategies (Özdemir, 2020).

Social media strengthens brand equity, which is the net result of the assets and liabilities associated with a brand name or symbol. In other words, social media is a good vehicle for development of a brand, creating brand loyalty, encouraging knowledge of costumers and providing travel experiences of passengers like dealing with troubles of passengers and answering to customers’ feedback via using social media (Majumdar, 2015). Utilizing social media for airline companies provides to maintain and increase brand awareness, loyalty and presenting a pleasant experience in accordance to their customers’ preferences. Creating loyalty by identifying customers' demands can be achieved by using social media efficiently in the virtual environment. The costs of advertisement reduce by using social media platforms. Managing social media accounts allows to airlines companies closely witness customers' reactions and comments to promotional campaigns. It enables to comprehend whether airline companies are on the right track.

Passengers may encounter troubles such as in-flight catering, long waits before departure or lack of service in the VIP lounge at the airport. They can comment on these issues through social media and sometimes record videos using social media platforms and this situation gives a chance to fix the situation. By social media, companies increase brand awareness and interaction with customers. For instance, Turkish Airlines is one of the airlines, which uses Twitter effectively by using hashtags (Ashraf, 2015). In addition, keywords or tags allows airline companies to communicate with their customers, elucidate their needs and get instant feedback.

Brand preference makes significant contributions to a product value of a brand. Brand awareness changes thanks to the conceptualization of brand equity. On the other hand, interactions with current customers as well as potential customers provide companies to convey a positive brand image. Furthermore, the mediating influence of brand equity should not be ignored. Using social media is a crucial determining factor of brand equity and provide to make stronger their brands. KLM Airlines that has millions followers on Facebook and Twitter is a good example in this issue. They respond to thousands of queries every week and these ultra-quick responses provide to obtain a positive brand image (Cortez, 2017). (See fig. 2.3.)



**Figure 2.3. Top 10 Airlines by Twitter Response Rate (Cortez, 2017)**

Social media provides many benefits to the organizations. With providing broad access to identified markets, companies can provide more customers, as most prospective consumers spend time online. Some of the important issues of the marketing phenomenon are to maintain brand awareness and increase reach with increasing brand awareness (Zimmerman and Sahlin, 2010). Social media contributes to the continuity of ties with consumers.

Nonetheless, companies should take care of some dynamics to come into being that:

- They should indicate their areas of expertise,
- They should use social media continuously,
- They should not do continuous advertising activities,
- They should provide value to their customers with the content they share,
- They should understand the problems of the consumer and produce definite solutions,
- Products and processes that will provide accurate analysis of consumers' thoughts and benefits,
- They should provide technological development for many consumers simultaneously,
- They should follow the companies that compete with the developing market,
- They should rank high in search engines (Zimmerman and Sahlin, 2010).

The social media accounts of Turkish Airlines demonstrates that Thy is one of the airline company which uses social media very effectively (Ilgazlı, 2020). Thy achieved the followings with the right social media strategy.

- To build trust and loyalty
- To convince customers with positive approach and make customers communicate with brand deeply
- To provide interactive communication platform for both customers and business
- Retain current customers and gain potential consumer” (Özdemir, 2020).

According to research regarding usage of social media in Turkey, 1.5 billion people regularly per day visit social media sites. Social media is widely used by millions of people, making it a significant advertising and marketing instrument for airline markets. Considering how popular it is now, it is unthinkable that companies would ignore such a strong instrument to present the brand and reach more people effectively. Social media provide to raise the voice of the customers and respond to companies very fast. They can very easily have an opinion about their products, like, share, retweet and comment them. All this activity on social media platforms gives airlines insight into whether their marketing campaigns are successful or not, which is why businesses are paying more attention to social media and progressively

incorporating it into their business strategies, such as market research and customer service (Salo, 2017).

It is obvious that using social media for the airline companies is an important step and the significance of it is still rising. It is clear that so social media becomes significant marketing tool in airline industry. As expected from previous years, social media becomes more marketing that is popular. The reason of this is that airline companies spent a big budget for advertisements but today social media provides to reduce this spending and carry out marketing activities through a single channel. These chances provide to become social media popular for companies (Sabuncu and Atmış, 2020).

## **2.5. Importance of Brand Image and Co-branding for Airlines**

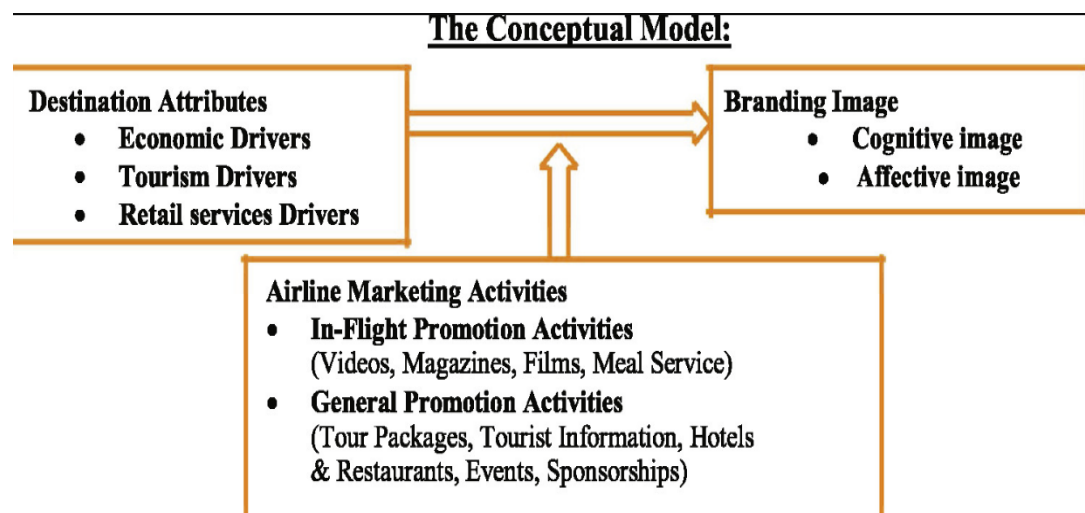
Managing alliance relationships between companies has a special importance for the efficiency of companies. The management mechanism that is effective on the success of alliances between companies includes basic elements such as formal and informal incentives, control, legal regimes, organizational structures and organizational culture (İplik, 2008). Companies need to create effective management mechanisms that can combine their existing resources correctly in strategic alliances and ensure that the value of these existing resources is preserved. Especially managing strategic alliances can become more complex during the internationalization process. In this respect, managing alliances requires balance, harmony, innovation, creativity, determination and luck. Strategic alliances, which emerge from the correct and effective mix of different talents, finance, communication, technology, infrastructure and the potential to be effective in the market and similar resources, are managed without any standardization since they have a rather complex structure (Çakınberk, 2010: 358).

For instance, Middle East aviation sector has been consistently growing. GCC has played a considerable role in this development process. Emirates that certainly plays a key role, acts as Dubai's brand ambassador, as will Singapore Airlines' key role in promoting Singapore tourism. The strongest brand in the UAE is widely recognized

as Emirates (Al Saed, Upadhya and Abu Saleh, 2020). Their successful brand strategy brings them to success.

Branding image is affected directly by airline promotion activities and in-flight services. Nonetheless, they do not soften the changing distance between tourism and destination branding, including retail types, or the changing brand image and destination. These activities play a key role on services that improves the image of destination. In addition to Emirates' flight promotion services, magazine, video, film and food services and general promotional methods, activities such as sponsorships, northern campaigns, advertisements and public outreach activities have positive effects to brand value (Al Saed, Upadhya and Abu Saleh, 2020).

On the other hand, co-branding can be organized under the same brand concept including logo, slogan, mission, vision, etc. is substantial for the development of the brand. Destination managers are suggested to improve co-branding strategy because they claimed that it provides more comprehensive and beneficial both Emirates Airlines and Destination Dubai. The same logo, slogan and promotional campaign are merit discovering, since promotional activities of Emirates are complimentary because synergy appeared but unified endeavors might create bigger consequences (Al Saed, Upadhya and Abu Saleh, 2020). (See fig. 2.4.)



**Figure 2.4. The Conceptual Model 2 (Al Saed, Upadhya and Abu Saleh, 2020)**

On the other hand, strategic collaborations are defined as partnerships between two or more businesses to achieve competitive advantage. Because one of the main reasons why businesses cooperate with each other today is undoubtedly that their current capacities are insufficient against environmental conditions. Especially businesses operating in industries where technology is used extensively may need more cooperation. Benefits of collaborations for businesses some of them are listed below (Eren, 2013):

- It allows the business to take part in a new market and increase the sales of its existing products,
- It is able to maintain the current status of the business in the market,
- Collaboration between businesses leads to increased productivity,
- It allows businesses to become stronger by combining their assets and talents with each other,
- Increase in the value of the business,
- In case of uncertainty in the product or market, businesses share information with each other to prevent uncertainties, allowing the clouds of uncertainty to disappear,
- It allows a stronger stance against competition.

## **2.6. Social Media Strategies of Turkish Airlines**

Some important dynamics like big data, analyzing of big data, social media and analyzing of social media became more important in the marketing and other management sciences, along with technological developments. The lack of knowledge and experience is recognized that among the biggest impediments faced in consulting new ways, which are often called business analytics. The reason why social media data is so important is that it can be used for sales, marketing communication and pricing purposes within the field of social media analytics (Salo 2017). Companies can make serious profits using social media effectively because they can identify potential customers and send ads to them by examination data sources like search engines and other information sources.

When planning integrated digital marketing campaigns, Turkish Airlines pays attention to which connections carry out the amount of business and the comprehensiveness of its reach. To combine successfully digital channels into the overall brand experience, marketers should comprehend which ways and what kinds of content are performing. According to McKinsey report, digital advertising will be the fastest-growing advertising context, the compound annual rise is predicted to be 15.1 per cent in 2018; in TV, this figure will reach 5 percent, 7 over the next five years (McKinsey, 2015).

Social media marketing points out utilizing social media channels like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook to promote brands and sell their products or services. As it is mentioned above, developments in technology and communication, changes in users' desires and demands, the expansion of product range and communication channels have caused businesses to seek alternative marketing methods. Today, many businesses prefer social media rather than traditional media tools, where they can provide face-to-face communication with their targeted customer group, have no difficulty in managing their relations with customers, expand their information networks, allow quick feedback, and provide sales and after-sales services. The fact that users, in fact, consumers, spend more time in social media networks has become the focus of marketers. In order to catch these trends, businesses and marketing managers have worked for the compatibility of brands with social media, and in order to increase the loyalty of their consumers to their brands, they have started to use them as a guide for future developments by providing more information from users about their goods and services than before. Social media has turned into a marketing perception that is controlled by users, not by managers as in the past (Sabuncu and Atmıř, 2020).

Social media makes significant contribution to develop the brand of Turkish Airlines (Zimmerman and Sahlin 2010):

- Providing broad access to identified markets: THY is able to provide more customers through social media because the majority of prospective consumers spend time online.

- Increasing brand awareness: Some of the important issues of the marketing phenomenon are to maintain brand awareness and increase reach.
- Strengthening relations with consumers: Social media contributes to the continuity of ties with consumers. THY constantly uses social media and they do not do continuous advertising activities. Also, they try to provide value to their customers with the content they share. The social media accounts of Turkish Airlines such as Twitter, Instagram and YouTube are used actively to reach the costumers.
- Providing organizational development: Turkish Airlines develops in terms of their organizations by enabling the use of social media. The following methods are preferred while ensuring the development in question
  - To understand the problems of the consumer and to produce definite solutions,
  - Products and processes that will provide accurate analysis of consumers' thoughts and benefits,
  - To provide technological development for many consumers simultaneously,
  - To follow the companies that compete with the developing market.
- To be at the top of the search engines: When the goods or services and brands they have are searched, they want to rank higher than the others do in the search engines. Reaching more sales when the opportunity arises: Thy like other companies considers social media channels as sales areas and prefers to sell their goods and services to social media.

### **2.6.1. The Example of Turkish Airlines' Popular Advertisement: "The Best Fly With the Best"**

In this advertisement (See, fig. 2.5.), while the world famous stars Kobe Bryant and Lionel Messi as seen the brand ambassadors are sitting on the seats in the cabin of Turkish Airlines' aircraft. Right behind them are a flight attendant, a pilot, a flying chef and a maintenance technician. It means that the flight crew is ready to serve the world famous stars.



**Figure 2.5. "The Best Fly With the Best" (<https://www.turkishairlines.com/>)**

These famous people representing their abilities in comfort and smiling with the balls that has logo of Turkish Airlines demonstrates that the brand presents comfort ability and happiness, while the confident postures of the flight crew. With this advertisement, they purposed to build a consistent brand image. All these characteristics features like charisma, richness, prestige, success and style transferred to the brand itself. The confident-looking pose of the flight crew, particularly the chef with folded arms, declares the crew and Turkish Airlines are masters of airline sector (Bati, 2013).

In this advertisement, Kobe Bryant and Lionel Messi who are two of the biggest stars of sports compete for the attention of a child. After this successful advertisement, Turkish Airlines prepared a new YouTube advertisement "Kobe vs. Messi: The Selfie Shootout" to increase brand awareness in Europe, the Far East, North America and the Middle East. It was again a great success. It became one of YouTube's fastest-spreading ads, with 77 million views at once and one of the most popular commercials of the week (Aydoğan, 2017).

The company has three fundamental goals such as:

- Kobe Bryant and Lionel Messi were promoting the 'Selfie Shootout' video on YouTube.

- Custom YouTube channel tried to present the advertisement in an interactive way.
- This advertisement reached 77 million views in only a week. It made the fastest spreading commercial in YouTube.

Thy increases its brand awareness so the willing of requested to reach a new target audience like spirited, adventurous people with the passion for travel. The brand wanted to test the realization of campaigns by measuring brand awareness in order to accelerate Turkish Airlines' advertising. The company decided to create a playful marketing campaign around one of 2013's most curious words: "Selfie". It provide to exploration of a custom channel to present the campaign and indicate the spirit of the company in an interactive way, working with Google. The goal of the brand is to leverage YouTube's advertising methods to attain a wider audience globally. The most impressive selfie was tried to be taken by Messi and Bryant. Messi preferred to pose in two ways: one of them was in front of Moscow's St. Basil's Cathedral and the other was with a monkey in Thailand. On the other hand, Bryant responded him with a photo from Africa being licked by a lion. The distinguished difference between this and the others advertisements is that the action campaigns are deployed from inside the cabin, where Thy flies around the world (Bati, 2013).

Moreover, Turkish Airlines attempted to establish global brand image and make stronger it so it uses the same headlines, visual elements and layout in both Turkish and English advertisements. Turkish texts in the advertisements are directly translated into the English ones. In these advertisements, it is claimed that the standardization strategy is applied with reference to theories. The advertisements play a key role between the producer and consumer. They are influenced and transformed by the globalization, which affects the social life in every aspects. The aim of the international and global companies is to protect their positions in the global markets used them as a method to make their voices heard and their products sold. The companies manage to reach more people thanks to social media (Saran, 2013).

In the global scale, the airline companies often follow standardized advertising strategies based on the perspective that assumes that globalization builds a

homogeneous, standard and common culture and consumer (Tomlinson, 2004). On the other hand, they can make advertising tailored to the perspective that cultural variety presents (Vrontis and Thrassou, 2007). Consumers' wants and needs are different depending on the perspective that the culture created by globalization is a hybridized culture. Airlines use globalizing advertising to allow companies to think globally and act locally (Hermans and Kempen, 1998). The advertisement of THY and social media posts demonstrate that it used effectively both. Furthermore, Skytrax awarded Turkish Airlines as the Europe's Best Airline. THY used the standardization strategy and globalization strategy in its print advertisements because it gave more importance to 'global thinking'. Turkish company that aims to be a global company in the global market with the aim of trying to build a common image in the minds of customers (Vrontis and Thrassou, 2007).

The motto of Turkish Airlines, "Globally Yours" provided to raise awareness by establishing a media buying strategy that improved their brand. Thy is a significant figure in the world of global aviation market. They have put so much effort and effort into developing this identity, which underlines progress and demonstrates that the airline is moving towards the future (Aydoğan, 2017). Turkish Airlines, which started with the "Feel like a Star" campaign with Kevin Costner, increased its global reputation. Since the famous use of communication processes is one of the parts that provide the fastest transfer of the desired emotion to the brand, Turkish Airlines has chosen to start its investment in the prestigious airline perception in this way. In addition, advertisements or marketing campaigns in traditional media cannot fully reach the target audience and everyone can see the advertisements. Most of the people are not interested in ads broadcast on traditional media because many people do not prefer to watch the ads and switch channels. The situation is totally the same for newspapers or magazines but social media ads or marketing campaigns are published only according to interest of the potential customers (Yıldırım, 2016). It provides to reach true potential customers by the companies.

People especially like the words, behaviors, choices, etc. of celebrities they sympathize with follows and consumes. For this reason, many brands use socially accepted stars when promoting their products and services to target audiences. Because of the reason that the product or service offered is accepted in the market

much faster when it is identified with the personality of the celebrities who promote it. Therefore, after the communication activities started with Kevin Costner, the main communication campaign continued with famous teams and athletes in many sports fields such as football, basketball and tennis at home and abroad. Advertising communication was made through famous athletes and teams, and since good results were obtained, it seems to be the aim of the brands to continue in this way (Ashraf, S. 2015).

Turkish Airlines make very successful advertisement from the past to today. THY's some of advertisements and sponsored agreements, in historical order from past to present, are as follows: 2009, "Feel Like A" starring the famous movie star Kevin Costner Star" advertisement (Bati, 2015).

**Table 3.1. THY Commercials Table**

<b>2009</b> , Red Carpet commercial. In the advertisement, Thy is Star Alliance member. The message is given that passengers will feel like a star walking on the red carpet.
<b>2010</b> , commercial starring Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ. Middle Eastern people who he are familiar with and loves Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ, from Turkish TV series, appears as the Middle East face of THY in this advertisement.
<b>2010</b> , "We are" featuring Manchester United Football Team globally yours" ad.
<b>2010</b> , "Turks Are Flying" starring the Basketball National Team advertisement.
<b>2010</b> , target consumer group, middle age who are hesitant to board a plane "Grumpy Grandpa" commercial with domestic passengers on board
<b>2011</b> , famous Senegalese singer as the face of THY in Africa Advertisement starring Youssou N Dour.
<b>2011</b> , starring famous female tennis player Caroline Wozniacki advert. "Who makes the number one of world tennis fly from success to success? The ad with the slogan "Wozniacki also flies with Turkish Airlines."
<b>2011</b> , commercial starring the famous basketball player Kobe Bryant.

**Table 3.1. (cont.)**

<p><b>2012</b>, Barcelona Football Team players speaking Turkish advert. The commercial, which attracted great attention, featured stars such as Abidal, Alves, Fabregas, Iniesta, Pique and Messi saying, "The real match is now" in Turkish, and Xavi saying "My only rival is Turkish Airlines".</p>
<p><b>2012</b> and <b>2013</b>, Lionel Messi and Kobe Bryant starred together. A chain of entertaining commercials in which they travel to various parts of the world and compete with each other. In this advertisement, the message is given that Turkish Airlines flies to many destinations.</p>
<p><b>2013</b>, National Anthem advertisement. The advertisement conveys the message "The airline that flies to the most countries", in which our national anthem is played with the country's local instruments.</p>
<p><b>2014</b>, featuring the Marseille Football Team, "We are a team, the ad with the slogan "We are the one".</p>
<p><b>2014</b>, Turkish Airlines Euro League Epic Pool Dunk commercial. Famous basketball players such as Sergio Rodriguez, Shawn James, Kyle Hines and Robin Benzing starred in the commercial shot by the pool.</p>
<p><b>2015</b>, Do not Give Up ad. Taken for Ordu Giresun airport. The advertisement also featured local people and football players from Trabzonspor. The advertisement also gives the message "Don't give up, son" using the local bird language.</p>
<p><b>2015</b>, commercial starring famous football player Didier Drogba. "How to become Drogba?" In the themed advertisement, the characteristics of the famous football player such as determination, talent, passion, style, loyalty and curiosity were emphasized, and the characteristics of Turkish Airlines were associated with the characteristics of the celebrity. The ad also says, "As your world grows, so do you. The world is bigger. The "Discover" message is conveyed.</p>
<p><b>2014</b>, When You Dream commercial. For the newly opened Iğdır Airport. The advertisement was shot with the slogan "If there is only one place in Turkey that we do not fly to, what difference it makes that we have flown to the most destinations in the world?"</p>

All these advertisement have extremely successful strategies but the most important dynamic for an advertisement to reach more and more consumers and customer. The best way to reach people is using social media for an airline company. Thanks to successful social media management, Thy can deliver these advertisement to more people. Thy has changed cooperation with celebrities reduced essentially along with strategies regarding advertisements and sponsored agreements since 2015.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY OF THE THESIS

#### 3.1. Aims and Importance of the Thesis

This chapter explains the methodological framework used in attaining the main objectives of this study as highlighted in the introductory chapter namely. To examine that how social media marketing activities effect on brand equity of airline companies.

- i. To explore that how social media trend marketing activities effect on brand equity of airline companies.
- ii. To elucidate the significance of brand image and co-branding strategies for airlines.
- iii. To investigate airlines' brand credibility that described as the reliability and believability of a brands product.
- iv. To present a comprehensive analysis on the influences of sponsorship, promotion and advertising on brand awareness and purchasing preferences on airline companies.

Methodological framework covers the philosophical stance, thesis design and methods utilized in data collection and data analysis, population of study, sampling size and sampling technique. This thesis offers an important literature review regarding the importance of social media, brand image, co-branding strategies, and brand credibility, and advertising in the context of airline industry. In addition, it presents a study particularly about Turkish Airlines' social media strategies through questionnaire technique. This thesis, an exemplary application that may be beneficial for academics and scholars who are willing to make research on social media analytics.

Four main components provide to create powerful brand image using good social media strategies, successful co-branding strategies and brand credibility. These factors are essential so 257 people traveled with Thy respond attended the questionnaire regarding these factors in the context of Thy. Although, there are some researches regarding this issue, still there is an important gap in this field. This thesis aimed to contribute to the demonstration strategies of Thy which creates strong brand that increases brand credibility, brand loyalty and brand awareness via successful social media strategies.

### **3.2. Limits and Methods of the Thesis**

A questionnaire method is used for data collection. The use of a closed ended survey was prepared by using 5 point Likert Scale. The survey along with the groupings indicating queries measuring brand loyalty, brand credibility and brand awareness is given in the next chapter. The survey questions of the study were prepared and answered by 257 people selected as pre-test method and easy sampling.

The survey consists of four sections. Section A underlines the demographic information of the respondents including age, gender, occupation, nationality and education level. Section B highlights the experience of respondents concerning social media. Section C covers the questions regarding brand image of Thy. Section D has been devoted co-branding strategies while section E points out the questions regarding brand credibility.

The questionnaire was created by using surveymonkey.com. There are two languages options such as Turkish and English It was chosen 257 passengers that generally travel by Thy. In the study, there are variables of flight service quality, post-flight service quality, passenger satisfaction, airline brand image, airline brand value, brand awareness, advertisement strategies and social media importance.

The focus of this thesis was analyzing the primary data. The sample group was chosen from various countries. The sample size in the thesis rely significantly on several factors including accuracy required, the likely of variation, and the

characteristics of population under study along with the analysis to be conducted on the data (Lewin and Somekh, 2005).

The sample group have experienced at least one time Thy. Frequency and percentage methods were used in order to analyze the data. The suitability of normal distribution of quantitative data was tested with T test, correlation, the chi-square and Anova. Importance level was met as  $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0, 01$ . The convenience was tested using SPSS program and it was found that study is trustworthy. Data collection tool was 5 point Likert Scale survey with anchors ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Likert Scale has been used as the most famous way to measure attitudes and ideas (Oskamp and Schultz, 2005). According to scholars, Likert Scale is simple way to establish and manager for researchers and respondents can comprehend how to use, therefore it is accepted very convenient for all forms of questionnaire study (Kachkar, 2016).

In Regression Analysis, it is aimed to functionally explain the relationship between variables and describe this relationship with a model. The linear relationship between X and the “Linear Regression Model” below can give Y variables observed in a population: (D. S. Moore, W. I, Notz & M. A. Flinger, 2013).

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon$$

Here;

X: Independent (Explanatory) Variable

Y: Dependent (Explained; Affected; Response) Variable

$\beta_0$ : The value of the dependent variable when  $X=0$   
(Cutoff point)

$\beta_1$ : Regression Coefficient

$\varepsilon$  : Error term (Mean = 0 and Variance = 2)

Regression Coefficient ( $\beta_1$ )

It shows the average change that a one-unit change in the independent variable will create in the dependent variable.

Error term: ( $\varepsilon$ )

It is the difference between the actual value of the dependent variable in each pair of observations and the value predicted from the model.

The goal of an accurate and reliable regression model is that there is no difference between the actual observation value and the predicted value, or the difference is minimal.

The existence of a linear relationship between the independent variable X and the dependent variable Y can be estimated by looking at the distribution of the points formed by the x and y values of each individual / unit on the coordinate plane. However, it needs to be investigated whether this estimate is consistent. For this purpose, the significance of the regression coefficient is checked and the significance of the departure from linearity is checked (D. S. Moore, W. I, Notz & M. A. Flinger, 2013).

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

#### 4.1. Findings of the Thesis

With today's social, economic and technological developments, it is seen that companies move their strategies to different points. There has been a transition from a structure where companies can make a difference with their products to a structure where they can make a difference with their brands. The concept of brand is interpreted as the way of conveying the social and emotional messages of the brand to the consumer, beyond the benefit offered through the product and service. Every experience that consumers have and the way they perceive the brand constantly develop their bond with the brand (Amine, A., 1998).

This thesis demonstrates that both – brand credibility and brand awareness – are convenient to build brand loyalty. They are the essential dynamics in creating brand loyalty, which is equally significant for consumers and marketers. Brand loyalty is powerful brand differentiator and presents sustainable competitive benefit. Brand credibility and brand awareness, which build or strengthen brand's personality, increase brand equity, can be leveraged through extensions of brand (Radcliffe, D.; Levy, D., 2016).

The brand, which has become an important strategic asset for companies, is a unit that affects consumer decision-making processes and can meet customer expectations. Along with the brand, changes have occurred in the size of marketing strategies. Along with the brand strategy, the strategies that enable them to explain their products and services to their customers have started to gain importance. Thanks to branding, consumers perceive branded products as high quality, and thus, their loyalty to the brand increases with the feeling of belonging to a certain class (Kaplan, A.M. and Haenlein, M., 2010).

In the past, companies developed brands that were tailored to local market needs. Today, companies tend to carry their products and services to a global dimension with global brands. For this reason, with the decrease in transportation and communication costs and the quick development of technology, the concept of globalization has raised the importance of companies on brand strategies. The thesis demonstrates that brand loyalty dynamics in social media are associated with reliability, satisfaction of service, interactive communication and benefit from company (Kabiraj, S., & Shanmugan, J., 2011).

The place of social media is increasing every day. The desire to socialize, which is inherent in human nature, has become easier with social media tools. Today, there are many social media platforms. These platforms, which have become an extension of the social world of the individual, have offered a world where users can interact without time and place restrictions. People socialize in the virtual world, share sections of their lives and engage in interactive communication (Angella J. K. and Eunju K, 2012). Moreover, most consumers consciously or unconsciously use social media to share positive or negative content about brands, products, services or companies. At the point of whether or not they prefer a brand, consumers can look at the comments about that brand, learn about the positive and negative experiences of other users, make recommendations or establish a direct connection with the brand online. Among the advantages of social media, over brands and businesses are to learn what the wishes, complaints and needs of consumers are and to provide instant interaction by receiving feedback. For this reason, social media is a very effective medium for both individuals and businesses (Lonoff, S. J., 2015).

The quick increase in the use of social media also is effective on consumer behavior in the social media world. In other words, according to the social media usage habits of consumers appears to be affected in various ways. At this point, it is essential which social media the consumer group uses, for what purpose, to what extent, and in what direction it affects consumer preferences. In this context, various results have been reached in this study, which focuses on the impact of social media usage habits on costumer behavior and the relationship between consumer's brand preference reasons (Vrontis, D. and Thrassou, A., 2007).

Along with the brand image, consumers' perceptions of the brand are shaped. The way the consumer perceives the brand causes it to add meaning and value to the brand. The image perception that consumers have towards the brand might differ from the image conveyed by the company. With the brand image work, the consumer will feel close to that brand and will show a tendency to purchase behavior. In this direction, based on the point that today's technology has come to, which we have explained above, social media is a significant place to express companies themselves (Vrontis, D. and Thrassou, A., 2007).

The marketing team at Turkish Airlines made a campaign that would captivate the audience with the spirit of the company in order to achieve their aim of raising their brand awareness. They did a custom channel based on taking selfies, with the help of Google, an activity that exploded in popularity over the past few years. This channel is based on YouTube's to communicate a larger audience, was very interactive. This advertisement has provided the airline raise knowledge of their brand. These dynamics makes peculiar this advertisement and provide to raise brand awareness. Building a brand identity needs out-of-the-box creativity and Thy got it right with its Selfie commercial that the name of the brand is brought to the forefront of global aviation (Aydoğan, 2017).

With conducted thesis, it was tried to determine whether there is a significant relation between social media performance and brand image. In this context, for the questionnaire 257 people was chosen. In the survey study, the participants were asked questions aimed at revealing their thoughts on the social media performance and brand image of the Thy brand and also their experiences and strategies of Thy. In this direction, the scales of "Perceived Social Media Performance" and "Brand Image" were used. The data obtained were evaluated in the SPSS 16.0 program.

The fundamental aim of the thesis is to elucidate whether there is an important relation between perceived social media performance and brand image. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the thesis is "There is a significant relationship between perceived social media performance and brand image." has been determined. In order to examine the first hypothesis of the thesis, it was necessary to determine whether there is an important relationship between the two scales and to determine in

which direction this relationship is. Correlation analysis was carried out in this direction. Taking into consideration the consequences of the correlation analysis, it was determined that there was a positive relationship between perceived social media performance and brand image. In the light of these data, it was seen that there is a positive and significant relation between the two variables, and the first Hypothesis, which constitutes the main purpose of the thesis, was confirmed.

In the light of the results obtained, it has been observed that the communication activities and performance carried out in the social media have a positive contribution on the brand image. In this direction, social media is seen as an important channel in order to create a brand, create a brand image or protect and strengthen the existing brand image. Considering that this medium is increasing its power day by day in the light of the data in the literature review, it can be said that it will affect the brands and the images they have in parallel (Belch G. and Belch M., 2003).

#### **4.2. Examination of the Survey**

Survey thesis is a data collection way that bringing information together from a sample of individuals through a set of standardized questions. It can be reached through several mediums, inclusive online questionnaires, paper questionnaires, telephone interviews, or face-to-face interviews. Survey research is often used in social sciences, marketing, and other fields to collect data and analyze trends, attitudes, and behaviors. It is fundamental to design surveys carefully, select a representative sample, and use appropriate analysis techniques to make sure the validity of the data collected. In addition, the questionnaire template assists gather data on a macro and micro level from all the passengers.

In this thesis, 257 individuals were contacted and asked following questions after presenting personal information of them using data collection method.

#### 4.2.1. Age

**Table 4.1. Age**

<b>Ages</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
18-24	37	14.01%
25-34	86	33.12%
35-44	55	21.66%
45-54	51	19.75%
55-64	25	10.19%
Above 64	3	1.27%

The age of the most of the people who attended the questionnaire is between 25-34. The second majority is between 35-44, the third majority is between 45-54, the fourth majority is between 18-24, the fifth majority is between 55-64 and the last group is between above 64. This result demonstrates that the major population of the questionnaire consists of middle ages people. It can be expected that they might use social media actively.

#### 4.2.2. Gender

**Table 4.2. Gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Female	132	51.4%
Male	125	48.6%

The ratio of female and male attended is very close to each other. Female consists of 51.4% while male consists of 48.6%.

#### 4.2.3. Occupation

The work areas between the people who attended the questionnaire listed below:

**Table 4.3. Occupation**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Student	36	% 14	Psychocolog	5	%2
Pilot	28	% 11	Company owner	4	%2
Teacher	21	%8	Pharmacist	3	% 1
Housewife	16	%7	Dietician	3	% 1
Engineer	15	%6	Pastry chef	2	% 1
Doctor	13	%5	Accoundant	2	% 1
Retired	12	%5	Graphic designer	2	% 1
Nurse	11	%5	Obtician	2	% 1
Lawyer	11	%5	Customer Repr.	2	% 1
Officier	9	%4	Worker	2	% 1
Manager	9	%4	Advisor	2	% 1
Import	8	%3	Marketing	2	% 1
Business man	7	%3	Cabin Crew	2	% 1
Architect	6	%2	Academician	1	% 1
Urban Planner	6	%2			

The highest ratio of the people who attanted the questionnare is student. Pilots has the second highest ratio and teachers follow them.

#### **4.2.4. Nationality**

**Table 4.4. Nationality**

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Turkey	193	75%

**Table 4.4. (cont.)**

United States	16	6.2%
Spain	14	6.4%
United Kingdom	13	5%
Netherland	9	3.5%
Etiopia	5	1.9%
Iran	5	1.9%
Slovakia	2	0.1%

The most of the people who attanted the questionnaire is Turkish. Also, there are people who are from various contries attended the questionnaire such as United States, Spain, United Kingdom, Netherland, Etiopia, Iran and Slovakia.

#### **4.2.5. Educational Level**

**Table 4.5. Educational Level**

<b>Degree</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
PhD	32	12%
Masters	57	22%
Bachelors	121	48%
Secondary	35	13%
Primary	12	4%

The most of the people who attanted the questionnaire is educated. Almost half of them has bachelor degree. People who have masters degree is 22%. The ratio between Ph.D and secondary school are very close. The last group is primary school with 4%.

### 4.3. Social Media

**Table 4.6. Social Media**

	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>7.</b> Do you think social media is important for airline companies? Please evaluate it from 1 up 5.	102	35	54	23	43
<b>8.</b> Are you interested the social media posts of THY?	87	69	32	36	33
<b>9.</b> Are you interested the Instagram of THY?	96	68	23	16	54
<b>10.</b> Are you interested the Facebook of THY?	56	61	34	43	63
<b>11.</b> Are you interested the YouTube of THY?	84	35	20	23	43

### 4.4. Brand Image

**Table 4.7. Brand Image**

	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>12.</b> The luxury brand image is recognized as being proportional to the quality of service. Do you think Thy present luxury brand image?	129	54	23	20	31
<b>13.</b> Do you think Thy is reliable?	163	52	4	11	27
<b>14.</b> How likely would you recommend Thy to your friends or colleagues?	85	72	67	21	12
<b>15.</b> Do you think Thy has good service?	57	134	32	21	13
<b>16.</b> Do you think Thy has bad service?	9	12	35	44	157

### 4.5. Co-branding Strategies

**Table 4.8. Co-branding Strategies**

	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>17.</b> Does attractive loyalty program of an airline that can make you loyal to an airline brand?	94	82	43	35	3

**Table 4.8. (cont.)**

<b>18.</b> Is branding strategies of Thy successful?	87	104	35	8	23
<b>19.</b> Is affordable price enough to make you loyal to an airline brand?	112	98	38	5	4
<b>20.</b> Is luxury enough to make you loyal to an airline brand?	23	53	34	52	95
<b>21.</b> Is the advertisement of Kobe and Messi influential?	67	83	64	21	22

#### **4.6. Brand Credibility**

**Table 4.9. Brand Credibility**

	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>22.</b> Is the advertisement of Thy the impression on you profound	87	94	13	38	25
<b>23.</b> Does the catchword of Globally Yours make contribution to increase the credibility of Thy	105	63	62	17	10
<b>24.</b> Does the catchword of Widen your World contribute to increase the credibility of Thy?	87	65	79	6	20
<b>25.</b> Does co-branding strategies effect on brand credibility of Thy?	71	68	55	10	53
<b>26.</b> Does TV advertisement has effect on brand credibility of Thy?	104	89	54	6	4

#### **4.7. Discussion of the Survey**

51.4% female and 48.6% male take part in the survey. The average age of them is 25-34, 33.12% of attendants. The majority of the group has university degree with 82%.

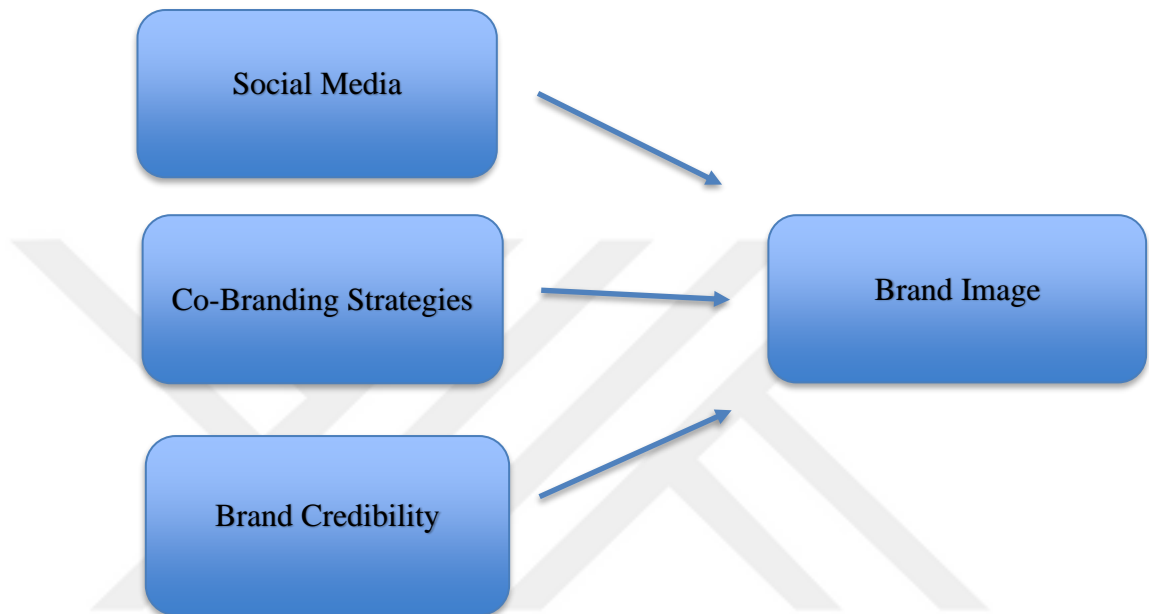
Previous theories and thesis took into consideration when findings for the hypotheses were elucidated. There may be some knowledge gaps regarding the relationships between social media and brand loyalty. Particularly the example of Thy is examined. It gives a chance to see whole picture in the market. The connection between these elements was solved. Those hypotheses was only an assumption.

Taking into consideration the results of the thesis, airline companies can establish brand loyalty via social media as long as they enable actual and current contents and fulfill the expectations of their customers using social media immediately. Hence, to survive in this competition environment, airlines should establish customer loyalty. Companies are able to understand how influential interactive communication to create brand loyalty using social media. The brand loyalty factor in social media primarily relies upon the financial situation of people so people who attended in the survey tend to reach the cheapest offer without regarding the brand because most of them responded regarding question like that luxury is not enough to make them loyal to an airline brand.

The concepts of trust, satisfaction, and perceived quality consist of brand loyalty. Therefore, one of the drivers of the brand in social media is WOM but the principal element is price so loyal consumers are assumed to be more price sensitive. Most of the people who attended the questionnaire responded the question that “Is affordable price enough to make you loyal to an airline brand?” positively. It displays the price is important but this is the not only factor because many people also emphasized the importance of good service rather than price.

Considering all these, it is elucidating that brand loyalty elements in social media are associated to trust, satisfaction with the service and advantages from the company. People prefer to follow a brand in social media, which is to give information about campaigns, and customers who would like to see flight occasions in social media. This thesis presents that how social media influences brand loyalty in airline industry. Based on the examinations and results on this study, it is said that a forward study is needed to further comprehension the significance of the social media marketing in the airline industry.

The research model displays the center and details of the study within the scope of the thesis goal; social media concept and social media marketing, internet-based communication and interaction methods, brand loyalty and the related research scales in airline industry. The model aimed that social media has effects on brand loyalty significantly. The thesis model and hypothesis for strong brand can be seen below:



**Figure 4.1. The Conceptual Model of the Present Study**

Brand Image can be valued as the component of the consumers` choice on purchase intention. Relation between brand image and the other factors is checked with multi regression linear model.

**4.7.1. Relation between Social Media and Brand Image**

**Table 4.10. H1 Coefficients**

Dependent Variable: Brand Image	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.

**Table 4.10. (cont.)**

<b>Social Media</b>	0,826	0,039	0,719	20,926	0,030
<b>Co-Branding Strategies</b>	0,366	0,076	0,383	4,846	0,130
<b>Brand Credibility</b>	-0,007	0,066	-0,008	-0,099	0,936

According to regression model relationship between brand image and other components can be formulized as below in the hypothesis (H1).

$$H1 (\text{Brand Image}) = (0.719 \times \text{Social Media}) + (0.383 \times \text{Co-Branding Strategies}) - (0.007 \times \text{Brand Credibility})$$

In statistical perspective, Anova Sig. values should be less than 0.05. It is safe to assume that social media has almost %72 percent effect on brand image with Anova Sig. value of 0.03. Co-branding strategies and brand credibility values has more than 0.05 value. These two components are statistically irrelevant with H1. According to obtained values, it is revealed that using social media effectively for airline companies is vital to create and protect good brand image.

**Table 4.11. Statistical Coefficients**

<b>Dependent Variable: Brand Image</b>	<b>95,0% Confidence Interval for B</b>		<b>Correlations</b>			<b>Collinearity Statistics</b>	
	<b>Lower Bound</b>	<b>Upper Bound</b>	<b>Zero-order</b>	<b>Partial</b>	<b>Part</b>	<b>Tolerance</b>	<b>VIF</b>
<b>Social Media</b>	0,324	1,328	0,956	0,998	0,529	0,542	1,842
<b>Co-Branding Strategies</b>	-0,593	1,326	0,831	0,979	0,122	0,102	9,793
<b>Brand Credibility</b>	-0,849	0,836	0,841	-0,098	-	0,092	10,798

Collinearity statistical VIF value should be in between 1.5 and 2.5 to have reliable model. Social media has 1.842 in this analysis.

**Table 4.12. Pearson Correlations**

<b>Correlations</b>				
	<b>Brand Image</b>	<b>Social Media</b>	<b>Co-branding Strategies</b>	<b>Brand Credibility</b>
<b>Brand Image</b>	1	0,956	0,831	0,841
<b>Social Media</b>	0,956	1	0,633	0,676
<b>Co-Branding Strategies</b>	0,831	0,633	1	0,948
<b>Brand Credibility</b>	0,841	0,675	0,947	1



## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Airline industry has a very competitive environment so they use various methods and strategies to strengthen their brands and survive in the sector. Strong brands can rise customer trust in the product and company. In this paper, significant issues to create brand image, importance of brand credibility, influence of social media, brand image and co-branding, are examined with various specific examples from airlines. Firstly, providing brand credibility is indispensable component for a strong brand so airlines frequently use technology, genuine quality and good customer service to make it possible. Secondly, today most of the airlines use social media effectively and they accessible across multiple major social media networks. Their aim is to engage the customer with a personalized feel and direct reply to their queries and keep their brand strong. Finally yet importantly, airlines make effort to promote their brand images that is the perception of the brand in the mind of the customer, and they develop co-branding strategy.

After the thesis, it is seen that brand loyalty factors in social media are regarding trust, service satisfaction and interactive communication. Having finished the thesis, I conclude that Thy uses social media very actively and the social media management and the strategies of the company is very successful. The survey demonstrates that the social media accounts become a meeting point with customers because most of the people who attended the survey follow very closely the social media accounts of Thy. Social media is a dialogue. It is not a monologue so the interactive relations with the customers provide to understand demands and preferences of the airline customers. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that social media qualities are significant contributor for fostering favorable customer outcomes and should be given prime importance by organizations. It is inevitable to use social media platforms to provide competitive advantage with customer profiles

and expectations and to ensure effective customer relationship management in today's dominant new media and communication technologies.

Findings and results for the hypotheses were taken into consideration and analyzed based on previous theories and thesis. There will be a lack of knowledge regarding the relationships between social media marketing and brand loyalty in the airline market. The connection between these elements is analyzed, these hypotheses being just an assumption. Taking into consideration the results, airlines can build brand loyalty using social media as long as they enable active and actual contents and meet expectancies of customers through social media. Hence, to protect their position of the company in competitive environment, they should establish customer loyalty.

It is enabled that interactive communication, brand expectation and brand loyalty in social media are connected with each other. Airlines may comprehend how influential interactive communication to create brand loyalty in social media is or how the level of brand loyalty raised the brand expectation. It is examined that brand loyalty elements in social media are associated to trust, satisfaction with the service, communication interactively and advantages from the company.

### **5.1. Limitations and Recommendations for Further Researches**

The most challenging point of this thesis is related to scarcity of research regarding social media and brand image particularly Turkish Airlines. There are miscellaneous researches regarding using social media of Turkish Airlines, there is no specific study relationships between social media and brand image. This thesis provides to comprehend the importance of strong brand image and what kinds of methods are used to achieve it. It will be preliminary thesis for future researches regarding social media and brand image of Turkish Airlines. It is predicted that with the development of social media, digitalization and technology, their impact on the brand image of airline companies will increase. This study can improve with these dynamics by considering these dynamics.

To sum up, many trends are effective on brand loyalty. Factors have direct connection to build brand loyalty via social media are identified. In this thesis, we

covered four components of the theory; I added another factor component that means customer chooses could base on other factors as well. This part is open for future improvements. This model with additional factors might give better iterations.



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## Personal Information:

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## Education:

2021-2024: Master Degree in Air Transport Management Student

M.Sc. Joint program by;

Air Business Academy

Turkish Airlines Aviation Academy

Ibn Haldun University

Embry Riddle University

Imperial College London

2006 - 2012: Bachelor Degree in Mechanical Engineering

Istanbul Technical University, Turkey

## Experience:

2023-To Date: Turkish Airlines, Turkey - Airbus 320 Commander

2013-2022: Turkish Airlines, Turkey - Airbus 320 First Officer

2012-2013: Ford Motor Company, Turkey - Product Development Engineer

Driveshaft Team

2012-2013: Lionbridge, Google Inc., United States

Internet Assessor

2010: 7-Eleven Inc., United States

Sales Associate

2006: Key Smart Computer Hardware Company, Turkey

Technical Support Department

## Achievement and Rewards:

11/02/2019: Letter of Appreciation from Turkish Airlines

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2005: Istanbulsum International Ecology and Environment Project, Turkey

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\*Gold Medal

2005: 9th INEPHO International Ecology and Environment Project, Turkey

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Language Skills:

Turkish: Mother Tongue

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