COMMUNICATING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH CORPORATE WEB SITES: A RESEARCH ON TURKISH GSM OPERATORS

KURUMSAL WEB SİTELERİ ARACILIĞIYLA KURUMSAL SOSYAL SORUMLULUK İLETİŞİMİ: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ GSM OPERATÖRLERİNE YÖNELİK BİR ARAŞTIRMA

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to examine the presence and organization of information on corporate responsibility through corporate web sites analysis of Turkish GSM operators. In this respect, firstly social responsibility as a concept, corporate responsibility communication tools that are used through the process and especially the usage of web sites would be examined theoretically. And then a web site analysis would be carried out in order to explore how Turkish GSM operators communicate their corporate responsibilities on corporate web sites. The web site content analysis[1] method which is used by P. Capriotti and A. Moreno would be applied.

Key Words: Corporate Social Responsibility, Communication, Corporate Web Sites, GSM Operators.

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[1]Capriotti, Paul, Moreno, Angeles. (2007), "Communicating Corporate Responsibility through Corporate Web Sites in Spain", Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 12 (3), 221–237.

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı Türkiye'deki GSM operatörlerinin kurumsal web sitelerinde bilgileri nasıl organize ettiklerini ve sunduklarını açıklamaktır. Bu doğrultuda öncelikle bir kavram olarak sosyal sorumluluk, kurumsal sorumluluk iletişimi araçları özellikle kurumsal web siteleri teorik olarak irdelenmiştir. Daha sonra Türkiye'deki GSM operatörlerinin kurumsal sosyal sorumluluk iletişiminde kurumsal web sitelerini nasıl kullandıklarını ortaya koymaya yönelik bir araştırma yapılmıştır. Web site analizinde P. Capriotti ve A. Moreno'nun çalışmalarında kullandıkları web sitesi içerik analizi yöntemi esas alınmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kurumsal Sosyal Sorumluluk, İletişim, Kurumsal Web Siteleri, GSM Operatörleri.

1.INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive environment, corporations seem to take on increasing responsibilities to enter to social realm. In this sense, they attach much more importance to social responsibility understanding and accelerate their related activities. From a business perspective, corporate social responsibility is considered to be an activity that legitimizes an organization in the eyes of society. It seems to be an obligation for corporations to accomplish their responsibilities towards their internal and external environment if they want to be perceived favourable by their stakeholders and differentiate themselves from others. Social and environmental responsibilities are factors that govern the formation of opinions about a corporate reputation (Esrock and Leichty 1998; Brønn and Brønn 2003). Actually it is very important for corporations to adopt social utility behaviours towards their stakeholders (shareholders, consumers, employees, local communities, providers and distributors, journalists etc.) in order to obtain and maintain a privileged room within the society. Various studies reveal that responsible activities are increasingly valued and demanded by stakeholders and they, in turn, influence corporate reputation. The empirical studies indicate that corporate social responsibility in both the environmental and philanthropy domains had a significant positive effect on evaluation of the company and purchase intent. These results support the idea that aspects of a company beyond its products, such as its reputation, influence evaluation of the company and buying choices (Mohr and Webb 2005).

If corporations try to achieve trust and legitimacy through social responsibility activities, then they must also have the capacity to respond to the demands from stakeholders and communicate with them effectively. Namely, communication as a function is vital in the management of corporate social responsibility. Corporations transmit their social responsibilities and their related messages to their employees, customers, other stakeholders and in general to the whole society with various communication tools. Internet and corporate web sites have all revealed themselves to be one of the powerful communication tools. They are also considered as important tools in order to create positive opinion and perception among stakeholders. Corporations can transmit their social responsibilities, their relevant activities and messages to their stakeholders via web sites, and they can also revise their activities according to the feedback coming through these web sites.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. 1. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The era of globalization and the so-called new economy demand that companies comprehend all the different problems of their employees and their partners in their social and business environments, and work with them in solving broader societal problems. These include producing and implementing innovative ideas in order to contribute to a higher quality of life in the originating community (Knez-Riedl et al. 2006: 442). Companies are amongst the most powerful social and economic institutions of modern society and, recently, their role has taken on more widespread functions, surpassing the traditional ones to include those belonging to the social and ethical profile (Testa 2006). Business behaviour must be aimed at meeting societal needs, generating revenues and profits, creating jobs, and investing in the future company development as well as its societal and business environments (Knez-Riedl et al., 2006: 442). Due to globalization, the context in which business operates is changing at an increasingly rapid pace. New stakeholders and different national legislations are putting new expectations on business and altering how the social, environmental and economic impacts should be optimally balanced in decision making. Thus, in such a context, corporate social responsibility management tools are needed, in addition to the previously established patterns, to develop and implement a successful business strategy (Dahlsrud

2006). Long-term sustainability demands that organizations rethink their business goals and objectives from solely focusing on making a profit to corporate citizenship (Lockwood 2004: 1).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a fuzzy terminology since other related concepts such as business ethics, corporate citizenship, corporate governance, corporate accountability and sustainability are used. CSR is concerned with the integration of environmental, social and economic considerations into business strategies and practices (Jones et al. 2006: 134). CSR is defined and placed in its contemporary business context, highlighting the importance of stakeholder dialogue for the development of the added value dimensions, both in economic and societal terms (Stainer 2006: 253). CSR is ultimately rooted in the recognition that businesses are part of society and that as such they have the potential to make a positive contribution to social goals and aspirations (Jones et al. 2005: 882).

The area defined by advocates of CSR increasingly covers a wide range of issues such as plant closures, employee relations, human rights, corporate ethics, community relations and the environment (Moir 2001 p. 17). Corporate social responsibility is a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources (Kotler and Lee 2005: 3). The concept of CSR encompasses many dimensions of business activity ranging from the social (e.g. community programmes), to economic (e.g. employment) to the environmental (e.g. waste reduction). Corporate social responsibility involves companies consciously orienting their activities towards value creation in three dimensions – People (creation of well-being in and outside the organization), Planet (achievement of ecological quality) and Profit (maximization of profit) – while at the same time maintaining a clear and communicative relationship with the diverse stakeholders on the basis of transparency and dialogue (Cramer et al. 2004).

CSR is not an optional extra. All businesses, particularly those that operate at a transnational level, are responsible not only for the ethical conduct of their operations but also for their impact on all their stakeholders now and in generations to come (Collierand and Esteban 2007: 30). The aim of CSR is to encourage businesses to act in a manner in order to

meet or exceed the ethical, legal, commercial, public and environmental expectations, investing on human resources, on environment and relationship with publics.

From the literature, three practical legs to the CSR agenda: economic, social and environmental. Good practice in all three areas has the potential to enhance reputation, but our preliminary analysis suggests that two out of three also have the potential to increase costs. The first leg is economic. Although good economic CSR practices can enhance corporate reputation, they also typically have the potential to increase costs and/or reduce performance. The second leg of the CSR agenda is environmental. In general, good environmental practice is perceived to significantly increase costs, although innovations which reduce waste and energy usage can have a positive impact in reducing costs. There are also good economic reasons for seeking to avoid the costs of violating environmental regulation (Carlisle and Faulkner 2005: 415-416). From a managerial perspective, CSR is concerned with competitiveness, reputation and risk. If CSR is about the steps taken by companies to contribute to society and to the environment in a way which goes beyond basic legal and industry standards, these steps can be justified by a business logic, according to which the company strengthens its implicit "licence to operate" in society, and earns the support and cooperation of the various stakeholders on whose support, in the final analysis, depends for its long term sustainability (Deakin and Whittaker 2007: 3).

2.2. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY COMMUNICATION AND WEB SITES

Communication of CSR practices through marketing, public relations, investor relations, and community relations systems is important if the company is up for having a privileged room within society (Waddock et al. 2002: 144). A successful CSR communication plan will involve multiple departments including human resources, publicity, marketing, investor relations, and internal communications (Connolly 2002). Even though many authors try to clarify techniques for the effective communication of CSR, communication continues to be a neglected area with regard to corporate responsibility. If business is to engage the public in the twenty-first century, its communications must give social responsibility a bigger and more central role. This means, inevitably and correctly,

breaking down some of the traditional demarcation between brand (owned by marketing) and reputation (owned by public affairs) (Lewis 2003: 359).

The audiences for corporate responsibility include a wide range of constituency such as customers, employees and investors, the media, investment analysts, regulators, policymakers, international organizations, and civil society groups active on corporate responsibility issues. Companies have to take into account the expectations of these various audiences and assure that stakeholders understand their corporate responsibility. Alignment of corporate responsibility communications with stakeholders' concerns is essential if companies are to break through the communications barrier and capitalise on the potential reputational benefits of corporate responsibility (Dawkins 2004: 109). As in all corporate disciplines, actions speak louder than words when communicating corporate responsibility. Managers should resist the temptation to try to demonstrate corporate responsibility via press release or advertising. Corporate communications and marketing should support, not drive, corporate responsibility programs. The most effective corporate responsibility communications are corporate actions that address the concerns of stakeholders (Doorley and Garcia 2007: 369).

The first ever European survey of consumers' attitude on corporate social responsibility provides the following list: social reports, thematic reports, codes of conduct, websites, stakeholder consultation, internal communication, prizes and events, cause-related marketing, communication on product packaging, interventions in the press and on TV, communication at points of sale. The studies show that companies use a wide range of these channels (Birth et al. 2006). The most effective corporate responsibility and sustainability communications and reporting offer stakeholders a series of snapshots of a company's commitment and performance as works in progress. This kind of approach is consistent with the evolving spirit of corporate responsibility as a continuing process, one that values a willingness to tackle tough long-term challenges over satisfaction with positive short-term results (Freeman 2005). As a fact, nowadays larger organizations tend to include more social responsibility messages on their web sites.

Technology is transforming the way things are done in organizations, and even their communications. As organisations stampede to the internet, they find that there is not a systematic way to examine communication opportunities and relate them to both available

internet tools and stakeholder communication behaviour. In particular, what is absent is an integrated approach to managing communication with, and between, stakeholders in the era of the internet (De Bussy et al. 2000: 140). The benefits of the internet for communicating information to stakeholders over traditional communication channels are substantially related to the possibility of disseminating more information less expensively and in a more timely fashion, and to its interactive nature. One of the more interesting features of the internet is that it allows companies to provide information targeted to different stakeholders and to obtain feedback from them (Branco and Rodrigues, 2006: 235).

CSR communication via the corporate web sites has been a direct offshoot of the digital revolution (Chaudhri and Wang 2007: 235). WWW pages offer corporations an opportunity to participate in "setting the agenda" on public policy issues. Web pages can also employ interactive features to collect information, monitor public opinion on issues, and proactively engage citizens in direct dialogue about a variety of matters. Given the ability of corporations to use the web to interact with audiences and provide information directly to individuals without having to pass through the gatekeepers of the news media, the medium could be used to express the organization's position on policy issues and thereby draw attention to those matters (Esrock and Leichty 1998: 306-309).

For example, according to Esrock and Leichty's (1998) content analysis conducted in November of 1997, homepages on the World Wide Web had become an accepted communication vehicle for *Fortune* 500 companies with 90% having a corporate web page. Of the companies that had web pages, a large majority (82%) used the web page to promote some aspect of their adherence to corporate social responsibility standards, suggesting that image-building via the Internet has become an accepted public relations practice. According to Kalender and Bakan's (2006) web site analysis of the 100 Turkish companies, a large majority (97%) of the companies used the web page in order to deliver their CSR messages. Their study also indicated that industrial companies usually prefer to use the web pages in order to deliver CSR messages related to product security, environment and economic improvements.

3. RESEARCH ON TURKISH GSM OPERATORS

3.1. PURPOSE

The main objective of this research is to examine the presence and organization of information on social responsibility through corporate web sites analysis of Turkish GSM operators.

3.2. METHODOLOGY

The authors have applied the methodology used by P. Capriotti and A. Moreno (2007) in order to identify the corporate social responsibility issues and to analyse how such issues are presented and located on corporate web sites. Two types of categories were established: content categories and categories of information organization. The content category allows for the identification of the issues that are encompassed by corporate responsibility. Ten issues that correspond to corporate responsibility themes identified as corporate profile, corporate governance, products and services, employment and human resources, social action, environmental action, external criteria, relationship with publics, economic action, and corporate ethics (Table 1).

With respect to the organization of information, three categories are established: the amount of information, the information hierarchy and the location of the information. The amount of information allows for the identification of whether each of the different themes is present on the corporate web sites of the Turkish GSM operators and also of the volume of the information that is present on each topic (Table 2).

Table 1. Issues of Corporate Responsibility

Issue	*Definition*
Corporate profile	Explanation of its view, values and corporate strategy. Presentation of the company's property, structure and legal form; divisions, subsidiaries and countries with which it operates. Explanation of results.
Products and	Explanation of its products, services and brands from a

services	corporate perspective and not from a commercial one (type of products, raw materials, manufacture systems, etc.)
Employment and human resources	Declarations and explanations of its systems of contract, promotion, evaluation and dismissal. Declarations and explanations about human rights in the company (children labour, discrimination. . .)
Economic action	Declarations and actions related to the economic impact of the company in its local, regional, national and supranational environment
Social action	Declarations and actions related to the company involvement in social issues.
Environmental action	Declarations and actions related to the company involvement in environmental issues
Corporate governance	Declarations and explanations of its transparency compromises in the governance of the company. Explanation of the structure of power, remunerations, responsibilities, government departments, etc.
Corporate ethics	Declarations and explanations about its ethical compromises in relation with the business and its groups of public.
Relationship with publics	Declarations and explanations about the interests, importance and linking of the stakeholders with the Company
External criteria	Declarations, explanations and linking with the national and international criteria on aspects of the CSR/CC/SD

Source: Capriotti and Moreno, 2007: 227.

The information hierarchy allows for the establishment of the hierarchical level that is allocated to the majority of the information on the previously defined themes of corporate responsibility (and to the specific section on corporate responsibility, if there is one) (Table 3). Towards this end, it was established that Level 1 would be the homepage of a GSM operator's web site, and the successive levels would be based on the number of clicks that were necessary to reach the information from the homepage. Five concrete options, which

corresponded to the first five levels (Level 1 to Level 5), and a sixth generic option (other), to include the information that was found at the remaining and inferior levels, were established. The location of the information consisted of locating the information on corporate responsibility that was found within the sections that were presented on the first level of the web sites (the sections that were presented on the homepages), in addition to specific sections on corporate responsibility, if they existed.

3.3. SAMPLE AND LIMITATIONS

This study was conducted only on Turkish GSM operators between February 2008-March 2008 and the results are necessarily representative of the entire GSM operators running in Turkey. The sample covers Turkcell, Avea and Vodafone. The reason why authors have chosen GSM operators as a sample is that there is an intense competition among GSM operators in Turkish market and most of the operators seem to assign importance to social responsibility activities. On the other hand, from a technical perspective, these operators have strong technological infrastructure and are inherently more close to the use of internet and web sites. In this regard, they are more likely to explore all possibilities of internet and take an adequate advantage of the full potential of internet for communicating with their stakeholders.

3.2. FINDINGS

The presence of corporate responsibility themes on corporate web sites
The whole Turkish GSM operators' corporate web sites have become essential tool to disseminate information about corporate responsibility. All the Turkish GSM operators seem to disseminate information about their corporate responsibility policies and programmes. Of these, Turkcell GSM operator dedicates a total of more than 30 pages to such content, and Avea dedicates 17 pages while Vodafone dedicates 13 pages to such content without taking into account the additional length of the attached documents to which links are provided.

The ten themes of corporate responsibility have a rather similar presence on the corporate web sites of the Turkish GSM operators (Table 2).

At an initial level, we find a very high presence of information on corporate profile, products and services, employment and human resources, economic action, social action, environmental action, relationship with publics. The relatively significant presence of these themes on the web sites may be due to the fact that they are related to the most definitive aspects of corporate responsibility.

At the second level, with a significant presence, Turkcell and Avea have information about external criteria on their web sites.

At the third level, there seems to be a very low presence of information on corporate governance and corporate ethics since only Turkcell has such themes on its corporate web site. In case of corporate governance theme, the very noteable non-presence of information is due to not having a legal obligation in Turkey. Since there is no legal obligation in Turkish market, Turkish GSM operators except Turkcell don't disseminate information on such a theme.

Table 2. Presence of corporate responsibility themes on corporate web sites

Corporate responsibility issues	Presence	
Corporate profile	3	Turkcell, Avea, Vodafone
Products and services	3	Turkcell, Avea, Vodafone
Employment and human resources	3	Turkcell, Avea, Vodafone
Economic action	3	Turkcell, Avea, Vodafone
Social action	3	Turkcell, Avea, Vodafone
Environmental action	3	Turkcell, Avea, Vodafone
Relationship with publics	3	Turkcell, Avea, Vodafone
External criteria	2	Turkcell, Avea
Corporate governance	1	Turkcell
Corporate ethics	1	Turkcell

With respect to specific sections that are devoted to corporate responsibility, it was found that all the Turkish GSM operators have specific sections on their web sites. Of the Turkish GSM operators that have a separate section, Turkcell demoninates it as "Social Sensitivity", and Avea denominates it as "Corporate Social Responsibility while Vodafone calls it as "Corporate Responsibility". Within these sections, environmental, cultural, educational, technological campaigns of the GSM operators and their sponsorships took part. These campaigns and sponsorships differ according to various stakeholders. None of the operators call the section sustainable development or corporate citizenship.

Main contents of corporate responsibility themes on corporate web sites

With regard to the information available on the ten specific themes of corporate responsibility, it is found that Turkish GSM operators identify similar information on their web sites. The general aspects about the content related to corporate responsibility themes are as the following:

Corporate profile: Turkcell and Avea disseminate information about social responsibilities in addition to their production and commercialisation activities in corporate profile section. However, Vodafone only disseminates information related to its production and commercialisation activities. It is found that Turkcell has successfully integrated its social responsibility and ethical messages into their commercialisation messages.

Products and services: GSM operators usually disseminate information about their tariffs, campaigns and discount services. However, it is found that this information is not integrated with their social responsibility messages.

Employment and human resources: All the GSM operators have "Human Resources" theme. They usually disseminate information about human resources policies and processes such as selection, training and development, performance evaluation, remuneration and career opportunities. They also have online recruitment opportunities. Unfortunately, there is not so much information about the human rights, labour rights, or gender, minority or children labour rights.

Economic action: All Turkish GSM operators' web sites include information about their economical effect on environment.

Social action: All the GSM operators inform about their social principles and commitment to improve the society. They principally present information related to their external corporate philanthropy and sponsorships in social and cultural issues. However, only Turkcell has CSR reports under financial and corporate governance section with the download possibility.

Environmental action: The information on this theme contains the description of corporate policies and actions regarding environmental protection. In addition, Avea disseminates information about a project together with IFC (International Finance Corporation) for the restructuring of its balance sheet, financing of operational capital and integration, expansion and maintenance of total GSM network and revised the possible effects of this project in environmental and social issues.

Stakeholder relations: Even though Turkish GSM operators do not clearly identify their stakeholders, they disseminate information about their social responsibility activities for various stakeholders.

External criteria: None of Turkish GSM operators' web sites include information about corporation's participation in external criteria of evaluation of their CSR activities (such as GRI-Global Reporting Initiative, UN Global Compact). However, Turkcell disseminates information about IPP (Investors in People) Certificate, and Avea disseminates information about a project in conjunction with IFC (International Finance Corporation).

Corporate governance: Only Turkcell's web site includes detailed explanation of its corporate governance principles and reports. These reports include sections such as public disclosure and transparency, human resources and social responsibility. Also web site visitors have the chance to download these reports.

Corporate ethics: Only Turkcell's web site conveys information about its corporate ethical codes.

The organization of information on corporate responsibility on corporate web sites

Turkish GSM operators do not place all of the information on this topic in a single specific section, but rather distribute it across a number of sections on their corporate web sites. On average, they distribute their information on corporate responsibility across 4 sections. It is worth highlighting that none of the operators concentrate all of their information on corporate responsibility in one single section.

None of the Turkish GSM operators has located corporate responsibility section at Level 1 on the web site. This indicates that generally Turkish GSM operators with a specific section that is dedicated to corporate responsibility themes do not consider such themes to be of sufficient importance to privilege the section with placement on the homepage.

Turkish GSM operators only disseminate information about their tariffs, campaigns, services on their homepage (Level 1). In addition, only Vodafone delivers information about human resources at Level 1.

All the GSM operators concentrate most of their information on corporate responsibility at hierarchical Level 2. Turkcell situates "corporate info, human resources and investor relations" at Level 2. Avea situates "about the company, sponsorship and human resources" while Vodafone situates "Turkish Vodafone Charitable Foundation, and sponsorships" at Level 2.

Turkcell disseminates information about corporate governance and corporate ethics at Level 3. These results indicate that information on corporate responsibility on the web sites of Turkish GSM operators is accessible through two or three clicks.

Table 3. Main sections where the information is located

Corporate responsibility issues	*Presence*	*Main Sections of Level 1*
Corporate profile	*3*	-
Products and services	*3*	*Tariffs, campaigns, services (Turkcell, Avea, Vodafone)*
Employment and human	*3*	*Human resources (Vodafone)*

resources		
Economic action	*3*	-
Social action	*3*	-
Environmental action	*3*	-
Relationship with publics	*3*	-
External criteria	*2*	-
Corporate governance	*1*	-
Corporate ethics	*1*	-

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Corporate Social Responsibility is one of the buzzy concepts which has become increasingly important in our era. Corporations try to meet the expectations of the whole society through their economic, social and environmental actions. By doing so, corporations have the chance to have a privileged room in the minds of their stakeholders. It is possible to communicate corporate responsibility messages to stakeholders by using different communication tools such as advertisements, social reports and corporate web sites.

In this study, a research on Turkish GSM operators' use of corporate web sites in social responsibility communications has been conducted. This research has revealed whether the operators use their corporate web sites effectively or not. Moreover, crucial findings on the issue have been reported.

Depending on the findings of the research, it is possible to indicate that Turkish GSM operators give importance to the communication of their responsible behaviour through their web sites. All Turkish GSM operators use them to disseminate such information. In addition, the study identified that all Turkish GSM operators have separate sections that is dedicated to the theme of corporate responsibility. The presence of a specific section signifies an explicit recognition of the topic in questions.

The themes with the greatest presence and relevance are those that are connected to the presentation of the general characteristics of the company (corporate profile), product and

services, employment and human resources, economic, social and environmental action, relationship with publics. The relatively significant presence of these themes on the web sites may be due to the fact that they are related to the most definitive aspects of corporate responsibility. While external criteria have a significant presence, corporate governance and corporate ethics do not receive much attention on the corporate web sites. In case of corporate governance theme, the very notable non-presence of information is due to not having a legal obligation in Turkey. In the case of corporate ethics theme, the very notable non-presence of information surprises even the researchers since this theme is one of the most relevant issues in the area of corporate responsibility.

Also worth pointing out is the high hierarchical level at which information on corporate responsibility is found on the corporate web sites of Turkish GSM operators. Most of the available information is primarily found between the second and third hierarchical levels, which represents a prominent location. These results indicate that information on corporate responsibility on the web sites of Turkish GSM operators is accessible through two or three clicks.

In addition, none of the operators has located corporate responsibility section at Level 1 (on the homepage). The specific sections that exist on corporate responsibility usually tend to be located at the second level. Another relevant finding is the highly dispersed nature of the corporate responsibility information. Not a single operator has concentrated all of the relevant information in one section. On average, Turkish GSM operators use 4 sections.

As a consequence, it is possible to state that corporate responsibility is a crucial issue taking place on Turkish GSM operators' web sites. Generally, it is possible to indicate that web visitors can acquire information related to the corporate responsibility of Turkish GSM operators.

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