

## Redefining the concepts of public relations and corporate communication: An examination and critical approach over the Corporate Communication Professionals Association of Turkey

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### **Abstract**

*The term "corporate communication" had emerged because of the developments achieved in communication, it is also related with the communication activities of the organization. However, although "corporate communication" takes part mainly under the umbrella of public relations activities, it is seen that the concept, as a separate area of expertise was tried to be considered as distinct from the public relations discipline. Starting from this point the study aims to discuss the reasons of foundation of the Corporate Communication Professionals Association (Kurumsal İletişimciler Derneği /KİD) which has activities in Turkey or its necessariness. In the study which aims to examine the corporate communication activities and to expose its relationship with the concept of public relations, first, the theoretical and practical frameworks of the concepts of "corporate communication" and "public relations" are exposed. The conceptual framework which is determined by literature analysis is analysed and discussed within the context of the activities of the Corporate Communication Professionals Association. In the study although the concepts of "corporate communication" and "public relation" had been dealt with all their dimensions, basically, dealing with the same practice as different concepts instead of being evaluated under the same umbrella is assessed by us with a critical perspective.*

**Keywords:** Communication, corporate communication, Corporate Communication Professionals Association of Turkey, public relations

### **1. Introduction**

The studies we had made over the credibility problem of the public relations urged us to feel that we had to think on distinct and new problems and to make new research. During our study with the subject of "Reputation Problem of Public Relations in Turkey and a Critical View about the Public Relations Professional Organisations of Turkey", we had the aim of examining the activities of the professional organisations/ communication NGO's over the public relations discipline and we started our road in order to interview with Public Relations Association of Turkey (TÜHİD), Communication Consultancies Associations of Turkey (İDA) and Corporate Communication Professionals Association (KİD) (Özgen and Akbayır, 2016). However in the study, KİD stated its field of activity as a distinct field of expertise than the public relations and it would not be appropriate for them to take place in our study. Thus this study emerged over the need to open up such basic questions over the perspective of Corporate Communication Professionals and this had led us to a new and different study. What is public relations and corporate communication? At which points they depart from each other and is corporate communication really a different area of expertise? Or, as it was for a long time, is public relations an umbrella term and corporate communication should be located under this umbrella?

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Starting from all these questions, the perspective about “corporate communication” “as an area of expertise evaluated as a different and separate area from the public relations” is discussed under the context of the activities of the Association of Corporate Communication Professionals in Turkey by starting from a literature analysis and practical examples.

## 2. A review about the concept of public relations

When the literature is examined, it is possible to meet with hundreds of definitions made about the public relations (PR). According to Grunig and Hunt (1984:6) who made one of the most well known definitions of public relations, “public relations is the management of communication between an organisation and its public”. While Long and Hazelton (1987:3) define public relations as “the communication function of management which enables the institution to adapt itself to the environment or to change, in order to perform its institutional goals”, according to Crable and Vibbert (1986:6) public relations is a multi functional communication method which researches, influences, analyses and evaluates the relationships among the organisation and its environments. Lattimore and et al. (2012:4) in their study named as “The Profession and the Practice” make the definition of public relations as the following:

“Public relations is a management function that helps achieve organizational objectives, define philosophy, and facilitate organizational change. Public relations practitioners communicate with all relevant internal and external publics to develop positive relationships and to create consistency between organizational goals and societal expectations. Public relations practitioners develop, execute, and evaluate organizational programs that promote the exchange of influence and understanding among an organization’s constituent parts and publics”.

Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), as a result of its studies for modernizing the definition of public relations in between the years of 2011-2012, brought this definition for public relations ([prsa.org/](http://prsa.org/), 7-10-2016):

“Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and their publics.” According to White and Mazur (1996:11), the aim of public relations is to influence the individual within each and every group which are contacted. According to them, this influence, as a respectable corporate function and a strategic source helping the corporate strategies should be performed by the public relations through establishing dialogues with different target masses of the corporation.

When the interpretations are examined, it is possible to tell that public relations is a communication and management function and it has a strategic importance in order to manage the communication and interaction among the corporation and its environment.

When the implementations are examined the term public relations is accepted as an umbrella term in the whole world. Many national professional organisations from the “Azerbaijan Public Relations Union” to “Zimbabwe Public Relations Institute” define themselves with this term. However some organisations and other groups may use different terms in order to define public relations function. One of the most popular terms among the Fortune 500 companies is the term of “corporate communication”. This definition is been used by many organisations from McDonald, BMW of North America, Toyota, Walt Disney, Walgreens. GM and Xerox (Wilcox, 2012:35).

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### 3. A review about the concept of corporate communication

In the recent years we meet with the term of “corporate communication” which is frequently used by the organisations and academics as an area of activity where the organisations run their communications with their target masses. According to Wood (2012:107), corporate communication expresses establishing meaningful values which shall encourage the organisation to act in a consistent manner and to communicate such values in order to form social capital and to take the support of the stakeholders. According to Riel and Fombrun, (2007:25), corporate communication is a series of activities where all internal and external communication which aim to form desired starting points together with the stakeholders associated with the organisation are managed and orchestrated. According to Riel and Fombrun (2007:35), this starting point depends on the smooth operation of the processes of marketing communication, organisational communication and communication management and is located at the centre of the elements of strategy, brand and identity.

On the other hand, as the perception about the concept of public relations is compared with the concept of “media relations” it is thought that the term “corporate communication” is used more widely. And according to many, corporate communication includes the concepts of advertising, public communication, public affairs, community relations, employee communication and includes all communication activities of the organisation (Wilcox, 2012:36).

One of the academic studies about public relations and corporate communication is made by Larissa Grunig, James Grunig and David Dozier (2002). The researchers in their study named as “Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations”, in order to set the limits of the concept of “Excellent Public Relations”, made comprehensive research performed about the communication departments of organisations. One of the interesting points is that the research made covered all communication departments and the employees in such departments without making any differentiation among the concepts of corporate communication or public relations.

James Grunig, in his book named as “Excellence in Public Relations and Communications Management” defines public relations and communication management in the same category. According to him (1992:4): “Public relations/communication management is broader than communication technique and broader than specialized public relations programs such as media relations or publicity. Public relations and communication management describe the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of an communication with both external and internal publics-groups that affect the ability of an organization to meet its goals”.

Consequently, it is possible to tell that significant theoreticians consider public relations as a whole together with the communication science and it plays an efficient role in the management of the organisations’ communications and forms a discipline which is enjoyed in general by the “communication departments”.

According to a survey made in 2015 in the USA (United State of America) by “Corporate Communication International” in order to determine the corporate communication trends, the communication managers defined their 7 priority roles in the organisation respectively under different headings such as manager of company’s reputation, Counsel to the CEO (Chief Executive Officer), Manager of Employee Relations, Manager of Company’s Image, Manager of relationship between company and all of its key constituencies, Engineer of Public Opinion, Driver of

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Company Publicity (prezi.com, 18-10-2016). As it may be understood from this example, instead of seeing the concept of corporate communication as a field of expertise different than the public relations, to evaluate it as the main form of implementing the public relations main heading within the organisation shall reduce the confusion experienced to a minimum as we believe. And in this case, instead of being drown among the concepts and to redefine the same concepts again and again there will be the search of solutions to different problems about the field.

The survey results made by European Association of Communications Directors (EACD) and Brunswick Insight in the year of 2015 in Europe over 163 corporate communication managers showed us that; -Reputation management, confidence and storytelling issues are among the most important factors, -Corporate employees, journalists, state organisations and business partners who are traditionally defined among the stakeholders have less significance, -But online communities, consumer groups, consumers and NGO's have an increasingly important role, -Communication plays a more central role within the organisation, -Corporate communication manager is included in the board of directors (72%), - The authority responsible for external communication is mostly named as Group Communications Director/Head/VP (34%), Head of Marketing/Branding and Communications (17%) and Head /VP/ Director Corporate/ Public Affairs (13%), - 9 of every 10 organisations takes support from a communication counselling agency external to the organisation, - Such agencies are used for taking support for tactical practices, providing an external point of view, taking strategic advises and taking public relations/media training were seen (brunswickgroup.com, 15-08-2016). This study shows us that, together with the above mentioned perspectives about corporate communication and public relations, the corporate communication professionals consider the implementation areas of corporate communication and the implementation areas of public relations as the one and the same thing. It was aforementioned that one of the common points of the definitions about public relations was the management of the communication of the corporation. In a similar manner, the opinions of the corporate communication managers that one of the functions of corporate communication plays a central role in the management and within the corporation points out the management counselling function of public relations.

Similarly, according to Riel and Fombrun (2007:23), the areas of responsibility of corporate communication are defined as to detail the profile of the brand behind the corporation, to develop the features which shall minimize the difference among the desired identity of the organisation and the features of the brand it owns, to expose the persons who shall perform the duties in the area of communication, to run and prepare efficient operations in order to facilitate the decision taking about issues of communication and to activate the internal and external support behind the corporate goals.

In this context, corporate communication as a communication function which establishes and reinforces the communication among the internal and external stakeholders of the corporation and also among itself, which runs the communication efforts in the areas of corporate identity and image and which provides the division of labour to perform these duties, is operating the areas of activity of public relations.

#### **4. What tasks do the public relations experts and corporate communication experts make**

According to Lattimore and et al. (2012:4), public relations practitioners help establishing and running efficient relationships with the third parties. In general, they perform their tasks by giving

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counselling in a public relations agency, firm or independently or as communication staff in corporations, in non-profit seeking organisations or public corporations. The definition of the “communication staffs of corporation”, that is given here by Lattimore and et al. points out the corporate communication departments. According to Grunig (1992:4), the public relations directors are among the senior directors within the organisation who are named as the dominant coalition having the authority to control. Thus they are among the decision taking people among the corporation. And it is one of their tasks to share the opinions of the public with such senior directors.

According to “The Occupational Outlook Handbook 2012–2013” which is published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Public Relations experts are at the same time named as “communication expert” and “media expert”. They run the communication of an organisation with its publics. Such publics include the consumers, investors, journalists and other media experts. Also, they inform the public opinion about the activities of the state authorities and corporations. Some of the activities performed by the public relations experts are listed briefly as: “write press releases and prepare information for the media, respond to information requests from the media, help clients communicate effectively with the public, help maintain their organization's corporate image and identity, draft speeches and arrange interviews for an organization's top executives, evaluate advertising and promotion programs to determine whether they are compatible with their organization's public relations efforts, evaluate public opinion of clients through social media” (bls.gov/,25-10-2016).

On the other hand, according to the “The Chief Communication Officer” survey made by Korn Ferry's Global Corporate Affairs Practice in the year of 2015 about the Fortune 500 companies (kornferry.com, 20-10-2016); 100 per cent of the corporate communication managers defined their area of responsibility as corporate communication, 98 per cent as media relations, 99 per cent as manager communication, 98 per cent as subject/crises management, 91 per cent as intra-corporate communication and 89 per cent as corporate reputation. 54 per cent defined as social responsibility, 60 per cent as community communication, and 48 per cent as corporate philanthropy.

Thus it is striking that the areas of activity and responsibility of corporate communication point out the areas of responsibility of public relations, and actually corporate staff who assumes the title of corporate communication expert enjoys the tools and methods of public relations among the corporation.

In summary, while the part of the public relations industry which deals more with media relations use the term “work in PR” that part which is in general manages the communication with investors, employees and state use the term “work in corporate communications”. However, both of the concepts are two different expressions of a single concept and someone who work as corporate communication expert is at the same time a public relations expert (taylorbennettfoundation.org, 07-10-2016).

## **5. Areas of activities of public relations agencies**

According to the “PR Census 2016” survey performed by PRCA (Public Relations and Communications Association) in the year of 2016 in England with 1,874 PR agency staff, the PR staff define their most basic 3 areas of work as; general media relations (76%), media relations strategic planning (75%) and digital and social media (75%). While the senior members of the PR industry

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deal with the issues of communication strategy development and reputation management, younger members deal with the issues of general media relationships and text authorship (prmeasured.com, 28-09-2016).

According to the results of Global Communications Report 2016 made by The Holmes Report (the conclusions drawn when the areas of activities of the biggest 10 public relations agencies in the world are as the following:

1. Edelman: It is seen that the agency gathers its areas of work under the headings of Business +Social Goal, Consumer Marketing, Corporate, Crises and Risk, Digital and Relations with the Public. It is striking that the “Corporate” heading is explained as building confidence and progressing, maintaining and sustaining the business values. Protecting corporate reputation and establishing close relationships with the customers, employees, state and the investors are taken under this context (edelman.com, 01-10-2016).

2. Weber Shandwick: Weber Shandwick expresses its voyage of foundation as “from a powerful foundation in PR, we've evolved into a leading global communications agency”. The agency defines all its communication efforts it performs as “engagement” (webershandwick.com, 01-10-2016).

3. Fleishman Hillard: It is seen that the activities of Fleishman Hillard are consisted by the issues of brand marketing, crises management, Digital&Social, media relations, communication with the public, reputation management, research&analytics and strategic integration (fleishmanhillard.com/, 01-10-2016).

4. Ketchum: It is seen that Ketchum has areas of activity such as brand marketing, change management, corporate communication, CSR&sustainability, digital marketing, efficiency marketing, financial communication, communication with public, subject and crises management and reputation management. It is seen that the main goal of the corporate communication studies of the agency include concepts of corporate identity, corporate stories and leadership and they put communication with the employees, media, customers and the society at its focus (ketchum.com, 01-10-2016).

5. Burson and Marsteller: It united the subjects of “corporate and financial communication” under a single heading. Under this context the headings of management counselling activity run by the basic communication capabilities of the agency and provision of information flow in between the internal and external communication platforms of the corporation, corporate positioning and leadership, corporate responsibility, financial communication and investor relationships, relations management among the influencers and opinion leaders and the corporation and subject and crises management take place. When the other areas of activities other than the “corporate and financial communication” are examined branches of activities such as relations with media, health communication, public affairs, sports marketing and consumer and brand marketing are striking (burson-marsteller.com, 02-10-2016).

6. MSLGroup: MSLGroup with French origins list their areas of activities as customers, corporate&brand citizenship, digital&social media, employee practices, events experiential, financial communication, health, public affairs, reputation management and corporate communication and technology. The corporate communication activities are defined as giving corporate communication advices for a corporation to sustain its life for a certain goal (mslgroup.com, 02-10-2016).

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7. Hill+Knowlton: Purpose driven communications, measuring, influencer identification and tracking, behavioural insights, crises training and simulation, measuring and 360 degrees reputation tracking, media measuring, content training, reputation management, response and relationship indicator are some of the areas of activities of Hill+Knowlton (hkstrategies.com, 02-10-2016).

8. Ogilvy PR: It is seen that Ogily PR's areas of expertise include the headings of brand marketing, content management, corporate communication, management branding, media communication and public affairs. The agency explains its corporate communication activities as "We help our clients build relationships with consumers, investors, employees, regulators, journalists and other stakeholders across a broad range of markets, product lines, and economic circumstances, in a way that drives value for their business" (ogilvy.com, 03-10-2016).

9. BlueFocus: BlueFocus with Chinese origins gathered its services under 4 main headings. These are consisted by the headings of integrated marketing, e-trade, Big data, and mobile internet. The agency expresses that it works in the areas of strategy, digital, advertisement, media, social, PR, design, branding, CRM (Customer Relationship Management), data, e-trade and mobile solutions (bluefocusgroup.com, 03-10-2016).

10. Golin: It is seen that Golin has activities in 5 main PR areas. These are: strategic planning, consumer insight, brave ideas, media relations and experimental marketing (golin.com/, 03-10-2016).

When it is looked from a general perspective the findings we obtained, show that the areas of the activities of the agencies include the areas of activities of the public relations such as reputation, identity, image, media relations, management counselling and corporate communication is one of these headings. In this context corporate communication as an area of implementation where the public relations agencies exactly provide counselling stays under the main umbrella of the public relations.

## **6. KİD (Corporate Communication Professionals Association)**

KİD (Corporate Communication Professionals Association) started its activities officially in the year of 2009 with the leadership of a group of corporate communication manager in Turkey with the goal of making the corporate communication experts to meet under the roof of a professional organisation. Some of the goals of establishment that is stated in the web page of KİD are to gather the corporate communication experts under the roof of a professional organisation, to increase the recognition of the profession of corporate communication and leadership for the professional standards to be enhanced (kid.com.tr, 15-08-2016).

KİD, defines "corporate communication" as management of all communication processes in an integrated manner for the strategic business targets of the corporations. And it explains the need for corporate communication as the following: "Increased competition together with globalisation today already brought with it a withering of the borders between various areas of communication such as marketing communication, reputation management, public relations and internal communication. In this process corporate communication is rapidly becoming a strategic function which plays an efficient role in the formation of business strategies rather than being a business support function". (kid.com.tr, 15-08-2016) From this definition it is seen that public relations is being separated from the areas of implementation such as reputation management and

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internal communication. On the other hand it is understood that the increasing conditions of reputation together with globalisation had created changes in the “corporate communication” function.

Globalisation and the new conditions of competition brought with it do require a new perspective about different areas of implementation and communication. However one of the most important problems posed by globalisation is the ethical problems experienced in the field of communication and inadequacy of the ways of solutions about such problems. On the other hand, while public relations is not an area independent than the internal communication and reputation management, it has the function of a maestro which provides the management of the communication processes which include the aforementioned areas.

KİD, lists the areas of the corporate communication concept as reputation management, CEO communication, crises management, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), corporate identity and other functions that may be seen under the heading of corporate communication, marketing communication and management of sports-art activities (special to the company) (kid.com.tr, 15-08-2016).

The areas of activity of KİD include the implementations of public relations. In this case, it is a serious question mark why the need to be a separate area of expertise is felt or why the need to form its own umbrella separating from the public relations umbrella is felt. At various stages of our study, despite we contacted with the Association of Professionals of Corporate Communication and we asked the below questions supposed intensity of their activities prevented us to take the answers. We once more repeat our questions via this study and share our inferences over our observations in the conclusion section. Our questions are gathered under the main headings such as:

- Why the concept of corporate communication is withdrawn from the umbrella of public relations and evaluated as a separate areas of expertise?
- Why a different and new formation other than the communication NGO’s having activity in Turkey?
- To which discipline’s area of expertise subjects such as social media, reputation, social responsibility and sustainability are supposed to belong?
- To which degree the association is participating in the mechanism of sanctions about the events if there would be non-ethical practices?

## 7. Conclusion

Public relations is the planned management of the communication among the corporation and the target constituency. When the definitions brought by significant scientists about public relations it is seen that the main element in public relations is the strategic management of communication.

Today the area of communication is increasingly assuming a more complex structure. It is not possible to give a single recipe about by which strategies and by whom the communication channels shall be used. The borders between the areas of communication are withering, every day a new practice is being added to the older ones or traditionalized implementations show change and

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progress. Expanding areas of activities, technological developments and expanding structures of the organisations caused the disciplines such as public relations, advertisement and marketing to be separated into specialized sub groups.

However that addition of a new implementation in communication every day to the existing ones or new communication practices which emerge after changing needs should not bring the understanding that the preceding ones must be totally left behind. When both the literature analysis performed and practices of the public relations sector are examined it is seen that the existing practices increasingly develop and evolve by adding the elements such as creativity, two-way communication, strategic management of communication and predominance of digital channels onto the practices of public relations which survived from Bernays to today. However we may tell that such practices nevertheless serve the public relations function. Starting from here, corporate communication is the product of an understanding which requires more integration of efforts of communication and public relations with the management strategies of the corporation. It means integrating various branches of communication and public relations with the management function by taking the elements of reputation and confidence due to corporate needs.

While activities of corporate communication requires a structuring by showing a variety according to the area of activity and sector of the corporation, containing sometimes advertisement, sometimes marketing and sometimes sales promotion jobs, indeed, its compass is never distanced from the strategic communication management. And this points for us the basis of public relations.

It is seen that the departments having activities under the name of corporate communication or practitioners of the field are enjoying the tools and implementations of public relations. For this reason it is actually possible to tell that public relations and corporate communication are two different articulations of the same concept. Public relations is an umbrella term covering all public relations activities. If the public relations practitioner is running the communication with the perspective of the corporation it is seen that instead of the term public relations, corporate communication term is preferred.

In summary, though corporate communication takes its roots from the public relations discipline, the management approach of the corporation and the public relations policy it follows may create different practices in the management of the communication process. But a correct analysis of the relationship among the corporate communication and public relations shows that whatever change may be displayed by the branches of activities lying under the concepts the way both of the concepts consider communication and perspective about communication are the same. For instance, elements such as reputation, image, integrity of identity and direct participation in corporate management which are important in public relations also constitute the basis of corporate communication. With this perspective public relations constitute the roots of the activities of corporate communication and considering them as independent formations from each other because of small differences in practice shall create negative affect over a correct conception of public relations.

The corporations have needs for planning and managing their strategies in two separate headings as social and corporate. The social strategies are a work plan where the corporation shall determine their corporate citizenship tasks for their employees, social stakeholders and the society and also their social missions and where, how and what they shall do over this mission. And

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corporate strategy is based on the planning process of the communication they shall have with their publics over the areas of activities of the corporations. Thus this perspective shows us the working area of the public relations.

In this study, it is understood that the concept of corporate communication in fact must be considered under an area under the main title of public relations but in our country as there are serious problems about the conceptualisation and consequently with the ethics of the public relations discipline corporate communication is experiencing a panic in this chaos in order to save its soul.

Basically founding organisations and NGO's over concepts which are actually within the field of public relations does not produce liberation from chaos but makes creation of ever new chaos within the existing one more probable. As public relations professionals, public relations academics, public relations NGO's and professional organisations, thus as the representatives of public relations being inside an endless academic and sector debate over the concepts and getting organised by feeling the need to give a name to each of the differences over this, instead of creating a universal conception of public relations pulls it in a more chaotic situation.

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