



Keywords

Corporate reputation
Innovative thinking
Structural equation modeling
Forest products industry

Paper Type

Research Article

Article History

Received: 13/11/2024
Accepted: 16/01/2025

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EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF CORPORATE REPUTATION PERCEPTION ON EMPLOYEES' INNOVATIVE THINKING IN THE FOREST PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

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Citation

Aydın A., Akyüz K.C., Nemli G. Examining the Effect of Corporate Reputation Perception on Employees' Innovative Thinking in The Forest Products Industry. *Wood Industry and Engineering*. 2025; 7(1): 1-10.

Abstract

Organizations must fully leverage their resources in increasingly challenging and changing production environments to succeed and remain strong. Corporate reputation and employees' innovative capabilities have now risen to the top of the resource hierarchy. Enhancing corporate reputation will support employees' desire to innovate, helping organizations secure top positions in market structuring. Our study aimed to examine the connection between corporate reputation and employees' innovative thinking within the forest products industry. The research, conducted with 128 managers, utilized a survey that included a Reputation Coefficient comprising six sub-components and an Innovative Behavior Perception Scale comprising three sub-components. The relationship between corporate reputation and innovative thinking was measured using the structural equation model with the help of 20 developed hypotheses. At the end of the study, it was determined that six of the hypotheses were accepted. It was also found that products and services, as well as vision and leadership, positively impact idea generation.

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1. Introduction

In today's world, organizations' economic success and ability to sustain their existence and achieve their goals depend on their ability to evaluate their resources in all aspects. Consumer demands and expectations, which are constantly differentiating and changing, show that organizations that provide this differentiation will remain strong in competition and can shape the markets. Operating only with a focus on economic success is not enough for continuity, and the availability of intangible resources (reputation, innovative thinking capacity, prestige, trust, honor...) gains critical importance (Sarıkaya, 2019).

It is clear that the existence of a respected corporate reputation will help to make economic and financial performance permanent. Whether the internal and external stakeholders of organizations have positive or negative opinions about the organization will determine the position of corporate reputation and will be the invisible criterion of organizational success (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001). Corporate reputation (Fombrun, 2007) is a collective representation of past activities and outputs that depict an organization's ability to provide desired outcomes for all stakeholders (Almıçık, 2001). Corporate reputation (Fombrun, 1996), defined as the level at which an organization is generally perceived when compared with its competitors, consists of social components such as knowledge, impression, perception, and belief (Rindova et al., 2010). Corporate reputation, which reduces costs, improves financial figures, and increases consumer confidence, is an important criterion for partners to evaluate their organizations (Caruana et al. 2004; Walsh and Beatty, 2007).

Different approaches have been developed to measure corporate reputation, ranging from unidimensional to multidimensional measurements. Initially, simple assessments of the goodness or badness of organizations were considered sufficient, but later, more effective and inclusive measurement methods were put into practice. Berens and van Riel (2004) identified three main topics for reputation measurement: social expectations, organizational personality, and trust. These headings have been referenced in important studies and have guided the studies in the field of corporate reputation as measurement criteria. The most important scales developed based on social expectations are the scale used by Fortune Magazine to rank America's Most Admired Companies (AMAC) and the Reputation Coefficient scale developed by Fombrun et al. (2000) The scale consists of six components: emotional appeal, products and services, financial performance, vision and leadership, work environment, and social responsibility. The most common corporate personality scale that measures corporate reputation by evaluating the personalization of organizations is the Corporate Personality Scale developed by Davis et al. (2004). Trust-oriented corporate reputation scales are determined as the third main heading, and the Corporate Credibility Scale developed by Newell and Goldsmith (2001) is at the forefront.

One of the most important elements that will enable companies and organizations to be at the forefront in the competitive environment and increase corporate reputation is the employees' innovation capacity and the innovative thinking power of companies. A high corporate reputation will mean high innovation capacity. Firms with high corporate reputations are advantageous in retaining more qualified and talented employees than their competitors (Liu, 2011; Saeed and Arshad, 2012). The ability of corporate reputation and innovative thinking capacity to act together will create a synergy effect in the organizational structure and increase competitiveness. In many studies, it has been determined that corporate reputation supports the formation of organizational and individual innovation and that employees with a corporate reputation are willing to create innovation.

Coming from the Latin root "innovatus", innovation means the application of new techniques (Uzkurt, 2017). Innovation, which was made by Schumpeter in 1912 and accepted as the basis of academic definitions, is defined as doing new things or doing things in new ways and methods. In past historical processes, many definitions have been made. In its most accepted form, it is defined in the Oslo Guidelines

as "the realization of a new or significantly improved product (goods or services) or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in the practices carried out within the enterprise, in the organization of the workplace, or the external relations of the enterprise" (Kacir and Sönmez, 2024). Innovation, which is classified in subgroups as product, process, organizational, and marketing innovation, has a broad concept.

In the literature, many studies examined corporate reputation and innovation capacity separately. However, studies that examine both concepts together are limited in number. In their study, Kacir and Sönmez (2024) investigated the level of impact of innovation activities on the perception of corporate reputation. They conducted a survey with 203 managers from small- and medium-sized enterprises. As a result of the study, they concluded that innovative activities could explain 55.4% of the changes in the corporate reputation of enterprises. Sarıkaya (2019), who examined the effect of corporate reputation perception on employees' innovative thoughts with a doctoral study, interviewed a total of 439 white-collar employees in the first 500 and second 500 industrial organizations published by the Istanbul Chamber of Industry. As a result of the study, he concluded that there are differences between corporate reputation and innovation according to the list in which the organization is included. Marvel et al. (2007) found that qualified employees who have a vision to create innovation evaluate corporate reputation in the first place in their organizational choices and make their choices accordingly. Özalp and Çetin (2022) investigated whether there is a relationship between the desire of academicians working at Marmara University to create innovation and the corporate reputation of their university. They concluded that the level of reputation encourages innovative behaviors. Yücel et al. (2022) determined that innovation studies indirectly affect corporate reputation. Again, in the doctoral study conducted by Yücel (2021), it was determined that corporate reputation contributes positively to innovation at the level of product differentiation.

Our study aimed to determine how the perception of corporate reputation in the Forest Products Industry impacts employees' innovative behaviors. For this purpose, a survey was conducted with employees in managerial positions at medium-and large-scale enterprises in the forest products industry.

2. Materials and Methods

Our study material consisted of 1,158 companies in the medium- and large-scale forest products industry group (Web-1). The selection of this group was based on the fact that medium- and large-scale enterprises have a corporate structure and the potential to establish systems to foster innovative thinking. The following formula was used to determine the number of firms to which the survey would be applied. Additionally, this survey was administered online to employees in managerial positions. Based on the total number of firms (N):

$$n = \frac{Z^2 NPQ}{ND^2 + Z^2 PQ} \quad (1)$$

The sample size was determined using the following formula (Dorman et al., 1990). The symbols used in the formula are as follows:

- **n**: Sample size
- **Z**: Confidence coefficient (taken as 1.64 for a 90% confidence level)
- **P**: Probability of the characteristic being present in the population (set at 50% due to the multipurpose nature of our study)
- **Q**: 1 - P
- **D**: Accepted sampling error (set at 5%)

Using these values, the sample size was calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{1.64^2 * 1158 * 0.5 * 0.5}{1158 * 0.05^2 + 1.64^2 * 0.5 * 0.5} = 218$$

was calculated as follows.

Surveys were conducted during April, May, and June 2024. However, due to some surveys not meeting the desired criteria, the study was completed with 128 acceptable surveys, yielding a response rate of 58.7%. In the literature, response rates for studies conducted on target populations typically range between 20% and 45% (Bal and Gundry, 1999; Hum and Leow, 1996).

The survey consisted primarily of two sections designed to assess perceptions of corporate reputation and innovative behavior. The section measuring corporate reputation, referred to in the literature as the reputation quotient scale, included six sub-criteria and twenty statements formatted using a five-point Likert scale (1. Strongly Disagree ... 5. Strongly Agree) (Fombrun et al. 2000).

The section addressing perceptions of innovative behavior used a five-point Likert scale with nine statements (Jannsen, 2000). Additionally, the survey included two questions regarding the respondents' roles/positions within the company and the specific subsector in which they work.

The data obtained in the study were subjected to statistical analysis with SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) programs. In the data analysis, structural equation modeling was used to reveal the relationships between the data sets. Structural equation modeling is a statistical approach based on the causal and relational identification of measurable and unmeasurable variables. This analysis tested the model in Figure 1 and the hypotheses in Table 1.

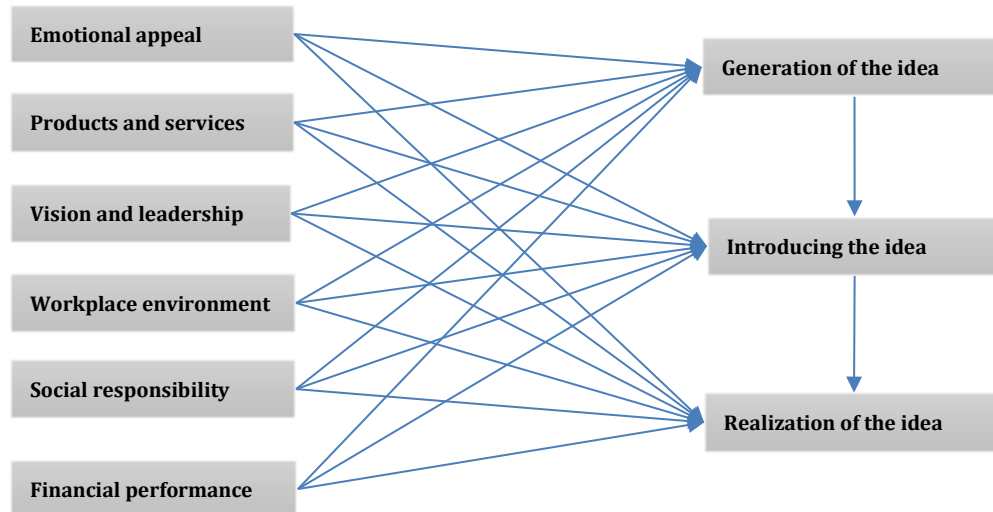


Figure 1: Structural model

Table 1: Test hypotheses

Hypotheses	
1	There is a relationship between emotional appeal and idea generation
2	There is a relationship between emotional appeal and promotion of the idea
3	There is a relationship between emotional appeal and idea realization
4	There is a relationship between products and services and idea generation
5	There is a relationship between products and services and the promotion of the idea
6	There is a relationship between products and services and the realization of the idea
7	There is a relationship between vision and leadership and idea generation
8	There is a relationship between vision and leadership and promotion of the idea
9	There is a relationship between vision and leadership and idea realization
10	There is a relationship between workplace environment and idea generation
11	There is a relationship between workplace environment and promotion of the idea
12	There is a relationship between the workplace environment and the realization of the idea
13	There is a relationship between social and environmental responsibility and idea generation
14	There is a relationship between social and environmental responsibility and idea promotion
15	There is a relationship between social and environmental responsibility and idea realization
16	There is a relationship between financial performance and idea generation
17	There is a relationship between financial performance and idea promotion
18	There is a relationship between financial performance and idea realization
19	There is a relationship between idea generation and idea promotion
20	There is a relationship between promotion of the idea and realization of the idea

3. Results

3.1. Demographic Characteristics

Within the scope of the study, the age, marital status, gender, working period, sector, and position of the group participating in the survey were questioned. In terms of the position worked, the position of foreman, etc., is considered a lower-level manager; shift supervisors and group/department-responsible engineers are considered middle-level; and the position of factory manager, etc., is considered an upper-level manager. Some demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Participants' characteristics

	Category.	N	Rate (%)
Sector	Furniture	12	9,4
	Wood-based board	91	71,1
	Paper-cardboard	15	11,7
	Timber-massive	10	7,8
Position held	Top level manager	19	14,8
	Middle manager	59	46,1
	Lower-level manager	50	39,1

When the table is examined, it is seen that 71.1% of the participants were in the wood-based board sector, and 46.1% were in middle management positions. In addition, it was determined that 50% of the participants were between the ages of 41 and 50, and 74.2% are married; 46.9% of them had a working period of 6-10 years. However, it should be noted that not all participants are male.

3.2. Reliability and Validity Analyses

Cronbach's Alpha test was applied to determine the reliability of the questionnaire form. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient varies between 0 and 1 and determines the internal reliability level of the questionnaire, and a value above 0.90 is defined as an excellent reliability level (Kalaycı, 2009). As a result of the analysis, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was determined to be 0.979. In this context, it was concluded that the questionnaire form was highly reliable.

Construct validity was examined to determine the validity of the questionnaire. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the factor structures of the judgments in the questionnaire. Before performing this analysis, the suitability of the data set for factor analysis was evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy criterion. To ensure the validity of the test, the KMO value should be higher than 0.5 (Sharma, 1996). As a result of this analysis, it was seen that the KMO value was 0.909 (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Sig.: 0.001) and the factor analysis could proceed due to the high level of adequacy. The results of the factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of each subcomponent are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Construct validity analysis results of the scale

Question. No	Variables	Factor load	Cronbach's Alpha
	Emotional appeal		0.932
Q1	I have positive feelings about my organization	0.962	
Q2	I admire and respect my organization	0.931	
Q3	I trust my organization	0.927	
	Products and services		0.908
Q4	My organization stands behind its products and services to the end	0.886	
Q5	My organization produces innovative products and services	0.904	
Q6	My organization provides high-quality products and services	0.938	
Q7	My organization offers products and services that provide excellent value for money	0.824	
	Vision and leadership		0.848
Q8	In my organization, management has excellent leadership	0.900	
Q9	My organization has a clear vision for the future	0.928	
Q10	In my organization, opportunities in the market are recognized and used in favor of the company	0.823	
	Workplace environment		0.878
Q11	My organization is well-managed	0.918	
Q12	My organization is a good company to work for	0.937	
Q13	My organization has good and talented employees	0.849	
	Social and Environmental Responsibility		0.890
Q14	My organization supports social responsibility projects	0.897	
Q15	My organization is a company that fulfills its responsibilities towards the environment	0.921	
Q16	My organization ensures high standards in the way it treats people	0.917	
	Financial Performance		0.743
Q17	My organization has a strong track record of profitability	0.815	
Q18	My organization is seen as a low-risk venture that others may want to invest in	0.403	
Q19	My organization tends to outperform its competitors	0.931	
Q20	My organization has strong expectations for the future	0.870	
	Generating the Idea		0.873
Q21	I generate new ideas when faced with difficult situations	0.913	
Q22	I research new working methods, techniques and tools	0.910	
Q23	I produce original solutions for problems	0.883	
	Introducing the Idea		0.893
Q24	I mobilize people to realize innovative ideas	0.928	
Q25	I get approval for innovative ideas	0.894	
Q26	I encourage influential/important people in the organization for innovative ideas	0.911	
	Realization of the Idea		0.955
Q27	I transform innovative ideas into useful applications	0.963	
Q28	I systematically reflect innovative ideas in the work environment	0.974	
Q29	I measure and evaluate the usefulness of innovative ideas	0.939	

When the table is examined, it is found that Cronbach's alpha coefficient of all subcomponents is above 0.70, and their reliability levels are sufficient. In addition, when the factor loadings of all subcomponents were analyzed. They were observed to be above 0.80, except for Q18 (0.403) in the financial performance component. Therefore, Q18 was removed from the analysis, and the analysis continued.

3.3. Measurement Model

Before proceeding to the structural model, the factor structure of the measurement model should be examined with confirmatory factor analysis. The AMOS program was used for confirmatory factor analysis. and the standard loadings and t-values of the model subcomponents were determined. These results are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Validity of the measurement model

	Variables	Standardized load	t
Emotional appeal (CR=0.93. AVE=0.81)	Q1	0.819	14.399
	Q2	0.918	20.511
	Q3	0.950	-
Products and services (CR=0.91. AVE=0.73)	Q4	0.834	13.998
	Q5	0.844	14.410
	Q6	0.932	-
	Q7	0.801	12.789
Vision and leadership (CR=0.87. AVE=0.69)	Q8	0.872	9.413
	Q9	0.924	9.892
	Q10	0.677	-
Workplace environment (CR=0.89. AVE=0.74)	Q11	0.891	12.525
	Q12	0.893	12.564
	Q13	0.790	-
Social and Environmental Responsibility (CR=0.89. AVE=0.73)	Q14	0.790	13.560
	Q15	0.807	14.257
	Q16	0.957	-
Financial performance (CR=0.88. AVE=0.71)	Q17	0.719	9.794
	Q19	0.928	15.539
	Q20	0.863	-
Generation of the idea (CR=0.88. AVE=0.71)	Q21	0.898	-
	Q22	0.791	11.698
	Q23	0.841	13.178
Introducing the idea (CR=0.90. AVE=0.74)	Q24	0.857	-
	Q25	0.866	13.528
	Q26	0.866	13.536
Realization of the idea (CR=0.96. AVE=0.88)	Q27	0.962	-
	Q28	0.966	28.208
	Q29	0.888	18.819

* P values for all t values are set as 0.001

AVE: Average Variance Extracted

CR: Critical Ratio

When the analysis results were examined, the standardized loadings of the variables varied between 0.677 and 0.966. In addition, the significance levels (p) of all t values were found to be significant at the 0.1% level. Therefore, the validity of the measurement model was statistically ensured.

Within the scope of this study, two types of reliability measures, namely the variance explained by factors (AVE) and the reliability coefficients of factors (CR), were used. Estimates of the explained variance of the factors indicated the total variance explained by the observed variables of each factor, while the reliability coefficients of the factors indicate the intrinsic reliability of the factors (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Netemeyer et al., 2005; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). As seen in Table 3, the variance explained by the factors is above the lower limit value (0.50) and the reliability coefficients are also above the lower limit value (0.70).

After ensuring the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the structural model was tested.

3.4. Structural Model

The structural model of the measurement model, whose reliability and validity were ensured, was tested, and the fit indices were examined before proceeding to the model's results. The fit indices of the structural model are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Fit indices of the structural model

Model	χ^2	df	P- value	χ^2 / df	CFI	RMR
Current model	1300.32	302	0.001	4.306	0.817	0.058

When the fit indices of the structural model were examined, they were within the acceptable limits specified in the literature (Anderson and Gerbing, 1984; Hancock and Mueller, 2006; Al-Refaie, 2015). Table 6 shows the hypothesis test results that emerged from testing the structural model.

Table 6: Hypothesis test results

Hypotheses	Prediction (r)	Decision
1 There is a relationship between emotional appeal and idea generation	-0.162	Reject
2 There is a relationship between emotional appeal and the promotion of the idea	-0.315	Reject
3 There is a relationship between emotional appeal and idea realization	0.091	Reject
4 There is a relationship between products and services and the generation of the idea	0.694*	Accept
5 There is a relationship between products and services and the promotion of the idea	-0.404	Reject
6 There is a relationship between products and services and the realization of the idea	-0.126	Reject
7 There is a relationship between vision, leadership. and idea generation	0.853*	Accept
8 There is a relationship between vision, leadership. and the promotion of the idea	0.222	Reject
9 There is a relationship between vision, leadership. and idea realization	0.149	Reject
10 There is a relationship between the workplace environment and idea generation	0.243	Reject
11 There is a relationship between the workplace environment and the promotion of the idea	-0.174	Reject
12 There is a relationship between the workplace environment and the realization of the idea	0.299*	Accept
13 There is a relationship between social and environmental responsibility and idea generation	-0.851*	Accept
14 There is a relationship between social and environmental responsibility and idea promotion	0.277	Reject
15 There is a relationship between social and environmental responsibility and idea realization	-0.258	Reject
16 There is a relationship between financial performance and idea generation	0.473	Reject
17 There is a relationship between financial performance and idea promotion	-0.076	Reject
18 There is a relationship between financial performance and idea realization	-0.339	Reject
19 There is a relationship between idea generation and idea promotion	0.708**	Accept
20 There is a relationship between the promotion of the idea and the realization of the idea	0.907**	Accept

Notes: * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Achieving targeted success is possible by organizing all inputs in line with the common goal and maximizing output with the positive interaction of production factors. While success in competition was measured by shaping the profit figures in the financial statements at desired or high levels in previous periods, today it has reached a position that is measured by continuity, respect, and reputation for all segments. Periodic gains have been replaced by long-term success goals. The most important actors in the goal of success are human resources and the productivity of the production power of this resource. Human power, which is used physically and mentally, has an infinite qualified production effect between entrepreneurial intelligence and muscle power in the densest parts of the production line. Studies show that there is a positive connection between the reputational position of the organizations and the innovative production power of the employees. Structural equation modelling was used to test the hypotheses in the study, in which the relationship between corporate reputation perception and innovative thinking was measured with 128 managers in the forest products industry sector.

As a result of testing the 20 hypotheses, two hypotheses (19 and 20) were accepted at the 1% significance level, and four hypotheses (4, 7, 12, and 13) were accepted at the 5% significance level. Products and services ($r=0.694$) and vision and leadership ($r=0.853$) positively and significantly affect idea generation, while social and environmental responsibility negatively and significantly affect idea generation. Workplace environment ($r=0.299$) and promotion of the idea ($r=0.907$) positively and significantly affect idea realization. It was also found that the introduction of the idea ($r=0.708$) had a positive and significant effect on the realization of the idea. Although the other hypotheses are not statistically significant, it is seen that they contain significant relationships.

Organizations that want to bring their human capital to the forefront should prioritize creating corporate reputation and developing investment ideas in this direction. The workplace's social position has a remarkable influence on the formation of innovation. The processes to be carried out at the level of corporate culture, as well as the existence of an environment for employees to express and prove themselves, should become a supportive force in the field of innovation.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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