

**HOW TO MANAGE REPUTATION DURING CRISIS:
AN ANALYSIS OF TURKISH WHITE MEAT SECTOR DURING THE AVIAN
INFLUENZA (BIRD FLU) CRISIS**

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ABSTRACT

One of the most unique specifications of this century is the rapid change and the ambiguities rooted at this atmosphere of change. Change and ambiguities force individuals, organizations and even societies to take precautions for crisis and to manage it. Handled in institutional means, the most valuable asset of an institution is its reputation which is related to an institution's image, institutional culture, the personal images of its workers, its communication activities, brand images of its products and services. Though reputation seems to be an abstract concept, it can be efficiently managed by the administrative level of an institution. Reputation is not a result that comes out in natural process; it's a value which can be developed through effective management and it should be protected. Both components of a crisis, threats and opportunities are of vital importance in a crisis in sense of losing and re-gaining the reputation during and after the problematic period.

In this paper, the importance of reputation management in crisis periods will be questioned through the analysis of how the crisis which was the most important ever in Turkish white meat sector was managed, how the reputation of sector and its producers was restored with the efforts of Turkish Government, media, sector representatives and public opinion leaders.

Keywords: Reputation Management, Crisis, Bird Flu.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of globalization getting highlighted with the effect of developing communication technologies brought forth the vanishing of geographical, economic and cultural borders which resulted with the replacement of local markets by the global markets. Markets of the day are subject to a competition at top level. For this reason, the establishment of institutional survival and success in global markets is growing harder each and every minute. This situation forces the managements to execute intensive marketing activities in order to provide a good sales ratio for their products and services and to keep their sales consistent. At the core of all efforts lies the goal of determining the reasons of customers in choosing products or services, the motives of consumption and the revealing of actual thoughts hidden behind customer choices. These activities also stand as the key point in the determination of strategies which shape marketing operations.

Interdependent with the acquired competitive structure and the technological improvements, the differentiation in product and services basis can now be achieved with abstract values rather than concrete, material resources. The idea that gained importance in modern marketing theories is to retreat from the functional values of products and services. The new tendency is to hold more visuality, presence, voice, fantasy, image and meaning value in order to increase the volume of customers interested in the assets. In this sense the values held by the product is influential on customers' purchasing decisions. "Consumers make decisions with their genuine feelings such as emotions, perceptions and values rather than using a logical or rational way of thinking" (Khalid & Helander, 2006, p. 205).

Reputation is the most important value for the managements of the date with its ability to be measured despite of its abstract nature. Positive reputation is the most fundamental perceived capital of the managements. "However abstract; powerful reputation can turn into a factual asset" (Marsteller, 1998, p. 1).

In this atmosphere of change, it is obvious that a strong and positive institutional reputation is the creator of the difference between long term success and failure. The reputation of today's managements is directly influenced by what they do and what they don't do for their target audience. The reason for that is target audience has expectations about the managements. Without considering the scale, all managements establish a reputation in accordance with their level and method of satisfying target audience's expectations. The reputation of a company should be managed in a planned manner in crisis periods which became easier to spread widely due to the technological developments and globalization as well as ordinary periods when companies execute their marketing activities routine. Moving from the relationship between crisis and reputation management, it is possible to state that crisis has a negative impact over managements; however a successful crisis management leads to an increase in reputation. A duplex reputation is also influential on crisis management process. An institutional reputation managed with awareness is of critical importance during crisis times in sense of overcoming it with least loss possible and turning the crisis into an advantage through various marketing strategies.

The avian influenza crisis which took place in Turkey in 2005 stands for a good example for the relationship between crisis and reputation management. The business wounded by the avian influenza crisis seems to have gained its old reputation back with the good planned crisis management cooperatively executed by ministries, non-governmental organizations, private sector representatives and media. For this reason, Turkish avian influenza crisis is selected as the subject to the case study in order to furnish the relationship between crisis management and reputation management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition and Functions of Reputation

The concept of reputation that has become a matter of utmost importance for individuals, institutions and countries not only in sense of marketing applications but also in various fields of social sciences such as politics and economics. With a general definition, reputation is a concept that covers the ideas established in the minds of target audience about a company and that brings advantages when managed effectively, especially during crisis situations that deeply influence the management functions.

According to Green who handled the concept in perception basis, “reputation is a perception of public, it is a value and it is very expensive” (Green, 1996, p. 21). On the other hand, reputation according to Sherman is “an outcome of the interaction between institutional values and social values” (Sherman, 1999, p. 11). Fomburn who underlines the relationship between image and reputation states that “there are many images. Reputation is the net evaluation of the entire images towards the various audience” (Fomburn, 2003, p. 14). While stating that reputation covers past actions and future prospects, Fomburn brings the roots of reputation to perception. According to him “reputation is a perpetual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describes the firm’s overall appeal to its key constituents when compared to other leading rivals” (Fomburn, 1996, p. 2). It is as important for institutions as it is for individuals to be the object of feelings such as being loved, being appreciated, having a say and being valued. Institutions loved, accepted, embraced and trusted by their target audiences would have a better capability in its actions and achieve a better success in its activities compared to the others. Reputation at this point means “the respect and courtesy devoted by the society to an individual or an entity” (Marconi, 2001, p. 20). Loved and respected institutions hold a powerful reputation in consequence and they can

establish emotional links to their target audiences which will help them gain competitive advantages.

Kothe who handles the reputation in financial point and explicates the financial value it adds to the companies defines reputation as “a value that accelerates the financial investments and organizational development” (Kothe, 2001, p. 572). As mentioned in Kothe’s definition, the concept of reputation which may be considered an abstract value provides concrete income to the institutions in financial means and helps them improve in global competitive markets with this concrete income. For this reason, institutions with a successfully managed and powerful reputation present a stronger and resistant institutional identity against crisis situations in the market that they act in. According to Schultz who evaluates the concept of reputation in emotional basis and underlines the relationship between reputation and crisis along with the role of reputation in crisis, “reputation is a value and it has a major influence over the organization. It acts as a barrier between the organization and its audiences during problematic periods” (Schultz, 2000, p.79). As clearly stated in this definition, the reputation of an organization strengthens the link between the organization and its shareholders, avoids the shareholders to move away from the organization and keeps them loyal to the organization during the crisis times identified as problematic periods by Schultz. The loyalty established is the most vital point that keeps the organization sound during the crisis. .

One of the leading goals of communication activities to create a positive image in the minds of target audiences and the most important element in gaining a positive image is to have the support of the target audience whose sympathy and interest is gained in process through consistent and holistic behavior. Persuading the target audiences in favor of the organization especially in atmospheres like crisis periods when extraordinary developments take place and the threats against the organization increase opening the way to destructive reactions is directly related to how the communication policies are constructed.

There are many reasons to cause an organization to lose its reputation. These reasons have a wide range from missing of incorrect information to an inappropriate behavior, from various developments activated by third parties in the market to natural disasters. The loss of reputation reduces the respectability and credibility of an organization drastically. The reflection of this reduction can be felt in a short while in financial and morale means which

may end up with huge financial losses. At this point, communication policies constructed with awareness in a planned way and the effective management of institutional reputation would enable the taking of precautions beforehand and the fast and efficient response to any sudden crisis to be faced in future. On the other hand, the activities of companies whose communication policies are already planned and managed would not suffer any interruption during crisis times and further they would be able to turn the crisis into new chances.

Communication policies and the reputation management studies they contain basically deal with managing the crisis and risks and protecting any kind of institutional assets. Reputation has a value as an asset that can be lost and damaged and it should be protected from risks. Institutional reputation is built upon many elements. Some of these elements are institutional image, perceptions of current and target audiences, marketing and production behaviors of institutions, reliability, consistency and accuracy. For this very reason, reputation is under significant risk due to its nature consisting of various elements, activities and target audiences.

A Conceptual Framework of Crisis

There are many definitions of crisis from the point of operational management. The daily growth of crisis management literature draws attention to the vital importance paid by the organizations to this issue. In Wordnet Online Dictionary, crisis is defined as “an unstable situation of extreme danger or difficulty” or “a crucial stage or turning point in the course of something” (<http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn>, 2006). While the crisis can represent a specific, critical turning point, it is connected to an already existing course of action with a past, present and future. Using this definition, crisis management focuses not only on the particulars of the crisis situation but on the entire system of which it is an integral part (Kartsen, 2005, p. 545).

According to Regester who handles crisis from operational management view crisis is an event which attracts the attention of institutional shareholders who have acquired rights in company actions and of the external groups including politicians, labor unions and pressure groups and it is potentially not in favor of an organization (Regester, 1995, p. 159). In another definition, crisis for organizations means a basic threat to balanced and consistent systems which is the questioning of beliefs. Organizational image is an element of risk for legal

conformation, profitability and the high goals including the survival of organization. Hence the utterances related to crisis are about the clearance of a company or industry from its misdoings and the restoration of its image (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002, p. 362). This definition which clarifies the post-crisis actions of an organization is especially focused on the concept of image restoration.

Standing as the dominant paradigm of crisis communication, image restoration primarily pays attention to negative side effects of crisis by focusing on strategic messages that would repair and minimize undesired situations like rejection, denial and humiliation.

In fact image restoration and restoration types pay utmost attention to the questions of reputation restoration by means of clearly determining the opponent strategic messages (Ulmer, 2007, p. 160).

At this point, crisis suffered also signals the possible crisis to be faced in future for the organizations. The problems clarified and identified during image restoration help providing advance solutions to potential matters which can harm the organization in future and threaten its reputation. In accordance with this fact, there is a significant link to be considered between crisis management and reputation management.

The Relationship between Crisis Management and Reputation

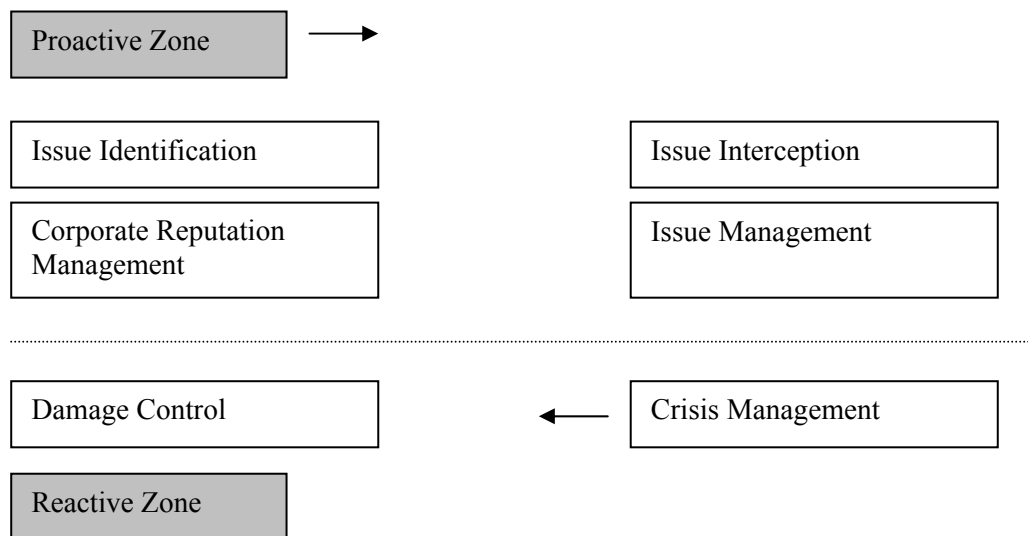
Fink starts the crisis which he identifies as the turning point of better and worse and “critical time, level or situation” from the point of the first level of an illness; crisis is the increase of anger, the intense accumulation of attention on the organization, the spoil of daily business routine and the threatening of organization’s financial entities and reputation (Wrigley, 2003, p. 282). As stated by Coombs regarding the effects of crisis on reputation “crisis responsibility indicates the initial reputation threat because crisis responsibility has been proven to be negatively related to organizational reputation (Coombs, 2007, p. 137). The point that draws attention in the statement is the fact that the negative side effects rooted at crisis significantly distress the organizational reputation as crisis badly influences the relationship with management, employees, institutional shareholders and customers by giving birth to a crisis of confidence and hurting the positive, confidence and good-will based relationship with target audiences which is among the main criteria of organizational reputation.

Considering various definitions of crisis, in addition to this point of view which is focused on negative effects of crisis on reputation, it is possible to mention about a different approach which says that reputation provides the ability to overcome crisis situations.

Standing as an example to this approach, Mitroff's expression of crisis is the failure in fighting against the threatening conditions (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993, p. 92) and according to this statement the ability of an organization to fight against crisis can be related to its reputation management. The raising of struggling ability is in direct proportion with the level of reputation an organization used to have before the crisis.

John Garnett, the former CEO of Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) states that good corporate reputation is a reservoir of good-will during crisis situations faced from time to time. He thinks that an institution with good corporate reputation is handled with care against negative impressions during crisis situations. On the contrary, if the corporate reputation of an organization is not good, it is considered guilty without even listening to its explanations. "Reservoir of good-will" implies that good reputation by itself is the gift of crisis situations. A durable and good reputation prepares more room of reliability for a company to defend itself better; that means reputation management establishes the result of crisis (Tucker & Melewar, 2005, p. 380).

Figure 1: The Cycle of Action (Morley, 1998, p. 69)



Third approach in claiming the link between crisis management and reputation is the idea that a successfully managed crisis turns into reputation which means the turning of crisis threats into opportunities.

Morley's model shows the link from reputation management to crisis management. Morley's model of action cycle displays how the corporate reputation needs to be managed during the times to act in cold blood. According to this model, it seems possible to manage and control the situations that can worsen the crisis atmosphere on condition that these situations are determined and identified in advance. Key point of the model and the constructor of the link between reputation management and crisis management is the determination of negative situations which can badly effect the organization and to identify these situations (Tucker & Melewar, 2005, p. 382).

A better and more successful crisis management application executed by Johnson&Johnson can be handled as an example on this subject. Though the company lost a certain market share in short term as a result of Tylenol crisis, it managed to gain public's confidence and sympathy back in the long run. The successful crisis management applications of J&J' turned back to the company as reputation. Reputation management is both a component and a result of crisis management. Successful reputation management brings successful crisis management and successful applications of crisis management provide enormous supports to the development of reputation (Tucker & Melewar, 2005, p. 380).

Moving from the crisis definitions and above mentioned case studies about crisis management, it can be said that there are 3 leading approaches in the expression of the link between crisis and reputation. First one is the negative effect of crisis situations over organizational reputation; company's workers, customers and the shareholders, media and all other groups linked to the organization lose their good faith and trust in company. The second approach states that reputation of a company gives a chance to organization to overcome crisis situations and turn threatening crisis conditions into new chances. If the organizational

reputation is in good state, crisis is easier to overcome in accordance with the good faith of public opinion. The third approach points that a successfully managed crisis where threats are turned into opportunities, the organization gets the chance to increase the level of its reputation. In accordance with this approach, it can be said that companies in post crisis period may have a higher reputation than the one they had before the crisis.

How Do Crises Turn into Opportunities?

Two characters of Chinese alphabet used for expressing crisis concept and meaning opportunity and danger are explainers of the nature of crisis (Wrigley v.d., 2003, p. 282). As per this duality in the structure of these characters, crisis includes both opportunity and danger at the same time and this conceptualization presents both positive and negative approaches to crisis situations. Crisis management abilities of organizations gain more importance than ever at the point of turning badly effecting crisis into an opportunity.

According to many intellectuals who believe that crisis can create opportunities the main point to be focused on is renewal in post-crisis period. Focusing on renewal is a way of making sense of a crisis or disaster by revealing the crisis-induced opportunities. Meyers and Holusha (1986) describe seven potential opportunities associated with crisis: heroes are born, change is accelerated, latent problems are faced, people can be changed, new strategies evolve, early warning systems develop, and new competitive advantages appear” (as cited in Ulmer, 2007, p. 132).

The response to be determined by organizations during crisis and after crisis renewal periods has gained huge importance along with the communication strategies. Crisis response strategies can be used to address reputational concerns. Crisis managers maximize the reputational protection by selecting the crisis response strategies that best fit the reputational threat presented by the crisis. Following Situational Crisis Communication Theory, the reputational threat is assessed by identifying the crisis type and any history of similar crises. The Crisis Communication Standards hold that crisis managers must provide instructing and adjusting information before taking any action designed to address reputation concerns crisis managers select crisis response strategies based upon the reputation threat of the crisis. Mild reputation threats require only instructing and adjusting information. Moderate reputation threats require diminish strategies. Severe reputation threats demand reinforcing strategies.

Deny can be used for rumors or challenges, charges that your organization is acting in an immoral manner. Reinforcing strategies can be used with any crisis (Coombs, 2004, pp.468-469).

Communication after various crises such as industrial accidents organizations have, terrorism or natural disasters was explored as a basis for post-crisis renewal. At this phase, leaders are natural motivators for organizations (Ulmer, 2007, p. 131). Renewal is a leader-based communication form. As they can create crises, leaders can also play an instrumental role in overcoming the crises and in renewal period. Leaders must have prestige. During the renewal level of an organization, leaders use “their own reputation” as the capital devoted to the aim. The power, vision and reputation of a leader are the necessary elements of the renewal period as the leaders have a critical role in company and in the embodiment of company values (Ulmer, 2007, p. 132).

Starring of journalist Uğur Dündar, the most important reference for Turkish public in public health issue as the public leader during the overcoming of hard crisis suffered in Turkish white meat business under influence of bird flu reduced the negative side effects of crisis and helped white meat sales rise up again. For this reason, considering the bird flu crisis in Turkey we can mention about the effectiveness of a public leader in crisis management through establishing his prestige, embodying the values about public health and transferring his own reputation to the sector along with the effectiveness of company leaders acting in white meat business. After bird flu crisis, Turkish public started to prefer the brands which produce in integrated facilities and they became more conscious about the consumption of white meat which resulted in the increase of competition in the market, more attention paid on hygiene by the producers and more steps devoted to rise up the total quality. As a result of all these steps, sector quality has been subject to a significant increase which consequently made the sector reputation increase, too. Considered on the basis of sector’s and public’s gains, it can be claimed that crisis has turned into an opportunity for Turkish public before all else.

DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

Being one of the most devastating crises ever took place in white meat business; Avian influenza (bird flu) crisis almost stopped the sales in local and global scale. The business became smaller to a significant extend during the boom of virus. “Bird Flu Virus” is selected as the subject of this case study and it is highlighted as the basic problem on which

the effects on white meat sector, on the sales of this business, the crisis it brought and the efforts to overcome the crisis are structured.

Avian influenza is an infection caused by avian influenza (bird flu) virus which naturally exists in birds' bodies. Wild birds usually carry the virus in their intestines without getting infected. However the virus is highly epidemic and causes serious illnesses and death among chicken, ducks and turkeys (<http://www.gribeson.com>, 2006). The disease is not microbial; it is a viral disease which tends to spread out rapidly. There are generally two types of disease detected in bird species. One type is milder and it's diagnosed through puffed feathers or reduced egg production. The other type which is more frequently diagnosed is the highly pathogen avian influenza. Diagnosed for the first time in Italy in 1878, this form of disease is very epidemic and the prognosis is almost 100 % mortal. Birds may die the first day virus is detected (<http://www.rshm.saglik.gov.tr> 2006). Despite of its species specific nature, influenza A virus started to spread over species barrier in last three years as detected in various Southeastern Asian countries and though rarely, it began to cause infection in human body (<http://ttb.org.tr>, 2006). In the beginning, the virus was a source of problem only in poultry production and it was causing serious losses in production processes. However in time the virus went through a genetic mutation which made it become badly influential on human health and this progress deepened the crisis. In this sense, the virus did not only cause problems in production processes but it also negatively influenced the consumption facts of white meat sector.

Bird flu virus which came into scene in global scale as well as in Turkey seriously infested national economies and sectors as much as it infested people and poultry. The spread of disease between poultry and the contamination of virus to human worsened the effect of crisis to a further point.

The Economic Analysis of Crisis

Analyzed in historical process, Turkish white meat business has been convulsed by 4 important crises before bird flu case. First two of these crises took place in 1994 and in 2001 due to the economic depression in Turkey and both crises had been influential on sector representatives.

As displayed in Figure 1, since the year of 1990, white meat business in Turkey has been in growth in production and consumption means. However this growth was interrupted by crises which took place in 1994 and 2001.

Figure 1: White Meat Business in Turkey, Report of BESD-BİR
(<http://www.sagliklitavuk.org/index.php/cPath/388>, 2007)

Years	Chicken meat production (Tons)	Total Poultry Meat Production (Tons)	Consumption per capita (kg/year)
1990	162.569	216.759	3,83
1991	179.073	238.764	4,15
1992	216.214	288.285	4,92
1993	276.501	368.668	6,15
1994	233.510	311.347	4,91
1995	313.154	417.539	6,65
1996	415.155	553.540	8,62
1997	493.271	616.589	9,53
1998	497.720	622.150	9,43
1999	557.666	656.078	9,83
2000	662.096	752.382	11,09
2001	592.567	673.371	9,59
2002	620.581	705.206	9,98
2003	768.012	853.345	11,88
2004	940.889	1.045.432	14,44
2005	978.400	1.084.780	14,53
2006	945.779	1.031.779	13,81

The third crisis that hit the business burst out in the beginning of 2005, with an accusation by Erman Toroğlu, the sport commentator who claimed that white meat producers use hormones in production. Companies operating in the business suffered a huge loss of reputation due to this accusation that remained on the agenda for a very long time. The economic effect of this reputation loss was acutely felt and the sales fell down 40 % as public credit in white meat producers was broken. Companies in white meat business were caught defenseless by this third crisis against their reputation and could not manage their reputation during the crisis period which brought them huge loss in economic, reputational and credit means. But the deepest cut for white meat business was bird influenza crises when the sales almost completely stopped.

Bird influenza virus globally spread and also detected in our country had not only devastated animals but also wounded national economies and various businesses. Detected in Italy, Holland and various Far Eastern countries rocking the national economies and white meat sectors, bird influenza also hit our country in 2005. The spreading of virus among poultry animals and its contamination to human body worsened the impact. Economic dynamics of the business totally stopped with the frequent appearance of crisis in media agenda and the global bird flu crisis showed its effects on local scale as well. White meat consumers lost their interest in white meat products after the crisis and these products were removed from the menus of Turkish schools, restaurants, hotels and holiday villages. The virus was detected for the second time in 2006 and the crisis had a more devastating effect than before. The reduction ratio of consumption fell down from 60 % to 80 % (<http://muhasebeturk.org/sector-haberleri/2627-besd-beyaz-et-uretimi-kisitlanmali.html>, 2007). The reduction of demand forced the producers to reduce their production scale; having 20.000 workers, the sector started to dismiss them one by one. Considering the businesses related to the sector such as transportation, seed production and medicine, the effect of crisis reached up to 2 million people all over the country. With a scale of 2, 5 billion dollars in economic means, the sector lost 50 % of its total value and become smaller in half. Financial loss reached up to 1 billion and 850 million dollars including the destruction of contaminated products and production loss(Windhorst, 2007).

Unlike previous crises, during the latest crisis producers in the business followed effective and conscious strategies to protect and strengthen their reputations and to turn some threats of crisis into opportunities. Especially the producers operating with integrated facilities made new chances from crisis by establishing effective communication strategies and reached at a point more advantageous than their previous position. .

STRATEGY FOLLOWED IN BIRD FLU CRISIS

The communication strategies conducted by producer companies during the crisis are built upon four basic points which established the building structure of communication as a part of companies' fight against the crisis.

The first step of institutions' fight against crisis is winning the media. In order to minimize the effects of reputation loss they suffer, institutions act in a way to receive media support. This strategy is especially followed by the companies which own integrated facilities and huge investments in the sector. For this reason, effective media communication strategies were applied both in order to stop misinformation of public about bird flu and to regain the institutional reputation gone away with the crisis through using the power of media. The message that virus do not contaminate to the products produced in integrated facilities was transmitted to public by newspapers and television channels along with the scientific proofs. The production lines of factories were broadcasted on advertising films and the explanation of how production standards avoid the contamination of virus was brought to the public. The support of public opinion leaders was also received in the process of persuading target audiences through the leaders' influence. Uğur Dündar, the Turkish journalist who is positioned as a public leader due to its professional reputation played a major role in the reduction and overcoming of crisis in the sector. Dündar performed in the advertisements made by the Information Platform of Healthy White Meat which was composed during the bird flu crisis by companies producing in integrated facilities and he helped companies in the process of persuading public opinion through the information he provided to people about the production processes and hygiene conditions of facilities.

Standing in the second step of crisis fight is the construction of sound relationships by sector's producer companies with other producer companies and with official institutions. To achieve the goal, 19 companies producing 85 % of total national production in Turkey gathered under the roof of "Information Platform of Healthy White Meat" in order to increase the consciousness of consumers, media and public about the production and consumption of healthy white meat, to transmit correct information regarding the standards of white meat production and consumption, to highlight the importance of white meat consumption in human health and to keep the public correctly informed against the harsh crisis (<http://www.sagliklitavuk.org/index.php/cPath/386?osCsid=17bdf9b3c815ec7735753d03c25fcafb>, 2007). The platform executes the organization of relationship between its member companies and their relationships with target audiences and official institutions. In addition, the platform supports the sector and its producers both in critical and ordinary periods by establishing and keeping the coordination with non-governmental organizations and cooperating with them.

Another point of crisis management strategies is the creation of new communication atmospheres. Crisis brought forth the usage of new channels based on technology and the use of these new- technological media has contributed to the sector through the positive perception of companies by public and increasing their reputations. One of the best examples among the companies is Keskinöglü which inserted barcode numbers on its entire products and enabled its customers to see the production reports by tracking the production processes the product went through along with the exact dates just by writing the barcode number into the “production tracking form” in company’s website. With this application, very effective communication strategies were followed for the sake of supporting the most important principle of reputation management which is trust.

The fundamental part of crisis strategies of sector representatives and of the unions’ they established is the phase of conquering public spirit and opinion. The social responsibility actions targeted at supporting public health against bird flu during the crisis assisted their executers in overcoming the crisis with the minimum loss possible and received the sympathy and support of target audiences and public at crisis time. Official authorities including Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Ministry of Health, companies operating in the sector, non-governmental organizations and media had major influences in the overcoming of crisis and the reconstruction of business reputation.

Crisis Management Practices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs activated “National Emergency Action Plan for Chicken Plague right after the acute effects of bird flu in Turkey. The crisis units arranged by the ministry and their missions are furnished in this plan. These units are National Crisis Center of Diseases (UHKM), Local Crisis Center of Diseases (YHKM) and National Experts Group. UHKM was appointed as the coordinator in order to make it a center taking action upon the crisis data. The common missions of these three groups operating in cooperation are to be prepared about the crisis, to determine the fields of obligation and responsibilities for this preparation, to keep conscious and ready about the disease, to keep the disease control applications continuous, to cull carcass and to identify the types of living animals. During real cases at crisis moment, the missions are the notification of disease suspicions to UHKM, the detection of infected areas and proceeding of the entire inspection

on these fields, the supervision of living poultry units and the control of environmental effects caused by culling.

The plan also includes disaster scenarios and lists the precautions to be taken in case the disease becomes widely and rapidly circulates in highly populated areas. Many urgent action points such as emergency vaccination, emergency culling and determination of situations when butcheries must be ready were detailed. Potential problems to come out in a possible revival of crisis were identified in order to gain effectiveness in fighting against negative situations and these endeavors helped arising the feeling of trust in public opinion. All the actions mentioned above are vitally important details in the management of reputation during crisis.

During the crisis, the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Affairs started to provide information to producers through its official web site and clarified the entire points about the way to be followed in the war with bird flu including technical information such as the method of culling and the precautions to be taken to avoid the circulation of virus.

Relevant institutions and ministries provided press releases to media in order to reduce the effects of crisis over white meat business which went through faced hard times. For example, Mehmet Mehdi Eker, the minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs underlined in his press speeches that citizens “do not need to hesitate to consume white meat produced under supervision and in accordance with the regulations.” (<http://www.meclishaber.gov.tr>, 2005). The “Final Report” regarding the complete removal of crisis which burst out on October, 5, 2005 was transmitted to World Organization of Animal Health (OIE) and European Union Commission on December, 8, 2005.

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs took immediate action when bird influenza was detected once again in Iğdır city on December, 26, 2005. The absence leaves of personnel were cancelled until the struggle with disease is over and all workers started working 24 hours a day in order to deal with notifications and take timely precautions. All developments were shared with public through the web site and it is declared that ministry acted in accordance with “Avian Influenza Urgent Action Plan.”

The most important point that constituted vital danger in Turkey was the socio-economic nature of poultry breeding in houses’ gardens and the frequent consumption of

these breeding by many families. Family members, especially the children are in close touch with chicks, chickens and roosters. For this reason the efforts to rise up public consciousness continued and brochures, posters and films were prepared to inform people.

Publication materials prepared were delivered to provincial directorates of agriculture all over the country and to related non-governmental organizations such as Union of Turkish Chambers of Agriculture, Turkish Medical Association and Turkish Pharmacists' Association.

Crisis Management Practices of Ministry of Health

Ministry of Health had started its activities around 7 months before the bird flu crisis took place and it had a proactive attitude towards the crisis. In "avian influenza circular" number 4273 dated March, 16, 2004, general information about the disease, situation all over the world and the precautions to be taken were furnished and provincial health directorates were informed about the disease. A Scientific Consultancy Council was organized and started to publish an influenza bulletin. The studies of National influenza pandemic plan which started In July, 2005 with the participation of 60 scientists continued and a web site was prepared (<http://www.grip.saglik.gov.tr>, 2006). furnishing information about the studies, applications and circulars of Ministry of Health regarding bird flu, posters and brochures, presentations and announcements by WHO.

The endeavors to increase consciousness continued from October on and brochures were prepared to keep public informed. Risk groups which need vaccine were determined and vaccination was suggested especially for the people working in production complexes. Together with the outburst of second crisis in January, 2006, the coordination center was established and it started working 24 hours a day to give regular information to national and international audience.

Posters and brochures were regularly arranged to keep consciousness alive. Members of Scientific Research Council which consisted of academicians, experts from the Ministry of Health and Recep Akdag, the Minister of Health started to appear more frequently on media programs to keep public enlightened.

The standing circular (18.01.2006-2006/8) announced by the ministry included information about risky contacts, clinical definitions, case classifications and their clinical evaluations as well as the determination of cases which need prophylaxis, the precautions to be taken by health institutions, patient discharge protocol, personal protection recommendations for health workers and animal destruction teams and the details of disinfection act(<http://www.grip.saglik.gov.tr/kg8.pdf>, 2007).

The cooperation between ministries, private sector institutions and non-governmental organizations during the struggle with bird flu crisis is noteworthy especially in crisis communication means. **“Bird Flu Strategic Communication Activity Team”** was established in Turkey by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Ministry of Health in order to coordinate communication activities of all institutions. The team included not only Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs but also many public institutions, non-governmental organizations and international organizations such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, FAO, Poultry Meat Producers and Breeders Association (BESD-BİR), Healthy White Meat Information Platform, Department of Religious Affairs, UNICEF, TRT, Central Association of Egg Producers, Nature’s Association, Bird Researches Association and Turkish Association of Veterinarians.

The publication of posters and brochures with the theme **“We can protect ourselves from bird flu”** is the first project of **“Bird Flu Strategic Communication Activity Team”** which was established by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Ministry of Health in cooperation. The project is mainly devoted to increase the consciousness of people living in rural areas and it is completed by Healthy White Meat Information Platform. 90.000 posters and 90.000 brochures were produced and delivered all over the country through provincial agriculture and health directorates.

It is clearly observed that Ministry of Health had a proactive attitude towards the crisis as it had started its activities before bird flu burst out in Turkey. Right after the blast of virus in Turkey, the risk groups and activity plans were declared immediately. The ministry paid utmost attention on communication underlining the prevention of disease and the activity plan to be followed in case it can not be prevented. The active role of Ministry of Health in crisis management was dominantly felt in cooperation between other ministries, non-governmental organizations and private institutions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Crisis communication activities and the working groups devoted to them had undeniable effects in the struggle against bird flu which was a major crisis for white meat producers. Ministries, private sector members and NGOs had worked in cooperation within the borders of working groups. Under the roof of these groups, many public institutions, NGOs and international organizations such as Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, FAO, Union of White Meat Industry and Cattle Breeders, Information Platform of Healthy White Meat, Department of Religious Affairs, UNICEF, TRT, Central Association of Egg Producers, Nature Association, Bird Researches Association and Association of Turkish Veterinarians worked voluntarily.

The concept of institutional reputation considered as one of the most important assets of managements especially in crisis periods is the face of companies that helps them overcome crisis with the less damage possible. To achieve success and move one step forward in national economies adapting to each other and in global market atmosphere born out of technological and social developments, managements need to create a powerful reputation for themselves. In other words, the strategic establishment, protection and management of an institutional reputation is a necessity as the reputation activities prove that it provides huge opportunities in financial, marketing and human resources means.

The producers of white meat sector managed to do something different than other crises; they followed up effective and conscious strategies to protect and improve their reputation, established coordination through getting the support of media, official institutions and NGOs and succeeded in turning the critical threats into opportunities. Especially the companies producing in integrated facilities had been able to convert crisis into opportunity by means of effective communication strategies they followed and came to a point more advantageous than before the crisis. As a consequence of awareness raising activities, Turkish public changed its purchasing preferences from open sold white meat to packaged products which helped the companies producing in accordance with the production technologies and hygiene standards in integrated facilities to turn the crisis into opportunity.

The success of bird flu crisis management in Turkey is directly related to the fulfillment of crisis management principles. These principles which can be listed as the establishment of monophony in communication, accurate and timely sharing of information, establishment of good relations with media and receiving the support of media, consulting to experts and correct spokesman choice and continuity in communication were all fulfilled in a coordinated way.

First dimension of crisis communication was formed by activities devoted to keep public informed. Healthy White Meat Platform (STBF) called into being by private sector members was positioned as the expert in crisis management process. The platform followed all developments in the world about the disease, analyzed written materials about bird flu and reported all these. In this way, the platform itself established the flow of information accurately and timely which is the first and the correct step towards the management of the crisis.

During crisis, white meat sector members sent continuous invitations to media, academicians and non-governmental organizations underlining that their production facilities are open to supervision 365 days and 24 hours. Frequent visits to media institutions, preparation of films about the precautions taken in production facilities and the delivery of them to media and universities are other activities. The platform fulfilled the requirements of crisis communication strategy by means of constituting a fiduciary and open communication with scientists and media which has a huge effect over the public.

The platform's asking for the help of Ugur Dunder, the journalist most trusted by public in food safety issues brought a new and different dimension to the crisis management. Dunder was positioned as a public leader due to his ability to move the masses. This preference enabled the fulfillment of correct choice of spokesman and consulting to expert principles of crisis management. Platform also did not fail in keeping the communication with public constant. The project was publicized with press releases, bulletins, special news and interviews and supported by radio, media and billboard commercials.

After crisis period which is an important part of crisis management was also regarded in the struggle with bird flu. "Bird Flu Strategic Communication Activity Team" was established by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Ministry of Health in order to

keep communication organized. The activities to keep public enlightened continued in after crisis period as well.

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