

Relations of Culture and Public Relations: The Case of Erzurum

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Article Info

Abstract

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Culture, which is defined as 'the way of doing business' simply, refers to the practices that cover people's way of life, beliefs, traditions and customs in general, and that change from society to society, from geography to geography. Culture is sustainable and transmitted from generation to generation thanks to communication. In this context, the forms of communication become both a part of the culture and the carrier/transmitter of the culture. Public relations activities may differ strategically according to cultural characteristics due to the international and global scale business areas of the companies. Public relations considers different cultures as an important function of companies' effective communication with their internal and external stakeholders. Public relations activities are shaped within the framework of the values, beliefs and norms of the stakeholders, can be reduced to local dimensions. This study reveals the relationship between public relations and culture and examines the culture of Erzurum in the example of local culture of Erzurum.

Introduction

People's lifestyles, their relations with their environment, shopping styles, eating and drinking styles, traditions and customs, that is, the forms of communication with other people constitute an element of culture. Cultures are transmitted through communication processes. The differentiation and transformations that culture has experienced over time can also be caused by communication and interaction. Communication-based public relations activities are also developing in a way that appeals to cultural differences due to the differentiation between countries and even regions.

The life adventure of mankind until today reveals the richness of cultural patterns. It refers to a set of practices that are directly affected by culture, geography and living conditions, open to constant change, and tend to protect themselves. Culture is the sum of the basic characteristics of a society. People have thoughts and behaviors according to the culture of the society they grew up in. For this reason, the forms of communication in societies differ from culture to culture. There may even be behavioral differences among members of the same culture. "The human being, observing, questioning and searching for meaning, had a very active adventure in his struggle with difficult conditions until he settled down; had to adopt a practice framed by 'property' relations in its world, which had a structure based on agriculture; as an extension of industrialization and transforming production relations, it has tried to construct its 'reality' within the dynamics of capitalism" (Öcal, 2022: 13).

Public relations is a professional business practice that companies get support in their managerial processes. As a field of practice, public relations is among the leading practice practices in terms of establishing relationships with stakeholders in the society in which they operate, promoting cultures, and establishing communication bridges. It is necessary for companies to carry out activities on a global scale, to know the markets in which they will take place and to act in accordance with these markets. As well as production relations, ensuring that the produced product is purchased in the market also requires knowing the cultural dynamics at the local level. The success of public relations activities depends on the analysis of the business practices, values and norms of the societies in particular of the

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stakeholders. “Designing successful localized public relations and advertising strategies that will reflect the cultural values and norms of the target audience requires developing intercultural understanding” (Erdem, 2021: 422). In the following years, with the understanding that culture is a determining factor in public relations activities, the classification of public relations practices in societies with similar cultures and the pursuit of excellence in public relations came to the fore.

The effort to recognize cultures, which is among the precursors of effective public relations activities, has a contribution to the field of study that will reveal the cultural structure of Erzurum when it is carried out in Erzurum in our country.

Culture and Intercultural Communication

Analyzing all the patterns of the social structure in which the individual exists, beyond individual experiences, requires addressing the perspectives of many psychological, sociological, economic and anthropological fields of study in general. Patterns of social structure, partnership and togetherness are extensions of consciousness. Technical and technologically based human production processes arise and develop from a cultural business practice. In this context, it would be meaningless to consider production relations separately from culture. “As an extension of many definitions, culture, which establishes a framework for how the individual uses the values transferred from the past or the experiences (practices) he has left behind in his daily practices, and how they benefit from them in his effort to shape the future, is the 'work that dominates the relations of social production and reproduction'. way of doing it” (Öcal, 2022: 14).

The concept of culture is derived from the Latin word 'colera' and means 'cultivation' (Doğan, 2007). According to the definition of the Turkish Language Association (2023), culture; It is the whole of the material and moral values formed in the historical and social process and the tools to be used to transfer them to the next generations; it is expressed as “all of the material and spiritual values created in the historical and social development process and the tools used in creating and transmitting them to the next generations, showing the extent of human dominance over their natural and social environment, culture, culture”.

In addition to serving as the basic building block in many disciplines, different features of culture are used among different disciplines. This shows that culture is multifaceted and reveals different definitions of culture. According to Falade (2018), culture is “the elements that constitute the values, communication and perceptions of people speaking the same language and living in a historical period and geography”. According to another definition, culture is “the features that make up the lifestyles and identities of societies and separate societies from each other” (Mutlu, 2004). Barutçugil (2011) defines culture as “individual's knowledge, belief, customs and traditions, habits gained over time, lifestyles experienced, abilities and behaviors in the society of which he is a member”. According to another definition explaining the concept, culture is “the set of values that express the feelings, thoughts and judgments of societies” (Oktay, 1995). According to Griffin (2007), it is “the set of behaviors, attitudes and attitudes that separate societies from each other”. When examined in terms of communication sciences, culture is expressed as “historical transfer of symbols and meanings” (Kartarı, 2016).

Based on these definitions of culture, it can be stated that it has some characteristics. These characteristics are as follows: Culture is (a) learned, (b) passed on from generation to generation, (c) shared, (d) symbolic, (e) stereotyped, and (f) adaptive (Luthans, 1989). All these definitions show that culture is a phenomenon that emerges as a result of people's communication with their social environment. In other words, culture is not innate, but consists of thoughts and behaviors learned through the interaction of societies. In addition, culture shapes the behavior of individuals and becomes sustainable because it is transmitted from generation to generation.

Culture encompasses the basic characteristics of society. Individuals are shaped according to the society they live in and their thoughts and behaviors are formed according to the social culture. This means that the communication of societies differs according to their cultures. Culture, which expresses the common values that people share in society, has its own values. These values are formed according to the lifestyles of societies. The fact that each society's lifestyle is different brings about different cultures. Elements that make up these differences: (a) religion, (b) technology, (c) politics, (d) language, (e) values and behaviors, (f) social organization, (g) law (h) education (Gegez and Arslan, 2003).

The traditions and customs of the individuals living in a society, the customs and traditions, the ways of eating and drinking, the way of shopping, the gift giving, the hospitality relations, in other words, all the elements that make up the society constitute the culture. Culture is transmitted between societies and to the next generations through communication. With the effect of communication, culture changes and differentiates over time. People who maintain their existence and lives in a society have various beliefs, knowledge, values, customs and traditions. Because culture comes from the past and is transferred to the future.

Culture is a system of values and these values are the building blocks of culture. "Social culture includes behaviors that contain the characteristics of the society in which they live, that were formed a long time ago and that emerged depending on a historical accumulation" (Nişancı, 2012). These features vary from society to society and differ from each other. Kaplan and Manners (2011) identify four elements that determine social culture: (a) techno-economics, (b) social structure, (c) ideology, and (d) personality. Hall et al. (2007), according to the social culture model, (a) Regulation (legal and official inspections and illegal local inspections), (b) Production (the emergence of cultural products), (c) Representation (coding of meanings), (d) Identity (meanings formed through social relations) can be explained by (e) Consumption (transfer of cultural products).

When generalizations are made about approaches to social culture, it is seen that the characteristics of social culture and its environment become evident. In short, culture is formed and transmitted through social interactions. It can also undergo change. The factors that are effective here are values, norms, symbols, roles, perceptions, stereotypes, technological developments, geographical location and ideologies.

The concept of intercultural communication refers to the communication between individuals belonging to different cultures or subcultures (Mutlu, 2004). Intercultural communication refers to both communication between different societies and communication within the same society. In intercultural communication, since individuals come from different cultures, the more information they have about each other's cultures, the more accurate they can communicate, so communication becomes more effective (Bozkaya & Aydın, 2010). Cultural preferences bring about different behaviors. It is necessary to understand and comprehend cultural differences well. It is more important to understand that different cultures may have different characteristics than to call a phenomenon false. The lack of this understanding causes some problems in intercultural communication: (a) Putting people into a certain mold, (b) Prejudices about other people, (c) Negativities caused by differences such as race, religion, age, gender, (d) Far from tolerance (e) Being closed and suspicious of culture, (f) Showing disrespect towards other cultures, (g) Lack of cultural empathy and (h) Having traditional cultural values (Erdoğan, 2008).

Globalization: The Relationship between Culture and Public Relations

Public relations is basically the communication bridge between an organization and its target audience. Public relations activities are communication activities that meet the expectations of the organization's bond with the society, its door opening to the society. In this context, to explain the role of public relations on intercultural communication, Harlow's definition is: It is a management function that provides early warning service and uses ethical communication techniques to predict" (Harlow, 1976 as cited in Cutlip, 1994).

Public relations is an application area that provides mutual communication, strives to establish and maintain cooperation based on common understanding, helps in problem solving, informs the public, serves the public, is based on ethical communication and contains healthy data. When we consider these features of public relations, we explain the role it plays in intercultural communication. Public relations also has the function of establishing useful relations in intercultural communication. While public relations creates intercultural communication, it is based on two-way communication and its democratic structure is built on the humanist image that accepts all parties in its communication in terms of professional ethics.

The role of public relations in the intercultural communication process can be examined in three different dimensions. The first is that public relations creates a self-awareness approach in the face of cultural differences. In this way, the values of other cultures will be taken into account, communication will be provided and ethnocentrism will be avoided. In the second dimension, it is about the role of public relations in the communication process of intercultural public relations. This dimension focuses on the problem-solving role of intercultural public relations. In the third dimension, there is the humanist approach of public relations in intercultural communication. All three dimensions show that in the emergence of intercultural communication, public relations practitioners should first realize that they are in different cultures and prefer two-way communication in public relations practices (Varol, 2012). In intercultural communication, public relations play the following roles in order to emphasize cultural diversity and cultural richness by providing an environment of mutual understanding, tolerance and peace, and to give importance to cultural sensitivities: (a) Facilitating communication, (b) solving problems, (c) providing an environment for negotiation, (d) To eliminate conflicts and agreements in intercultural communication, (e) to erase the negative image of intercultural communication and to contribute to the creation of a positive image, (f) to increase intercultural recognition and (g) to create an environment of reconciliation based on universal values, (Varol, 2012).

The culture of a society is effective on the communication used in that society. For this reason, public relations is first and foremost a communication activity. Because of this situation, public relations have a direct effect on culture (Sriramesh and White, 2005: 636). In order for public relations activities to be effective and successful, it is necessary to know the culture in the society and pay attention to cultural elements. In this context, it is necessary to analyze the culture in which the event is held. Intercultural communication paves the way for the evaluation of cultures in terms of differences and similarities. "What connects the concepts of culture and communication with each other in intercultural communication studies is the qualification of 'intercultural'. Intercultural communication means communication between members of different cultures or different subcultures within a culture" (Özdemir, 2011: 29).

In addition to trying to understand the cultures of different nations in all aspects, the relationship between intercultural communication and public relations should be well understood. In addition to those who agree with this view, it is necessary to expand the traditional culture and, accordingly, the cultural framework, public relations theories to other cultures. Since each culture reveals its own internal dynamics, public relations activities also differ as cultures differ. This shows that culture is the most fundamental determining factor in public relations activities and approaches.

Globalization brings public relations into focus by providing new opportunities, on the other hand, it affects the field of public relations in many ways and puts it in mutual interaction. Public relations practitioners must increasingly be present in new markets. Today's economic conditions increase competition in different markets. Public relations have a high place in the achievement of the objectives of the institutions. Public relations practitioners should develop strategies formed by the common synthesis of global and local cultures, and ensure that people and societies integrate with global values without losing their local cultural characteristics. In this context, the acceptance of public relations as an important area of expertise in intercultural communication gains importance. In this context, the

creation, management and sustainability of public relations activities focused on intercultural communication at local, regional and global levels will make great contributions.

Local culture, which stands out within the framework of public relations practices, is expressed as the culture that gives identity to a nation, helps to determine the difference between it and other nations, that has occurred and accumulated throughout the history of that nation, and ensures the integrity of the nation. According to another definition, local culture is expressed as the common values of the nations living in a geographical region. In other words, local culture is the experiences, beliefs, acquired behaviors and attitudes shared by the citizens of the same nation (Kozak, 1997).

One of the important phenomena of recent years is globalization. The globalization process, which gained momentum with the development of mass media, has affected the economic, political, social and cultural dimensions at different rates today. Globalization emerges as a system that ignores national borders. Candaş (2007) expresses cultural globalization as the shrinking of the world and its formation as a whole. According to another dimension, cultural globalization is both the universalization of locality and the localization of universality. From this point of view, globalization is stated not as the opposite of locality, but as phenomena that act simultaneously and together (İçli, 2001).

George Ritzer deals with the situation of cultural globalization in three different ways: these are the "global difference" in which cultures persistently try to differ from one another, the "global overlap" in which local cultures can be overcome by stronger other cultures, and an external culture that manages to penetrate the local culture into a single one. It is "cultural hybridization" that creates a hybrid culture (Ritzer, 2011: 262-277). Globalization is also very effective on languages. Language is at the forefront of local cultural values, it provides communication between people and helps to transfer cultural heritages from generation to generation. The nation consists of people who speak the same language. Language unity also provides cultural unity. Language, which is the most important element that distinguishes one nation from another, creates an identity crisis by creating similarities at the international level as it experiences deterioration.

Globalization is a multifaceted process that affects the whole world and all areas of life. Globalization makes its impact felt in all areas of life, from economy to politics, from nationalism to religion. The area in which the impact of globalization is felt the most is undoubtedly culture. Local cultures have been greatly affected by globalization and have undergone a great transformation. While some local cultures have re-established themselves by being caught in the current of globalization, some have taken a negative attitude towards globalization and formed local counter-movements. Some other cultures, on the other hand, have chosen a third way, taking the right and positive aspects of globalization and making a synthesis between their own values and global values.

The impact of globalization on local cultures has been the subject of many scientific studies. While there are approaches that highlight the positive effects of globalization, there are also approaches that express its negative effects. A third approach, different from these two opposing approaches, refers to the synthesis of local and global elements. This third approach softens the sharp claims of the first two schools and points to a new and third situation. In some sources, these three schools are called "Hyperglobalization school", "Globalization skeptics" and "transformationists" (Held et al., 2009).

New global processes decode and deploy local production technology. The change in production patterns makes it necessary to standardize consumption patterns more and more. This shakes the lifestyle patterns envisaged by local cultures and brings along a cultural monopoly under the guise of globalization (Davutoğlu, 2002:211). With globalization, people begin to remember or discover their local values. In the face of the globalization wave, people try to look for something new to embrace and invent something called "cultural essence" (Aktay, 2005). The cultural essence is found by some in the ethnic structure, by some in religion, and by some in the village environment and tried to revive it. This is the remembrance of local cultures and identities that have emerged in parallel with globalization. Therefore, the relationship between globality and locality may result in the re-creation of cultural

authenticity. In this sense, the importance of localization is how globalization comes to an end, and the importance of globalization is how local cultures are transformed at the end. With the increase in the importance of public relations practices, intercultural communication studies have also increased. The basis of communication is language. This reveals the need for sufficient language and cultural knowledge in order to communicate effectively in societies. Even in countries that speak the same language, different meanings emerge under the influence of culture. For this reason, it is not sufficient to know the language of that country only for the practice of public relations, but also the integration of the information with the local culture is required. Among the studies carried out to understand the forms of communication in different cultures, Hofstede's model consisting of five main items stands out (cited in Anholt, 2003:75 and Çelik, 2005): (1) Range of Authority (Power Distance): The distribution of power in each society, the behavior of those who hold power and the attitudes towards power are different. (2) Uncertainty Avoidance: In every culture, how people feel in uncertain and unconventional situations and their ways of coping with it are different. (3) Individualism/Pluralism: The extent to which people's commitments and interests extend to larger groups or how limits are varies. (4) Masculinity/femininity: It refers to the ratio between masculine values of success and the power to overcome something, and feminine values such as sacrifice and quality of life. (5) Long-term Orientation or Confucian Dynamism: While there are long-term management and perseverance values, in the short-term there is respect for traditions and fulfilling social responsibilities.

The Example of Erzurum Culture in the Focus of Local Culture

Anatolia is a land that has hosted many cultures that have historically been under the influence of various cultures. All provinces in the country are also parts of the culture. Erzurum is one of the provinces where the local culture is richly experienced. It has been kneaded and shaped in history and has reached the characteristics of local culture. Tezcan (1987) listed the characteristics of the local culture of Erzurum as follows: (a) Enjoying beauty, (b) heroism, bravery and bravery, (c) javelin game, (d) artistic spirit, (e) commerce, (f) love of nature, (f) tea culture, (g) religiosity, (h) education, (i) sincerity, (i) bride-mother-in-law conflict, and (j) consanguineous marriages. There are many customs and beliefs as well as beliefs belonging to transitional periods such as birth, child, youth, marriage and death. Some of these are ritual beliefs based on religion and some are profane beliefs that are material (Sezen, 2007).

- (a) *Alkarısı*: It is believed that alkarı, who is considered as a jinn, fairy and devil, has the identity of a witch woman who combines human and animal qualities (Acıpayamli, 1961).
- (b) *Noding Cloth Çapıt*: It is known that the custom of tying yarn, cloth and captite has been around since ancient times. In Erzurum culture, yarn, cloth and fabric binding is seen not only on tombs but also on some trees, especially the rosehip tree (Sezen, 2007).
- (c) *Frankincense (Buhur)*: Frankincense, which means incense, consists of flammable and fragrant materials such as oud, amber, and is burned to clean the deteriorated air of crowded environments such as mawlids and condolences (Sezen, 2007).
- (d) *Magic (Büyü)*: It refers to the actions taken to obtain some extraordinary results and to change the ordinary order of events (Bayı, 1947). It is generally believed that he causes resentment between people and mediates.
- (e) *Witch (Cadı)*: The word meaning is magician, witch is used in Erzurum as jazz or vixen (Develioğlu, 1970). It is generally believed that he causes resentment between people and mediates.
- (f) *Sleeping in İstihare (İstihareye Yatma)*: Istikhara is going to sleep after making ablution and praying in order to understand whether something is good (Sezen, 2007). Interpretations are made according to the colors seen in the dream.
- (g) *Burning Oil Lamps (Kandil) and Candles*: It is done in order to grant wishes or to prevent the dead from being afraid in the grave after burial (Sezen, 2007).
- (h) *Amulet and Longing (Muska and Boylama)*: It is a triangular piece of paper with a prayer written on the person in order to be protected from diseases and evil eye.

- (i) *Collecting Arafalık (Arafalık Toplamak)*: Children collect some chocolate and candies from their neighbors the day before bayram.
- (j) *Bath Set (Hamam Takımı)*: Groom's family buy some materials like towel, clog, perfume to their bride and give it before the wedding.

Kayserili (2011) gathered the local culture of Erzurum under some headings:

- (k) *Erzurum's Traditional Residential Culture*: Erzurum and its surroundings have hosted many civilizations throughout history, and this has had an impact on residential architecture. Erzurum houses, which are of great importance in terms of culture and art history, are parallel to traditional Turkish house architecture in terms of basic principles and general lines, as well as have unique local cultural characteristics due to their geographical location.
- (l) *Clothing Culture of Erzurum*: There are professions called abacı, which deal with sewing and preparation of clothes, in Erzurum city. In addition, there are clothes called ehram, which are preferred by women. In the local culture of Erzurum, there is a fur called kevel, which is worn in winter.
- (m) *Erzurum's Food Culture*: Due to the continental climate of Erzurum, cereals and meat products have an important place. Nutrition culture for protection from cold is in the front. In addition, thanks to the developing transportation opportunities, the local food culture has developed considerably, with the products that are not in the local cuisine culture easily brought.

In addition to these, Sezen (2013) stated the following titles:

- (a) *Erzurum Folk Songs*: Erzurum folk songs, which have become famous from the past to the present and have been transferred from one language to another, contain intense emotions and meanings. These folk songs, which have a unique melody, maintain their popularity today.
- (b) *Erzurum Folk Dances*: Folk dances, which have an important place in Erzurum local culture, reflect the Turkish beauty taste, heroic legends, manifestations of human psychology to the customs and traditions of the region in the most beautiful and impressive way.
- (c) *Erzurum Handicrafts*: Handicrafts, which constitute a large part of folklore and have an important place in material culture, take different forms. Handicrafts, which are the product of a deep-rooted transition and have a very rich repertoire, are valuable documents of material culture.

Discussion and Conclusion

Every individual has patterns of thought and behavior originating from the society he grew up in. But it is not right to try to put everyone in these patterns. At this point, public relations is in charge of communicating with target audiences who do not share the same culture. While doing this, they should understand the emotions and needs of the target audiences from different cultures and make this situation felt. Because public relations is aware of cultural differences and provides communication by building bridges between these differences.

The concept of culture and communication are intertwined phenomena. As Dhanesh and Sriramesh (2017) stated, the concept of culture is so important in public relations, and it is difficult to examine the concept of culture empirically. There is a strong communication between public relations and culture. Beliefs, values, customs, traditions and customs are an important factor in the success of public relations activities.

Erzurum has been an important gateway and trade center between Asia and Europe for centuries. The region, which remained under the influence of the cultures of the tribes coming from Iran and the Caucasus and the cultures of other tribes in Europe, has a rich cultural treasure whose roots go back to the depths of history. The city of Erzurum has been influenced by many cultures due to its geographical location, but over time it has created and preserved its own local culture.

Erzurum has a homogeneous social structure in many aspects. The historical development and the transferred cultural heritage have allowed the local people to mingle with each other homogeneously and the local culture to be enriched. This homogeneous structure is also reflected in many aspects of local culture. For this reason, there has not been much change in the local culture. In short, Erzurum has been one of the rare provinces that has preserved its local culture and has not undergone much change. Although industrialization and developments led to some changes, it continued to exist as an indicator of Erzurum's local culture.

Public relations practices are implemented in relation to the cultural structures of the stakeholders. In this context, companies tend to act within the framework of cultural interaction, intercultural differences and intercultural communication, especially if they have global-scale activities. The understanding of glocalization makes it a necessity for global-scale companies to operate in the markets they enter, taking into account the structure of that market in order to establish and gain sympathy and interest. Sometimes a country is considered as a local culture, while sometimes a province or region in a country represents what is local. In this context, it is important for all companies to develop strategies based on local culture, regardless of whether they are national or international. In the case of Erzurum, an application will achieve success when it aims to develop product/service marketing and sales policies, taking into account the local culture of Erzurum.

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