

## **A Business Perspective on Social Innovativeness: The Influence on Corporate Reputation and the Relationship with Product Innovativeness**

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**Abstract:** When companies collaborate at a social innovation project, benefits accrue both for the project and the company. The project gets increased sustainability and scalability, whereas the company enjoys bottom line achievements. The study investigates one of the company achievements through social innovation initiatives, namely corporate reputation enhancement. For this purpose, a new scale is developed to measure the social innovativeness of a company. Measuring a company's social innovativeness primarily contributed to investigate its impact on corporate reputation. This impact is then compared to the one created by product innovativeness. In addition, the correlation between social innovativeness and product innovativeness is examined to understand the dynamics between these two types of innovation. In order to evaluate the positioning of companies within social innovation arena, the study used the perspective of customers, who are the main revenue generators for a company. Figuring out the viewpoint of customers can help a company to envisage resource utilization and target setting, in other words how to contribute and what to expect, when taking place at a social innovation project. The results show that social innovativeness of a company will positively influence corporate reputation, and this effect may even surpass the impact created by product innovativeness on reputation. Customers also correlate social and product innovativeness, and consider socially innovative companies as being also innovative in developing new products.

**Keywords:** Social Innovation, Corporate Reputation, Social Innovativeness Scale, Product Innovativeness

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## INTRODUCTION

Social innovation relates to searching new, innovative and value creating solutions with the aim of improving the life of socially disadvantaged people (Phills et al., 2008: 36-39). These problems, either not answered until then or newly emerging, include not only universally shared societal issues, such as aging populations, but also aspects transmitted between societies, like social integration problems due to migration. If these challenges are not addressed carefully, they can result in differences accessing resources among different nations, genders, age groups etc., which could lead to social tensions, even to a political extremism (Grimm et al., 2013: 437).

Social innovativeness is gaining in importance. Although social innovations have been realized in different forms for centuries by governments, by social movements, by individuals or even by religion, within the last two centuries many social innovations achieved to reach the mainstream (Mulgan et al., 2007: 11-12). The reasons of this development could be considered as the inclination of service economies (Mulgan et al., 2007: 11-12), the diminishing social governments (Phills et al., 2008: 39-40) or the deficiency of nation states in solving inequalities (Halme and Laurila, 2009:325).

Formation, acceptance and transmission of social innovations showed that each historical era had her own mechanisms, whereas the contemporary period demonstrates a growing expectancy from the private sector to take action (Phills et al., 2008: 39-40). Bottom of the Pyramid researchers state that business served mainly high income markets in the world but should have innovatively worked for low income markets as well (Prahalad and Hammond, 2002: 48). Respectively, this study aims to provide insights in two aspects regarding the role of companies within social innovation.

First, the study stresses a business perspective in social innovation, and aims to highlight the standing point of companies as a major player within this ecosystem together with the public sector, social sector, and people (Murray et al., 2010: 144). The belief, that the main duty of companies towards society are to offer jobs, pay salaries and provide profits, is getting outdated and companies, who aim to be enduring, more and more act as an intrinsic pillar of society (Kanter, 2011: 68; Phills et al., 2008: 40). In parallel, as being bottom line oriented, companies also search for direct or indirect

benefits through these social actions (Halme and Laurila, 2009: 325). Otherwise, social initiatives could be considered as inevitable costs, which are difficult to realize without compromising from corporate goals (Herrera, 2015: 1468) or too expensive for replication (Mulgan et al., 2007: 31) or needed as a “reservoir of goodwill” for crisis cases (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004: 19). However these benefits of social action are not easy for a company to achieve, since customers can get skeptical about intent and sincerity, consider these acts as a tax-off path or get irritated by the way they are communicated (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004: 14; Öberseder et al., 2011: 456).

Hence companies get confused how to proceed in social initiatives. But the solution can be provided by social innovation. In a social innovation project, companies can add great benefits to social value, definitely much more than providing financial resources only, and at the same time experience bottom line benefits without irritating their customers.

Through social innovation, companies can create social value by providing economies of scale, extensive global network and human resources power, positively influencing the success of the project (Kanter, 2008: 48-50; Sakarya et al., 2012: 1718). Also scaling up an initiative is important, and according to Mulgan et al. abilities of creating an innovation and scaling it up differ (2007: 25).

Companies can also experience benefits by social innovativeness. Elkington proposes that companies can realize win-win strategies in protecting the environment and get a major role in sustainability (1994: 91). Kanter contributes to the win-win business strategy, stating that companies can create change by corporate social innovations, i.e. by assessing social needs as a source to find new technologies, to serve new markets or to solve business problems (1999: 124). This path is observed at the multinational giants considering both social and business value simultaneously (Kanter, 2008: 48). Porter and Kramer name this direction of win-win as “shared value” (2015: 65). Companies can produce shared value by providing social impact and by improving business at the same time (Porter and Kramer, 2011: 68; Porter et al., 2011: 3).

When corporations provide social innovations with a business sense, they can expect enrichments in knowledge/expertise/networks, engagement with new opportunities, improvements in finance and technology, and de-

creases in environmental effects, which all end up by an increased competitive power (Murphy et al., 2015: 147-148; Murray et al., 2010: 180). Additionally, through linking social impact to business opportunities, investors can be influenced as well (Porter et al., 2011: 4).

With the help of social innovations, companies can also leverage customer feedback met at Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. Compared to a sheer donation within a CSR frame, social innovativeness of a company shall face a more positive customer evaluation, because it would indicate clues of intent, effort and sincerity (Öberseder et al., 2011: 456; Pelozo and Shang, 2011: 129).

Accordingly, the first contribution of the study is analyzing how social innovativeness can enhance customer evaluations for a company.

As a second insight, the study delivers an empirical perspective on social innovation. In business and marketing literature, the social role of a company is considered with a rich stream of studies in terms of CSR, philanthropy, cause marketing or societal marketing (e.g. Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004; Dahlsrud, 2008; Herrera, 2015; Hoeffler and Keller, 2002; Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006; Pelozo and Shang, 2011; Porter and Kramer, 1999; Porter and Kramer, 2002; Sirgy and Lee, 2008; Sotorrio and Sanchez, 2008). However regarding social innovation, the literature mostly holds conceptual and case studies (e.g. Elliott, 2013; Kanter, 1999; Le Ber and Branzei, 2010; Murphy et al., 2012; Porter and Kramer 2002; Sakarya et al., 2012).

It is theoretically and practically important to study the companies' position within the social innovation scheme and understand business point of view. For this purpose, first a theoretical framework and the constructs of the model, i.e. social innovativeness, product innovativeness, and corporate reputation are discussed. In following, the relations of social innovativeness and product innovativeness to corporate reputation, and to each other are presented through a quantitative study in Turkey within the mobile communication sector.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Building up corporate reputation can be based on the signaling theory (Walker, 2010: 376). According to the signaling theory, a company's repu-

tation is developed by its initiatives informing actual and potential stakeholders about the strategy, missions, and visions of the company and letting them to form a general evaluation and a future projection of success (Basdeo et al., 2006: 1206).

Signals radiated by companies can be grouped into those that demonstrate success in the market, like financial results or product quality, those that demonstrate strategy, like differentiation or diversification, and those that demonstrate legitimacy, like institutionalized ownership, media visibility or social conformity (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990: 233). The higher the number of actions and the more they have a variety that is having a complex structure, the greater is the positive effect on corporate reputation (Basdeo et al., 2006: 1215). Within the study, two of these signals will be discussed within a combination: social acts and innovativeness.

Signaling theory is especially focused on the role of social acts (Walker, 2010: 377) and social conformity is one of the signals showing legitimacy (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990: 233).

Innovativeness lies at the core of entrepreneurship for a company and is a key factor for success (Drucker, 1984: 67; Hult et al., 2004: 429; Sandvik and Sandvik, 2003: 35). Rubera and Kirca mention that innovativeness can affect firm value through the impacts on market position and financial situation, as innovativeness gives investors clues regarding the future (2012: 131, 142). In emerging markets and in cultures where customers are not ready or willing to take risks, innovativeness of a company plays a much more important role for an enhanced reputation (Falkenreck and Wagner, 2011: 234, 235).

## CONSTRUCTS

### *Social Innovativeness*

The European Union defined social innovation in a very simplistic way, namely as “new ideas, services and models to better address social issues by inviting input from public and private actors” (2016). This simple definition highlights three dimensions for a social innovation, namely offering novelty, targeting social issues, and building up collaboration between different stakeholders.

In the literature, researchers describe main features of a social innovation

and define recurring patterns in different case studies (e.g. Elliott, 2013; Le Ber and Branzei, 2010; Murphy et al., 2012; Sakarya et al., 2012). These characteristics deliver the meaning behind the terms “social” and “innovation”, and are in parallel with the three dimensions pointed out in the EU definition. One aspect is being “social”, i.e. to offer social value (Phills et al., 2008: 38) or to be initiated by a social purpose entity (Mulgan et al., 2007: 10) or both (Murray et al., 2010: 3). In other words, a social innovation has social purposes and offers value for society.

Another dimension again emphasizes the word “social” but it depends on the creation of a social network by bringing several stakeholders together for collaboration (Mulgan et al., 2007: 8; Murray et al., 2010: 3). Social innovations create a new combined economy, called the social economy, which includes different stakeholders and has a dense network of partnerships (Murray et al., 2010: 142).

Last aspect is related to “innovation”, focusing on the end result or on the process (Caulier-Grice et al., 2010: 18; Phills et al., 2008: 36-39). These innovations could be socially transformative, product based or process based (Shier and Handy, 2015: 2592-2597). Mulgan et al. state that innovations do need not to be completely new, but could be a new combination of existing elements (2007: 34); so any novelty that carries an incremental step or an improvement can also play important social roles (Phills et al., 2008: 36-39).

Accordingly, different definitions of the concept or listed characteristics share the traits of three dimensions of a social innovation as social value, social network, novelty (e.g. EU, 2016; Mulgan et al., 2007; Phills et al., 2008).

Therefore, social innovativeness of a company can be associated with its capability to deliver social value thanks to the novelties developed in collaboration with different stakeholders.

### ***Product Innovativeness***

Product innovativeness is defined by Henard and Dacin as “a firm’s track record of product innovations, degree of creativity, and potential for continued innovative activity in the future” (2010: 321).

Product innovativeness can act as a strategic weapon in creating new customers, keeping existing ones, replying customer needs, increasing de-

mand, and gaining competitive advantage, all of which contribute to building up an entry barrier against competitors (Kunz et al., 2011: 816; Olson et al., 1995: 48; Sandvik and Sandvik, 2003: 357; Szymanski et al., 2007: 37-38). Especially products, which are unique and new to the market, make a difference (Sandvik and Sandvik, 2003: 370). Due to the impacts of globalization, the pace of change has increased and surprising competitive attacks can be faced anywhere, therefore innovativeness gains importance and companies need to rely on innovation (Kanter, 2011: 69).

### *Corporate Reputation*

Gotsi and Wilson define corporate reputation as an “overall evaluation of a company over time” (2001: 29).

Corporate reputation is built with the perception of all stakeholders, both internal and external (Walker, 2010: 367). This perception of stakeholders can depend on a combination of signals either given by the company or shared by the external actors and adds value to the company (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990: 233-258; Sarstedt et al., 2013: 329; Schwaiger, 2004: 47; Walker, 2010: 377). Reputation shows a connection with shareholders’ investment intentions, suppliers’ partnership intentions, and job seekers’ employment intentions (Eccles et al., 2007: 104; Ponzi et al., 2011: 27; Roberts and Dowling, 2002: 1079).

Customer view of reputation is specifically important, as they build up the main source of revenue for a company, however the literature does not show many studies for this important stakeholder group (Walsh et al., 2009: 187, 189). In regard of customers, corporate reputation impacts satisfaction, loyalty, trust, increased wallet share, and enhanced lifetime value (Eccles et al., 2007: 104; Ou et al., 2012: 779; Walsh and Beatty, 2007: 140; Walsh et. al, 2009: 197-198). Reputation can also play an umbrella role under a threat situation (Mandelli and Mari, 2012: 460), which can arise very quick and can reach to impressive results within the contemporary digital world (Gaines-Ross, 2010: 70).

Trends in the competitive environment such as media fragmentation and increasing product commoditization specifically escalate the importance of reputation in creating sustainable advantages (Gardberg and Fombrun, 2002: 303; Neville et al., 2005: 1192; Schwaiger, 2004: 46).

## **HYPOTHESES**

**H1:** Social Innovativeness has a positive impact on Corporate Reputation

Social performances of a company affect corporate reputation (Abdullah and Abdul Aziz, 2013: 357) especially if there is a fit of these acts with stakeholder expectations (Brammer and Pavelin, 2006: 451). This impact can be explained by social initiatives providing information regarding the company's missions (Neville et al., 2005: 1190) and contributing to a stronger trust in the brand (Kim et al., 2015: 3690). In terms of social innovation specifically, the company will invest in time and human resources, use its expertise and R&D capability, and show her commitment, and hence a positive feedback is expected (Öberseder et al., 2011: 456; Pelozo and Shang, 2011: 129).

In addition to the social value created, the collaboration aspect of social innovativeness shall impact corporate reputation as well. In projects, where the collaboration of different partners is essential, stakeholders circle enhances and stakeholder appraisal increases (Murphy et al., 2015: 147; Sakarya et al., 2012: 1716).

Finally, the innovativeness dimension of social innovativeness shall impact corporate reputation as innovativeness is related with success (Drucker, 1984: 67; Hult et al., 2004: 429; Sandvik and Sandvik, 2003: 35) and moderates how customers evaluate social acts (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006: 15).

**H2:** Product Innovativeness has a positive impact on Corporate Reputation

Product innovativeness is linked to corporate reputation (Henard and Dacin, 2010: 322; Kunz et al., 2011: 816). Customer perception of innovativeness leads the company to be evaluated as being modern, R&D enhanced, having high capabilities, and offering the most up-to-date products, therefore it is a major competitive tool (Keller, 2013: 411). Product innovativeness builds up an intangible asset for the company, so that the company image is enriched and the tolerance against failures is increased (Henard and Dacin, 2010: 330).

Product innovativeness positively impacts company reputation also as



being a financial success factor (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990: 233). New products increase market share, sales, and profitability especially if they concern a unique offer (Lee et al., 2014: 92; Sandvik and Sandvik, 2003: 370). Firms get the chance to charge a price premium and still attract a large number of customers; thus both the price and quantity of the product sold increase (Sandvik and Sandvik, 2003: 370). By enhancing the product portfolio and by expanding the customer reach, companies enjoy a bigger share from the customer spending (Hult et al., 2004: 436).

### **H3: Social Innovativeness and Product Innovativeness are interlinked**

Social innovativeness and product innovativeness share common points. First, both can serve well within difficult markets. Product innovativeness offers competitive advantages, where demand is fluctuating, customer criteria is changing, and high technological progress is experienced (Zhou et al., 2005: 54). Kunz et al. gave the example of Apple, where the company creates the perception of being creative, dynamic, and innovative in culture and drives a whole market (2011: 818). Similarly social initiatives provide particular success in customer relationships in challenging competitive markets (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004: 18, 23).

Second, both help to build up a valuable resource for the future. A series of ongoing product innovations would benefit a company by creating a positive expectancy regarding the future (Rubera and Kirca, 2012: 131). Also social actions realized by the company develop an intangible asset for future (Hawn and Ioannou, 2016: 2569; Liu et al., 2021: 3).

Third, both depend on the same resource within a company, namely the capability to innovate. Nourishing innovativeness in the company considers a dedication and a long time investment as the related mind set shall be rooted and planted within the organization (Menguc and Auh, 2006: 66). Innovativeness of a company asks for human resources with talent, knowledge, and concentration (Drucker, 1984: 67, 72). Additionally, a supporting organizational culture shall be framed, developed, nurtured and encouraged (Herrera, 2015: 1471-1473; Hult et al., 2004: 437). In other words innovativeness shall be within “the social fabric” of the company (Menguc and Auh, 2006: 66). But if this capability does exist, it can be used both for social and product innovations. The set out processes, company mentality, and established teams

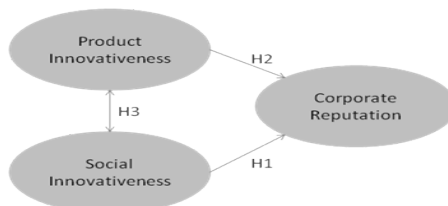
can serve both purposes.

The two innovations, social and product oriented ones, can serve each other as well. For example, product innovativeness feeds social innovativeness, when a product already developed for the main business is enhanced or modified for a social purpose (Padgett and Galan, 2010: 415). Fu et al. describe this relationship as a “synergistic opportunity” and state the example of Huawei where the AI centered advances of the company are used for several social purposes (2020: 13). When companies let their product innovativeness leverage the social projects, they are creating a value for the total business (MacGregor and Fontrodona, 2008: 20).

On the other hand, social innovativeness can help product innovativeness to prosper. Social innovativeness helps companies and their teams to think out of the box, consider different needs, and achieve targets with less resource, all of which can increase team creativity. Additionally, thanks to a realized social innovation project, a company can increase its knowledge about a new product. Such a project will demonstrate a tried experience of that product, and new knowledge gained can be brought to mainstream markets by a reverse innovation (Murphy et al., 2012: 1705-1706; Porter and Kramer, 2011: 68; Porter et al., 2011: 3).

Also from the perspective of the customer, social innovativeness and product innovativeness are in a relationship. The closer a social innovation and the company's core business are to each other, the more benefits are achieved (Halme and Laurila, 2009: 336), and these benefits include increased brand awareness, enhanced customer relations, and boosted consumer loyalty (Henard and Dacin, 2010: 330; Murphy et al., 2015: 147-148).

**Figure 1.** Research Model



## METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the study is to assess social innovativeness of a company, and to further investigate how customers evaluate this social innovativeness in regard to product innovativeness and corporate reputation. Revealing the relationship between social and product innovativeness and comparing their impact on corporate reputation shall provide a clear view of the establishing social innovativeness concept in the business world.

The realized research studies the mobile communication providing companies in Turkey. As these companies are in services, they depend much on intangible assets like innovations, social acts and reputation (Rindova et al., 2005: 1035; Walsh et al., 2009: 188). Being in a high-tech industry, fighting at a tough environment with a few competitors but constantly developing market, and experiencing a dynamic consumer demand, social acts and innovativeness are expected to be valuable sources for success (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004: 18, 23; Kaya and Seyrek, 2005: 70; Meral and Baş, 2013: 6; Rubera and Kirca, 2012: 131, 142).

### Measurements

#### *Social Innovativeness Measurement*

The literature provides measures for the characteristics of the individuals creating social innovation (Halaç et al., 2014: 183), the means utilized by the service non profits to realize social innovation (Shier and Handy, 2015: 2591), the effect of being a family firm in social benefit innovation (Wagner, 2010: 589), and shared value (Porter et al., 2011: 3).

In evaluating the results of a social innovation, a tool mainly offered to social funds and social enterprises is SROI, Social Return on Investment, which searches answers to the questions such as who benefits the initiative, how important is the created value, and how much of this value shall be due to the initiative (Social Value UK, 2016). Mulgan, criticized the SROI and developed a tool for the National Health Services UK, however specifically noting that this tool had clear goals and a well defined subject matter, hence it has a simplifying applicability factor (2010: 42). Within the scope of the “Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Foundations for Building Social Inno-

vation in Europe” (TEPSIE) initiative, two different perspectives have been utilized, one at the macro level, focusing on the social innovativeness of nations, and the other one at the micro level, focusing on the specific social innovation initiatives. For the micro level, an appraisal template has been prepared to assess a social innovation (Modikos and Kennard, 2014: 3).

The scale developed by Modikos and Kennard follows the definition of the social innovation concept (2014: 4) and is taken as the basis for this study. Enhanced by an item pool, it is adapted to assess the company social innovativeness. An item pool, representing the framed domain, can be generated by the existing information within the literature and additional studies (MacKenzie et al., 2011: 304). The prepared item pool combined the characteristics provided within the definitions, and the recurring patterns at the case studies. A preliminary scale was developed, which was then studied through the interviews with 12 people to understand whether there are concerns in regard of wording or phrasing (Sekaran, 2003: 249). The sample for these interviews was collected according to a convenience sampling; different gender, age, education and professional groups were included into the sample to ensure diversity.

### ***Product Innovativeness Measurement***

Several researchers measured innovation, innovativeness and entrepreneurship by surveying the managers and employees, i.e. they used the perspective of companies (Calantone et al., 2006: 414; Fang, 2008: 94; Hult et al., 2004: 433; McNally et al., 2010: 998; Menguc and Auh, 2006: 67; Theoharakis and Hooley, 2008: 73; Zhou et al., 2005: 48).

However, firm innovativeness shall depend on a broader judgment (Hult et al., 2004: 429; Kunz et al., 2011: 816; Rubera and Kirca, 2012: 131). Kunz et al. state that it should be the end customer who gives the final decision whether or not an innovation is successful (2011: 816). Henard and Dacin agree that consumer perception is essential and stress that also the continuity of innovations shall be taken into consideration in measurement (2010: 321). They study innovativeness as containing a flow of several successful innovations, pioneering the sector, providing creativity and progress, and showing signs of future innovations (Henard and Dacin, 2010: 321). Within the study, the scale of Henard and Dacin (2010: 335) is utilized.

### ***Corporate Reputation Measurement***

One of the most popular reputation measurement scales is Reputation Quotient, which was developed by scanning the most visible corporate reputation lists, academic studies, and practitioner writings (Gardberg and Fombrun, 2002: 305-306; Sarstedt et al., 2013: 331). The original Reputation Quotient scale had 32 items, which then evolved to a 20 item scale (Ponzi et al., 2011: 18). One step further, the need of a more simplified and shorter version brought RepTrack™ Pulse, a scale assessing antecedents separately from main construct measurement (Ponzi et al., 2011: 15-16).

Reputation measurement loads into two groups, emotional factors and cognitive factors, and The RepTrak™ Pulse measures the emotional part (Ponzi et al., 2011: 18, 23). RepTrak™ Pulse is validated in 17 countries at six different studies as a simple tool, that is easy to replicate, budget friendly for both large and small scale applications, valid for different type of stakeholders and different cultures, and applicable at online and traditional polls (Ponzi et al., 2011: 30). Within the study RepTrack™ Pulse is used.

### **Results**

The research is realized with 328 respondents collected on a convenience base. Convenience sampling is used for the advantages of accessibility and cooperativeness (Malhotra, 2010). The sample consists of 59.1% female and 40.9% males. Age groups change between 16 and 77 with a mean of 29.8. In terms of occupation, the highest group is built by students 47.6%, followed by private sector employees 27.4%, public sector employees 5.8% and others 19.2%.

The sample size with an observations-to-variable ratio higher than 10:1 is accepted as suitable for an exploratory factor analysis and further studies (Hair et al., 2014). Missing values are less than 0.5%, hence disregarded. Outliers are neglected as all standard deviations remain below the threshold of 2.5 (Hair et al., 2014).

As the first step of the study, the new scale of social innovativeness is checked with exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. The exploratory factor analysis, realized with a Varimax rotation, first collected all items into a single factor. However, since the explanation of the data remained at

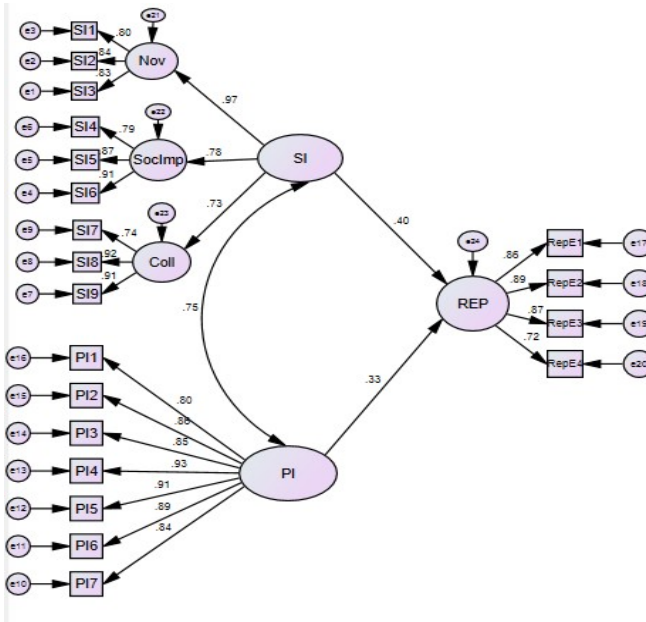
62%, and since the aim is to have a better understanding of the construct, the analysis is rerun with three factors, following the three characteristics of social innovativeness specified within the literature.

The factor analysis of social innovativeness scale with three factors explained 81% of the data (KMO=.882;  $p=.000$ ). KMO value, being higher than 0.800, shows a perfect fit of the data for the exploratory factor analysis (Durmuş et al., 2013: 80). The three factors are considered as Social Impact, Collaboration, and Novelty, corresponding to social value, social network and innovation aspects suggested at the literature.

The construct reliabilities are checked by the Cronbach coefficient alpha; results are .889 for Social Impact, .887 for Collaboration, and .860 for Novelty. All factors are reliable being above the 0.70 threshold (Durmuş et al., 2013: 89). Convergent validity of the scale is secured by factor loadings (all are significant and have medium to high values), by construct reliabilities, and by the Average Variance Extracted values. AVE values are .734 for Social Impact, .740 for Collaboration, and .677 for Novelty, whereas the threshold limit is stated as .50 (Hair et al., 2014). Discriminant validity is first assessed by the comparisons with alternative models. A two factorial design remained unidentified, whereas a model with only one factor, provided a poorer fit (Chi-square=489.061;  $p=.000$ ;  $df=27$ ; GFI=.737, CFI=.782, and RMSEA=.229). In addition, as the AVE estimate of each factor is greater than the squared correlation of that factor with the others, a more conservative assessment of discriminant validity is also assured (Hair et al., 2014).

Then, the social innovativeness scale is studied by a confirmatory factor analysis through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) by AMOS 20.0. With the sample size greater than 250 and variable size of 20, the data provide an acceptable fit in terms of Chi-square=98.008;  $p=.000$ ;  $df=24$ ; GFI=.937, CFI=.965, but created a question mark on RMSEA=.097 (Hair et al, 2014). The reason could rely on the sample including different age and occupational groups, who can have a diverse understanding of the emerging social innovativeness concept. A check with a sub sample including only students provided a better results in all terms (N=156; Chi-square=44.321;  $p=.007$ ;  $df=24$ ; GFI=.940, CFI=.971; RMSEA=.074). Still, the whole data is used for the further study.

Figure 2. Total Model



As the second step of the study, the relations of social innovativeness and product innovativeness to corporate reputation and to each other are configured in a total model by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS 20.0. The data provides an acceptable fit to the model with Chi-square =515.655;  $p=.000$ ;  $df=164$ ;  $GFI=.865$ ,  $CFI=.940$ , and  $RMSEA=.081$ . The highest relation is observed within the correlation between social innovativeness and product innovativeness, supporting H3 ( $r=.746$ ;  $p=.000$ ). H1 and H2 are also supported as there is a significant and positive impact of social innovativeness and product innovativeness on corporate reputation with  $r=.396$  and  $r=.327$  ( $p=.000$ ), respectively. The total model is presented at Figure 2.

## DISCUSSION

Social innovation is a new concept and the role of companies within the scheme remains debatable (e.g. Borzaga and Bordini, 2014; Mulgan et al., 2007; Payaud, 2014; Pol and Ville, 2009). This study presents a clear business perspective for social innovativeness. It investigates how social inno-

vativeness can impact customer feedback, in this case corporate reputation, and compares this impact with the one created through product innovativeness. To enhance the understanding, the relationship between a company's social innovativeness and product innovativeness is questioned as well.

The first contribution of the study is in offering a measurement tool regarding the social innovativeness of a company. Enhancing the study of Modikos and Kennard (2014: 3) with items shared in different definitions and case studies of the literature, a valid and reliable scale is developed. The arising three factorial design reflects the literature stated emerging dimensions of the concept (e.g. EU, 2016; Mulgan et al., 2007; Phills et al., 2008).

Second, the study confirmed that customers assess social innovativeness and product innovativeness of a company as correlated ( $r=0.746$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). Literature states that innovativeness is within the culture of a company with a reinforcing mentality, supporting operational structures and an encouraging atmosphere (Herrera, 2015: 1471-1473; Hult et al., 2004: 437; Kanter, 2008). In other words, if there is an innovativeness capability at a company, it can show itself both in social and product terms. The study confirms that customers recognize this capability and consider the reciprocal effects between social and product innovativeness.

Third, the study questioned the effect of social and product innovativeness on corporate reputation. The findings confirmed that both have a statistically significant positive impact on corporate reputation. The impact of social innovativeness on corporate reputation is  $r=.396$  whereas the impact of product innovativeness on corporate reputation is  $r=.327$ . This finding is in line with the literature as enhanced reputation is a result of social (Murphy et al., 2015: 147) and product innovativeness (Henard and Dacin, 2010: 322; Kunz et al., 2011: 816).

Finally, the impacts of the two types of innovativeness on corporate reputation are compared. The results demonstrate that social innovativeness has a higher effect on corporate reputation than product innovativeness. This finding is consistent with the literature stating that compared to purely product oriented ones, innovations with social advantages have a higher impact on corporate reputation, because they exhibit a higher potential to be noticed and appraised (Padgett and Moura-Leite, 2012: 230). Both social innovativeness and product innovativeness point out to the capability of



creativity and finding novel solutions. However in social innovativeness, the issue of novelty is enhanced with social impact and collaboration aspects, which help out for appraisal. Similarly, the CSR literature reports that social initiations have a higher effect on company reputation than innovations, as the social acts impact reputation both directly and indirectly (Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2019: 16). The same pattern is observed when comparing the effects of CSR and innovation in creating market value; again, CSR has a higher impact on market value than innovation (Rodgers et al., 2013: 615).

## **CONCLUSION**

The study searched the customer point of view regarding the company social innovations. It is shown that a company's social innovativeness positively affects corporate reputation. Being more specific, this effect of social innovativeness can even surpass the effect created by product innovativeness on corporate reputation. Thus, if the focus is corporate reputation, companies could benefit more from social innovativeness than product innovativeness.

In addition, customers correlate social innovativeness with product innovativeness; therefore a company's ability to develop socially innovative projects will create the image that the company is also innovative in developing new products or services.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

In terms of the academic implications, the study presents an empirical analysis of customer evaluations regarding companies' social innovativeness, compares it to product innovativeness and explains gains at corporate reputation. It also offers a scale in measuring the perception of company social innovativeness.

Regarding the business implications, the study shows that companies will benefit by being more active within socially innovative projects. Depending on the research, several suggestions arise for companies. First, companies should foster an innovative culture within their organization to benefit both from social and product innovativeness. Second, social innovations shall be considered as a well-designed alternative to philanthropic so-

cial initiatives, as they signal to customers both social capability and success of the company and could benefit the company at the same time. Finally, companies should be in a close cooperation with different stakeholders like universities or Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to stimulate an innovative culture and take a place in the social innovation ecosystem.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The chosen sector for the study does not have a long history, but has already experienced a lot of changes in terms of technology, rules and regulations, and company backgrounds. Further research could show the applicability of the social innovativeness scale and the relationship between social innovativeness, product innovativeness, and corporate reputation in different contexts such as other industries and countries, or in a comparison with other social initiatives of companies, like philanthropy.

The study had focused on the customer point of view whereas further studies could explore the viewpoint of other stakeholders, especially employees, for example regarding the benefits reached by volunteering.

## **İş Dünyası Açısından Sosyal Yenilikçilik; Kurumsal İtibar Üzerindeki Etkisi ve Ürün Yenilikçiliği ile İlişkisi**

**Özet:** Firmalar bir sosyal inovasyon projesinde işbirliği yaptığında, hem pro- je hem de şirket adına fayda sağlanır. Bir yandan projenin sürdürülebilirliği ve ölçeklenebilirliği artarken, diğer yandan şirket de temel kazanımlar elde eder. Çalışmada, bu kazanımlardan biri olan kurumsal itibarın artırılması araştırılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, öncelikle firma sosyal yenilikçiliğini ölçmek için yeni bir ölçek geliştirilmiştir. Firmanın sosyal yenilikçiliğinin ölçülmesi kurumsal itibar üzerindeki etkisinin araştırılmasını ve bu etkinin ürün yeni- likçiliğinin kurumsal itibar üzerindeki etkisi ile karşılaştırılmasını sağlamıştır. Ayrıca sosyal ve ürün yenilikçiliği arasındaki dinamiği anlamak için iki inovasyonun ilişkisi de analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmada firmaların sosyal yenilik alanındaki yerini değerlendirme doğrultusunda, bir firma için ana gelir kay- nağını oluşturan müşterilerin bakış açısı kullanılmıştır. Müşteri perspektifini anlamak sosyal yenilik projelerinde kaynak kullanımı ve hedef koyma adımlarında, diğer bir deyişle nasıl bir katkıda bulunulacağı ve ne elde edileceğini öngörmeye firmaya yardımcı olacaktır. Sonuçlara göre, sosyal yenilikçilik firma kurumsal itibarını olumlu yönde etkilemekte, hatta bu etki ürün yenilikçiliğinden daha yüksek oranda gerçekleşmektedir. Müşteriler aynı zamanda sosyal yenilikçiliği ürün

yenilikçiliği ile ilişkilendirmekte ve sosyal yenilikçi firmaların yeni ürün geliştirmede de yenilikçi olduğunu düşünmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sosyal Yenilik, Kurumsal İtibar, Sosyal Yenilikçilik, Ölçek, Ürün Yenilikçiliği

## Appendix

Social Innovativeness Scale - developed based on Modikos and Kennard, 2014: 4)

1. ... puts emphasis on innovativeness (Novelty)
2. ... provides radical and disruptive innovations (Novelty)
3. ... develops unconventional solution methods (Novelty)
4. ... meets social needs of society better than existing situation (Social Impact)
5. ... meets the unsolved needs of disadvantaged social groups (like disabled or low income or unemployed) (Social Impact)
6. ... improves quality of life both for whole society and for disadvantaged social groups (Social Impact)
7. ... develops projects in collaboration with Non Governmental Organizations, governmental institutions, universities etc. (Collaboration)
8. ... is open to any kind of information sharing and cooperation within collaborative projects (Collaboration)
9. ... brings in prevalence and sustainability to collaborative projects (Collaboration)

Product Innovativeness Scale (Henard and Dacin, 2010: 335)

1. ... successfully provides new products and services
2. ... is a pioneer
3. ... is a leader in launching new products and services
4. ... is an innovative company
5. ... is a progressive company
6. ... is a creative company
7. ... is expected to introduce innovative products and services in the future

Reputation Scale - RepTrack™ Pulse (Ponzi et al., 2011: 22)

1. ... forms a good feeling at me
2. ... generates trust

3. ... creates admiration and respect
4. ... has a good overall reputation

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