

ACTIVITY ANALYSIS OF HEALTH TOURISM AGENCIES: AN APPLICATION ON HEALTH TOURISM AGENCIES IN ISTANBUL

Mustafa Kara, Nurullah Arikan, Mustafa Sercan Çakmak

T.C. Istanbul Rumeli University, Turkey

Abstract

In this study, the activities of health tourism businesses in Istanbul will be examined. The study examines the health tourism sector and the potential of Istanbul, and evaluates the functioning, services, customer satisfaction and future potential of health tourism companies operating in Istanbul. The aim of the study is to provide in-depth information about the activities of health tourism businesses and to evaluate the future growth potential of the sector. Therefore, it has been determined that health tourism businesses in Istanbul are in a good position and promising for the future. However, it was also emphasized that quality standards and customer satisfaction should be improved.

The data shows that Istanbul's health tourism sector is growing rapidly and various health service providers have benefited greatly from this expansion. These agencies collaborate with healthcare providers such as hospitals, clinics, thermal and spa centers to offer various healthcare services to foreign patients. These services include dentistry, cancer care, cardiac surgery and other medical procedures. In the study, the operation and functioning of health tourism agencies in Istanbul were examined in detail. The duties of the agencies include bringing patients to Istanbul, providing accommodation, transporting clients to and from the airport, arranging medical appointments and providing translation services. Agents are also responsible for how long their clients spend in Istanbul and customer satisfaction is very important.

The findings of the study show that Istanbul is an area for future expansion of health tourism businesses. However, agencies should continue to improve customer satisfaction and service quality. The higher the service quality of agencies, the more likely customers are to choose health tourism in Istanbul. Agencies should therefore take the necessary actions to raise the quality standards of their services and continue their customer-oriented work.

Key words: health tourism, agency, Istanbul, medical tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the global health tourism industry has experienced rapid growth. The development of health tourism around the world has also started to take place in Turkey. Turkey has an important place in the health tourism economy, which has become an important source of income for countries. Both travel agencies and healthcare providers are experiencing an increase in demand due to the growing number of people seeking medical care abroad.

In addition to its historical, cultural and touristic attractions, Istanbul has numerous hospitals and clinics offering high quality medical care. Istanbul can offer a wide range of options to patients traveling specifically for medical tourism. Patients prefer Istanbul because it offers so many opportunities and options. Therefore, identifying the growth potential of the sector requires consideration of the roles and pursuits of medical tourism companies operating in Istanbul. Turkey is a successful destination for medical tourism, as evidenced by the revenues generated from the sector and the increase in the number of medical travelers arriving here each year.

This study aims to examine the activities of health tourism organizations in Istanbul. For this purpose, the health tourism sector in Istanbul, the importance of the sector, the functions, services, customer satisfaction and future potential of health tourism organizations were investigated. The study aims to provide comprehensive information about the activities of health tourism agencies in Istanbul and help

identify the future growth potential of the sector. In this study, 127 health tourism agencies were interviewed. Survey method was applied to these agencies. The survey questions are divided into 3 sections and consist of 50 questions in total. The article consists of 4 sections. Conceptual environment, Purpose and Problem of the Research, Research Methodology, Findings and Data Analysis are included. In the last section, a general evaluation is made within the scope of Conclusions and Recommendations and suggestions for future studies are presented.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Health Tourism

The word "tour", which dates back to the 17th century and is derived from the Hebrew word "tourah" meaning "learning, research", is where the idea of tourism first emerged. When the Hebrews looked at the economic and social conditions of individuals residing in a place other than their permanent residence, they called the travelers tourists and the activity as a tour (Erdoğan, 1996: 8).

There are various definitions of the terms "health tourism" and "tourist health". The term "health tourism" refers to tourist travel for the purpose of regaining, improving or maintaining one's health. On the other hand, tourist health refers to the totality of actions taken by travelers to identify and address health problems they may encounter during their travels, as well as to prevent various diseases and mishaps (Gençay, 2007; Aydın & Şeker, 2011).

There are many benefits of health tourism in the economic situation of nations and provinces. Some of them are the promotion of various cultural and social interactions between nations, the exchange of knowledge, skills and technology, and the development of the economies of the nation and provinces with the money generated from tourists traveling for health tourism. In addition, health tourism can positively influence the growth of the medical industry and trade in the country and province, improving health services and promoting a comprehensive network of public and health organizations aligned with these services (Annette B and deArellano, 2007).

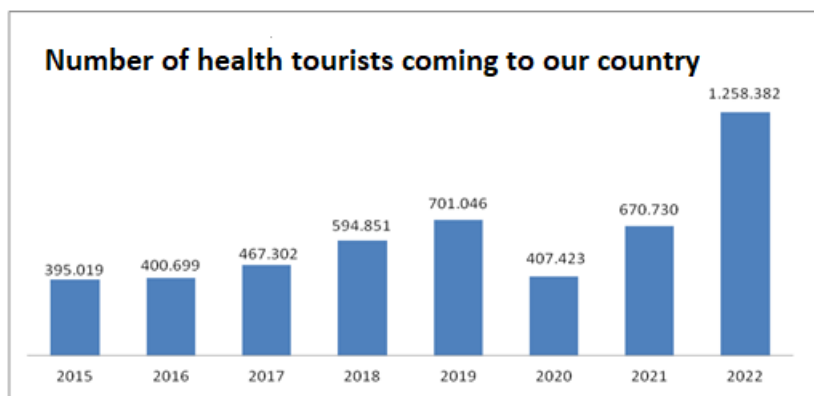
One of the factors affecting individuals to travel for tourism is undoubtedly health. This factor has emerged from time to time to regain lost health and from time to time to maintain health for a long time (Ztürk and Yazcolu, 2002: 9). Thanks to the growth of the tourism industry worldwide and in Turkey, alternative travel options have gained popularity and once again, travel for health-related reasons has begun to develop and diversify. Countries with important tourism markets are trying to spread the use of tourism tools such as golf tourism, cultural tourism, winter tourism, highland tourism, faith tourism and health tourism throughout the year (Göksu, 2002:17).

2.2. Health tourism in Turkey

When it comes to health tourism in Turkey, the first thing that comes to mind are hotels established near the source of healing waters and health facilities where thermal treatment is applied. However, there have been significant changes in the last 10-15 years, especially in the private sector, and Turkey is now competing with countries around the world in health tourism. Turkey has recently become a rising value in the field of health tourism with the growth of private health facilities and the elimination of the deficiencies of public hospitals in this field (Özgül, 2014:23).

The significant increase in the number of health tourists coming to our country in recent years can be seen in Table 1. Health tourism, which constitutes a significant portion of economic income, is one of the most important topics that should be developed with the necessary infrastructure and incentive programs and raised to better levels.

Table 1. Number of health tourists coming to our country



Source: TUIK (<https://www.ushas.com.tr/saglik-turizmi-verileri/>)

In recent years, patients from all over the world have started to prefer Turkey's private medical facilities for their medical care. This is mainly because medical procedures in Turkey are more affordable than those performed with modern techniques in source countries. Almost all branches such as plastic and aesthetic surgery, open heart surgery, hair transplantation, IVF, eye surgeries, skin diseases, cancer treatments, check-ups, otolaryngology, dialysis and cardiovascular surgery, gynecology, dentistry, neurosurgery, orthopedics, SPA, physical therapy rehabilitation, etc. prefer Turkish health institutions due to their low cost and high quality and technology standards (İçöz, 2009: 2271).

3. PURPOSE AND PROBLEM OF THE RESEARCH

3.1. *The Purpose of the research*

The aim of this study is to analyze the activities of health tourism institutions in Istanbul and to determine the growth potential of the sector. For this purpose, we aim to provide information about health tourism institutions in Istanbul by examining the importance of the health tourism sector, functions, services, customer satisfaction and future potential of health tourism institutions. The aim of this study is to learn more about the activities of health tourism institutions in Istanbul and to gain insight into the future growth potential of the sector.

The problem of this study is that there is not enough information about the functioning, services, customer satisfaction and future potential of agencies operating in the health tourism sector in Istanbul. Therefore, the activities of health tourism agencies in Istanbul should be analyzed in detail to determine the growth potential of the sector and to improve the activities of businesses in the sector. By addressing this problem, this study aims to provide a comprehensive information about the activities of health tourism agencies in Istanbul.

3.2. *The Research Problem*

Health tourism is one of Turkey's most important economic resources and attracts a significant number of tourists. Since there is a lack of information or resources, institutions or organizations that want to engage in health tourism cannot be guiding on what to do and what not to do. Health tourism in our country has not yet reached the desired level despite the investments made by authorized institutions in this field. This study fills this gap and paves the way to create a reference point for institutions or organizations that want to exhibit health tourism activities in our country.

At the stage of determining the problem of the research, 4 hypotheses were established. At the end of the study, evaluations were made according to the results of the survey by trying to prove these hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. Female customers make their agency preferences mostly on recommendation.

Hypothesis 2. Female customers from the Middle East region prefer Istanbul health tourism agencies the most.

Hypothesis 3. The most demanded service by customers who prefer Istanbul for health tourism is aesthetic service.

Hypothesis 4. Agencies with Instagram social media accounts have more customers than agencies with other social media accounts.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Model, Type and Data Collection Method

In this study, data were collected through a questionnaire. The scope of the research is the agencies operating in Istanbul related to health tourism. The survey questions were directed to the relevant managers or directors of health tourism agencies.

4.2. Determination of Sample Size and Error Margin

The survey was applied to 127 businesses operating in the field of health tourism in Istanbul. The sample size calculation table of the research is given below.

SAMPLE CALCULATION TABLE

F	Parameters	Description	x
p	Acceptance rate of the studied event	Enter a value such that $p+q=1.0$	0,500
q	The rejection rate of the studied event	Enter a value such that $p+q=1.0$	0,500
d	Accepted ($\pm$) sampling error	Enter the sampling error of your choice	0,050
t	According to the significance level, the t-value	Please select from the side table according to the value of d	1,960
N	The Universe of Research	Enter the research universe	175

n	Sampling	120
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4.3. Form of Conducted Survey and Types of Questions

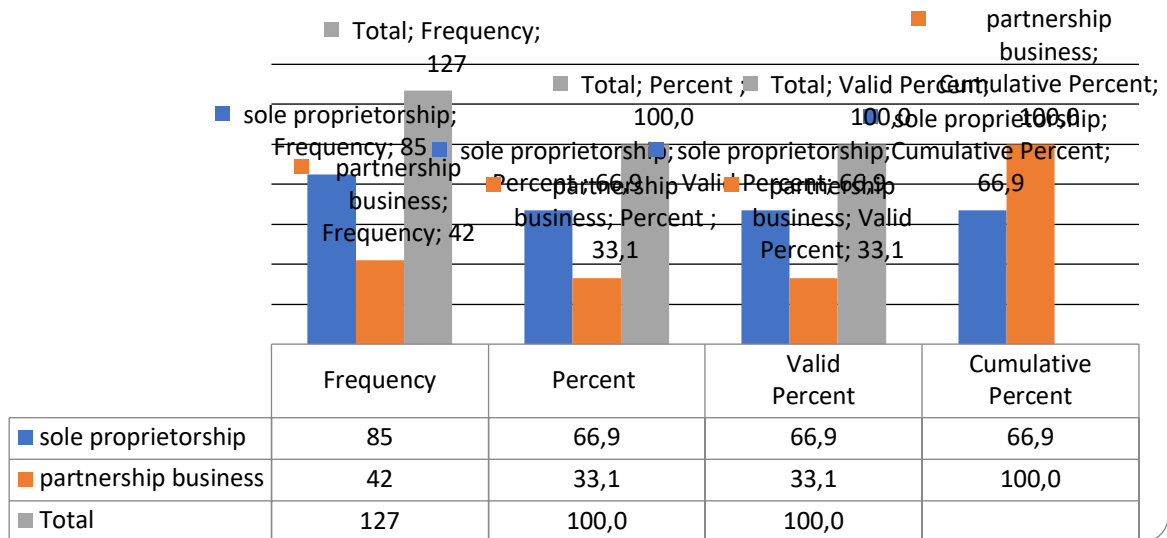
The questionnaire consists of 60 questions and 3 sections. In the first section, Demographic Structure and Socio-Economic Indicators, in the second section, Agency Information and in the last section, Customer and Service Information of Agencies were tested.

5. THE FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH AND THEIR ANALYSIS

5.1 Business Structures of Agencies

The question "What is the legal structure of the agency?" was asked to the respondents. When the answers given to the questionnaire question were analyzed, it was determined that 66.9% were sole proprietorships and 33.1% were partnership businesses. Related data are given in Table 2.

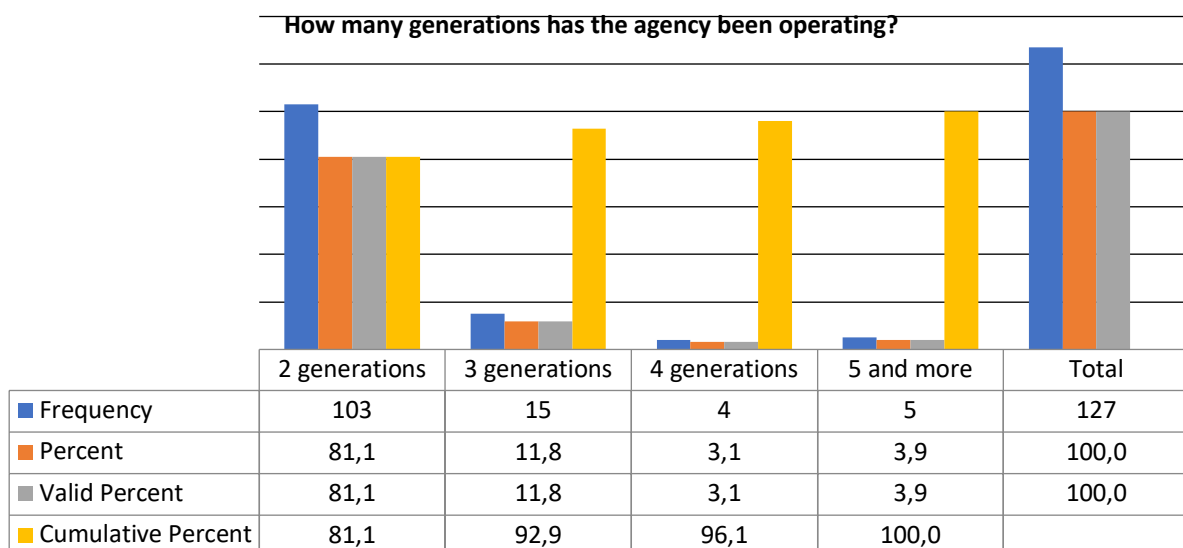
What is your agency legal structure?



When Table 2 is analyzed, it is seen that the frequency value of the agencies answering "sole proprietorship" is 85, while the frequency value of those answering "partnership business" is 42.

5.2. Continuity of Agencies

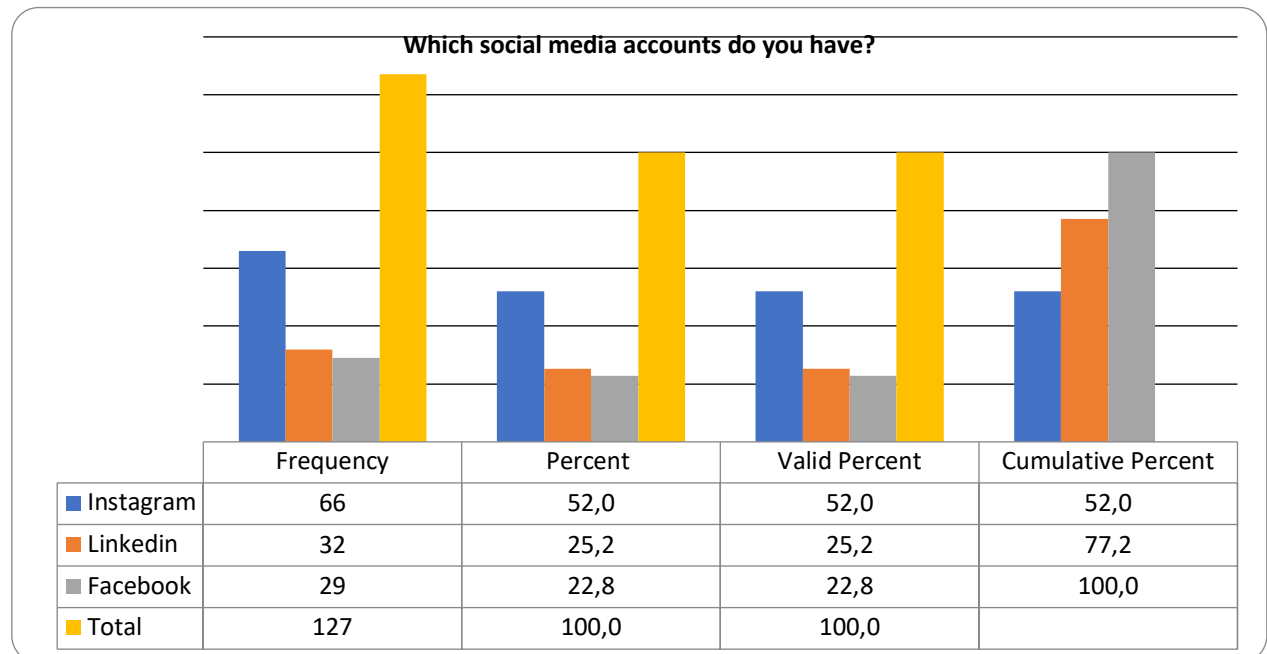
The question "How many generations has the agency been operating?" was asked to the respondents. When the answers given to the questionnaire question were analyzed, 81.1% answered 2 generations, 11.8% answered 3 generations, 3.1% answered 4 generations and finally 3.9% answered 5 or more generations. Related data are given in Table 3.



When we examine Table 3, it is seen that the frequency value of the agencies answering 2 generations is 103, the frequency value of the agencies answering 3 generations is 15, the frequency value of the agencies answering 4 generations is 4, and the frequency value of the agencies answering 5 and more is 5.

5.3. Social Media Accounts of Agencies

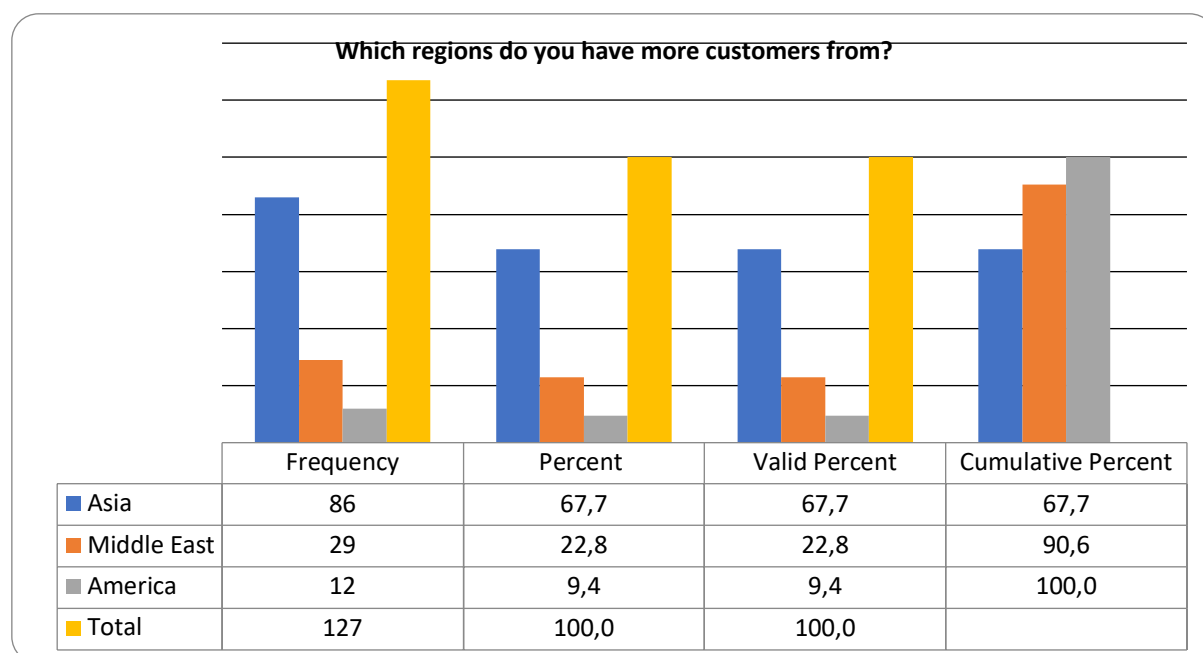
The participants were asked the question "Which social media accounts do you have?". When the answers given to the questionnaire question are analyzed, 52% said that they have Instagram, 25.2% LinkedIn and 22.8% Facebook accounts. Related data are given in Table 4.



When we examine Table 4, it is seen that the frequency value of agencies with Instagram accounts is 66, the frequency value of agencies with LinkedIn accounts is 32, and the frequency value of agencies with Facebook accounts is 29.

5.4. Regions of Customers Arriving at Agencies

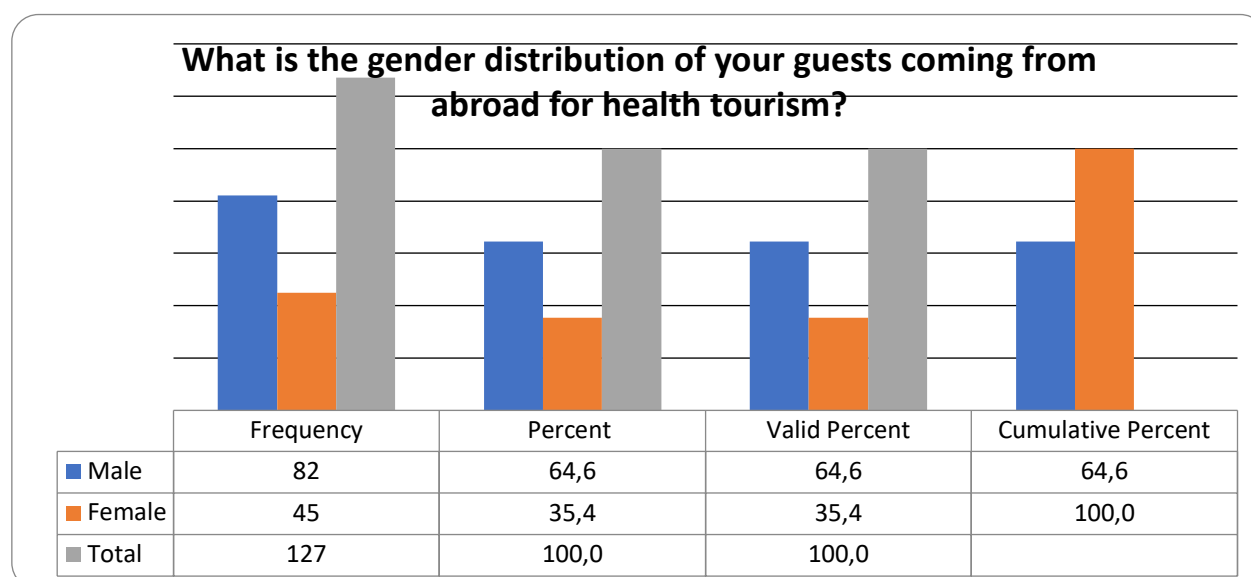
The respondents were asked the question "Which regions do you have more customers from?". When the answers given to the survey question are analyzed, 67.7% of the respondents said that they have customers from Asia, 22.8% from the Middle East and 9.4% from America. Related data are given in Table 5.



When we examine Table 5, it is seen that the frequency value of the agencies stating that they have customers from the Asian region is 86, the frequency value of the agencies stating that they have customers from the Middle East region is 29, and the frequency value of the agencies stating that they have customers from the American region is 12.

5.5. Gender Distribution of Customers

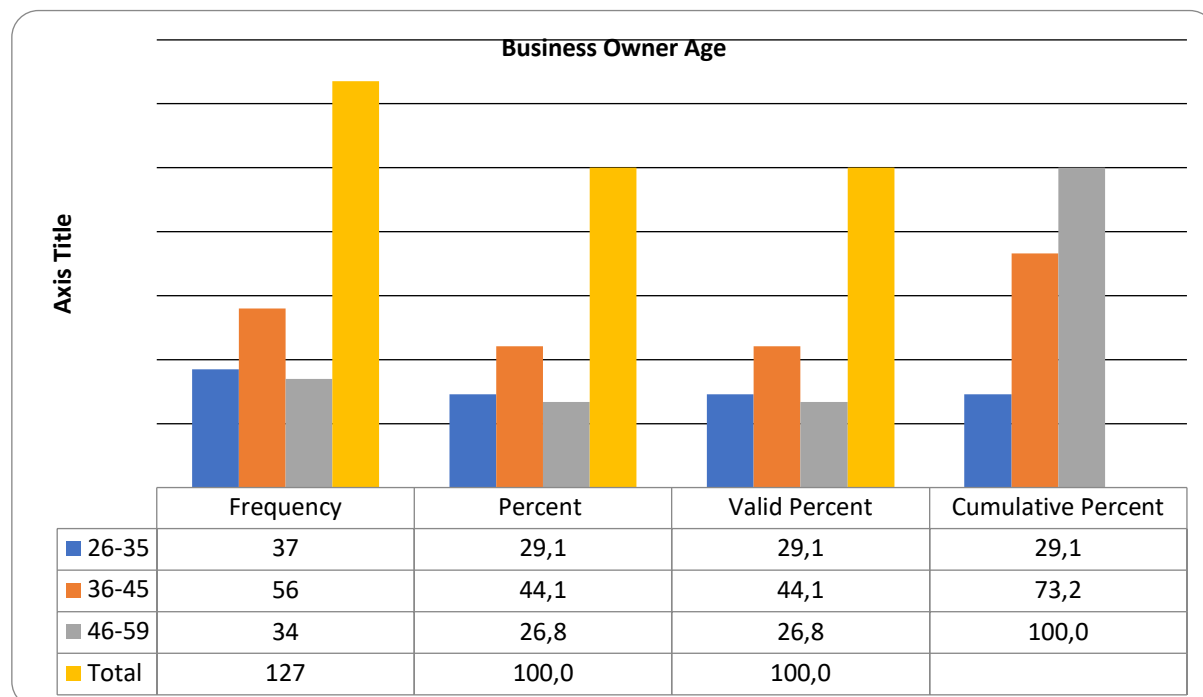
The question "What is the gender distribution of your guests coming to our country for health tourism from abroad?" was asked to the participants who participated in the survey. When the answers given to the questionnaire question were analyzed, 64.6% of the respondents said that they had male and 35.4% said that they had female customers. Related data are given in Table 6.



When we examined Table 6, it was seen that the frequency value of the agencies stating that they have male customers is 82 and the frequency value of the agencies stating that they have female customers is 45.

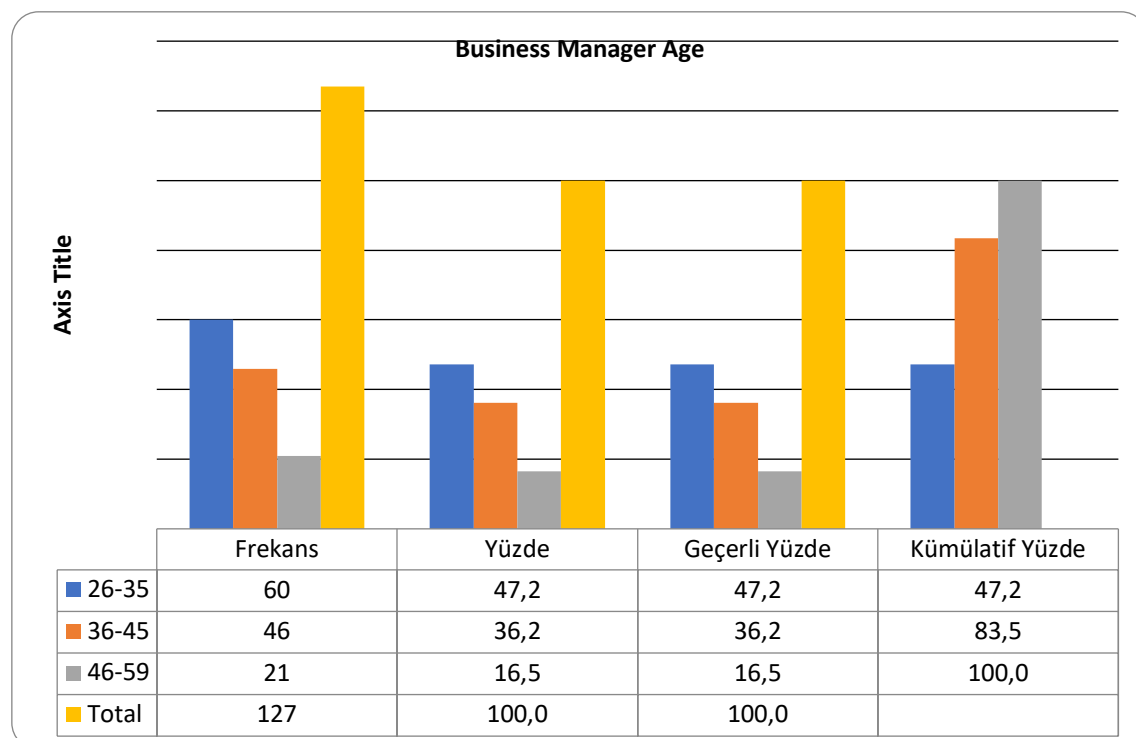
5.6. Age Distribution of Enterprise Managers and Owners

The question "Your age?" was asked to the Business Managers or Business Owner participants who participated in the survey. When the answers given to the questionnaire question were analyzed, 29.1% of the business owners stated that they were between 26-35 years old, 44.1% between 36-45 years old, and 26.8% between 46-59 years old. Related data are given in Table 7.



When we examined Table 7, it was seen that the frequency value of the respondents who stated the age range of 26-35 as the Business Owner was 37, the frequency value of the respondents who stated the age range of 36-45 was 56, and the frequency value of the respondents who stated the age range of 46-59 was 34.

When the answers given to the questionnaire question were analyzed, 47.2% of the Business Managers stated that they were between the ages of 26-35, 36.2% between the ages of 36-45, and 16.5% between the ages of 46-59. Related data are given in Table 8.



When we examined Table 8, it was seen that the frequency value of the participants who stated the age range of 26-35 years as Business Manager was 60, the frequency value of the participants who stated the age range of 36-45 years was 46, and the frequency value of the participants who stated the age range of 46-59 years was 21.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study, which was prepared to analyze the activities of health tourism agencies operating in official records in Istanbul, was carried out with business owners or business managers of health tourism agencies serving in Istanbul. In this context, the survey data obtained from business owners or business managers were analyzed with SPSS data analysis program. According to the results of the analysis; 66.9% of the health tourism agencies in Istanbul are sole proprietorships and 33.1% are partnership businesses. In terms of the duration of continuing their activities within these agencies, it was seen that the rate of agencies continuing their activities for 2 generations was 81.1%, the rate of agencies continuing for 3 generations was 11.8%, the rate of agencies continuing for 4 generations was 3.1%, and the rate of those who answered 5 or more generations was 3.9%. Among the social media accounts, 52% of the agencies have Instagram accounts, 25.2% have LinkedIn accounts and 22.8% have Facebook accounts. The most common customers of the agencies were 67.7% from the Asian region, 22.8% from the Middle East region and 9.4% from the American region. The gender distribution of the visitors to the agencies was 64.6% male and 35.4% female. As for the age ranges of the business owners and business managers of the agencies, 29.1% of the business owners are between the ages of 26-35, 44.1% between the ages of 36-45, 26.8% between the ages of 46-59, and 47.2% of the business managers are between the ages of 26-35, 36.2% between the ages of 36-45, and 16.5% between the ages of 46-59.

In this study, 4 hypotheses were established. Hypotheses were analyzed with Chi-square test in SPSS program. When the analysis results are evaluated;

Hypothesis 1, "Female customers make their agency preferences mostly on recommendation." has established a significant relationship. As a result, the analysis of our research shows that

recommendation plays an important role among the factors affecting the agency preferences of female customers.

Hypothesis 2, "Istanbul health tourism agencies are mostly preferred by female customers from the Middle East region", has established a significant relationship. As a result, the analysis of our research supports that customers from the Middle East region are mostly women.

Hypothesis 3, "The service most demanded by customers who prefer Istanbul for health tourism is aesthetic service." A significant relationship was established. As a result, the analysis of our research has determined that the most preferred service is not aesthetics.

Hypothesis 4, "Agencies with Instagram social media accounts have more customers than agencies with other social media accounts." A significant relationship was established. As a result, the analysis of our research supports that agencies with Instagram social media accounts have more customers.

In this study concerning health tourism, we concluded that health tourism agencies in Istanbul are lacking in advertising and marketing for their services, aside from some presence on certain social media networks. As it stands, these services are predominantly chosen by women for medical aesthetics. However, by establishing a broad and accessible advertising platform, there's potential to attract more male clientele by raising awareness of the services offered in other medical fields, thereby advancing health tourism. Enhancing advertising and marketing strategies within the realm of health tourism could attract customers from various countries.

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