

Instrumental Use of Corporate Social Responsibility and Capitalist Activism

Kurumsal Sosyal Sorumluluğun Araçsal Kullanımı ve Kapitalist Aktivizm

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ABSTRACT

This study highlights how the concept of social responsibility has been transformed into corporate social responsibility (CSR), which has been detached from social responsibility both etymologically and epistemologically. The study also investigates how and in what ways organizations implement CSR, in which the concept of social responsibility has been transformed as an invention of instrumental reason, for their own purposes to ensure their sustainability within the capitalist system. The study has uncovered and identified these objectives and examines them under two headings in correlation with CSR: CSR for brand image and CSR for symbiosis. The study also brings a critical perspective to the concept of CSR within the framework of capitalist activism as a concept proposed for the first time here and constituting the study's grounded theory, arguing society as also being instrumentalized for corporate purposes. In this direction, the study has a two-fold methodology: descriptive and grounded theory. This study uses the instrumental theory of CSR to conduct itself from the perspective of historical materialism. In this context, the study is expected to contribute to the critical political economy approach and the disciplines of public relations and business administration regarding CSR.

Keywords: analogy between social responsibility and helping, capitalist activism, CSR, CSR for symbiosis, instrumental use of CSR activities

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, sosyal sorumluluk kavramının hem etimolojisinden hem de epistemolojisinden kopararak nasıl kurumsal sosyal sorumluluğa(KSS) dönüştürüldüğüne dikkat çekmekte ve sosyal sorumluluk kavramının araçsal aklın bir icadı olarak dönüştürüldüğü kurumsal sosyal sorumluluk kavramının, kuruluşlar tarafından kapitalist sistem içerisinde sürdürülebilirliklerini sağlamak için kendi amaçları doğrultusunda nasıl ve ne şekilde uygulandığını araştırmaktadır. Bu çalışmada ortaya çıkarılan ve tanımlanan amaçlar iki başlık altında incelenmiştir; "marka imajı amaçlı KSS" ve "bu çalışma doğrultusunda KSS ile ilişkilendirilen simbiyoz amaçlı KSS". Ayrıca bu çalışmada ilk kez ortaya atılan ve çalışmanın temellendirilmiş teorisini oluşturan "kapitalist aktivizm" kavramı çerçevesinde kurumsal sosyal sorumluluk kavramına eleştirel bir bakış açısı getirilmekte olup toplumun da kurumsal amaçlar doğrultusunda araçsallaştırıldığını savunmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, çalışmanın metodolojisi iki yönlüdür; betimsel metodoloji ve temellendirilmiş teoridir. Bu çalışmada, tarihsel materyalizm KSS'nin araçsal teorisi ile birlikte yürütülmüştür. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın, kurumsal sosyal sorumluluk kavramına ilişkin eleştirel ekonomi politik perspektifine, halkla ilişkiler ve işletme disiplinlerine katkı sağlaması beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kapitalist aktivizm, KSS, simbiyoz amaçlı KSS, sosyal sorumluluk ve yardımlaşma arasındaki analogi, KSS faaliyetlerinin araçsal kullanımı

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1. Introduction

Institutions and businesses have conceptually hollowed out and institutionalized social responsibility within the scope of practices that serve their own purposes and have been legitimized on a global scale in line with the phenomenon of economic growth and profit, which lie at the basis of capitalist production. As a result, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which has been legitimized in place of social responsibility, has gained a position as a set of communication activities businesses implement for their self-interests in line with the capitalist economic system. For this reason, the problematic of this study involves defining what the concept of social responsibility means before the system institutionalized and monopolized it, as well as how and for what purposes it has been transformed into the concept of CSR. The study additionally aims to reveal the purposes for which CSR projects have been instrumentalized to benefit corporations while at the same time revealing how society has been made to participate in corporations through these projects. Furthermore, the study aims to show how the concept of social responsibility has conceptually been legitimized in the historical process in line with the capitalist economic system by detaching it from its etymological, epistemological, and theological contexts and to reveal the purposes for which CSR has been institutionalized, namely to serve corporations' self-interests.

This study's analysis occurs in line with the critical political economy approach and in light of interdisciplinary theories and concepts. The concept of CSR is the subject of the research and covers a number of interactive processes in which the material production powers of society are integrated with society in general in order to ensure sustainable development, as shown by the two-way communication studies that are frequently implemented by today's businesses and institutions. Therefore, these practices facilitate businesses and organizations' ability to enter into such areas as health, education, environment, and culture in line with their economic goals. This study examines social responsibility within the scope of historical materialism theory, examining how social responsibility, a concept contrary in essence to the structure of businesses and institutions, has been institutionalized to shape and transform it into the concept of CSR.

The study's interdisciplinary nature stems from how CSR is addressed by both public relations as well as businesses. Although CSR has gained functionality as an application of public relations studies in practice, its theoretical framework has gained more space in the literature in line with the studies on the business discipline and its fields for the economic-based reasons of production forces. As a result, the study's theoretical framework has been handled by various disciplines that may be related to business and business fields. In this respect, Milton Friedman's (1962, p.133) neo-classical perspective, which is one of the first approaches to the concept of CSR in economic theories and asserts that corporations have only the one social responsibility of producing profit, and CSR's instrumental theory have served as the guiding principle for the study's interdisciplinary analysis. In addition to these, the theory of evolution has guided this study in order to reveal the epistemology of the concept of social responsibility.

Noteworthy, the concept that intersects both disciplines in the context of CSR is sustainability. While the discipline of public relations realizes the concept of sustainability within the scope of communication studies, business and the aforementioned disciplines deal with the concept of sustainability in the context of sustainable development. Therefore, business disciplines and their areas are seen to work in partnership with the discipline of public relations. In this context, the study examines the concepts of brand image in relation to the concept of sustainability in public relations and business disciplines, as well as the concept of symbiosis as used in biology terminology. The study associates this symbiosis with CSR activities for the first time, analyzing it in line with industrial symbiosis.¹

The study problem and its analysis are presented in relation to the critique of instrumental reason (Horkheimer, 2013, p. 57). In this regard, the study examines the framework of the concept of capitalist activism, which is put forward for the first time here as the study's grounded theory method in order to reveal how and for what purposes the concept of CSR as an invention of instrumental reason is being applied within the capitalist system, as well as how society is also being instrumentalized by making it participate in these purposes.

2. The Analogy between Social Responsibility and Helping One Another

The concept of social responsibility is frequently used today as a synonym for such concepts as charity and philanthropy. However, when considering these concepts etymologically, epistemologically, and even theologically, they are seen to differ from one another. Firstly, charity as a virtue means both theologically and etymologically the “highest love of human in Christianity”. According to this definition, charity is connected to Christianity, and therefore is inadequate for explaining the concept of social responsibility properly because of this religious limitation. On the other hand, philanthropy has also been found to be an insufficient term for defining social responsibility due to its etymological and epistemological structure. In Greek, *philos* means love, and *anthropos* means human. In short, philanthropy etymologically refers to “love of humanity”. In sectoral descriptions, the concept of philanthropy is also used as a synonym for social responsibility. However, the two concepts are seen to not be synonymous: the concept of social responsibility encompasses not only the love of humanity but also all living beings including plants and animals. When looking at the etymological structure of social responsibility, *socius* is seen to derive from *socius responder* in Latin, which means companion or partner, with *responder* here meaning respondent (Etymonline, 2018). In this respect, the etymology of social responsibility refers to one responding to another. For this reason, this study has associated the etymology of social responsibility with helping one another for defining social responsibility, because helping one another appears more appropriate compared to either philanthropy, whose root meaning is love of humanity, or charity, whose etymology is the highest manifestation of Christian love.

1 This study has been abstracted from the dissertation “The Analyses of CSR projects Through Critical Discourse Study.” See Öztürk (2023).

As an expression, helping one another (as different from philanthropy and charity) is neither limited by human senses nor by activities. For this reason, helping one another is not unique to human beings but is a characteristic common to all living things. Plants, animals, and all other living things help one another, because all living things survive on two fundamental needs: nutrition and reproduction. While the first need drives them to fight each other, the need to reproduce brings them closer together. In this context, solidarity between living beings is much more important than struggling with one another. For example, when two ants of different or hostile species meet, they may attack each other. However, when two ants from the same colony or species meet randomly, they don't reject coming in contact. Moreover, if one is hungry, the other will feed the hungry ant with its own saliva (Kropotkin, 2018, p. 25). This example does not show the sensitivity or love between two creatures of the same species but rather indicates the importance of cooperation for the continuation of the species.

When looking at mammals as an example, elephants are also seen living together. They feed, move, and fight together and have families and herds. For this reason, living together is no exception for them because it is a law of nature. Each creature also has roles in its own herd for sustaining the species. These roles or tasks are a part of living together, so cooperation is needed to live together (Kropotkin, 2018, p. 30). In this regard, although competition exists between different species, helping one another is understood to be a kind of rule for the same species to live together. This rule is genetically coded as a motive for all living things. Therefore, helping each other is an instinct humans also possess.

For example, when looking at the first traces of humans in history, they are seen to have lived together. All the data shows early humans to have discovered the advantages of hunting, sharing, and eating together, in short, living together to survive. Early humans are understood to have sought cooperation to survive and the cooperative lifestyle to have taught them to help one another (Şenel, 1982, p. 42). According to Lumholtz (as cited in Kropotkin, 2018, pp. 92–93), primitive people have a strong sense of friendship, provide for the weak and poor in their tribes, and take care of the sick and elderly in their tribes. While some are cannibals, they still take care of the old and sick, neither abandoning nor eating them. Among barbarians, helping each other was not a choice but an obligation. Barbarian tribes show no difference in behavior between the poor and the rich. The rich give the jointly cultivated fields to the poor. If a poor person needs help, the rich come and plow the poor person's field. One important difference between primitives and barbarians is that barbarians help not only people from the same village but also strangers. They do not eat strangers as primitives do. For example, while people were seen dying of starvation in Algeria between 1867-1868, the barbarians in Berber territory accepted all the victims struggling with starvation without exception, saving more than 12,000 people from starvation by feeding them (Hanoteau & Letourneux, 1872, p. 58). As clearly seen, each species including humankind responds by helping one another. As a result, all these examples, from insects to mammals show that social responsibility in terms of its etymology is analogous with helping one another. Therefore, this indicates social responsibility is also epistemologically being misused today as a concept.

3. The Transformation of Social Responsibility into CSR

The concept of social responsibility began changing over time alongside the changes in social and economic order in ancient times. Cooperation between nobles and the people also underwent a transformation in the form of *noblesse obligé* [nobility obligates] in order to unidirectionally “ensure the sustainability of the nobility” Crouch, 2008, pp. 26–49. During this era, the common good that was known in Ancient Greek through Plato and meant the welfare of society is seen to have been changed into *noblesse oblige*, a French term of aristocracy that refers to nobles having to take on certain responsibilities in order to maintain and promote their privileged position in society (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 15). In the Middle Ages, guilds were also established to keep merchants and artisans united and to ensure their professional continuity and sustainability. This transformed the sustainability of daily life that had been provided by cooperation into a sustainability of commercial life realizable through economic competition. In this context, social responsibility had moved away from helping without self-interest and started to transform into a concept that was made between commercial groups for their self-interests.

Since the beginning of industrialization, government policies and deadly wars have changed societies and lives. Fertile lands have been plundered, art and knowledge have declined, and the monopolistic structures of European governments over all activities and mechanisms have encouraged individual lives. These individual lives have damaged collective life and distanced people from the consciousness of helping without self-interest. While the single most important thing expected of human beings in primitive times was to help one another, individual living has limited human beings to being a good citizen who obeys the rules and pays taxes regularly. For this reason, people have lost such basic human responsibilities as sharing, helping, and protecting one another due to the increase in citizenship responsibilities, individual lifestyles, and material obligations of big cities. While liberalism has encouraged the construction of new institutions and companies, these institutions and companies that were created in the capitalist system have broken the common spirit and solidarity of society and increased the class divide. Collective living, in which the conscious of helping without self-interest had provided the security, livelihood, and needs of the community in previous periods, has come to an end and passed to individual living, in which the right to live (e.g., residence permit, security, health, education) is granted in return for citizenship duties and the distinction among classes has deepened. Accordingly, human beings have been drawn away from helping without self-interest and from the responsibilities that all living beings owe to each other for their collective solidarity and survival.

The individualistic lives of liberalism have focused on the power of capital, so new trade strategies have required new and faster transportation routes. The search for new trade routes resulted in the establishment of railroads in America in the 1820s. This new formation then paved the way for the establishment of companies (Chandler, 1977, p.120). When looking at the background for this, the birth of corporations is seen to have emerged through

the reshaping of ideologies. Economic and sociopolitical issues such as the collapse of feudalism and the weakening of the power of the church influenced the process of reshaping ideologies. The transition from feudalism to capitalism and the new social, economic, and political structures of nation states supported private property. Thus, all these processes have influenced the constitutional states that protect the corporatization of capital and have given capitalists the opportunity to open their own companies. In this context, the era of corporate capitalism, in which “a capitalist market economy dominated by hierarchical and bureaucratic corporations that control the factors of production and the amount of profit they generate” has begun (Misachi, 2017).

The increase in competition in the free-market system has increased CSR projects both quantitatively and qualitatively in line with one another. When looking at the research in the academic literature regarding CSR, although no clear starting date is found for social responsibility, CSR is seen to have originated from the increasing industrial production of companies at the end of the 1800s. This increase alongside new means of transportation such as railroads led to an increase in competition by supporting the free market economy. This situation also supported the establishment of private corporations by encouraging privatization of the market economy, where the prices of goods and services are determined within a free pricing system. For instance, industry-leading family businesses such as John D. Rockefeller, Cornelius Vanderbilt and Andrew Carnegie were founded during this period. In the USA, some of these corporations have resulted in bad reputations and distrust and been accused of unfair competition. Therefore, corporations have developed new ways to avoid blame and to subsist. For example, Rockefeller founded Standard Oil, the world’s largest oil company, in 1839. The company reached its peak in 1868, and after the 1870s, Rockefeller had monopolized all oil refining companies in the states. Standard Oil’s unfair monopolistic growth attracted the attention of authorities, and the U.S. government passed laws against unfair monopolies. During this time, Standard Oil decided to take on a new formation to eliminate the negative perception and reputation. In order to regain the positive perception and reputation it had lost, the corporation created separate managements for each factory in each state of America to counter the monopolization phenomenon. However, Standard Oil’s efforts yielded no results because the public had lost confidence in the company (Standard Oil Co. v. U.S., 1910). This event demonstrates the importance of the public and showed companies that no company can survive without the public. Therefore, this event also set a good example for companies, showing them that they need to create new strategies to make a good impression on the public.

Moreover, not only for-profit commercial organizations and corporations but also non-profit corporations, especially governments, have benefited from new marketing and communication strategies in order to gain public trust in accordance with economic liberalism. For example, the Great Depression of the 1930s caused discord between American businessmen and the public. The business environment had lost public confidence. For this reason, new reforms were introduced under Franklin D. Roosevelt. Although the new

reforms had been introduced due to World War II, this critical process continued until the Truman era. The U.S. government launched a social program involving companies in order to reduce tensions between the business community and the public. Thus, the state legally demonstrated its support for commercial corporations. The concepts of social justice and social responsibility had come to the fore due to the increase in poverty after the Great Depression and World War II, because millions of people had become unemployed during this period, and the impoverished public had lost confidence in the government, institutions, and companies. As a result of these problems, CSR projects within the scope of public relations practices started (Kazancı, 1980, p. 5). Corporations realized they need the public to sustain their existence and sought new practices to restore public trust. Thus, the industrial giants understood the power of duty toward society at this time (especially at the beginning of the 20th century). This time is when CSR began being formed with the new mentality known as “Benevolent Feudalism” (Morrell, 1957, p. 376).

During the 1920s, service had become a kind of business motto, not only as a legitimate objective but also an essential means for profiting from mass production (Morrell, 1957, pp. 380–382). In this context, CSR in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s was handled with specific issues focused on labor, pensions, security, and disease. In addition, women’s rights and environmental movements of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the 1960s were effective in the formation of CSR projects (Carroll & Shabana, 2010, p. 87). In other words, the works of civil society organizations had become a model for the business environment.

Morrell (1957, p. 380) emphasized how, despite businessmen in this period claiming the old system to be a thing of the past and themselves to have adopted an understanding based on service and trust rather than profit, the theorists of the period clarified the issue with CSR having been introduced for the first time in Howard Bowen’s (1953) book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*. According to Bowen (p. 6), “social responsibility cannot be seen as a panacea for all the social problems which businesses face, but nevertheless businesses should be guided by such responsibility and determine whether they really have social responsibilities and whether they will fulfill them or not.” Wood (1991, p. 698), defined CSR as an equilibrant element between making profit and the expense of making profit. According to Drucker (1984, p. 26), who was one of the first theorists to explicitly address CSR in his 1954 book *The Practice of Management*, “The social responsibility of business transforms a social problem into an economic opportunity and economic benefit, productive capacity, human competence, well-paid jobs, and wealth.” Friedman (1962, p. 133) accentuated how corporations have the sole responsibility of increasing their profits, and according to Friedman’s explanation, CSR is one possibility for increasing their profits.

As Carroll (2015, pp. 88–89) explained, globalization and the expanse of capitalism in the 1990s increased companies’ activities, and the search for new markets resulted in global competition. Global visibility, international reputation, and shareholder networks have become important concepts for multinational companies, with many multinational companies

having recognized that being socially responsible is a competitive advantage that balances the challenges and opportunities of globalization. In addition, these global changes have also had an impact on the institutionalization of CSR, and as a result, the Business for Social Responsibility (BSR),² an organization that provides business networking and consultancy to corporations, was established in 1992. Thus, the global framework and ethical rules of CSR projects were formed.

For private corporations, CSR has become a global phenomenon with the landmark speech of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the 1999 “World Economic Forum”, where he said, “I propose that you, the business leaders gathered in Davos, and we, the United Nations, initiate a global compact of shared values and principles, which will give a human face to the global market” (UN, 1999). As Annan explained one year later at the “2000 World Economic Forum”, the concept of social responsibility had been institutionalized “as CSR” and legitimized on a global scale, transforming social responsibility into a different concept by creating a human face for global companies to show society. For this reason, CSR projects have become an advantage where organizations mask the social and environmental destruction they cause while simultaneously highlighting their human characteristics.

4. The Relationship between CSR and Sustainability

Sustainability basically refers to the capacity to continue processes and activities for an indefinite period of time and is associated with three subdimensions: economic, social, and environmental. Due to sustainability being addressed differently within these three dimensions, many definitions also occur within the various theoretical approaches of various disciplines (Kristić, 2018, p. 197), resulting in uncertainties on how to define the concept. For instance, economists state sustainability as the necessity to maintain a certain level of living standards in an economic context, sociologists state it as the need to preserve sociological ties and relationships within communities, and ecologists state it within the context of biodiversity and ecological resilience (Cole, 2006, p. 242). Because of this ambiguity in definition, this study examines sustainability in line with the economic perspective in order to associate it with CSR.

Economic and institutional sustainability is a management theory that influences the development process as an alternative to profit optimization and the conventional growth model (Wilson, 2003, p. 16). In this context, sustainability refers to a kind of management practice in which long-term approaches are adopted over short-term gains. In the 1920s after World War I, companies moved to profit-oriented organizational structuring, with giant enterprises such as General Motors and Ford, the increase in industrial pollution caused by these competitive enterprises, their employees’ long work hours, and the overwhelming power of competition between these giant enterprises having left their mark on history (Tedlow, 1988, p. 53; History.com Editors, 2009). Lawsuits filed against businesses due to all these

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unfavorable conditions damaged their reputations. These situations started to reduce the profits of these enterprises. For this reason, a number of social reforms such as improved work hours and work environment, as well as ensuring gender equality in the workplace, were introduced to balance these unfavorable conditions against the profitability of business. In addition to their economic concerns, businesses have accordingly also added social concerns to their list of business items that provide profitability. Emphasizing here that the enterprises themselves create all the negative conditions that disrupt the social balance is important. Businesses disrupt employees' social life and cause health problems by increasing work hours in order to make more profit, and business waste destroys nature and those in nature. In addition, irresponsible communication practices such as promoting and advertising for these enterprises cause many problems by disrupting the mental and spiritual development of not only adults but also new generations. In this regard, businesses can be understood to be afraid that the negativity they create can destroy them, because businesses need raw materials and consumers in order to continue their productions and earnings. For this reason, businesses pursue sustainability policies under the guise of social and environmental reforms to avoid self-destruction due to the environmental and social damage they cause.

Sustainable development was presented as a term for the first time in the "Brundtland Report" by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987, p. 45) chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland and used to mean meeting the needs of present and future generations without endangering themselves. This definition is generally accepted worldwide. Sustainable development refers to the need to balance economic growth with the need for environmental protection and social equity and is a broad concept associated with such things as business, politics, environmental science and management, and law. The concept is defined as "a process of change in which resources, consumption, the direction of investment, technological development, and institutional change take place in harmony... increasing the potential for meeting human needs and aspirations now and in the future" (p. 9).

The idea of sustainable development and the search for solutions had started being produced in the 20th century due to the problems that arose as a result of the economic system implemented by Western countries, especially regarding environmental problems. Due to capitalist economies, environmental values such as nature, climate, water, and wildlife, etc. are being destroyed due to production and consumption. The main resource that determines how much production will occur is the environment, so businesses have sought sustainability in order to maintain the resource they profit from and to ensure more production from the resource. Sustainable development is defined as economic growth in which the negative environmental and social effects of development are alleviated (Roper, 2012, p. 72). Hamilton (2006, p. 307) evaluated sustainability within the scope of the economic dimension and based his definition on Hicks' (1946, p. 172) definition of income. Accordingly, the highest sustainable element is consumption. In order to sustain consumption, the capital stock that provides the flow of the goods and services subjected to consumption and the producer potential must be preserved. In this context, economic sustainability studies the effect of

limited resources on economic growth and the types of capital that benefit this effect. Nordhaus and Tobin (1972, p. 15) expressed sustainable development as the substitution of capital and labor for natural resources, and emphasized it as being vital for future growth. At the same time, “sustainable development” does not mean the change in purely economic or purely social policies; it is a process based on economic interests and affects the social structure and policies. According to Kılıç (2012, p. 207), sustainability “stems from a necessary change and transformation on the understanding that the hegemonic policies established by economic policies on the environment are unsustainable.” For this reason, the basic elements of and studies on how to ensure sustainability are based on the creation of the continuity of natural resources in a non-renewable environment.

As is well known, the production of capitalist economies is indexed to consumption. In this system, where environmental values are considered free goods, balancing production and consumption has created environmental and social problems. Because the system now focuses on mass consumption, production is becoming more and more destructive. This situation is summarized by the fact that the dominant ideological structures and related institutions in society constantly support consumption. In this case, the definition of sustainable development needs to be updated as the continuation of the economic prosperity of developed countries at the same time as the exploitation of underground and above-ground resources of developing countries and the ideological exploitation of developed countries over developing countries. Companies have added CSR practices to their corporate vision and missions in order to gain greater efficiency from the world that is the source of production, as well as to repair their reputation, which is very important for companies in a wildly competitive environment whose reputations have been shaken due to the damage they’ve caused while producing. In the eyes of global business organizations, CSR projects have been legitimized on a global scale by being included in every business’ items of order.

Some well-known organizations and their global agreements for sustainability (e.g., the Global Compact of United Nations Organization, the International Labour Organization, The Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises) have been transformed into a logic of serving the interests of imperialist countries rather than meeting needs. If this had not been so, world hunger could have been completely eradicated with the world’s annual gross national product. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are still in effect after the Millennium Development Goals implemented by the United Nations over 15 years to emphasize this situation. This is why the SDGs have not yet been able to completely end humanitarian and environmental problems as described to society and proves that the principles and targets are designed for giant global businesses. In this respect, these goals and principles are understood to have been prepared for these businesses so they can plan how cover up their violations and destruction against society and the environment and what kind of perception they should create by covering it up in order to ensure their sustainability.

In this respect, sustainable development has played an active role in the development of CSR and its economic and social impacts. Sustainable development has determined

which areas (e.g., environmental, social) should be concentrated on in line with a common goal, not only for companies but also for governments and NGOs. In line with this, businesses and organizations have started to constitute their own corporate pragmatic and deontological elements by taking over such areas as the environment and society in which sustainable development organizations work and envisaging them as a resource while creating their CSR projects.

While all these global business organizations and associations are understood to have defined the concept of CSR in order to “give a human face to the global market” (UN, 1999), they have prepared principles to protect their own interests and legitimized these globally by creating awareness of corporate sustainability as a mandatory business practice. Thus, CSR has become a kind of tool to mask the social and environmental destruction that corporations want to conceal while at the same time highlighting corporations’ human characteristics, provided that maximum benefit is obtained for minimum responsibility.

5. Businesses’ Instrumentalization of CSR Practices

The use of CSR activities to benefit corporations expresses the instrumental use of reason. The concept of reason has both subjective and objective aspects (Horkheimer, 2013, p. 57). The objective reasons are purposive and meaning-oriented, while subjective reasons are instrumental and pragmatic. Because reason is reduced to a tool in industrialized societies, it becomes powerless and subject to ideological manipulation. In societies dominated by this type of subjective reason, individualism and self-interest prevail. In this context, the instrumentalization of CSR projects by the ruling class in line with its own interests is an indicator of the dominance of subjective reason.

In the capitalist system, reason is instrumentalized to ensure that the goal is achieved in the most profitable and shortest way. According to Weber (as cited in Bauman, 2005, p. 181), instrumental reason is the main factor regulating human behavior in modern industrial society. Instrumental reason expresses the totalitarian form of domination and is based on how to exploit the world. In this context, companies also use the things they produce as tools along with the reason they instrumentalize them in order to maintain their domination over consumer society. In line with this, CSR projects as a strategic communication practice that ensures company sustainability are also used as tools in various fields in order for the ruling class to achieve its goals. CSR projects are understood to be used by public relations specialists serving organizations as a tool to realize the objectives briefly described above. The following section addresses how businesses instrumentalize CSR projects for the purposes of brand image and symbiosis, sub-sections created and determined in this study in light of the instrumental theory of CSR.

5.1. CSR for Brand Image

CSR is used as a tool for corporations’ brand image due to global economic associations and organizations accepting CSR activities as a mandatory strategic communication activity.

The concept of brand needs to be examined before looking at CSR as a tool for the brand image. Many definitions are found in the literature regarding the concept of brand.

According to the basic and short definition of the American Marketing Association (as cited in Wood, 2000, p. 110), “a brand is a name, sign, symbol, or shape or combination of these that identifies a seller’s goods and services and aims to distinguish them from their competitors.” In Article 4 of the Industrial Property Law No. 6769” published in Issue 29944 of the Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye on January 10, 2017, the content of the trademark (i.e., brand) is determined as follows:

A trademark may consist of any signs, including words, figures, colors, shades, letters, numbers, or sounds and the form of the goods or their packaging, including personal names, provided that they enable the goods or services of one undertaking to be distinguished from the goods or services of other undertakings and are capable of being displayed in the register in such a manner as to enable the subject matter of the protection afforded to the proprietor of the trademark to be clearly and unambiguously understood.

Aaker (1991, p. 1) explained brand with a quote from the American Author Stephen King: “A product is something made in a factory; a brand is something bought by a consumer. The product may be copied by a competitor; a brand is unique. A product may become obsolete immediately; a successful brand is timeless.” What is clear from this quote is that a brand also has a strong influence on the product and service. The brand phenomenon is important in consumers’ choice of brands and products.

As understood, a brand is far beyond being a name or a symbol; it includes all kinds of elements perceived and felt by the consumer on behalf of the product or service (Pirtini et al., 2006, p. 126). According to Franzen (2002, pp. 103–105), the values positioned in all kinds of consumers, from the symbolic elements of the brand to the manufacturer’s business apart from price and quality, affect the brand perception. Brand equity is the sum of the perception of the brand, including its product and service quality, its financial performance, customer loyalty and satisfaction, sympathy, and respect for the brand (Knapp, 2003, p. 3). Aaker (2009, p. 34) defined the brand equity, which a business creates with a name and symbolic elements offered to customers for a product or service, as a set of assets that increase or decrease the value. Aaker (2010, p.21) also examined brand equity under four headings: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Brand awareness refers to a potential consumer’s understanding or recollection that a brand is a member of a certain product category (Aaker, 1991, p. 83). Businesses use differentiating methods to make their brands more easily remembered, such as brand symbols, slogans, advertising music, sponsorships, and CSR studies. A potential consumer’s awareness is aroused as a result of their sympathy, love, and respect for any of these elements of a business’ brand. For example, a brand’s product that a potential consumer has never tried before can only be

recognized by their sympathy for the brand, the brand's advertising music, or the appreciation gained through its CSR activities. Aaker's (p. 109) second heading of brand associations involves any element related to the brand that occurs in the mind of the consumer. In other words, it is the set of mental facts belonging to the brand. The third heading of perceived quality is the customer's perception that the quality of a product or service is better than other competing brands (Aaker, 2009, p. 106). In other words, it is the customer's good perception of the brand's products and services. According to Knapp (2003, p. 228), quality should be reinforced with the product and service offered in order to create the perception of quality, customer satisfaction should also be ensured, and various communication methods should be used to increase and maintain the perception of quality. The last heading of brand loyalty involves the loyalty of customers who do not change their preferences despite the alluring factors of other competitor brands in terms of such things as price or quality. Brand loyalty may be for the quality of a product produced by a brand, or a loyalty that arises only from sympathy for its color and logo, just the same as the interest and appreciation for the CSR project created by that brand. Accordingly, brand loyalty refers to the fact that a brand can be preferred for years due to any one or more of its elements.

In the global competitive market, the number of brands owned by corporations increase as much as the difference and diversity of products or services increases. In this direction, corporations launch different and diverse brands by deepening product mix depth (e.g., corporations offering many types of chocolate such as almond or pistachio under the chocolate brand) and broadening the product line (e.g., the same chocolate brand also producing such things as coffee, biscuits, or confectioneries in addition to its chocolate products). This is because corporations need to sell their products and services to more consumers in order to ensure their sustainability in the market while at the same time staying ahead of their competitors and because corporations are understood to need good branding for their sustained profitability. In this context, corporations categorize the brands they create according to the demographic characteristics of main and potential consumers, as well as other socioeconomic or psychosocial criteria. Therefore, due to a brand being based on the products and services that consumers purchase, consumers themselves are also classified by corporations in terms of brands. For this reason, corporations need strategic communication activities in order to maintain and improve their image (e.g., to become more popular, to gain more consumers), which is formed in line with consumers' own perceptions of the main or potential consumers with whom they classify their brands, and to raise themselves to the top of the list in the market. Enriching a brand with social issues and universal ethical principles created within the system increases the value of the brand in parallel with its profitability. In line with the instrumental theory of CSR, CSR activities that add value to the brand are understood to be effective public relations practices used to create an image. Good brand positioning in the eyes of society puts the organization ahead of its competitors and makes gaining loyal customers and other stakeholders easier. For this reason, CSR activities that announce to society how the brand is aware of an event or phenomenon related to society and the world

and how they are working towards this have added value, which also increases the value and brand image of the corporation. This indicates that CSR projects are easily used as tools to create, renew, and maintain a brand image.

For example, the analysis of CSR for brand image addressed the CSR of ETİ, a well-established Turkish brand and producer of ready-to-eat food (Öztürk, 2023, pp. 109–126). Scientific studies have proven that various food additives are added to the content of packaged ready-to-eat food products in order to extend shelf life, color, increase aroma and for similar purposes and that these food additives cause different effects on various organs of the body (Çalışır & Çalışkan, 2003, pp. 198–202). In particular, the consumption of such foods from infancy to childhood has been observed to cause health problems in later ages (Küçük et al., 2019, pp. 120–121). This is why ETİ has a brand association that it causes and sustains an unhealthy life, with the reason being the ready-to-eat products it produces. Unlike competing ready-to-eat food brands in Türkiye with the same product inventory, ETİ has therefore developed the ETİ Yellow Bike project (see <https://www.saribisiklet.com>), with a focus on healthy living for the first time in order to recreate an image that attaches importance to healthy living. In other words, CSR has been used as a tool for ETİ's brand image.

5.2. CSR for Symbiosis

This study associates the concept of symbiosis with the concept of CSR for the first time (Öztürk, 2023, p. 86). Explaining this concept will be beneficial before indicating this association.

As a biological term, symbiosis refers to the coexistence of two living things by helping each other as a single organism (Chertow, 2000, p. 314). Although it is a biological term, the capital industry has adapted the term symbiosis to its own functioning as a result of the destruction of the environment and the reduction of the natural resources used, especially by the technological and industrial transformations realized in the second half of the 20th century. The concepts of industrial ecology and industrial ecosystem, which express how industrial activities are similar to ecological systems, were developed for the first time in 1989 by Frosch and Gallopoulos (as cited in Özkan et al., 2018, p. 85). Industrial ecology has been addressed through different dimensions over time and been interpreted in various ways. In 1995, Garner (as cited in Özkan et al., 2018, p. 86) stated industrial ecology to bring a systematic view to the interactions between industrial and ecological systems and to cover an approach involving more than one discipline; it makes industrial systems resemble more effective and sustainable natural systems. Expressing the same approach as industrial ecology, industrial symbiosis is defined as the exchange of matter and energy between two different and independent industrial enterprises, similar to that in nature (Chertow, 2000, p. 314). In this direction, industrial symbiosis is a kind of industrial management system that brings together two or more industrial enterprises that are physically close to each other but work independently of one another; it is a system making the input of the other's output, which

in turn increases both environmental performance, competition and, as a result, economic power. This industrial system is considered to support regional development and maintains both resource use and economic power.

CSR projects are public relations practices that are used effectively in the communication activities of this whole process and are the perfect fit for this job. As the purpose of a business is to generate profit from its commodities, CSR projects ensure that environmentally sensitive products are purchased by environmentally sensitive consumers. CSR is used to have these kinds of productions reach consumers through green marketing, ecologic marketing, or zero-waste campaigns. Therefore, businesses that produce with industrial symbiosis can be seen to directly engage in CSR.

On the other hand, symbiosis is not only a concept that the industrial industry instrumentalizes in its CSR projects based on recyclable production (i.e., circulation of raw materials and waste) but also for other industrialized sectors. To reduce the symbiotic relationship of CSR projects to the marketing communication of environmentally sensitive products would be to underestimate the power of the capitalist economy. This is because symbiosis can be seen in every field of capitalist industrialization. In this context, the symbiotic relationship of CSR projects can be seen in various industries such as sports, digital, health, and fashion.

In this analysis of CSR for symbiosis, the original study examined CSR alongside the production system of DEHA, a recycling and recovery company in Türkiye (Öztürk, 2023, pp. 147–160). DEHA recycles waste oil into biodiesel and so is known as an environmentalist brand. However, because its earnings, profits, income, and expenses depend on this recycling facility, its projects are seen to aim to increase the profit of the enterprise by collecting and recycling waste (i.e., someone's output is the raw material of the enterprise). According to the report of the Biodiesel Industry Association (2019, p. 9), "The amount of biodiesel obtained from vegetable waste oils collected from workplaces and homes in [Türkiye] is 34 million liters and the economic value of this amount is 155 million TL;" namely, the economic value of biodiesel converted from waste oils has been presented. When looking at the content of the project in this context, DEHA has realized the need for waste oil and that it constitutes the basis of its business; namely, the raw material is required for its production and trade, as known through the CSR projects it has designed. The CSR projects DEHA uses as a tool are expressed in environmentalist language in the context of collecting waste oil, providing food for stray animals (see <https://www.skb.gov.tr/sakin-dokmeyin-kampanyasi-sokak-hayvanlarina-besin-sagliyor-s25063k/>), or for protecting the seas (see <https://images.app.goo.gl/Hi2g38iMwzrnszQV9>).

6. Capitalist Activism and CSR

This study introduces the concept of capitalist activism for the first time in line with its aim. Capitalist activism refers to how today's corporations manipulate their target

audiences in the post-industrial and post-modern activist movements that they support or produce themselves for their own benefit, turning activists into supporters of the corporations. This section clarifies and explains how capitalist activism is also practiced in the activist movements that businesses support or produce themselves within the scope of CSR activities.

Because the starting point of capitalist activism is activism, the study will first examine this concept and explain how it has been transformed into capitalist activism. Activism is not limited to a certain ideology but refers to all kinds of individual, social, public, and/or informal activities that aim to create change in people's lives (Bayat et al., 2006, p. 69). Activism draws its power from collectivism, and for this reason has been seen in the literature review to also be considered as social movements. From the historical process to the present, social movements have emerged from class struggles (Özburun, 1999, p. 43).

Çoban (2009, p. 23) viewed two forms of activism: mainstream activism, which aims to transform power in a certain way, and micro-activism, which aims to dismantle power. While micro-activism supports social movements against global capitalism and the global companies it creates, mainstream activism supports social movements aimed at keeping the status quo. In this regard, positioning post-industrial and post-modernist social movements within mainstream activism would be correct. Therefore, today's new social movements within the scope of mainstream activism can be understood to also be produced, supported, managed, and/or directed, covertly or overtly, by global businesses.

Public relations professionals play a role in the production, management. or direction of an existing activist movement. The ways in which public relations professionals can direct an activist movement against the system for the benefit of business can be seen throughout history. In 1913, 9,000 mine workers from the Rockefeller-owned Colorado Oil and Iron Company went on strike because of the poor working conditions and deaths they had suffered. As a result, mine workers were evicted from the houses allocated for themselves, so they were obliged to build tent cities for themselves. A year later, 20 workers were burned to death in a fire in one of these tent cities, with the cause being unclear. This incident is called The Ludlow Massacre historically and damaged the Rockefellers' corporate reputation. It is also why the Rockefeller hired Ivy Ledbetter Lee, one of the pioneers in the history of public relations, to fix their damaged corporate reputation (Smith, 2005, pp. 6–9). Lee directed worker activism in favor of the business, influencing newspaper editors and then public opinion leaders in order to turn negative public opinions into positive ones. As can be understood from this historical case, public relations professionals clearly directly serve the purpose of their stakeholders.

On the other hand, looking at capitalist activism in depth reveals that activism has shifted to the axis of capitalists and accordingly been taken over by the ruling class. As such, this study has determined the main criteria for the formation of capitalist activism to be as follows:

- 1) Being carried out within post-industrial and post-modern movements

2) Businesses and institutions uniting in line with macro-activist movements as activists or formulating a new macro-movement in line with their own views

3) Creating the perception that businesses and institutions are united with society and agree with society's views through the post-industrial and post-modern macro-activist movements that businesses and institutions instrumentalize for own benefit

4) Businesses and institutions being able to make revisions or adjustments (or create the perception of doing so) to their products and services, corporate identities, communication channels, and designs for a certain period of time or permanently according to the macro-movements they are involved in or have created (e.g., Mercedes-Benz's redesign of its logo in rainbow colors for LGBTQ pride month, Nike's sneaker production with Kaepernick's embroidered portrait for the Colin Kaepernick anti-racism movement)

5) Businesses and organizations attracting the attention of their target audience and stakeholders by creating awareness through these movements

6) Businesses and institutions being in a position of router and guider in these movements in order to realize their own objectives

7) Businesses and institutions instrumentalizing their target audiences by making them stakeholders and mobilizing them over these movements in line with the goals they plan to achieve.

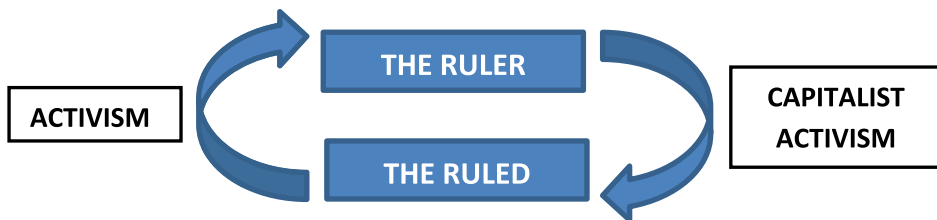


Figure 1: The difference between activism and capitalist activism

Note: As seen in Figure 1 formed in this study, while activism expresses oppression from the bottom up (i.e., from the ruled to the rulers), capitalist activism expresses a top-down oppression (i.e., from the rulers to the ruled)

CSR practices obviously bring added value to businesses in areas such as brand building, corporate reputation, and marketing. Businesses exhibit defenses against any situation that confronts them and that will harm their business. The proactive aspects of businesses have enabled them to put their planned CSR activities on the agenda before a problem arises, and without being exposed to activist pressures even when a problem does arise. Businesses can measure how long any problem they have caused will take to spread to the public and how much economic damage the negative situation will cause them. For example, they can launch a CSR activity within the framework of an issue, such as whether the goods or services they

produce are related to the environment or not, before activist pressure on the environment harms the business. These efforts see the enterprise itself assume a kind of activist role. In this direction, the businesses give the message that “as a business, we are also sensitive, we are sensitive to the demands from the grassroots like an activist.” In fact, calling this work capitalist activism is more accurate than just activism. Instead of confronting activists with their CSR activities for capitalist activism, businesses somehow involve them in their own planned CSR activities. Through CSR, the reputation of the organization is not damaged, new customers and other new stakeholders are gained, and economic gains are made, all while preventing activist pressure. In this direction, a business’ professionally implemented CSR serves as a tool for capitalist activism.

7. Conclusion

The literature review conducted within the scope of this study has observed the studies conducted on the critical political economy approach to CSR studies to generally include the normative stance, utilitarian role, and political dimension of the concept and to focus on CSR’s structural and functional limits. Unlike other studies, however, this study’s critical political economy perspective is not based on only one subject related to concept. The study has used interdisciplinary approaches to scrutinize the concept both notionally and pragmatically and has also put forward new concepts within the research. Therefore, this study has also examined the concept in line with the projects being implemented today. In this respect, the study first examined the analogy between social responsibility and helping one another before clarifying how the concept of social responsibility has been transformed into the concept of CSR in line with the capitalist economic system by detaching it from social responsibility’s etymological, epistemological, and theological aspects. This study has also addressed CSR projects as an instrument for the purposes of corporations in light of the instrumental use of reason and the instrumental theory of CSR. The study has also examined the purposes of CSR activities that are instrumentalized for the benefit of corporations in line with the two headings of capitalist activism, which clarifies that society and other stakeholders are instrumentalized by making them participate in corporations through these CSR projects and which this study has put forward for the first time.

As mentioned above, this study has focused on the concept of social responsibility as having been eviscerated, institutionalized, and legitimized historically and also examined the current definitions of CSR that have been shaped qualitatively and quantitatively according to the interests of corporations in both practical and theoretical terms. In this context, the study has proven that, simultaneously with the transformation and legitimization of CSR’s definition within the capitalist economic system, CSR projects are also being used as a kind of tool to serve the goals of corporations, with society also being manipulated and transformed into participating in these corporations through their projects. In this regard, the study has selected and examine a sample of current CSR projects being implemented in Türkiye to see how they are being instrumentalized in line with the two objectives (brand image and symbiosis) identified in this research.

While this study brings a critical approach to CSR projects as an application of public relations studies, it also shows how today's corporations have realized capitalist activism in line with CSR practices. Accordingly, the concept of capitalist activism has indicated how corporations make society and other stakeholders participate in the corporation by making them dependent on the conditions and preferences they have, with or without their consent (e.g., voluntarily or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously, actively or passively, arbitrarily or compulsorily). In other words, corporations have made society a kind of tool for their own self-interests. In line with the objectives and practices of the analyzed CSR projects, the study has also associated capitalist activism with the context of CSR projects, thereby determining institutions to have realized capitalist activism by making themselves supporters, affiliates, or suppliers while being founded on manipulating society to act in their interests.

Accordingly, the study has observed capitalist activism to be practiced in each CSR project analyzed herein. In addition, just as various categories and groupings have been made for the concept of activism in line with studies various academicians have conducted, the current study has also shown that the concept of capitalist activism can be categorized and grouped within itself. For example, while ETİ has carried out capitalist activism in the activities and actions of its CSR projects, which are open to the public, DEHA has been seen to directly engage in capitalist activism through industrial symbiosis based on its ecological output. This is because every individual or institution that provides recycling for its production becomes a collaborator for the company through its CRS project and in parallel with it. These examples indicate that the concept of capitalist activism can be classified and categorized on its own. As a result, this research has proposed within its scope that the term of capitalist activism is associated with CSR. As mentioned above, however, because the concept can be grouped within itself and in line with various fields, capitalist activism will be a beneficial concept to study in future studies by using a multidisciplinary approach, namely by considering jointly in such fields as sociology, psychology, ecological production, and industrial production, as well as the sub-branches of advertising and marketing within the disciplines of public relations and business administration similar to as has been done in this study regarding research that may be subject to each post-modern social movement in which individuals are made to participate in line with the businesses' interests.

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