An Assessment On The Relationship Of Corporate Communication And Corporate Reputation

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ABSTRACT

Today, it is a fact that effectively managing communication resources and corporate communication process makes institutions different from each other and adds value to institutions. With this value, institutions stand out among their peers and gradually gain reputation. In this context, with the intense competition environment brought by globalization, how institutions reflect themselves to their stakeholders is becoming increasingly important. In addition, the communication and interaction that institutions establish with their stakeholders also affect their reputation levels independently of the production of goods/services. Corporate reputation is one of the main determinants of corporate sustainability in the long run. Developing corporate reputation only by establishing high interaction with internal and external stakeholders; brings with it the necessity of good communication. In this context, for institutions; a consistent, balanced and uninterrupted communication performance has become inevitable. Corporate communication can only function properly as long as reciprocity and interaction are observed. In addition, information acquisition/exchange, which enables institutions to achieve their goals in interaction with their stakeholders and requires the redefinition of the corporate vision, is possible with the effective use and diversification of communication resources. The only way to effectively use the communication resources available in most institutions is to adopt a systematic and strategic management approach. The communication process carried out within the framework of a strategic management approach is one of the most important elements that make institutions superior to each other in the eyes of stakeholders. This strategic communication management also positively affects corporate reputation. Corporate Communication conceptualized in this context; it is extremely important to determine the scope that meets the requirements of interaction with the stakeholders, to establish/develop/protect corporate reputation and ultimately to ensure corporate sustainability. In this context, the aim of the study is to examine the role of corporate communication management in the process of reputation building, which is based on the creation and strategic use of communication resources. In the study, first of all, the conceptual framework of corporate communication management was mentioned, and then it was associated with corporate reputation.

Keywords: Corporate Communicatıon, Corporate Reputation, Corporate Sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past, the interaction dimension related to internal and external stakeholders was handled in a more limited way for institutions, but today this dimension has changed based on high interaction. Because the stakeholders have a wide scope as any group or individual that can affect the achievement of the goals and objectives of the institutions and be affected by this process. In this context, the increasing interaction process with internal and external stakeholders has led to the conceptualization of corporate communication. Corporate communication is a management function that bases communication processes on planning and coordination. Today, the scope of this function has increased and important developments have been experienced in the field of corporate communication. The most important of these new functions is to combine and commemorate the fields of communication and expertise under the "corporate communication" in a single department. "Communication" courses in management and business schools also contributed to the conceptualization of corporate communication. On the other hand, it is inevitable to manage all forms of communication. The orchestration process, which has come to the fore in this context, means that all forms of communication are managed with a strategic understanding. Corporate communication management, which is the current equivalent of this orchestration process, comes to the fore in the process of determining the environmental factors that cause the revision of corporate targets in relations with both internal and external stakeholders. In addition, the management of existing communication channels in institutions with a strategic understanding also supports gaining reputation. Communication resources that will provide reputation gain and the decision-making process necessary to create these resources are one of the main issues of corporate communication management. In this context, corporate communication management has a key role in the reputation building process.

Considering the efforts of researchers working on communication to impose corporate communication management as a special field, the development of a strategic understanding in corporate management becomes increasingly important. On the other hand, while in the past corporate reputation studies, it was seen that reputation was mostly associated with product and service quality, while in today's studies, it is seen that corporate reputation is associated with communication processes as well as with the production of goods and

services. These two developments reveal the increasing importance of the subject. In this context, work; based on the existing literature and research, it aims to reveal and evaluate the role of corporate communication management in the reputation building process, which is based on the creation of communication resources and their handling on a strategic level.

2. CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

Corporate communication in the most general terms; it is the whole of the communication processes that an institution has carried out in order to achieve its goals and ultimately ensure its sustainability. This process; It includes internal/external information flow, motivational elements, coordination, organizational skills, educational and supervisory issues. Corporate communication can also be defined by keeping all communication channels open to its stakeholders and targeted audience. Especially since the beginning of the 1990s, many books titled Corporate Communications have been published in the United States (USA) and Europe. The books published by Argenti (1994) and Goodman (1994) are important examples of this acceleration. Some of the authors of these books have taken a general perspective towards corporate communication. For example, Heath (1992) took corporate communication as a metaphor. On the other hand, Van Riel (1995) examined corporate communication more specifically through marketing and organizational behavior without any metaphor or rhetoric. In this context, in the relevant period, institutions focused on how they could integrate internal-external communication activities from simple message transmissions to corporate level in order to create a positive reputation or image among their stakeholders. This focus and acceleration has made the concept of corporate communication, which is associated with sustainability and reputation, more prominent by forming the main lines of a new discipline (Frandsen and Johansen, 2018).

The first examples of the formation of the literature on corporate communication took place within the scope of business management. Authors in this discipline first associated corporate communication with the corporate brand, and saw it as a tool that transforms product branding into corporate branding. Here, the meaning attributed to corporate communication is the process of dissemination of information in order to ensure organizational development (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007).

Joep Cornelissen evaluated the emergence of corporate communication in the 1990s through three classifications (Frandsen and Johansen, 2018):

- ✓ Market and environment based driving forces
- ✓ Communication based driving forces
- ✓ Organizational factors

Market and environmental driving forces; it is about attracting new individuals and stakeholders with different expectations/demands to the institution. In addition, an employee of an institution can also be a customer of the institution. In this context, a high level of coordination is necessary and important when institutions want to establish a strong communication with their internal and external stakeholders.

Communication based driving forces; it is handled within the scope of numerous messages and media messages that individuals in the society are exposed to willingly or unwillingly. Similarly, a high level of coordination is required for institutions to convey their messages and appear clearly and consistently in various media types.

Organizational factors; it is related to the efforts of both senior management and communication departments in order to ensure corporate effectiveness and a strong positioning. In this context, the communication department should adopt an understanding that the communication strategy is compatible and connected with the general corporate strategies.

In the following years, as the concept of corporate communication deepened, public institutions and senior executives in the private sector dealt with the concept of corporate communication in strategic dimensions and showed interest in this concept as a separate function and means of gaining reputation. In this context, Frandsen and Johansen have developed features/definitions that include all key elements of corporate communication based on the literature and these statements and synthesized them as follows (Frandsen and Johansen, 2014):

- ✓ Corporate communication is a strategic management function. In this respect, it can be defined as a bridge connecting this approach to the overall strategy of the institution, while bringing a strategic perspective to the communication activities of an institution. As a matter of fact, corporate communication; It is closely related to the mission, vision, goals and corporate strategies.
- ✓ Corporate communication is a holistic system that integrates internal and external communication activities. This systematic may involve some changes from institution to institution.

✓ The purpose of integrating internal and external communication activities in corporate communication is to create, maintain, change and/or repair a positive image and/or reputation. In addition, corporate communication is not limited to corporate branding as it includes other communication disciplines.

While these issues, which have made great contributions to the emergence and development of corporate communication, maintain their importance today, the process of transforming corporate communication into an organizational function still continues. Although this transformation process first started in the private sector, it soon included public institutions as well.

One of the issues often associated with corporate communication is public relations. The main differences between these concepts are expressed in Table.

Table 1. Distinctions Between Corporate Communication and Public Relations Concepts

	Corporate Communication	Public Relations
Positioning	Stakeholder Theory	Citizen/Customer
Emphasis	Image and Reputation	Behavior and Relationship

While corporate communication strongly positions the concept of "stakeholder" put forward by Freeman (1984), public relations makes a positioning on the basis of "citizen/public/customer". In this context, stakeholder positioning of corporate communication focuses on image and reputation, while public relations focuses on the relations and behaviors between the institution and the citizen/public/customer. In this respect, corporate communication includes more strategic elements when compared to public relations.

It is possible to summarize the basic concepts of corporate communication as follows:

✓ Stakeholder Relations
✓ Integration
✓ Identity
✓ Image and Reputation

Stakeholder Relations:

Stakeholders of an institution; customers, employees, investors, relevant public, private and third sector organizations, etc. can be defined as these are categorized among themselves as internal and external stakeholders. Stakeholder relations, on the other hand, are the communication process between those expressed. In this context, stakeholder issue is among the most basic and dominant concepts of corporate communication (Cornelissen, 2017). This importance attributed to stakeholder relations for corporate communication is also related to corporate sustainability.

Integration:

In its most basic definition, integration can be defined as the strategic coordination of organizational activities and communication processes. In this respect, the degree of coordination may differ from institution to institution, depending on the size of the institutions. Although integration is reduced to a minimum/basic level as a general trend, the existence of statements formulated in abstract terms reveals the value/difficulty of a strong integration. The appropriate degree of coordination for a particular communication process (Frandsen and Johansen, 2014):

✓ The purpose and status of the coordination
✓ It depends on the strategy, management and organization understanding of the institution or unit.

If the goal is to establish a clear and consistent communication infrastructure in the medium term to build a positive reputation among internal and external stakeholders, tighter and stronger coordination is required. The same is true for crisis communication in crisis situations. However, a looser coordination may be a more appropriate solution in some cases (Cornelissen, 2000). Finally, corporate communication plays a key role in terms of decisions/procedures for establishing and securing coordination as well as the degree of coordination.

Identity:

It is possible to talk about three different types of identity in the field of corporate communication. These; corporate identity, organizational identity and social identity (Frandsen and Johansen, 2018):

✓ Corporate identity is related to brand/reputation management and in its most general definition; It is the way an institution presents itself to external stakeholders in order to appear different from other institutions. Corporate identity is usually planned and controlled by top management.

✓ Organizational identity, unlike corporate identity, expresses how the employees of the institution understand the basic values / strategies of the institution and how they behave in this context.

✓ While both corporate identity and organizational identity are solely related to the identity of the whole organization, the individual-group relationship is dominant in the concept of social identity. This identity is shaped by the individual participation of employees in groups or how they identify with these groups (in-group or out-group).

These three types of identities expressed are intertwined in institutions and may be interdependent variables.

Image and Reputation:

The concepts of image and reputation are related to how stakeholders perceive and evaluate an institution. While the concept of corporate image in the literature has become a subject of study especially in the 1950s, the place of corporate reputation in the literature dates back to the 1990s (Frandsen and Johansen, 2018).

In its most general definition, corporate image is the image that emerges in the target audience of an institution. In this respect, corporate image is the whole of the opinions about the depictions directed to corporate identity. The concept of reputation was first defined by Fombrun. While defining the concept of reputation, Fombrun focused on the concepts of process and competition and made the following definition (Fombrun, 1996):

"Corporate reputation is a perceptual representation of an organization's past actions and future expectations that defines the overall attractiveness of an organization to all its key components compared to other leading peers."

In recent years, corporate reputation research has tended towards a more complex understanding from the basic understanding in the literature. An important milestone in this development, the Oxford Corporate Reputation Handbook provided an up-to-date overview of some new concepts such as status, label, and fame (Barnett and Pollock, 2012). Corporate communication helps the concepts of image and reputation reach a corporate dimension.

3. CORPORATE COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIES

As stated before, the concept of corporate communication is the use of communication channels by an institution within the scope of its corporate goals. Corporate communication management, on the other hand, can be defined as an effective and proactive communication process that coordinates interconnected communication resources and improves corporate performance with various strategies (Dozier et al., 2013). The concept of communication is not just a set of tactics or methods for organizations. According to Holm, communication; involves a strategic perspective rather than short-term techniques and methods. This strategic dimension contributed to the conceptualization of corporate communication management (Holm, 2006). In this context, institutions that have adopted corporate communication management see the communication process as a functional strategy (Hooghiemstra, 2000). Communication strategy is a basic argument of corporate communication management; it is based on the systematic use of communication tools and their compatibility with the corporate mission/vision. While the communication strategy is a key derivative of the corporate strategy, it is compatible with the common values shared by the employees of the organization (Cornelissen, 2008). In this context, it is possible to say that corporate communication management has a close relationship with corporate culture.

In corporate communication management, it is important to pre-define communication resources from a strategic point of view. In this context, a classification emerges as institution-specific and non-organization-specific communication resources. Institution-specific communication resources are shaped on the axis of institutional capacity, strengths, core values and historical references regarding corporate identity. These communication resources are very valuable and unique for the institution, as well as contributing to corporate sustainability. Ultimately, these resources are the result of strategic actions in decision-making processes and have long-term implications. In determining the communication resources specific to the institution; corporate identity elements such as basic keywords, tags, distinctive short messages, symbols and sounds, and corporate culture elements come to the fore (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007). All institution-specific resources make sense in a system where managers direct communication channels and encourage their use in the context of public relations (Schwartz, 2001). This situation necessitates corporate communication management. On the other hand, non-organisation-specific sources of communication arise within the scope of short-term activities or mandatory procedures with other institutions. In addition, such communication resources are not based on corporate identity (Davis et al., 1997). The management function within corporate communications is part of a

long-term process. In this process, internal and external stakeholders continue their interactions through communication resources that include their own methods. In this context, stakeholders; they can find the opportunity to define or reshape organizational communication resources. This situation can mean that planned or unplanned communication emerges in different ways in a single administrative framework and institutional communication process (Varey, 1998). In this context, the cyclical process of corporate communication management facilitates the handling of planned and unplanned communication within a system. In addition, this management approach based on interaction and system; it envisages redefining communication strategies according to circumstances and being sensitive to environmental changes.

With the changing technology environment, the corporate communication strategy has also changed. The traditional approach to corporate communication has been based on channels such as articles, newsletters, meetings or conferences. Organizations that organize articles and promotions in newspapers and magazines to promote the products and services of public relations teams exemplify this approach. The meaning of corporate communication today is more flexible. It usually involves a two-way exchange of information. The flow is carried out not only from the organization to its stakeholders, but also from the stakeholders to the organization (Neill, 2015). This helps to establish a better relationship between all actors.

Today, besides classical communication methods, organizations also use social media channels to communicate. The most frequently used social media channels are Facebook, Twitter, and Linkedin. The use of these channels allows communication to be established under the control of the organization and at the desired time. For organizations, it is possible to determine corporate communication strategies with hybrid models using traditional approach elements and today's communication networks. Organizations build the process of determining corporate communication strategies in line with their mission and vision, through corporate communication professionals.

Corporate communication professionals need to have various skills in order to be successful in their roles. The skills that an organization manager who wants to establish a strong communication team should have can be explained as follows (Indeed, 2021):

Writing Skills: Since the primary responsibility of communication professionals is to interact through mass media, their writing skills should be strong. In this context, in order to be effective, different styles should be adopted for different target groups.

Research Skills: Communication experts are expected to have the capacity to conduct research on the source of the content they create. It is important to be aware of knowledge-based content such as articles, websites or various works and to use them according to ethical rules.

Critical Thinking: Communication professionals must think critically within reasoning regardless of their role within an organization. This can also develop skills such as analytical thinking and problem solving.

Public Speaking: First of all, communication professionals must have the courage to speak in public. Then, he should have a certain proficiency in matters such as style, emphasis, intonation and diction. Being able to convey a subject in a short and concise manner by choosing the right words as possible will positively change the level of impact.

Technical Skills: Communication professionals should have advanced technical skills in their field before focusing on the side factors that increase their impact levels. When technical skills are examined within the scope of priority and posteriority, it is the first requirement.

4. CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AND CORPORATE REPUTATION RELATIONSHIP

Corporate communication refers to the methods organizations use to communicate with a variety of actors, including customers, employees, stakeholders, the media, the general public, and regulators. The purpose of corporate communication is to create a positive perception and ultimately reputation among the stakeholders of the business, such as investors, employees or the general public. Corporate communication is also the variety of ways a business or organization communicates with a variety of target audiences, both internal and external. These masses are classified as follows (Indeed, 2021):

- ✓ Customers / potential customers
- ✓ Employees, Stakeholders/investors
- ✓ Partners, Suppliers
- ✓ Media, State organs

✓ General audience / Public

Regarding corporate communication; there are three main branches of corporate communications, including management communications, marketing communications, and organizational communications, all working together to create a strategic approach to an organization's overall communications. In corporate communication, there are typically three main areas. These areas can be explained as follows (Adonimedia, 2020; Indeed, 2021):

✓ Management communication: This form of communication takes place between management and both internal and external audiences. To ensure successful internal and external business communication, management relies on experts to deliver their messages effectively. These professionals often work in marketing communications and organizational communications.
✓ Marketing communication: Since it can include advertising, direct mail, sponsorship and sales, it is quite common for businesses to devote a large part of their budget to corporate and marketing communications.
✓ Organizational Communication: Employees in the public relations industry are largely involved in organizational communication. This area; It consists of experts in areas such as public relations, corporate advertising, employee communication, investor relations and public relations.

These three major clusters work together to provide effective business communication, with most organizations designing a business communication plan (also known as a corporate communication plan) to ensure their companies communicate successfully with all stakeholders.

It starts with communication, dialogue and interaction processes for institutions and then continues in planned or unplanned ways. While planned communication takes place under control, it also keeps communication channels alive (Grönroos, 2004). In this context, corporate communication; means the use of communication channels on the axis of a plan in order to achieve corporate goals and sustainability (Cornelissen, 2008).

On the other hand, gossip and related processes spread by word of mouth are within the scope of unplanned and uncontrolled communication and can negatively affect the perception of internal and external stakeholders. In addition, planned communication that includes various clues about corporate identity can be one-way or two-way (Hartley and Pickton, 1999).

Face-to-face communication is important in transferring corporate identity, corporate culture and values (DEVELOP, 2016). In addition, the role of corporate managers and indirectly personnel is important in the development of corporate reputation (Gray and Balmer, 1998). The fact that corporate managers have such a great responsibility in the perception/representation process on the internal and external stakeholders of the institutions pushes the corporate managers to the role of "communication genius leader" (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007). On the other hand, personnel participation in the relevant processes is also important.

Along with corporate reputation, activities based on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and interaction with external stakeholders are also considered within the scope of planned communication (Blomback and Scandelius, 2013). Planned communication management in the CSR process both increases awareness of sustainability initiatives and promotes communication between corporate stakeholders while improving stakeholder identification (Morsing and Schultz, 2006). From this point of view, CSR, which is considered within the scope of corporate communication, improves public relations and strengthens corporate reputation. In this respect, it is possible to say that planned communication is a key element of corporate reputation and public relations. However, as stated before, the signals transmitted by the institutions can consist of planned or unplanned communication processes (Grönroos, 2000). Uncontrolled communication with the environment within the scope of unplanned communication reflects positively or negatively on the institution and may affect the corporate reputation in the long run. The dimensions of unplanned communication have greatly increased with the rapid development and spread of information and communication technologies. Online interactions on digital platforms and especially in social media environments have become an important part of the communication process. In this context, external stakeholders can obtain information and impressions against institutions even in the electronic environment. This situation gives the external stakeholders benefiting from the services of the institution the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction and to affect the corporate reputation. In this context, the better the unplanned communication is managed for institutions, the more reputation gain is possible. The operation of even unplanned communication within a strategy and system necessitates corporate communication management as stated before.

Corporate communication strategy; it is concerned with how to improve interaction with stakeholders to sustain the corporate mission and support corporate goals (Mohr and Nevin, 1990). In this context, strict adherence to

strategic management and stakeholder relations is required in corporate communication management (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007). In this context, the interaction with internal and external stakeholders and the management of related processes also positively affect corporate reputation.

Creating and maintaining a positive corporate reputation is one of the ultimate goals of corporate communication management (Karatepe and Ozan, 2017). On the other hand, transforming strategic decisions in the context of public relations into communication strategies is an important opportunity to improve corporate reputation (Cornelissen, 2008). In this context, the desire of institutions to achieve a positive reputation also contributes to the conceptualization of the concept of corporate communication management on the axis of public relations. In this respect, it is possible to say that both corporate reputation and public relations are subsets of corporate communication management.

Institutions that deal with stakeholder relations with a contemporary perspective for reputation gain tend to include these stakeholders in their decision-making processes (Stroh, 2007). This also emphasizes the proactive role of corporate communication managers while supporting reputation building. On the axis of corporate communication management; opinions on public websites, social networks and platforms can also be effective in creating communication resources for institutions. In this context, taking part in a social network for an institution is an opportunity to follow the comments of the beneficiaries of the service. While social accounts can also be corporate-specific communication resources, they can also contribute to the creation of new communication resources with incoming feedback. In this context, the perceptions and impressions of those who benefit from the service affect the corporate reputation.

Following the implementation of communication strategies in corporate communication management, data collection on processes and results and reputation measurement methods are initiated (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007). On the other hand, based on the findings of Fombrun and Van Riel, it was seen that corporate communication processes directly affect the gain or loss of reputation (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2004). In this respect, when we look at the research companies that measure and rank reputation according to years, it is seen that they also emphasize communication processes in reputation measurement criteria. In this context, it is possible to say that corporate communication management, which is based on the effective use and coordination of highly interactive communication tools, contributes to the element of trust between the institution and its stakeholders, and ultimately improves corporate reputation.

5. CONCLUSION

All kinds of positive initiatives related to corporate communication help to strengthen the reputation of organizations and help them reach their goals and objectives by raising awareness. In order for corporate communication to be effective in establishing relations with stakeholders, it is important that the messages are correct. Organizations use corporate communication to respond to negative perceptions about themselves to protect their reputations. In this context, the importance of corporate communication in terms of sustainability and reputation makes it a critical function. Until the 1980s, most of the institutions limited their relations with the public only as a communication process with the press and media. On the other hand, the importance of corporate communication has been understood as both internal and external stakeholders demand more information from institutions. In the intense competition environment brought about by globalization, how institutions reflect themselves to the public and their stakeholders has gained importance. In addition to producing goods or services for institutions, the relations they have established with the public also affect their sustainability. In this context, institutions; they have to exhibit a consistent, balanced and uninterrupted communication performance. Institutions that can achieve integrity in this communication performance gain social approval from the public and their stakeholders and improve their corporate reputations in the long run. Corporate reputation distinguishes institutions from their peers and supports sustainability by reflecting corporate value. However, it is not possible to have a positive reputation for every institution. Corporate reputation; communication management is the result of the sum of many values such as functionality, quality, performance and predictability. In this context, it is possible for an institution to have a good reputation and to manage corporate communication well. In addition, it is very important for institutions to reach their goals in their relations with their stakeholders and to adapt to the environmental factors that cause the corporate vision to be redefined. This target and adaptation process requires the systematic use of communication resources. Corporate communication management conceptualized in this context; determining the framework that meets the requirements of stakeholder relations is extremely important in terms of establishing/developing/preserving corporate reputation and ultimately ensuring corporate sustainability. Decision-making processes within corporate communication management can positively affect public relations, corporate communication and

indirectly corporate reputation. As a result, it is understood from both the literature and studies on the subject and the relevant impressions and inferences on the subject: corporate communications management; it is an interaction process that increases corporate reputation, ensures communication coordination, improves performance, comes out of decision-making processes, and ultimately contributes to corporate sustainability by influencing these processes. In this case, it is possible to say that institutions that have adopted corporate communication management within the scope of strategic management can be more successful in gaining corporate reputation and that there is a positive relationship between the success of corporate communication management and corporate reputation.

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