Aydın, K. B., & Güven, G. Ö. (2026). Multilayered determinants of country brand perception: Empirical evidence from Generations Y and Z in Istanbul. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Communication and Media Studies (ICOMS-J),* 2(1), 38-87

Multilayered Determinants of Country Brand Perception: Empirical Evidence from Generations Y and Z in Istanbul*

Research Article

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Abstract

While brand perception plays a critical role in the international positioning of nations in the context of globalization, understanding how this perception is shaped by different generations is becoming increasingly important. In particular, generations Y and Z constitute a key area of research for understanding country brand perceptions due to their close engagement with digital media, exposure to a high flow of information, and evolving value systems. This study aims to examine the perceptions of generations Y and Z living in Istanbul regarding Türkiye's branding within a multi-layered framework.

Based on the assumption that a country brand perception cannot be explained solely by generational identity, the study analyzes the role of intersecting variables such as socio-economic class, digital media use, ethno-linguistic identity, international experience, and political ideology. Within the scope of the quantitative research method, data were collected through a survey

*This article is derived from the master's thesis titled "Perceptions of Turkey's National Brand among Generations Y and Z: A Study in the Context of Socio-Cultural, Economic, and Political Factors in Istanbul," completed by Kemal Bilal Aydın at the Graduate School of Istanbul Commerce University under the supervision of Assist. Prof. Gurur Öyküm Güven.

administered to selected participants using stratified sampling. The data were analyzed using the Mann–Whitney U, Kruskal–Wallis, and Dunn tests, as well as moderation and mediation analyses with the Hayes Process Macro (Model 1 and Model 4) and K-Means clustering analysis.

The findings reveal that the brand perception of Türkiye varies across different dimensions. In the socio-cultural dimension, the generational effect is limited but significant; however, the explanatory power of the generation variable was found to be weak in the socio-economic and socio-political dimensions. Demographic variables such as education level, employment status, and gender were identified as stronger determinants in many dimensions. The use of digital media, particularly through certain platforms, differentiates the country's perception as well. Furthermore, the socio-political aspects were found to become more critical as the level of political interest increased.

The study highlights the limitations of generation-based approaches in the country branding literature, proposes an intersectional analytical framework, and empirically demonstrates the multidimensional structure of young generations' perceptions of the country.

Keywords: *Country Branding, Country Brand Perception, Generation Y, Generation Z, Digital Media.*

Citation

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Article Information

Type	Research Article		
Date of submission	4 Ovtober 2026		
Date of acceptance	3 May 2026		
Date of publication	29 May 2026		
Reviewers	Two Internal - Two External		
Review	Double-blind		
Plagiarism checks	Yes - intihal.net		
Conflicts of Interest	The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest		
Grant Support	No funds, grants, or other support was received		
Ethical Statement	Ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study.		
Complaints	icomsj@icoms.com.tr		
Author Contributions	Conceptualization (CRediT 1)	Author-1 (%40)	Author-2 (%20)
	Data Curation (CRediT 2)	Author-1 (%40)	Author-2 (%20)
	Investigation – Analysis Validation (CRediT 3-4-6-11)	Author-1 (%40)	Author-2 (%20)
	Writing (CRediT 12-13)	Author-1 (%40)	Author-2 (%20)
	Writing – Review & Editing (CRediT 14)	Author-1 (%40)	Author-2 (%20)
Use of Artificial Intelligence	No artificial intelligence-based tools or applications were used in the preparation of this study. The entire content of the study was produced by the author(s) in accordance with scientific research methods and academic ethical principles		
S. Development Goals	10 Reducing Inequalities 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions		
License	CC BY-NC 4.0		

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Ülke Markası Algısının Çok Katmanlı Belirleyicileri: İstanbul'da Y ve Z Kuşaklarından Ampirik Bulgular*

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Öz

Ülke marka algısı, küreselleşme süreciyle birlikte ülkelerin uluslararası konumlanmasında kritik bir rol oynarken, bu algının farklı kuşaklar tarafından nasıl şekillendiği giderek daha fazla önem kazanmaktadır. Özellikle Y ve Z kuşakları, dijital medya ile iç içe yaşamaları, yüksek bilgi akışına maruz kalmaları ve değişen değer sistemleri nedeniyle ülke markasına yönelik algıların anlaşılmasında kilit bir araştırma alanı oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışma, İstanbul'da yaşayan Y ve Z kuşaklarının Türkiye markasına ilişkin algılarını çok katmanlı bir çerçevede incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Bu çalışma, İstanbul'da yaşayan Y ve Z kuşaklarının Türkiye markasına ilişkin algılarını çok katmanlı bir çerçevede incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, ülke markası algısının yalnızca kuşak kimliğiyle açıklanamayacağı varsayımından hareketle; sosyo-ekonomik sınıf, dijital medya kullanımı, etnik-

* Bu makale, Kemal Bilal Aydın tarafından İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü'nde Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Gurur Öyküm Güven danışmanlığında tamamlanan "Y ve Z Kuşaklarının Türkiye Markasına Bakışı: Sosyo-Kültürel, Ekonomik ve Siyasi Bağlamda İstanbul Örneğinde Bir Araştırma" başlıklı yüksek lisans tezinden üretilmiştir.

dilsel kimlik, uluslararası deneyim ve siyasi ideoloji gibi kesişen değişkenlerin rolünü analiz etmektedir. Nicel araştırma yöntemi kapsamında, tabakalı örnekleme ile belirlenen katılımcılardan anket yoluyla veri toplanmış; hiyerarşik regresyon, Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis ve Dunn testleri, Hayes PROCESS Macro ile moderasyon ve aracılık analizleri ve K-Means kümeleme analizi yöntemleriyle değerlendirilmiştir.

Bulgular, Türkiye marka algısının farklı boyutlarda değişkenlik gösterdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Sosyo-kültürel boyutta kuşak etkisinin sınırlı ancak anlamlı olduğu; buna karşılık sosyo-ekonomik ve sosyo-politik boyutlarda kuşak değişkeninin açıklayıcılığının zayıf kaldığı tespit edilmiştir. Eğitim düzeyi, çalışma durumu ve cinsiyet gibi demografik değişkenlerin birçok boyutta daha güçlü belirleyiciler olduğu görülmüştür. Dijital medya kullanımının, özellikle belirli platformlar üzerinden, ülke algısını farklılaştırdığı; siyasi ilgi düzeyi arttıkça sosyo-politik algının daha eleştirel hale geldiği bulgulanmıştır.

Çalışma, ülke markası literatüründe kuşak temelli yaklaşımların sınırlılıklarını ortaya koyarak, kesişimsel bir analiz çerçevesi önermekte ve genç kuşakların ülke algısının çok boyutlu yapısını ampirik olarak göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Ülke Markası, Ülke Marka Algısı, Y Kuşağı, Z Kuşağı, Dijital Medya.*

Atıf Bilgisi
Aydın, K. B., & Güven, G. Ö. (2026). Ülke Markası Algısının Çok Katmanlı Belirleyicileri: İstanbul'da Y ve Z Kuşaklarından Ampirik Bulgular. Disipimlerarası İletşim ve Medya Çalışmaları Dergisi *(ICOMS-J),* 2(1), 38-87.

Makale Bilgileri

Türü	Araştırma Makalesi		
Geliş Tarihi	4 Ocak 2026		
Kabul Tarihi	3 Mayıs 2026		
Yayım Tarihi	29 Mayıs 2026		
Hakem Sayısı	İki İç Hakem - İki Dış Hakem		
Değerlendirme	Çift Taraflı Kör Hakemlik		
Benzerlik Taraması	Yapıldı - intihal.net		
Çıkar Çatışması	Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.		
Finansman	Herhangi bir fon, hibe veya başka bir destek alınmamıştır.		
Etik Beyan	Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde etik ilkelere uyulmuştur.		
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Yazar Katkıları	Araştırmanın Tasarımı (CRediT 1)	Yazar -1 (%50)	Yazar -2 (%50)
	Veri Toplanması (CRediT 2)	Yazar -1 (%80)	Yazar -2 (%20)
	Araştırma – Veri Analizi – Doğrulama (CRediT 3-4-6-11)	Yazar -1 (%80)	Yazar -2 (%20)
	Makalenin Yazımı (CRediT 12-13)	Yazar -1 (%90)	Yazar -2 (%10)
	Metnin Tashihi ve Geliştirilmesi (CRediT 14)	Yazar -1 (%50)	Yazar -2 (%50)
Yapay Zeka Kullanımı	Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde yapay zeka tabanlı herhangi bir araç veya uygulama kullanılmamıştır. Çalışmanın tüm içeriği, yazar(lar) tarafından bilimsel araştırma yöntemleri ve akademik etik ilkelere uygun şekilde üretilmiştir		
S. Kalkınma Amaçları	10 Eşitsizliklerin Azaltılması 16 Barış, Adalet ve Güçlü Kurumlar		
Lisans	CC BY-NC 4.0		

Introductıon

With the globalization process, countries are positioned not only as economic or political actors, but also as entities with distinct brand identity. Since Anholt's (2005) pioneering work, the concept of nation brand has constituted an ever-expanding research area at the intersection of international relations, marketing and communication disciplines. However, the influence of social, identity-related, and political factors on perceptions of a country's brand has not been adequately addressed in the literature, particularly among younger generations.

Türkiye offers a unique field for country brand research due to its geopolitical location, demographic structure and multi-layered cultural heritage. Composing a significant proportion of the population, generations Y (born 1981-2000) and Z (born after 2000) consist of individuals who closely follow both domestic political dynamics and global information flows, are deeply engaged with digital media and are relatively mobile on international level. The perceptions of these generations on Türkiye's brand are not only a matter of academic curiosity; it is also a strategic data source for the country's internal and external communication strategies.

A review of existing literature reveals that country brand perception has largely been examined through the lens of generational differences, while intersecting variables such as socio-economic class, ethnic identity, digital media use, and international experience have often been overlooked. This article aims to address this gap. The main research question of this study is as follows: How, and to what extent, do generational identity, socio-economic class position, the digital information ecosystem, ethno-linguistic identity, international experience, and political ideology shape perceptions of Türkiye's country brand among members of generations Y and Z living in Istanbul? This question is explored through an analytical framework comprising five distinct sub-questions.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Map for Country Brand, Country Image and Country Reputation

Although the concepts of country brand, country image, and country reputation are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature, they are analytically distinct. Anholt (2005, 2007) defines the country brand as the perceptual value that a country possesses in the international

arena. Passow, Fehlmann, and Grahlow (2005) conceptualize a country's reputation as the aggregate of its cognitive and emotional components. More recently, Hitz, Schwaiger, and Gabel (2024) updated this framework by emphasizing the dimensions of governance, economic performance, and cultural appeal in the measurement of reputation. Hakala, Lemmetyinen, and Kantola (2013), in turn, examined country image through the lenses of historical memory, cultural identity, and international visibility. In this study, these three concepts are employed as complementary analytical layers for understanding perceptions of a country.

Generational Identity and Class Position: An Intersectional Perspective

Generational research suggests that individuals develop shared value systems through common historical experiences and technological transformations (Twenge, 2017; Dimock, 2019). However, a longstanding criticism of generational theory, dating back to Mannheim (1952), is that an exclusive focus on generational identity tends to overshadow class-, ethnicity-, and gender-based differences. Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality places this critique within a broader theoretical framework, arguing that individual perceptions are not shaped by a single axis of identity but rather emerge at the intersection of class, ethnicity, gender, and generation. Indeed, Parry and Urwin (2011) empirically demonstrated that generational differences are often overstated and that class-related variables possess greater explanatory power. This article extends this debate to the context of country brand perception.

Digital Media Ecosystem and Country Perception

Digital media platforms have become the primary spaces in which a country's image is produced and circulated. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) demonstrated that social media has fundamentally transformed the processes of information production and consumption. Studies examining the impact of digital platforms on country brand perception (Florek & Insch, 2020; Sevin, 2017) have shown that different platforms provide distinct informational frames and that these frames directly influence perceptions. Given the differing content logics and user demographics of platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter/X, platform preferences influence country brand perception in many distinct ways, representing an important and underexplored aspect of the question.

Ethnic Identity, Language and Belonging

In multicultural societies, perceptions of a country's brand are closely related to ethnic identity and language use. Bairner (2015) and Ichijo and Uzelac (2005) argue that national identity is not a homogeneous construct; rather, ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences play a significant role in shaping individuals' sense of national belonging. In Türkiye, the ways in which ethnic and linguistic identities shape national belonging have been extensively discussed in the political science and sociology literature (Kadıoğlu, 1996; Özkırımlı & Sofos, 2008). However, the relationship between ethnic and linguistic identities and country brand perception remains largely underexplored. The role of ethnic identity in brand evaluation (Jamal, 2003) therefore points to a significant gap in the literature.

International Experience and Comparative Evaluation

The impact of international experience on country perception has been widely discussed in the tourism and international education literature. Pizam, Uriely, and Reichel (2000) demonstrated that experiences abroad transform individuals' comparative evaluations of their home countries. Similarly, Vanhoonacker and Reslow (2016) argue that international mobility strengthens critical citizenship awareness. In this context, whether international experience abroad plays a moderating role in shaping perceptions of Türkiye's brand constitutes a unique and worthwhile research question.

Political Ideology and Country Reputation

The relationship between political ideology and perceptions of country reputation has emerged as a significant area of research, particularly in the context of politically polarized societies. In their cultural backlash thesis, Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that political identity directly shapes individuals' levels of institutional trust and perceptions of national reputation. In the case of Türkiye, the impact of political polarization on media trust, perceptions of governance, and evaluations of freedom constitutes a key theoretical foundation underpinning the political dimension of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Purpose and Importance of the Research

The primary aim of this research is to examine the perceptions of Türkiye's brand among generations Y and Z living in Istanbul within a multidimensional framework and to identify the socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political variables that shape these perceptions. Based on the assumption that perceptions of a country's brand cannot be explained solely by generational differences, the study seeks to analyze the influence of intersecting factors such as socio-economic class position, digital media usage patterns, ethno-linguistic identity, international experience, and political ideology. Accordingly, the research aims to assess the explanatory power of the generational variable in comparison with other structural and identity-based determinants.

Another objective of the research is to provide an alternative analytical framework to the reductionist approaches frequently encountered in the literature by examining young generations' perceptions of Türkiye not only through individual variables but also from a multi-layered and intersectional perspective. In this context, the study seeks to reveal the holistic structure of country brand perception by investigating the relationships among different perceptual dimensions, namely the socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political dimensions.

This research is significant in several respects. First, it challenges the limitations of generation-based explanations commonly employed in the country branding literature and contributes theoretically to the field by incorporating an intersectional perspective. Second, given the limited number of empirical studies that examine young generations' perceptions of the country in a multidimensional manner within the Turkish context, the study addresses an important gap in the literature using original and up-to-date data. Third, the findings are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers working in the fields of public diplomacy, strategic communication, and brand management.

Finally, by simultaneously examining the effects of the digital media ecosystem, identity-based differences, and political orientations on country brand perception, this study makes an interdisciplinary contribution to understanding the perceptual world of younger generations.

Method of the Research

This research uses a correlational survey model, a quantitative research method, to examine the brand perception of generation Y and generation Z living in Istanbul regarding Türkiye. The correlational survey model is a research approach that aims to investigate the relationships between two or more variables and to reveal the direction and strength of these relationships (Karasar, 2012). Accordingly, the study is based on the comparative and relational analysis of multiple variables affecting country brand perception.

The population of the research consists of individuals from generations Y and Z residing in Istanbul. The sample was determined using a stratified sampling method based on generation, gender, and district variables. This method allows the population to be divided into subgroups and ensures the adequate representation of each group (Büyüköztürk et al., 2012).

A questionnaire was used for the data collection. The questionnaire consists of a total of 49 Likert-type items measuring the socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political dimensions of country brand perception. It also includes variables related to the participants' demographic characteristics, socio-economic class positions, digital media usage habits, ethno-linguistic identities, international experiences, and political orientations.

The data analysis was conducted in five stages using SPSS 25.0 and JASP 0.96. In the first stage, the relative predictive power of generation and class variables was compared through hierarchical multiple regression analysis. By reporting the increase in explained variance (ΔR^2) at each block, the study sought to identify the strongest predictors using standardized beta coefficients (β) (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). In the second stage, the Mann–Whitney U test was employed to examine whether significant differences existed between participants who used a particular social media platform and those who did not. In the third stage, differences associated with social media use were further examined using the Mann–Whitney U test, while the Kruskal–Wallis and Dunn tests were applied to identify differences among ethnic identity groups. In the fourth stage, the moderating role of international experience was tested using Hayes' Process Macro (Model 1) implemented in SPSS 25.0 (Hayes, 2022). In the fifth stage, the mediating role of political interest was analyzed using Process Macro (Model 4). Finally, a typology was created based on the participants' perception profiles using K-Means clustering analysis.

Problems of the Research

This research aims to identify the fundamental dynamics shaping young generations' perceptions of Türkiye's brand, based on the assumption that country brand perception is a multidimensional and multi-layered phenomenon that cannot be adequately explained through single variables. Accordingly, the study adopts a holistic analytical framework that examines the interactive effects of generational identity, socio-economic class, digital media use, ethno-linguistic identity, international experience, and political orientation.

In line with this objective, the main research problem and its corresponding sub-problems were formulated as follows:

1. *Generation or Class?*
   Are the perceptions of Türkiye's brand among generations Y and Z shaped more strongly by generational identity or by socio-economic class position?

2. *Digital Identity and Country Branding*
   How do social media usage patterns influence and differentiate the perceptions of Türkiye's brand among generations Y and Z?

3. *Ethnic Identity, Language, and Belonging*
   Do ethnic identity and native language use play a decisive role in shaping emotional attachment to and socio-cultural perceptions of Türkiye's brand?

4. *International Experience and Comparative Evaluation*
   How do international experiences, including travel frequency and duration of residence abroad, influence and transform younger generations' evaluations of Türkiye's brand?

5. *Political Interest, Ideology, and Country Reputation*
   How do levels of political interest and ideological identity shape younger generations' perceptions of Türkiye's political reputation?

6. *Typology of Research Participants on Perceptions of Türkiye's brand*
   How do the typology and profile of participants in the research on the perception of Türkiye's brand differ?

Measurement Validity and Reliability

- To establish the validity of the measurement model, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was first conducted, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). In the CFA, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI ≥ 0.95), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA ≤ 0.06), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR ≤ 0.08) were used as the primary goodness-of-fit indicators (Hu & Bentler, 1999). However, the RMSEA threshold of 0.08 proposed by MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara (1996) was also taken into consideration, and RMSEA values below this threshold were interpreted as indicating acceptable model fit. Indeed, model evaluation should be based on a holistic assessment of multiple fit indices rather than on a single index alone (Kline, 2016). Furthermore, it was acknowledged that RMSEA is sensitive to sample size and degrees of freedom and may yield relatively higher values in models containing a large number of items. Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50) was used to assess convergent validity, whereas the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) was employed to evaluate discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients were calculated to assess internal consistency reliability.

- Exploratory factor analysis of the socio-cultural context scale was conducted using SPSS 25.0. The analysis revealed a three-factor structure. The first factor was labeled "Cultural and Natural Wealth," the second "Quality of Life and Development," and the third "Emotional Bond." To further examine the validity of the measurement model, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was subsequently performed for each factor using JASP 0.96.

- The Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) were examined as indicators of model fit.

Table 1. Goodness-of-Fit Indicators in Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Socio-cultural Context Scale

Index	Value	Acceptance Limit
CFI	0,975	≥ 0.95
RMSEA	0,050	≤ 0.06
SRMR	0,031	≤ 0.08

During the CFA process for the socio-cultural context scale, the three-factor structure identified through exploratory factor analysis was initially tested. However, an examination of the modification indices indicated that the items associated with the "Quality of Life and Development" factor negatively affected the overall model fit.

Within this factor, a high residual covariance (Mod. Ind. = 28.819) was observed between the items "I feel comfortable in Türkiye" and "Türkiye is a country that attaches importance to environmental cleanliness." Similarly, the item "There are internationally recognized individuals of Turkish origin in the fields of science, arts, and sports" exhibited substantial cross-loadings across multiple factors (Mod. Ind. = 41.330).

Although the addition of a covariance path between the relevant items was considered, this approach was ultimately rejected because it resulted in inadmissible negative variance estimates. Based on these findings, the "Quality of Life and Development" factor, along with all associated items, was removed from the measurement model. The CFA was then re-estimated, and the fit indices of the resulting two-factor structure were evaluated.

The revised model demonstrated the following fit indices: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.975, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.050, and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = 0.031. According to the criteria proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999), the CFI exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.95, the RMSEA remained below 0.06, and the SRMR was well below 0.08. These results indicate that the two-factor model exhibits an excellent level of fit.

Within the "Cultural and Natural Richness" factor, the factor loadings for the items "Türkiye is a place with natural beauty," "Türkiye is socially and culturally diverse," "Türkiye has a rich historical heritage," "Türkiye has cities worth visiting," "Türkiye is a country rich in gastronomy," and "Türkiye is a country rich in cultural activities" ranged from 0.334 to 0.419. All factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Within the "Emotional Bond" factor, the factor loadings for the items "I love Türkiye" and "I respect Türkiye" were 0.530 and 0.483, respectively, and both were statistically significant ($p < .001$). The covariance between the two factors was 0.518 and was also statistically significant ($p < .001$). Taken together, these findings suggest that the two-factor structure of the socio-cultural context scale is well supported by the data and provides evidence for the validity of the measurement model.

For the socio-economic context scale, exploratory factor analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.0, resulting in a two-factor structure. The first factor was labeled "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness," whereas the second was labeled "Human Resource Qualifications." Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was subsequently performed using JASP 0.96 to evaluate the validity of the measurement model.

The Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) were examined as indicators of model fit.

Table 2. Goodness-Of-Fit Indicators İn Confirmatory Factor Analysis Of The Socio-Economic Context Scale

Index	Value	Acceptance Limit
CFI	0,970	≥ 0.95
RMSEA	0,067	≤ 0.06
SRMR	0,028	≤ 0.08

In the CFA process for the socio-economic context scale, the two-factor structure identified through exploratory factor analysis was initially tested. An examination of the modification indices revealed high residual covariance between several pairs of items: "Türkiye's economy is moving in a future-oriented direction" and "Türkiye has a developed economy" (Mod. Ind. = 85.930), "Türkiye's communication infrastructure is strong" and "Türkiye's transportation infrastructure is strong" (Mod. Ind. = 39.316), and "The work environment in Türkiye is designed to meet the needs of employees" and "The workforce in Türkiye is efficient" (Mod. Ind. = 30.860).

Given the conceptual similarity between these item pairs, one item from each pair was removed from the model. Accordingly, the items "Türkiye's economy is moving in a future-oriented direction," "Türkiye's housing infrastructure is strong," "Türkiye's communication infrastructure is strong," "Turkish-based brands are internationally

recognized," and "The work environment in Türkiye is designed to meet the needs of employees" were excluded from the analysis.

Following the removal of these items, the CFA results for the revised model indicated a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.970, a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.067, and a Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) of 0.028. According to the criteria proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999), the CFI exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.95, and the SRMR remained well below 0.08. Although the RMSEA value slightly exceeded the more stringent threshold of 0.06, it remained within the acceptable range of 0.08. Considering the overall pattern of fit indices, particularly the strong CFI and SRMR values, the model was deemed to demonstrate an acceptable level of fit.

Within the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" factor, the following items—"Türkiye's transportation infrastructure is strong," "Türkiye's health infrastructure is strong," "Türkiye is a country that offers favorable conditions and opportunities to entrepreneurs," "Türkiye is a safe place to invest," "Türkiye has a developed industrial sector," "The labor force in Türkiye is efficient," "Türkiye has a developed economy," "Türkiye produces high-quality products," "Türkiye produces high-quality services," "Turkish Companies are internationally recognized," "Türkiye is known for its design products," and "Türkiye produces high-tech products", all ranged between 0.657 to 1.042— were statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Within the "Human Resource Qualities" factor, the items "Turkish people are creative" and "Turkish people are hardworking" had factor loadings of 0.616 and 0.666, respectively, and both were statistically significant ($p < .001$). The covariance between the two factors was 0.431 and was also statistically significant ($p < .001$). Taken together, these results indicate that the two-factor structure of the socio-economic context scale is adequately supported by the data and provides evidence for the validity of the measurement model.

Exploratory factor analysis of the political context scale was conducted using SPSS 25.0. The results indicated that all items loaded onto a single dimension, yielding a one-factor structure labeled "Socio-Political Perception." Confirmatory factor analysis was subsequently conducted using JASP 0.96 to assess the extent to which this structure fit the sample data. The resulting fit indices were evaluated according to the criteria proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999).

Table 3. Goodness-of-Fit Indicators in Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Political Context Scale

Index	Value	Acceptance Limit
CFI	0,984	≥ 0.95
RMSEA	0,070	≤ 0.06
SRMR	0,020	≤ 0.08

In the initial model, in which a single-factor structure was tested, the results indicated a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.919 and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.107, both of which fell below the recommended threshold criteria. During the model refinement process, modification indices were examined iteratively, and items exhibiting high residual covariances and conceptual redundancy were identified and removed from the model.

In this context, an extremely high residual covariance was observed between the items "The media in Türkiye operates according to the principles of impartial journalism" and "The media in Türkiye operates according to the principles of responsible journalism" (Mod. Ind. = 211.658). Given the substantial overlap in their content, the latter item was removed from the scale.

Subsequent analyses revealed that several additional items also exhibited high residual covariances and were therefore excluded from the model. These included "Türkiye is politically stable," "Türkiye has charismatic leaders," "Türkiye is a reliable actor in international peace negotiations," "The media in Türkiye operates according to the principles of impartial journalism," "I want to continue living in Türkiye," "Türkiye supports humanitarian aid activities," and "Türkiye has a tolerant social structure."

Following these modifications, the CFA results for the revised model indicated a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.985, a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.066, and a Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) of 0.018. According to the criteria proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999), the CFI exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.95, and the SRMR remained well below the 0.08 cut-off value. Although the RMSEA slightly exceeded the more stringent criterion of 0.06, it remained within the acceptable upper limit of 0.08. Furthermore, the lower bound of the 90% confidence interval for RMSEA was 0.051. Taken together, these results suggest that the model demonstrates an acceptable level of fit, particularly in light of the strong CFI and SRMR values.

Within the final model, the factor loadings for the items "Türkiye is a safe country," "Türkiye plays an active role in international relations," "Türkiye presents an interesting vision of the future for its society," "Türkiye implements regulations and policies to protect the environment," "Türkiye's activities are consistent with international law," "Türkiye is well governed," "Türkiye offers a desirable lifestyle," "Türkiye has respectable values and social norms," and "People in Türkiye experience a sense of freedom" ranged from 0.743 to 1.172. All factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < .001$).

These findings indicate that the single-factor structure of the political context scale is consistent with the empirical data and provides support for the structural validity of the measurement model.

Table 4. Convergent Validity, Disjunction Validity and Internal Consistency Coefficients of Scales

Test	Factor	Number of Articles	AVE	HTMT	Cronbach's α	McDonald ω
Socio-cultural Context	Cultural and Natural Richness	6	0,368	—	0,775	0,776
Socio-cultural Context	Emotional Connection	2	0,599	0,516	0,748	0,755
Socio-economic Context	Economic Capacity and Competitiveness	12	0,674	—	0,961	0,961
Socio-economic Context	Human Resources Qualifications	2	0,634	0,44	0,775	0,775
Political Context	Socio-Political Perception	9	0,7	—	0,953	0,954

The evaluations regarding the convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency of the three scales used in the study are presented below.

For convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) were examined. In the socio-cultural context scale, the AVE value of the "Emotional Bond" factor was found to be 0.599, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. In contrast, the AVE value of the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" factor was

0.368, falling below this criterion. This result may be considered relatively common in the measurement of broad and multidimensional constructs such as cultural perception, which may lead AVE values to fall below the 0.50 threshold (Hair et al., 2019). Nevertheless, given that all items in this factor exhibit statistically significant loadings and that the CFA model fit indices meet acceptable criteria, the overall measurement model is considered to retain adequate validity.

In the socio-economic context scale, the AVE values for the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" and "Human Resource Qualifications" factors were 0.674 and 0.634, respectively, both exceeding the recommended threshold and indicating satisfactory convergent validity. In the political context scale, the AVE value for the "Socio-Political Perception" factor was well above 0.50, indicating an excellent level of convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). In the socio-cultural context scale, the HTMT value between the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" and "Emotional Bond" factors was 0.516, well below the accepted threshold of 0.85. In the socio-economic context scale, the HTMT value between the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" and "Human Resource Qualifications" factors was 0.440, also satisfying the discriminant validity criterion. Since the political context scale is unidimensional, HTMT values were not computed for this scale. Overall, the findings indicate that the constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another in the multidimensional scales.

Internal consistency was assessed using both Cronbach's alpha (α) and McDonald's omega (ω) coefficients. The results showed that Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.748 to 0.961, while McDonald's omega values ranged from 0.755 to 0.961. All coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating a high level of internal consistency across all factors. These findings suggest that the scales demonstrate strong reliability.

Demographic Findings

Generation or Class?

By conducting hierarchical regression analysis, the study tested whether the generation variable retains its explanatory power when class indicators (income, education, and employment status) are controlled for.

Table 5. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results for Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor

	Block 1					Block 2					Block 3				
Variable	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**
Gender	-0,019	0,046	-0,022	-0,416	0,678	-0,026	0,046	-0,030	-0,561	0,575	-0,024	0,047	-0,027	-0,507	0,612
Education: High School	-0,027	0,049	-0,030	-0,546	0,585	-0,027	0,048	-0,031	-0,557	0,578	-0,025	0,049	-0,029	-0,520	0,604
Education: Associate degree and above	-0,036	0,058	-0,037	-0,628	0,530	-0,050	0,058	-0,051	-0,856	0,392	-0,048	0,059	-0,049	-0,825	0,410
Employment: Working	-0,020	0,049	-0,023	-0,417	0,677	-0,011	0,049	-0,013	-0,228	0,820	-0,014	0,051	-0,016	-0,271	0,786
Employment: Looking for a job	-0,166	0,065	-0,123	-2,544	,011*	-0,160	0,065	-0,119	-2,462	,014*	-0,160	0,065	-0,119	-2,463	0,014*
Experience abroad	-0,018	0,065	-0,013	-0,281	0,779	-0,038	0,066	-0,027	-0,577	0,564	-0,038	0,066	-0,027	-0,579	0,563
Generation (Z=1, Y=0)						0,232	0,110	0,096	2,098	,036*	0,232	0,111	0,096	2,094	0,037*
Social class											-0,008	0,045	-0,009	-0,185	0,853
R^2	0,015					0,023					0,023				
Adjusted R^2	0,003					0,010					0,008				
ΔR^2	0,015					0,009					0,000				
F Change	1,242					4,400					0,034				
p (F Change)	0,283					0,036*					0,853				

Note: **p<0.05. Reference categories: Gender=Female; Education = Primary Education; Occupation = Student; Generation = Generation Y. SE=Standard Error.*

The "Cultural and Natural Wealth" factor of the socio-cultural context scale measures perceptions of Türkiye's brand in terms of its cultural and natural resources. A three-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the relative predictive effects of generation and social class on this dimension of perception while controlling demographic variables. In the first block, gender, education level, employment status, and international experience were included as control variables. Generation was entered in the second block, and social class was added in the third block. This hierarchical structure was employed to assess the incremental contribution of each predictor to the dependent variable after accounting for the effects of variables entered in preceding steps.

The model including only the control variables in the first step was not statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.015$, $F(6, 498) = 1.242$, $p = 0.283$). In the second step, the inclusion of the generation variable resulted in a statistically significant increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.009$, $\Delta F(1, 497) = 4.400$, $p = 0.036$). In the third step, the addition of social class did not produce a statistically significant improvement in model fit ($\Delta R^2 = 0.000$, $\Delta F(1, 496) = 0.034$, $p = 0.853$).

At the coefficient level, generation Z evaluated the cultural and natural wealth dimension more positively than generation Y ($B = 0.232$, $\beta = 0.096$, $p = 0.036$). In contrast, participants who were seeking employment reported lower perceptions on this dimension than students ($B = -0.160$, $\beta = -0.119$, $p = 0.014$). Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated that all variance inflation factor (VIF) values remained within acceptable limits (VIF < 2.00).

Table 6. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results for Emotional Attachment Factor

	Block 1					Block 2					Block 3				
Variable	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**
Gender	-0,026	0,062	-0,022	-0,424	0,672	-0,033	0,062	-0,028	-0,534	0,594	-0,014	0,063	-0,012	-0,225	0,822
Education: High School	-0,099	0,065	-0,084	-1,520	0,129	-0,099	0,065	-0,084	-1,529	0,127	-0,085	0,066	-0,072	-1,291	0,197
Education: Associate degree and above	-0,224	0,077	-0,169	-2,890	0,004*	-0,237	0,078	-0,179	-3,051	0,002*	-0,224	0,078	-0,169	-2,856	0,004*
Employment: Working	0,153	0,065	0,130	2,342	0,020*	0,162	0,065	0,138	2,480	0,013*	0,135	0,068	0,115	1,976	0,049*
Employment: Looking for a job	-0,108	0,087	-0,060	-1,242	0,215	-0,102	0,087	-0,056	-1,176	0,240	-0,105	0,087	-0,058	-1,208	0,228
Experience abroad	-0,046	0,087	-0,025	-0,533	0,594	-0,066	0,088	-0,035	-0,754	0,451	-0,068	0,088	-0,036	-0,769	0,442
Generation (Z=1, Y=0)						0,235	0,148	0,072	1,591	0,112	0,234	0,148	0,072	1,585	0,114
Social class											-0,084	0,061	-0,064	-1,378	0,169
R^2	0,037					0,042					0,045				
Adjusted R^2	0,025					0,028					0,030				
ΔR^2	0,037					0,005					0,004				
F Change	3,167					2,531					1,898				
p (F Change)	0,005*					0,112					0,169				

Note: **p<0.05. Reference categories: Gender=Female; Education = Primary Education; Occupation = Student; Generation = Generation Y. SE=Standard Error.*

The "Emotional Bond" factor of the socio-cultural context scale measures participants' emotional attachment to Türkiye's brand, as reflected in feelings of love and respect. A three-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the relative predictive effects of generation and social class on this dimension of perception while controlling demographic variables. In the first block, gender, education level, employment status, and international experience were included as control variables. Generation was entered in the second block, and social class was added in the third block. This hierarchical structure was employed to assess the incremental contribution of each predictor to the dependent variable after accounting for the effects of variables entered in preceding steps.

In the first step, the model including only the control variables was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.037$, $F(6, 498) = 3.167$, $p = 0.005$). In the second step, the addition of the generation variable did not result in a statistically significant increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.005$, $\Delta F(1, 497) = 2.531$, $p = 0.112$). Similarly, in the third step, the inclusion of social class did not produce a statistically significant improvement in the model ($\Delta R^2 = 0.004$, $\Delta F(1, 496) = 1.898$, $p = 0.169$).

At the coefficient level, participants with an associate degree or higher level of education reported lower levels of emotional bond perception than primary school graduates ($B = -0.224$, $\beta = -0.169$, $p = 0.004$). In contrast, employed participants reported higher levels of emotional bond perception than students ($B = 0.135$, $\beta = 0.115$, $p = 0.049$). Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated that all variance inflation factor (VIF) values remained within acceptable limits ($VIF < 2.00$).

Table 7. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results for Economic Capacity and Competitiveness Factor

	Block 1					Block 2					Block 3				
Variable	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**
Gender	-0,500	0,105	-0,247	-4,784	0,000*	-0,506	0,105	-0,250	-4,828	0,000*	-0,494	0,107	-0,244	-4,595	0,000*
Education: High School	-0,144	0,110	-0,071	-1,311	0,190	-0,145	0,110	-0,071	-1,314	0,189	-0,135	0,112	-0,067	-1,210	0,227
Education: Associate degree and above	-0,193	0,131	-0,085	-1,471	0,142	-0,205	0,132	-0,090	-1,552	0,121	-0,196	0,133	-0,086	-1,470	0,142
Employment: Working	0,238	0,111	0,117	2,152	0,032*	0,246	0,111	0,122	2,217	0,027*	0,228	0,116	0,113	1,964	0,050*
Employment: Looking for a job	-0,332	0,148	-0,106	-2,249	0,025*	-0,327	0,148	-0,105	-2,212	0,027*	-0,329	0,148	-0,105	-2,222	0,027*
Experience abroad	0,063	0,148	0,019	0,424	0,672	0,045	0,149	0,014	0,302	0,763	0,044	0,150	0,014	0,296	0,767
Generation (Z=1, Y=0)						0,208	0,251	0,037	0,827	0,408	0,207	0,251	0,037	0,824	0,410
Social class											-0,056	0,103	-0,025	-0,540	0,589
R^2	0,065					0,066					0,066				
Adjusted R^2	0,053					0,053					0,051				
ΔR^2	0,065					0,001					0,001				
F Change	5,735					0,685					0,292				
p (F Change)	0,000*					0,408					0,589				

Note: **p<0.05. Reference categories: Gender=Female; Education = Primary Education; Occupation = Student; Generation = Generation Y. SE=Standard Error.*

The "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" factor of the socio-economic context scale measures perceptions of Türkiye's economic infrastructure, production capacity, and international competitiveness. A three-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the relative predictive effects of generation and social class on this dimension of perception while controlling demographic variables. In the first block, gender, education level, employment status, and international experience were included as control variables. Generation was entered in the second block, and social class was added in the third block. This hierarchical structure was employed to assess the incremental contribution of each predictor to the dependent variable after accounting for the effects of variables entered in preceding steps.

In the first step, the model including only the control variables was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.065$, $F(6, 498) = 5.735$, $p < 0.001$). In the second step, the inclusion of the generation variable did not result in a statistically significant increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.001$, $\Delta F(1, 497) = 0.685$, $p = 0.408$). Similarly, the addition of social class in the third step did not significantly improve the model ($\Delta R^2 = 0.001$, $\Delta F(1, 496) = 0.292$, $p = 0.589$).

At the coefficient level, gender emerged as the strongest predictor. Male participants reported significantly lower perceptions of economic capacity and competitiveness than female participants ($B = -0.494$, $\beta = -0.244$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, employed participants reported higher perceptions on this dimension than students ($B = 0.228$, $\beta = 0.113$, $p = 0.050$), whereas participants seeking employment reported lower perceptions than students ($B = -0.329$, $\beta = -0.105$, $p = 0.027$). Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated that all variance inflation factor (VIF) values remained within acceptable limits (VIF < 2.00).

Table 8. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results for Human Resource Qualifications Factor

	Block 1					Block 2					Block 3				
Variable	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**
Gender	-0,295	0,075	-0,204	-3,946	0,000*	-0,290	0,075	-0,200	-3,874	0,000*	-0,263	0,077	-0,181	-3,432	0,001*
Education: High School	-0,092	0,079	-0,063	-1,165	0,245	-0,091	0,079	-0,063	-1,161	0,246	-0,070	0,080	-0,048	-0,883	0,378
Education: Associate degree and above	-0,234	0,094	-0,143	-2,490	0,013*	-0,225	0,094	-0,138	-2,377	0,018*	-0,204	0,095	-0,125	-2,148	0,032*
Employement: Working	0,154	0,079	0,106	1,948	0,052	0,148	0,079	0,102	1,859	0,064	0,107	0,083	0,074	1,289	0,198
Employment: Looking for a job	-0,268	0,106	-0,120	-2,534	0,012*	-0,272	0,106	-0,122	-2,569	0,010*	-0,276	0,106	-0,123	-2,611	0,009*
Experience abroad	-0,013	0,106	-0,006	-0,126	0,899	0,000	0,107	0,000	0,002	0,998	0,001	0,107	0,001	0,013	0,990
Generation (Z=1, Y=0)						-0,161	0,180	-0,040	-0,897	0,370	-0,163	0,179	-0,041	-0,908	0,364
Social class											-0,125	0,074	-0,078	-1,685	0,093
R^2	0,065					0,066					0,071				
Adjusted R^2	0,053					0,053					0,056				
ΔR^2	0,065					0,002					0,005				
F Change	5,717					0,804					2,840				
p (F Change)	0,000*					0,370					0,093				

Note: **p<0.05. Reference categories: Gender=Female; Education = Primary Education; Occupation = Student; Generation = Generation Y. SE=Standard Error.*

The "Human Resource Qualifications" factor of the socio-economic context scale measures perceptions of the qualities of Turkish people, such as creativity and diligence. A three-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the relative predictive effects of generation and social class on this dimension of perception while controlling demographic variables. In the first block, gender, education level, employment status, and international experience were included as control variables. Generation was entered in the second block, and social class was added in the third block. This hierarchical structure was employed to assess the incremental contribution of each predictor to the dependent variable after accounting for the effects of variables entered in preceding steps.

In the first step, the model including only the control variables was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.065$, $F(6, 497) = 5.717$, $p < 0.001$). In the second step, the addition of the generation variable did not result in a statistically significant increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.002$, $\Delta F(1, 496) = 0.804$, $p = 0.370$). Similarly, the inclusion of social class in the third step did not produce a statistically significant improvement in the model ($\Delta R^2 = 0.005$, $\Delta F(1, 495) = 2.840$, $p = 0.093$).

At the coefficient level, gender emerged as a significant predictor. Male participants reported significantly lower perceptions of human resource qualifications than female participants ($B = -0.263$, $\beta = -0.181$, $p = 0.001$). Additionally, participants with an associate degree or higher level of education reported lower perceptions on this dimension than primary school graduates ($B = -0.204$, $\beta = -0.125$, $p = 0.032$). Participants seeking employment also reported lower evaluations of this dimension than students ($B = -0.276$, $\beta = -0.123$, $p = 0.009$). Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated that all variance inflation factor (VIF) values remained within acceptable limits ($VIF < 2.00$).

Table 9. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results for Socio-Political Factor

	Block 1					Block 2					Block 3				
Variable	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**B**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**
Gender	-0,387	0,116	-0,178	-3,350	0,001*	-0,397	0,116	-0,183	-3,434	0,001*	-0,405	0,118	-0,187	-3,427	0,001*
Education: High School	-0,292	0,122	-0,135	-2,402	0,017*	-0,295	0,122	-0,136	-2,425	0,016*	-0,301	0,123	-0,139	-2,446	0,015*
Education: Associate degree and above	-0,302	0,145	-0,124	-2,078	0,038*	-0,326	0,146	-0,134	-2,236	0,026*	-0,331	0,147	-0,136	-2,257	0,024*
Employment: Working	0,308	0,121	0,142	2,542	0,011*	0,323	0,121	0,149	2,665	0,008*	0,336	0,127	0,155	2,647	0,008*
Employment: Looking for a job	-0,363	0,164	-0,108	-2,218	0,027*	-0,346	0,164	-0,103	-2,113	0,035*	-0,344	0,164	-0,103	-2,100	0,036*
Experience abroad	0,080	0,163	0,023	0,487	0,626	0,046	0,165	0,013	0,277	0,782	0,046	0,165	0,013	0,279	0,780
Level of political interest	-0,112	0,058	-0,091	-1,918	0,056	-0,117	0,058	-0,095	-2,004	0,046*	-0,117	0,058	-0,095	-1,993	0,047*
Generation (Z=1, Y=0)						0,471	0,307	0,070	1,534	0,126	0,473	0,307	0,071	1,539	0,124
Social class											0,038	0,113	0,016	0,336	0,737
R^2	0,067					0,071					0,072				
Adjusted R^2	0,053					0,056					0,054				
ΔR^2	0,067					0,005					0,000				
F Change	4,828					2,354					0,113				
p (F Change)	0,000*					0,126					0,737				

Note: **p<0.05. Reference categories: Gender=Female; Education = Primary Education; Occupation = Student; Generation = Generation Y. The level of political interest was scored on a scale of 1 (very low) 5 (very high). SE=Standard Error.*

The "Socio-Political Perception" (S3_1) factor of the political context scale measures perceptions of Türkiye's governance quality, adherence to the rule of law, environmental policies, and quality of life. A three-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the relative predictive effects of generation and social class on this dimension of perception while controlling for demographic variables. In the first block, gender, education level, employment status, international experience, and level of political interest were included as control variables. Generation was entered in the second block, and social class was added in the third block. This hierarchical structure was employed to assess the incremental contribution of each predictor to the dependent variable after accounting for the effects of variables entered in preceding steps.

In the first step, the model including only the control variables was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.067$, $F(7, 473) = 4.828$, $p < 0.001$). In the second step, the addition of the generation variable did not result in a statistically significant increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.005$, $\Delta F(1, 472) = 2.354$, $p = 0.126$). Similarly, the inclusion of social class in the third step did not significantly improve the model ($\Delta R^2 = 0.000$, $\Delta F(1, 471) = 0.113$, $p = 0.737$).

At the coefficient level, gender, education level, employment status, and political interest emerged as significant predictors. Male participants reported significantly lower socio-political perception scores than female participants ($B = -0.405$, $\beta = -0.187$, $p = 0.001$). In addition, participants with a high school education ($B = -0.301$, $\beta = -0.139$, $p = 0.015$) and those with an associate degree or higher level of education ($B = -0.331$, $\beta = -0.136$, $p = 0.024$) reported lower evaluations than primary school graduates.

Regarding employment status, employed participants reported more positive evaluations of this dimension than students ($B = 0.336$, $\beta = 0.155$, $p = 0.008$), whereas participants seeking employment reported lower evaluations ($B = -0.344$, $\beta = -0.103$, $p = 0.036$). Furthermore, socio-political perception scores decreased as political interest increased, indicating that participants with higher levels of political engagement evaluated Türkiye's socio-political situation more critically ($B = -0.117$, $\beta = -0.095$, $p = 0.047$).

Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated that all variance inflation factor (VIF) values remained within acceptable limits (VIF < 2.00).

Digital Identity and Country Branding

In this study, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was initially planned to examine the differentiating effects of social media usage patterns on Türkiye's brand perceptions. However, during the data collection process, participants were allowed to select up to three social media platforms, resulting in a substantial proportion of respondents reporting the use of multiple platforms. A key assumption of MANOVA is that each observation belongs to only one mutually exclusive group. Because this assumption could not be satisfied under the present data structure, the application of MANOVA would have required assigning participants to a single platform category, which in turn would have led to substantial data loss and potentially arbitrary classification decisions.

Given this methodological limitation, the Mann–Whitney U test was employed instead. In this approach, each platform was treated as an independent binary variable, enabling separate comparisons for each platform. This method allows for the examination of whether statistically significant differences in perception scores exist between users and non-users of a given platform on a platform-by-platform basis, thereby avoiding the methodological issues associated with forced single-group assignment. In addition, the non-normal distribution of the data provided further justification for the use of this non-parametric test.

Although a typology of social media platform usage (visual/entertainment, news/discussion, professional) was originally intended to enable a simultaneous examination of three-dimensional perception differences using MANOVA, this was not feasible due to the aforementioned constraints in the data structure. Therefore, the Mann–Whitney U test was ultimately applied to assess whether perception scores differ significantly between users and non-users of each specific platform.

Table 10. Brand Perception in Türkiye According to Social Media Platform Usage: Mann-Whitney U Test Results

Rank Statistics					**Mann-Whitney U Test**			
Social Media Platform	**Factor**	**Group**	**n**	**Rank Average**	**Test Statistics**	**Z**	**p-value**	**Meaningful**
Instagram	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor	Not using	66	329,08	11380,00	-3,511	0,000	✓
		Using	468	258,82				
	Socio-Cultural Context Scale	Not using	66	309,75	12656,00	-2,509	0,012	✓
		Using	468	261,54				

	Emotional Bond Factor							
	Socio-Economic Scale Economic Capacity Factor	Not using	66	273,45	15051,00	-0,335	0,738	
		Using	468	266,66				
	Socio-Economic Context Scale Human Resource Qualifications Factor	Not using	66	284,35	14266,00	-1,018	0,309	
		Using	467	264,55				
	Political Context Scale Socio-Political Perception Factor	Not using	66	299,42	13338,00	-1,796	0,073	
		Using	468	263,00				
Twitter/X	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor	Not using	436	272,40	19229,00	-1,568	0,117	
		Using	98	245,71				
	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Emotional Bond Factor	Not using	436	276,05	17637,00	-2,851	0,004	✓
		Using	98	229,46				
	Socio-Economic Scale Economic Capacity Factor	Not using	436	274,82	18171,00	-2,314	0,021	✓
		Using	98	234,92				
	Socio-Economic Context Scale Human Resource Qualifications Factor	Not using	435	273,01	18699,00	-1,977	0,048	
		Using	98	240,30				
	Political Context Scale Socio-Political Perception Factor	Not using	436	282,33	14897,00	-4,688	0,000	✓
		Using	98	201,51				
TikTok	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor	Not using	416	266,10	23963,00	-0,398	0,690	
		Using	118	272,42				
	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Emotional Bond Factor	Not using	416	268,71	24043,00	-0,358	0,720	
		Using	118	263,25				
	Socio-Economic Scale Economic Capacity Factor	Not using	416	281,27	18815,00	-3,874	0,000	✓
		Using	118	218,95				
	Socio-Economic Context Scale Human Resource Qualifications Factor	Not using	416	270,05	23066,00	-0,898	0,369	
		Using	117	256,15				
	Political Context Scale Socio-Political Perception Factor	Not using	416	281,38	18772,00	-3,904	0,000	✓
		Using	118	218,58				
Facebook	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor	Not using	455	262,58	15733,00	-1,794	0,073	
		Using	79	295,85				

	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Emotional Bond Factor	Not using	455	262,67	15774,00	-1,834	0,067	
		Using	79	295,34				
	Socio-Economic Scale Economic Capacity Factor	Not using	455	267,87	17803,00	-0,134	0,893	
		Using	79	265,35				
	Socio-Economic Context Scale Human Resource Qualifications Factor	Not using	454	258,01	13851,00	-3,364	0,001	✓
		Using	79	318,68				
	Political Context Scale Socio-Political Perception Factor	Not using	455	265,97	17278,00	-0,549	0,583	
		Using	79	276,30				
YouTube	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor	Not using	144	263,12	27450,00	-0,404	0,686	
		Using	390	269,12				
	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Emotional Bond Factor	Not using	144	241,40	24322,00	-2,507	0,012	✓
		Using	390	277,14				
	Socio-Economic Scale Economic Capacity Factor	Not using	144	263,73	27537,00	-0,343	0,731	
		Using	390	268,89				
	Socio-Economic Context Scale Human Resource Qualifications Factor	Not using	143	234,20	23195,00	-3,099	0,002	✓
		Using	390	279,03				
	Political Context Scale Socio-Political Perception Factor	Not using	144	248,33	25320,00	-1,745	0,081	
		Using	390	274,58				
Telegram	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor	Not using	528	267,71	1472,00	-0,302	0,763	
		Using	6	248,83				
	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Emotional Bond Factor	Not using	528	267,80	1425,00	-0,448	0,654	
		Using	6	240,92				
	Socio-Economic Scale Economic Capacity Factor	Not using	528	267,52	1574,00	-0,027	0,979	
		Using	6	265,83				
	Socio-Economic Context Scale Human Resource Qualifications Factor	Not using	527	267,68	1223,00	-0,995	0,320	
		Using	6	207,25				
	Political Context Scale Socio-Political Perception Factor	Not using	528	267,69	1484,00	-0,268	0,789	
		Using	6	250,75				
WhatsApp	Socio-Cultural Context Scale	Not using	288	272,27	34050,00	-0,784	0,433	

	Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor	Using	246	261,91				
	Socio-Cultural Context Scale Emotional Bond Factor	Not using	288	261,99	33837,00	-0,943	0,346	
		Using	246	273,95				
	Socio-Economic Scale Economic Capacity Factor	Not using	288	253,43	31371,00	-2,282	0,023	✓
		Using	246	283,98				
	Socio-Economic Context Scale Human Resource Qualifications Factor	Not using	287	257,06	32447,00	-1,676	0,094	
		Using	246	278,60				
	Political Context Scale Socio-Political Perception Factor	Not using	288	259,58	33143,00	-1,284	0,199	
		Using	246	276,77				

Mann–Whitney U tests were conducted for Instagram, Twitter/X, TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Telegram to examine the differentiating effects of social media usage patterns on Türkiye's brand perceptions. To control the increased risk of Type I error arising from multiple comparisons, a Bonferroni correction was applied. Because each social media platform and each scale represented an independent research question, the correction was calculated separately at the scale level. Accordingly, the significance threshold was set at $p < 0.025$ for the two-factor socio-cultural and socio-economic context scales, and at $p < 0.050$ for the single-factor political context scale. Statistically significant results are also reported separately in the tables.

Regarding Instagram usage, non-users scored significantly higher than users on both the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" factor ($U = 11380$, $Z = -3.511$, $p < 0.001$) and the "Emotional Bond" factor ($U = 12656$, $Z = -2.509$, $p = 0.012$). This finding suggests that Instagram's visually oriented content structure may be associated with more critical perceptions of Türkiye's cultural richness and emotional attachment among its users.

For Twitter/X usage, non-users also scored significantly higher than users on the "Emotional Bond" ($U = 17637$, $Z = -2.851$, $p = 0.004$), "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" ($U = 18171$, $Z = -2.314$, $p = 0.021$), and "Socio-Political Perception" ($U = 14897$, $Z = -4.688$, $p < 0.001$) factors. Given that Twitter/X is a platform characterized by high exposure to news and political content, its users may develop a more critical stance toward Türkiye.

In relation to TikTok usage, non-users scored significantly higher than users on the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" ($U = 18815$,

Z = −3.874, p < 0.001) and "Socio-Political Perception" (U = 18772, Z = −3.904, p < 0.001) factors. This may suggest that TikTok's entertainment-oriented content structure is associated with comparatively lower evaluations of economic and political dimensions.

For Facebook usage, users (mean rank = 318.68) scored significantly higher on the "Human Resource Qualifications" factor than non-users (mean rank = 258.01) (U = 13851, Z = −3.364, p = 0.001), indicating that Facebook users hold more positive perceptions of the creativity and diligence of Turkish people.

Regarding WhatsApp usage, users (mean rank = 283.98) scored significantly higher on the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" factor than non-users (mean rank = 253.43) (U = 31371, Z = −2.282, p = 0.023). For YouTube usage, users scored significantly higher than non-users on both the "Emotional Bond" (U = 24322, Z = −2.507, p = 0.012) and "Human Resource Qualifications" (U = 23195, Z = −3.099, p = 0.002) factors.

Due to the extremely small number of Telegram users in the sample (n = 6), results for this platform are not statistically interpretable and are reported for descriptive purposes only.

Ethnic Identity, Language and Belonging

The Kruskal–Wallis and Dunn tests were conducted to examine whether there are statistically significant differences in Türkiye's brand perceptions according to ethnic identity and language use.

Table 11. Brand Perception of Türkiye by Ethnic Identity Groups: Kruskal-Wallis H Test and Dunn Test Results

Rank Statistics				Kruskal-Wallis H Test				Multiple Comparison Test	
Scale / Factor	**Group**	**n**	**Rank Average**	**Test Statistics**	**S.d.**	**p-value**	**Meaningful**	**Dunn Test Comparison**	**Flat. p-value**
Socio-Cultural Context Scale									
Cultural and Natural Richness	Turkish	454	273,62	5,376	2	0,068			
	Kurdish	62	226,45						
	Other	18	254,53						
Emotional Connection	Turkish	454	274,59	8,296	2	0,016	✓	Kurdish - Turkish	0,012*
	Kurdish	62	217,76					Kurdish - Other	0,839
	Other	18	260,06					Other - English	1,000
Socio-Economic Context Scale									
	Turkish	454	269,13	1,612	2	0,447			

Economic Capacity and Competitiveness	Kurdish	62	268,77						
	Other	18	222,14						
Human Resources Qualifications	Turkish	453	273,32	6,076	2	0,048			
	Kurdish	62	224,51						
	Other	18	254,22						
Political Context Scale									
Socio-Political Perception	Turkish	454	270,38	1,067	2	0,587			
	Kurdish	62	251,96						
	Other	18	248,31						

Note: *The Bonferroni correction was applied on a scale basis. The significance threshold for the socio-cultural and socio-economic context scales was determined as p<.025 (0.05/2) and for the socio-political context scale as p<.050 (0.05/1). ✓Factors found to be significant after Bonferroni correction in the Kruskal-Wallis test. * Pairwise comparison found significant after Dunn test with Bonferroni correction. The other group includes Zaza, Arab, Laz, Circassian, Albanian, Bosnian and other ethnic identity statements.*

A Kruskal–Wallis H test was conducted to examine whether statistically significant differences in Türkiye's brand perception dimensions exist across ethnic identity groups. Participants were categorized into three groups: Turkish (n = 454), Kurdish (n = 62), and other ethnic identities (n = 18). A Bonferroni correction was applied at the scale level; accordingly, the significance threshold was set at $p < 0.025$ for the socio-cultural and socio-economic context scales and at $p < 0.050$ for the political context scale.

The results indicated a statistically significant difference between ethnic identity groups only for the "Emotional Bond" factor of the socio-cultural context scale ($H(2) = 8.296$, $p = 0.016$). To identify the source of this difference, post hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted using Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction. The results showed that Turkish participants (mean rank = 274.59) reported significantly higher emotional bond perceptions than Kurdish participants (mean rank = 217.76) (adjusted $p = 0.012$). No statistically significant differences were observed between Kurdish participants and participants in the other ethnic identity group (adjusted $p = 0.839$), or between participants in the other ethnic identity group and Turkish participants (adjusted $p = 1.000$).

No statistically significant differences were found between ethnic identity groups for the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" factor ($H(2) = 5.376$, $p = 0.068$) of the socio-cultural context scale, the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" factor ($H(2) = 1.612$, $p = 0.447$) and "Human Resource Qualifications" factor ($H(2) = 6.076$, $p = 0.048$) of the socio-economic context scale, or the "Socio-Political Perception" factor ($H(2) = 1.067$, $p = 0.587$) of the political context scale.

Migration Experience and Comparative Evaluation

Moderation analysis was conducted to examine whether international experience moderates the effect of generations Y and Z on Türkiye's brand perceptions. Accordingly, the moderating role of international experience was tested using Hayes' Process Macro (Model 1) (Hayes, 2018). In the analysis, generation was specified as the independent variable (X), while international experience was defined as the moderating variable (W). The dependent variables (Y) included the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" and "Emotional Bond" factors of the socio-cultural context scale, the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" and "Human Resource Qualifications" factors of the socio-economic context scale, and the "Socio-Political Perception" factor of the political context scale.

Table 11. Process Model Summary Statistics (Model 1)

Dependent Variable	R	R^2	MSE	F	S.d.1	S.d.2	p-value
Socio-Cultural Context Scale Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor	0,103	0,011	0,189	1,795	3	501	0,147
Socio-Cultural Context Scale Emotional Bond Factor	0,071	0,005	0,347	0,853	3	501	0,466
Socio-Economic Context Scale Economic Capacity and Competitiveness Factor	0,018	0	1,034	0,053	3	501	0,984
Socio-Economic Context Scale Human Resource Qualifications Factor	0,084	0,007	0,524	1,196	3	500	0,311
Political Context Scale Socio-Political Perception	0,057	0,003	1,169	0,544	3	501	0,652

It was observed that the generation (X) and international experience (W) variables did not yield statistically significant models for any of the five dependent variables. The R^2 values ranged between 0.000 and 0.011, indicating extremely low explanatory power across all models. This finding suggests that these perception dimensions are largely independent of both generational identity and international travel experience.

In particular, the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" factor (R^2 = 0.000, F = 0.053, p = 0.984) and the "Socio-Political Perception" factor (R^2 = 0.003, F = 0.544, p = 0.652) demonstrated no explanatory

power. The highest, albeit still minimal, explanatory power was observed for the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" factor (R^2 = 0.011). However, even this value remained well below the threshold for statistical significance.

Table 12. Effects of Generational and Overseas Experience on Dependent Variables (Model Coefficients)

Dependent Variable	Predictor	b	SE	t	p-value	LLCI (95%)	ULCI (95%)
Socio-Cultural Context Scale Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor	**Fixed**	**4,386**	**0,021**	**211,549**	**0,000**	**4,345**	**4,426**
	Generation (X)	0,148	0,139	1,062	0,289	-0,126	0,421
	Experience abroad (W)	-0,072	0,066	-1,086	0,278	-0,202	0,058
	Generation × experience abroad	0,205	0,224	0,915	0,361	-0,236	0,646
Socio-Cultural Context Scale Emotional Bond Factor	**Fixed**	**4,385**	**0,028**	**156,143**	**0,000**	**4,330**	**4,440**
	Generation (X)	0,165	0,188	0,875	0,382	-0,205	0,535
	Experience abroad (W)	-0,114	0,090	-1,277	0,202	-0,290	0,062
	Generation × experience abroad	-0,007	0,304	-0,023	0,982	-0,604	0,590
Socio-Economic Context Scale Economic Capacity and Competitiveness Factor	**Fixed**	**3,227**	**0,049**	**66,559**	**0,000**	**3,132**	**3,322**
	Generation (X)	0,123	0,325	0,379	0,705	-0,516	0,762
	Experience abroad (W)	-0,016	0,155	-0,101	0,920	-0,319	0,288
	Generation × experience abroad	-0,100	0,525	-0,191	0,848	-1,131	0,930
Socio-Economic Context Scale Human Resource Qualifications Factor	**Fixed**	**4,119**	**0,035**	**119,171**	**0,000**	**4,051**	**4,186**
	Generation (X)	-0,369	0,232	-1,591	0,112	-0,823	0,087
	Experience abroad (W)	-0,098	0,11	-0,887	0,376	-0,314	0,119
	Generation × experience abroad	0,276	0,373	0,740	0,460	-0,458	1,010
Political Context Scale Socio-Political Perception	**Fixed**	**3,085**	**0,052**	**59,848**	**0,000**	**2,984**	**3,187**
	Generation (X)	0,141	0,346	0,407	0,684	-0,539	0,820
	Experience abroad (W)	-0,125	0,164	-0,758	0,449	-0,448	0,198
	Generation × experience abroad	0,357	0,558	0,640	0,523	-0,739	1,452

The constant term was statistically significant across all models ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the dependent variables exhibit a baseline level above zero. However, neither generation (X) nor international experience (W) demonstrated a statistically significant direct effect on any of the dependent variables.

For the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" factor, the generational coefficient was b = 0.148 (p = 0.289), and for the "Emotional Bond" factor it was b = 0.165 (p = 0.382); both effects were statistically non-significant. Although the coefficient for generation in the "Human Resource Qualifications" factor was negative (b = −0.369, p = 0.112), this trend also did not reach statistical significance.

The interaction terms (Generation × International Experience) were non-significant across all five models. The coefficients ranged from −0.007 to 0.357, and all corresponding confidence intervals included zero.

These results indicate that international experience does not exert a systematic moderating effect on the relationship between generation and any of the dependent variables.

Table 13. Moderation Test of the Interaction Term (Generation × Experience Abroad)

Dependent Variable	ΔR^2	F	S.d.1	S.d.2	p-value
Socio-Cultural Context Scale Cultural and Natural Wealth Factor	0,0017	0,837	1	501	0,361
Socio-Cultural Context Scale Emotional Bond Factor	0,0000	0,001	1	501	0,982
Socio-Economic Context Scale Economic Capacity and Competitiveness Factor	0,0001	0,037	1	501	0,848
Socio-Economic Context Scale Human Resource Qualifications Factor	0,0011	0,547	1	500	0,46
Political Context Scale Socio-Political Perception	0,0008	0,409	1	501	0,523

Note: *Generation (X): 0=Generation Y, 1=Generation Z; Ydd = Experience Abroad (W); b=Unstandardized Regression Coefficient; SE=Standard Error; LLCI/ULCI=95% Confidence Interval Lower/Upper Bound; Bootstrap sample count=5000.*

According to the findings of the moderation analysis, international experience does not play a statistically significant moderating role in the relationship between generation and the five dependent variables. The interaction term (Generation × international experience) did not reach statistical significance in any of the models, with ΔR^2 values ranging between 0.000 and 0.002.

The highest explained variance was observed for the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" factor ($\Delta R^2 = 0.002$, $F = 0.837$, $p = 0.361$); however, this value remained well below the threshold of statistical significance. In the "Emotional Bond" factor, the interaction term contributed virtually no explanatory power ($\Delta R^2 = 0.000$, $F = 0.001$, $p = 0.982$).

Taken together, the results indicate that international experience does not moderate the relationship between generation and any dimension of Türkiye's brand perception. This suggests that these

perceptions are largely formed independently of international travel experience and that generational differences cannot be accounted for by this variable. Future research may therefore benefit from examining alternative explanatory factors, such as identity structures, media consumption patterns, and cultural belonging.

Political Interest, Ideology and Country Reputation

Moderation–mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether the level of political interest mediates the effect of generations Y and Z on Türkiye's brand perceptions. Accordingly, the mediating role of political interest was tested using Hayes' Process Macro (Model 4) (Hayes, 2018). In the analysis, generation was specified as the independent variable (X), while political interest was defined as the mediator variable (M). The dependent variables (Y) included the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" and "Emotional Bond" factors of the socio-cultural context scale, the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" and "Human Resource Qualifications" factors of the socio-economic context scale, and the "Socio-Political Perception" factor of the political context scale.

Table 14. The Intermediary Variable Model: Its Impact on Generational Political Interest Level

Dependent Variable	**Predictor**	**b**	**SE**	**t**	**p**	**LLCI (95%)**	**ULCI (95%)**
Level of political interest	**Fixed**	2,921	0,041	71,965	0,000	2,841	3,001
	Generation (X)	0,618	0,247	2,501	0,013	0,132	1,103

Note: *R^2=0.013, F(1,479)=6.256, p=0.013. In all dependent variable models, the mediating variable equation is the same.*

The model for the mediating variable is consistent across all analyses. The generational variable significantly predicts the level of political interest (b = 0.618, SE = 0.247, t = 2.501, p = 0.013). The model explains 1.3% of the variance (R^2 = 0.013, F(1, 479) = 6.256, p = 0.013). This finding indicates that generation Z exhibits a higher level of political interest compared to Millennials.

Table 15. Dependent Variable Models: Effects of Generational and Political Interest Level

Dependent Variable	Predictor	b	SE	t	p-value	LLCI (95%)	ULCI (95%)
Cultural and Natural Richness	Fixed	4,385	0,070	62,870	0,000	4,248	4,522
	Generation (X)	0,232	0,124	1,866	0,063	-0,012	0,476
	Political interest (M)	-0,000	0,023	-0,013	0,990	-0,045	0,045
Emotional Connection	Fixed	4,455	0,094	47,255	0,000	4,270	4,641
	Generation (X)	0,057	0,168	0,341	0,733	-0,273	0,387
	Political interest (M)	-0,025	0,031	-0,820	0,413	-0,086	0,035
Economic Capacity and Competitiveness	Fixed	3,424	0,162	21,091	0,000	3,105	3,742
	Generation (X)	0,164	0,289	0,567	0,571	-0,404	0,732
	Political interest (M)	-0,076	0,053	-1,429	0,154	-0,181	0,029
Human Resources Qualifications	Fixed	4,183	0,115	36,491	0,000	3,958	4,409
	Generation (X)	-0,289	0,204	-1,417	0,157	-0,691	0,112
	Political interest (M)	-0,024	0,038	-0,649	0,517	-0,098	0,049
Socio-Political Perception	Fixed	3,491	0,171	20,377	0,000	3,155	3,828
	Generation (X)	0,366	0,305	1,199	0,231	-0,234	0,966
	Political interest (M)	-0,148	0,056	-2,645	0,008	-0,259	-0,038

Note: *b = non-standardized regression coefficient; SE=standard error; LLCI/ULCI=95% confidence interval lower/upper bound; Generation: 0=Generation Y, 1=Generation Z. The p value in bold indicates statistical significance (p<0.05*

When the dependent variable models are examined, it is observed that the level of political interest does not exert a statistically significant effect on four of the five factors. The political interest coefficient was b = −0.000 (p = 0.990) for the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" factor, b = −0.025 (p = 0.413) for the "Emotional Bond" factor, b = −0.076 (p = 0.154) for the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" factor, and b = −0.024 (p = 0.517) for the "Human Resource Qualifications" factor; none of these effects reached statistical significance.

A different pattern emerges for the "Socio-Political Perception" factor, where political interest significantly predicts the outcome (b = −0.148, SE = 0.056, t = −2.645, p = 0.008). The results indicate that socio-political perception scores decrease as the level of political interest increases. In contrast, the direct effect of generation on this factor was not statistically significant (b = 0.366, p = 0.231).

Table 16. Direct and Indirect Effects of the Generation on the Perception of Türkiye

Dependent Variable	Impact Type	Impact	BootSE	BootLLCI (95%)	BootULCI (95%)
Cultural and Natural Richness	Direct impact	0,232	0,124	-0,012	0,476
	Indirect impact	-0,000	0,016	-0,031	0,035
Emotional Connection	Direct impact	0,057	0,168	-0,273	0,387
	Indirect impact	-0,016	0,026	-0,077	0,032
Economic Capacity and Competitiveness	Direct impact	0,164	0,289	-0,404	0,732
	Indirect impact	-0,047	0,048	-0,162	0,023
Human Resources Qualifications	Direct impact	-0,289	0,204	-0,691	0,112
	Indirect impact	-0,015	0,032	-0,086	0,043
Socio-Political Perception	Direct impact	0,366	0,305	-0,234	0,966
	Indirect impact	-0,092	0,071	-0,253	0,021

Note: The bootstrap method was used for indirect effects (N=5,000). The fact that the confidence interval does not include zero indicates that the mediation effect is significant. None of the five models obtained a zero-inclusive confidence interval.

When the indirect effects estimated using the bootstrap method are examined, it is observed that the level of political interest does not function as a statistically significant mediator in any of the five models. In all cases, the bootstrap confidence intervals include zero, indicating the absence of significant indirect effects.

The indirect effects were estimated as −0.000 for the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" factor (BootLLCI = −0.031, BootULCI = 0.035), −0.016 for the "Emotional Bond" factor (BootLLCI = −0.077, BootULCI = 0.032), −0.047 for the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" factor (BootLLCI = −0.162, BootULCI = 0.023), −0.015 for the "Human Resource Qualifications" factor (BootLLCI = −0.086, BootULCI = 0.043), and −0.092 for the "Socio-Political Perception" factor (BootLLCI = −0.253, BootULCI = 0.021).

Taken together, these results indicate that political interest does not serve as a meaningful mediator in the relationship between generation and Türkiye's brand perceptions. Although political interest has a significant direct effect on socio-political perception, there is no statistical evidence supporting an indirect pathway through which generation influences the dependent variables via political interest.

Typology of Research Participants on Perceptions of Türkiye's brand

K-means cluster analysis was conducted on five factor scores to identify participant profiles regarding Türkiye's brand perception. The number of clusters was set at three, and the algorithm converged after 13 iterations. Of the total 534 participants, 533 were included in the final analysis, while one participant was excluded due to missing data.

Table 17. K-Means Cluster Analysis: Final Cluster Centers

Factor	**Cluster 1 Critical Perception (n=18, 3.4%)**	**Cluster 2 Positive Perception (n=291, 54.6%)**	**Cluster 3 Selective Perception (n=224, 42.0%)**	**Number of Clusters**
Cultural and Natural Richness	3,51	4,42	4,43	5
Emotional Connection	2,92	4,45	4,41	5
Economic Capacity and Competitiveness	1,93	3,96	2,40	5
Human Resources Qualifications	2,44	4,31	3,94	5
Socio-Political Perception	1,94	3,90	2,10	5
n	**18**	**291**	**224**	**533**
%	**%3,4**	**%54,6**	**%42,0**	**%100**

Note: *Factor scores range from 1-5. Cluster names were determined by the researcher according to factor profiles. 1 participant could not be included in the analysis due to missing data*

When the final cluster centers are examined, it is observed that participants are grouped into three distinct perception profiles. The first cluster (n = 18, 3.4%) is characterized by very low scores in the "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" (1.93) and "Socio-Political Perception" (1.94) dimensions, and a moderate score in the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" dimension (3.51). This profile reflects a generally critical stance toward Turkey.

The second cluster (n = 291, 54.6%) represents a predominantly positive perception profile, comprising more than half of the sample. This group reports high scores across all five dimensions (3.90–4.45), indicating consistently favorable evaluations of Brand Türkiye.

The third cluster (n = 224, 42.0%) shows a mixed perception pattern. While it exhibits similarly high scores to the second cluster in the "Cultural and Natural Wealth" (4.43) and "Emotional Bond" (4.41) dimensions, it reports considerably lower scores in the "Socio-Political Perception" (2.10) and "Economic Capacity and Competitiveness" (2.40) dimensions. This profile suggests a selective perception structure in which cultural and emotional attachments are strong, whereas economic and political evaluations remain relatively critical.

Table 18. Euclidean distances between the centers of the last set

Cluster	Cluster 1 (Critical Perception)	Cluster 2 (Positive Perception)	Cluster 3 (Selective Perception)
Cluster 1 (Critical Perception)	—	3,822	2,350
Cluster 2 (Positive Perception)	3,822	—	2,417
Cluster 3 (Selective Perception)	2,350	2,417	—

Note: Values are based on Euclidean distance measurement. A high value indicates that the divergence between the two clusters is strong.

When the Euclidean distances between clusters are examined, it is observed that the distance between the first and second clusters (3.822) is the largest. This finding indicates that the divergence between the critical perception profile and the positive perception profile is the most pronounced.

The distance between the second and third clusters (2.417) and between the first and third clusters (2.350) are relatively similar, suggesting that the selective perception profile differs to a comparable extent from both the critical and the positive clusters.

Table 19. Summary of Cluster Profiles

Cluster	n	%	Highly Rated Dimensions	Dimensions with low scores
Cluster 1 Critical Perception	8	% 3,4	Cultural and Natural Wealth (3,51)	Economic Capacity (1.93), Socio-Political Perception (1.94), Emotional Connection (2.92)
Cluster 2 Positive Perception	91	%54,6	All dimensions high (3.90–4.45)	—
Cluster 3 Selective Perception	24	%42,0	Cultural and Natural Wealth (4.43), Emotional Connection (4.41)	Socio-Political Perception (2.10), Economic Capacity (2.40)

Note: K-Means cluster analysis was performed with 3 clusters and 100 maximum iterations. The algorithm converged in the 13th iteration.

When the summary of the cluster profiles is evaluated, it is observed that the majority of the sample is concentrated in the positive perception (54.6%) and selective perception (42.0%) profiles, while the critical perception profile represents a very small segment (3.4%). This finding indicates that the overall perception of Türkiye among both generations is more positive or mixed rather than negative.

It is also noteworthy that the selective perception profile is nearly as large as the positive perception cluster. This suggests that a substantial proportion of respondents maintain favorable evaluations of cultural and emotional dimensions while simultaneously adopting a more critical stance toward economic and political dimensions.

Conclusion And Recommendations

This study examined the Türkiye's brand perceptions of generation Y and generation Z within socio-cultural, socio-economic, and political contexts, adopting a multi-layered analytical framework that considers the effects of generational identity, demographic variables, social media usage patterns, ethnic identity, international experience, political interest level, and perception profiles across these dimensions.

The research makes significant contributions to the testing of country image and country-of-origin theories, which occupy an

established place in the country branding literature, from a generational perspective. The six-dimensional country brand model proposed by Anholt (2005) and the country image framework developed by Kotler and Gertner (2002) conceptualize perception as multidimensional and dynamic. The findings of this study largely support this assumption. Türkiye's brand perceptions appear relatively strong in terms of cultural and natural richness as well as emotional bond, while remaining weaker in the dimensions of economic capacity and socio-political evaluation. This pattern suggests that the components of country image may operate relatively independently and indicates that Türkiye continues to exhibit perceptual weaknesses in institutional and governance-related dimensions despite its strong cultural attractiveness.

When interpreted within the framework of Mannheim's (1952) theory of generations, Y and Z generations are assumed to be shaped by shared historical experiences and processes of digital transformation, which would suggest systematic differences in their perceptions of Türkiye. However, the findings of this study indicate that both the direct and indirect effects of generation on perception dimensions are limited. This result aligns with growing methodological critiques in generational research that question the extent to which generational identity serves as a decisive explanatory factor in shaping perceptions of nations (Rudolph & Zacher, 2017). Indeed, the finding that demographic variables such as gender, education level, and employment status emerge as stronger predictors than generation in several perception dimensions suggests that the determinants of perception are more closely related to structural and socio-demographic conditions than to generational categorization alone. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that the generation variable significantly predicted the cultural and natural wealth factor (ΔR^2=0.009, p=0.036). The fact that generation Z evaluates this dimension higher than generation Y indicates that the younger generation has a more positive perception of Türkiye's cultural and natural heritage. This finding can be explained by generation Z's increased exposure to travel content and cultural narratives through digital media. On the other hand, the generational variable did not stand out as a significant predictor in the factors of emotional bond, economic capacity and competitiveness, human resource qualifications and socio-political perception. This finding suggests that perceptions in these dimensions are shaped by broader demographic and social dynamics, independent of generational identity.

Gender emerged as a notable predictor across all models. Male participants reported significantly lower scores than female participants in the dimensions of economic capacity and competitiveness, human resource qualifications, and socio-political perception, suggesting that

gender roles and differential socio-economic experiences shape perceptions of the country in distinct ways.

It was also observed that perceptions of emotional bond and human resource qualifications decrease as the level of education increases. This finding is consistent with the literature suggesting that higher education strengthens critical thinking capacity, leading individuals to evaluate country perceptions from a more questioning and analytical perspective.

With regard to social media usage patterns, the type of platform appears to play a decisive role in shaping Türkiye's brand perceptions. Participants who do not use Instagram reported higher scores in the dimensions of cultural and natural richness and emotional bond, suggesting that visually oriented platforms may influence perception by shaping expectations and fostering comparative evaluations among users. Similarly, non-users of Twitter/X and TikTok reported more positive evaluations in terms of economic capacity and socio-political perception, indicating that exposure to politically and critically oriented content on these platforms may contribute to more critical assessments of the country.

In contrast, Facebook and YouTube users reported higher scores in the dimensions of human resource qualifications and emotional bond, suggesting that community-oriented interaction and long-form content may contribute to more favorable perceptions of Türkiye. When interpreted within the framework of media repertoire theory (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006), these findings indicate that individuals' exposure to diverse content environments across platforms differentiates country image formation at the dimensional level.

A statistically significant difference between ethnic identity groups was observed only in the emotional bond factor. Participants identifying with Turkish ethnicity reported significantly higher emotional attachment scores compared to those identifying with Kurdish ethnicity, highlighting the role of ethnic identity in shaping emotional integration with the country. Interpreted through social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this finding suggests that individuals tend to develop stronger attachment and loyalty toward national contexts that align with their ethnic identity, underscoring the relevance of ethnic identity as a meaningful dimension in country branding research.

At the same time, the absence of significant differences between ethnic groups in the dimensions of cultural and natural richness, economic capacity and competitiveness, and socio-political perception

suggests that these evaluations are shaped by more universal assessment criteria that are relatively independent of ethnic identity.

The findings regarding the moderating role of overseas experience contradict certain results in the existing literature on the impact of international travel on country perceptions, and therefore present a noteworthy point for discussion. Within the framework of the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), it is generally expected that individuals' direct experiences with different countries lead to more positive evaluations and perceptions. However, in this study, overseas experience was found not to play a statistically significant moderating role in the relationship between generation and perceptions of Türkiye. This finding suggests that while foreign experience may become visible in bivariate comparisons, it loses its explanatory power when embedded within a broader sociological structure such as generational identity.

The mediation analysis of political interest indicates that generation Z exhibits a higher level of political interest compared to Millennials. This finding is consistent with the literature characterizing generation Z as more sensitive and engaged in social and political issues (Dimock, 2019). However, political interest demonstrated a significant direct effect only on the socio-political perception factor, with individuals reporting higher political interest evaluating Türkiye's socio-political context more critically. At the same time, this effect does not form a significant indirect pathway through generation; in other words, political interest does not function as a mediating mechanism between generational identity and socio-political perception. This suggests that political interest operates as an independent evaluative factor rather than a variable structurally embedded within generational differences.

K-Means cluster analysis revealed that participants are grouped into three distinct perception profiles regarding Turkey. The predominance of the positive perception (54.6%) and selective perception (42.0%) clusters indicates that overall perceptions of Türkiye are more positive or mixed rather than negative. In particular, the selective perception profile—characterized by high evaluations of cultural and emotional dimensions and lower evaluations of economic and political dimensions—is almost as large as the positive perception group. This typology provides a strategic indication that although Türkiye maintains strong cultural appeal, its long-term brand value may be constrained unless perceptual gaps related to institutional performance and governance credibility are addressed. The fact that the critical perception profile constitutes a very small segment (3.4%) further

suggests that Türkiye does not suffer from a predominantly negative image among these two generations.

Several methodological limitations of this study should also be acknowledged. First, the research is limited to generation Y and generation Z and does not include generation X or the Baby Boomer generation. This restricts intergenerational comparison and limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study is confined to individuals residing in Türkiye and does not include Turkish diaspora populations or foreign nationals, thereby limiting comparative external validity. It is therefore recommended that future nation branding studies distinguish between internal and external perceptions; this study captures only internal perceptions. Third, the cross-sectional design does not allow for the observation of perceptual changes over time. Fourth, measuring social media usage at the platform level does not capture deeper dimensions such as content type, usage intensity, or the nature of exposure, which may be crucial for understanding platform effects in greater depth.

The findings of this research suggest several directions for future studies:

First, longitudinal research designs would enable a more robust understanding of how generational perceptions evolve over time and under what conditions such changes occur.

Second, comparative studies involving the Turkish diaspora residing abroad as well as foreign nationals evaluating Türkiye from an external perspective could help to reveal similarities and divergences between internal and external country perceptions.

Third, future research examining social media usage in terms of content types, algorithmic influence, and echo chamber dynamics would provide deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying platform-based differentiation in country perception.

Fourth, an in-depth exploration of the relationship between ethnic identity and country perception through qualitative research methods would allow access to experiential and interpretive dimensions that are not easily captured through quantitative approaches.

Finally, testing the influence of generational variables on country perception across different countries and cultural contexts would enable a more comprehensive assessment of whether the findings of this study reflect universal patterns or are context-specific.

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